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SERMONS.

James M'Crie

BY THE LATE

THOMAS M'CRIE, D.D.

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF JOHN KNOX,"

&c. &c. &c.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS, EDINBURGH;
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EDITOR'S ADVERTISEMENT.

A CONSIDERABLE number of the following Sermons were transcribed by the lamented Author from his notes for the pulpit, some years before his death. Though often solicited to publish them, he was prevented, by other avocations, from completing the proposed volume. The remaining Discourses have been selected from his manuscripts, and the whole has been arranged with as much attention to order as the nature of the subjects would admit. In the task of selection the Editor has been guided chiefly by the state of preparation in which the notes were found, though in some measure also by the earnestly expressed desires of those who heard them delivered. In one or two instances, what occupied two Discourses in the delivery has been put into one. The judicious reader

will be prepared to expect, in a series of Discourses on topics nearly allied to each other, and of a strain almost uniformly practical, an occasional coincidence of sentiment and phraseology; and he will understand the feelings which have restrained the Editor from attempting such alterations as might have been expected from the Author.

With regard to the reception of those Sermons which were prepared by the Author's own hand, the Editor has no right to pretend uneasiness. It is, however, with no small degree of anxiety that he presents along with these the other Discourses which fill the volume. Well knowing the extreme care which his late revered father was accustomed to bestow on all his compositions intended for the public eye, he feels as if he had presumed too far on the silence of the grave, by publishing what the Author would never have given to the world, in such an imperfect form, during his lifetime. There is some relief in the reflection, that what it might have been unworthy of the living Author to bequeath as a gift, it may be permitted to his friends to present as a memorial; and to those, at least, who enjoyed his ministrations, the value of these relics of their

departed minister may be enhanced by that very absence of finish which may be found to distinguish them from the other Sermons in the volume.

It was at first intended to prefix to this volume a brief Memoir of the Author; but it has been found impracticable to do any manner of justice to the materials which have presented themselves, without both delaying the publication of the Sermons beyond the time which the impatience of the public would allow, and occupying an unreasonable share of a volume which must derive its principal interest from being the sole production of the Author whose name it bears. The Editor has therefore been induced, in compliance with the urgent advice of his friends, to postpone his proposed Sketch, with the view of its being filled up at more leisure; and he embraces this opportunity of respectfully soliciting those who may be in possession of letters of his father's, that he will esteem it a favour if they would communicate to him, directly, or through the medium of his Publishers, either the originals, which shall be carefully restored, or such extracts as may throw light on the life, character, or sentiments of his deceased relative.

To those who have expressed a wish to see

a volume of his father's Lectures printed, the Editor begs to intimate that they have been left in such a state as might warrant the publication of a select number, and that if they should still be called for, he shall commence the preparation of them for the press as speedily as his other engagements will allow. In closing his present task, it is his humble trust that these Sermons, with all the disadvantages under which they necessarily labour, may be pronounced, as a whole, not unworthy of their Author; and that they may be blessed for leading the reader, under the solemn impression of the mournful event to which they owe their present appearance, to "consider the end of his conversation, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day and for ever."

THOMAS M'CRIE.

Clola, by Mintlaw,
January, 1836.

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SERMON I.

THE CHARACTER OF PAUL.

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BY THE GRACE OF GOD I AM WHAT I AM.

It is not my intention, from these words, to discourse of the nature of the grace of God, or to prove the necessity of divine influence on the hearts of men to form them to goodness and happiness. But I propose to show what Paul became through the grace of God, or, in other words, to set before you the leading features of his character as a Christian and Apostle.

Every one who has read the New Testament must have observed, that, next to "the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus," Paul is the most extraordinary person, whose name has been handed down to us in connexion with the propagation of the Gospel, and the establishment of the Christian Church. The Church of Rome, building on a single declaration of our Saviour greatly misunderstood, has pretended that Peter was the Prince of the Apostles, and universal Bishop. If this had been the fact, it would have been rather strange that we have a much fuller account in the sacred records of the labours of Paul in spreading the Gospel, than we have of those of Peter; and that

we possess only two epistles of the latter, while no fewer than thirteen, written by the former, are included in the canon of Scripture. Not that we would infer from this that Paul was advanced to any species of primacy, either in respect of jurisdiction, dignity, or order, among the Apostles. They were all brethren, and he that was "greatest" among them, in point of usefulness, was to act as "the least," and he that appeared to be "chief" in gifts, was not only to call himself, but also to behave as, "the servant of all." He that said, "I am of Paul," and he that said, "I am of Cephas," in the primitive church (for the spirit of vain-glory and faction, which produced the Popedom, began early to work), were equally blamable: neither of them was crucified for us, nor were we baptized in the name of either, and their highest honour is, not that they were lords of God's heritage, but ensamples to it, and helpers of its joy. I mean not to speak of the apostolical authority of Paul; nor do I intend pronouncing his panegyric, a species of discourse in which the excellences of the person described are rhetorically exaggerated, and artificially blazoned, so as to form a masterpiece, in which the device and image of the artist are conspicuously enstamped. Such an attempt the sacredness of the subject forbids; the text frowns on it; and it would violate instead of embalming the memory of one whose uniform object it was to "preach not himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord," and who had these words more than any other in his mouth—"Glory not in men." But without incurring this censure, we may surely dwell for a little on a character which meets us so frequently in the word of God. It cannot surely be unlawful for us to trace and point out the marks of the finger of God in framing this "chosen vessel" to bear "the unsearchable riches of Christ" to the Gentiles. We must be prone to idolatry indeed, if we are in danger of putting that servant out of his place who is continually reminding us that he is "nothing," and that his Master is "all in all." In delineating his excellences, and describing his abundant labours, is it possible that we should be puffed up, and not rather humbled and mortified at our falling so far behind a

man, who, after all, disclaimed every thing bordering on perfection, and gloried only in his infirmities?

The information which the New Testament contains respecting Paul, appears to point out his character as peculiarly deserving our attention, while it furnishes us with ample materials for describing it. In the Acts of the Apostles we have a narrative of his travels and preaching by the pen of one who accompanied him for many years—who enjoyed the very best opportunities of knowing his inmost sentiments, and of observing his conduct among Jews and Gentiles, among friends and enemies, in circumstances of honour and of disgrace—and whose record of what he saw and heard bears the most indubitable and convincing marks of truth and ingenuousness. Besides this we have the confidential letters (which, of all things, reflect the character most truly), written by the apostle to individuals and churches in different parts of the world, and at different periods of his life, which show him to be always the same person, and on comparing which with the narrative of Luke, we discover such incidental coincidences in facts, sentiments, and feelings, as throw equal light and authority on both. Those who have carefully examined these documents, and especially those who have entered into the spirit of his epistles, are admitted to all those advantages which were enjoyed by his contemporaries and companions, and may be said, like Timothy, to have "fully known his doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions."* The epistles of Paul are, in fact, a continuation of the *Acts of the Apostles*, and in them he is the historian of himself, as well as of the churches to which he wrote. They have often been represented as filled with discussions of a speculative and abstruse kind; but of all writings, sacred or profane, ancient or modern, I know none in which there is such truth and force of moral painting, in which there is such a union of doctrine and practice, and, above all, in which the heart of the author is so completely laid open, and all his sentiments, and feelings, and emotions

* 2 Tim. iii. 10.

depicted. In his epistles the writer, to use his own expression, may be "known and read of all men." This renders our present task the less difficult.

With the facts of the early life of Paul you are all well acquainted, and it is unnecessary for me to do more than advert to them. Born in Tarsus, a free city of Cilicia, and of Jewish parents, he inherited from his father the rights of a Roman citizen. Educated by Gamaliel, a celebrated teacher at Jerusalem, he made great proficiency in the knowledge of the Jewish religion; and having joined the popular sect of the Pharisees, was held in reputation for the correctness of his manners, and his scrupulous observance of the written and traditionary law of his fathers. When Christianity first made its appearance, he opposed it with all the keenness of the sect to which he belonged; and so inflamed was his zeal, that he became an active and forward instrument in the hands of those who sought to extirpate the nascent religion, and not contented with persecuting its followers to death in Jerusalem, obtained a commission from the chief priests to make inquisition after them in foreign cities, and to bring them to punishment. But he was arrested in this mad career, convinced that he had been ignorantly warring against the truth, and wonderfully converted from an enemy to a friend, from a persecutor into a preacher of the Christian faith. Into the subject of his conversion, which has been treated at large, and justly considered as one of the leading secondary evidences of the truth of the gospel, I propose not to enter. When sincerely believed, and deeply felt, Christianity is calculated to work so thorough a change on the whole frame of the mind—often sharpening the understanding and enlarging the soul, as well as regulating and purifying the heart—that it is difficult to determine what the natural dispositions of Paul were. From the facts preserved respecting the early part of his life, and from a cautious comparison of them with his subsequent conduct, we may perhaps be warranted in drawing the following inferences. He possessed a good understanding, which enabled him to judge of the characters of men, and manage their various tempers. Pride, rather than vanity of mind, was his besetting

sin. Naturally open and ardent in his temper, he was ready to follow violent rather than deceitful courses—to be a warm friend and a determined, but not concealed, enemy. His zeal, though misguided, and his prejudices, though strong, differed from those of a person of weak intellect, or who is actuated by interested motives; and having embarked in a cause which his judgment approved, it is probable that he was endued with a resolution and courage which disposed him to prosecute it, notwithstanding difficulties and dangers. I say *it is probable;* for there are unquestionable instances of persons, naturally irresolute and timid, who, under the influence of religion, have acquired a high degree of firmness of mind and moral courage. What was vicious or excessive in the temper of Paul, the grace of God corrected, while it strengthened and sanctified whatever was of a different kind, and rendered it eminently conducive, under the guidance of higher principles, to the advancement of the divine glory, and the best interests of mankind.

I shall, in the first place, take a general survey of the character of Paul; and, in the second place, point out some of its discriminating features.

I. Let us begin with a short survey of his labours as an indefatigable preacher of Christianity. This was the sphere in which he was formed by the grace of God for moving, and in which all the excellences of his private character shone forth. He was chosen, not merely for his own sake, but "for the elect's sake, that they also might obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." The heavenly treasure was bestowed on him, that he might "make many rich" along with himself. He was called at the same moment to be a saint and an apostle; and "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" shone upon his mind, that being made "light in the Lord," he might irradiate the minds of multitudes. "It pleased God," says he, "who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen." *

* Gal. i. 16.

Paul was invested with the entire apostolical office, and we find him discharging every part of it. He dispensed both sacraments, planted and watered churches, ordained elders in them, corrected abuses which crept into them, assisted in settling such controversies as disturbed the whole Christian community, or particular sections of it, and on more than one occasion promoted and took charge of charitable contributions made for the relief of poor or persecuted saints. But the principal employment to which he considered himself as called was that of preaching the gospel. To this he devoted himself, his time, his talents, his strength, suffering nothing to interfere with it, and devolving upon his companions and helpers those duties which might distract him from his main and most appropriate work. "For Christ," says he, "sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." *

No sooner received he his commission, and his qualifications for executing it, than he entered on the arduous undertaking, which he prosecuted during a period of nearly thirty years, with amazing success, until his course was terminated, and his labours crowned with a glorious martyrdom. Besides Judea, he preached over the extensive countries of Syria and Cilicia; of Pamphylia, Pisidia, and Lycaonia; of Phrygia and Galatia; at Ephesus, and other cities of proconsular Asia; and passing into Europe, he taught in the principal cities of Greece and of Macedonia, as far as Sclavonia; in the islands of Cyprus, Crete, and Melita, and the city of Rome. In the course of his travels, he converted thousands to the faith of Christ—Jews, Jewish proselytes, and idolaters, and erected Christian Churches in all the principal towns, the most of which he visited thrice, confirming the disciples, and adding to their numbers and their gifts. From the commencement to the close of his career he was never idle, teaching from house to house, preaching in season and out of season, by night and by day; and when the door of usefulness was shut on him in one place, he removed to another. During the period of which we read in the New Testament, the other apostles

* 1 Cor. i. 17.

resided chiefly at Jerusalem, and they appear to have seldom preached beyond the bounds of Judea before the destruction of that city. But Paul was specially chosen to propagate Christianity among the heathen. Considering himself as "the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles," he, with the approbation of his brethren, went into all the world, preaching the word every where, and seeking out those places, in preference to others, which had not heard the gospel. "I will not dare to speak of any but those things which Christ hath wrought by me to make the Gentiles obedient by word and deed, through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that, from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ: yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation." *

In the midst of these great labours he composed the letters which have instructed and made wise to salvation so many thousands besides those to whom they were immediately addressed, which have diffused the knowledge of the Gospel far beyond the sphere of his personal exertions, and will continue, along with the other Scriptures, to diffuse it more and more, until, having accomplished all their purposes, they shall be burnt up with the earth and all that is in it.

2. Consider him as a sufferer for the gospel. It behoved him to submit to more than toil and fatigue, privations and hardships, in pursuing the course which he had chosen. At the very commencement of it he "suffered the loss of all things,"—of every thing which he had formerly coveted and laboured to acquire, and valued at the highest rate, and gloried most in, the love of his friends, the high reputation which he had acquired among his countrymen, the prospects which he had of worldly advancement; and, what was still dearer to his proud and pharisaical heart, that goodly and rich garb of personal righteousness which he had woven and embroidered with infinite care, in which he had so often looked on himself with inward gratulation and complacency, and trusted

* Rom. xv. 18–20.

for the approbation of God and men—all, all this he sacrificed cheerfully, threw it at his feet, and trampled on it as so much dirt and refuse, that he might "win Christ and be found in him," clothed with his righteousness; and that he might discharge that high ministry to which he was called of heaven. "I will show him" (said Jesus to Ananias, when he sent him to baptize his new convert), "how great things he must suffer for my name's sake;" as if the only thing to which he had been called was to suffer! And he gave him an early proof of the treatment which he might expect from men in his service: for scarcely had he avowed himself a believer in Christianity, and begun to "preach the faith which once he destroyed," when the Jews sought to kill him; and so keen was their search after him, that it was necessary for his new friends to let him down by a basket over the wall of Damascus. From this time forward he was continually exposed to the deadly hatred of his unbelieving countrymen, along with the contempt and rage of the heathen world. Luke has given us some account of the sufferings he endured, and the hair-breadth escapes he made by sea and land, during the period that he accompanied him. They are frequently adverted to by the apostle himself in his writings. But we could have had no idea of their number, variety, and greatness, if he had not been led to specify them in one of his epistles, in answer to certain false teachers who aimed at marring his usefulness by derogating from the proofs of his apostleship. "Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the

care of all the churches." (2 Cor. xi. 23–28.) You will observe, my brethren, that this was written ten years before his death, and that it is but a bare catalogue of the kinds of suffering to which he had been subjected, without mentioning particulars or detailing instances. What a fine opportunity would this have afforded to some persons to gratify, what is called, an innocent vanity, cover their detractors with shame, and awaken the slumbering sympathies of their friends, by entering into a minute detail of some of the most interesting and affecting of the tales of danger and death, by which it would have been easy to fill a letter larger than any in the New Testament! But the apostle hurries rapidly over them. So far from boasting of them, he apologizes for mentioning them, and declares that he "will glory in the things which concern his infirmities." The only one of which he gives any particulars was the most inglorious of his escapes (Verses 32, 33). And he states as the crowning and heaviest article of his distress, the burden which daily pressed upon his mind from (what many would have contrived to make light enough) "the care of all the churches."

3. Consider him as an advanced and experienced Christian. Deeply impressed as he was with the importance of his apostolical office, and assiduous in the discharge of its duties, he did not forget that he had a soul to be saved or lost, as well as the meanest of those to whom he preached. He found time to attend to and watch over this amidst the multiplicity of his public cares and watchings; and hereby left an example to all who should afterwards be intrusted with the gospel. He knew that persons might possess the most splendid and even edifying gifts; and that they might perform the most specious acts of charity and piety, and after all be destitute of saving grace, and strangers to the power of godliness. And he did not neglect to apply this test to his own character: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." (1 Cor. xiii. 1–3.) He

had heard of Judas, and of Ananias and Sapphira, and he did not look upon their attainments as the *ne plus ultra* of hypocrisy and professional religion. He knew that persons might open the door to others, and usher them into the kingdom of heaven, and yet be themselves shut out; that they might be employed as heralds to proclaim peace to others, and as ambassadors might reconcile them to God, and yet continue to be themselves enemies to him. And knowing these things, he was anxious to prevent such a dreadful issue, and therefore laboured not only that he "might by all means save some" by the gospel, but also that he "might be partaker thereof with them." "I keep under my body," adds he, "and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."*

Though favoured with an immediate revelation from heaven to qualify him for his office, this did not hinder him from searching the scriptures daily, and comparing spiritual things with spiritual, that he might be the more fit for teaching the way of salvation to others; nor did it prevent him from meditating upon these things that he might save himself, applying them to his own soul in the exercise of faith and love, and living under their reviving, purifying, and consolatory influence. What great progress had he made in the Christian life when he presents himself to our view in the first written of his epistles; and yet how dissatisfied with his attainments, and eager in pressing forward! What extensive and deep insight into the Divine law! How abiding his sense of the deceitfulness of sin, the remaining depravity of his own heart, the seductions of the world, the wiles of Satan! How pungent his grief at his non-conformity to the will of God! How ardent his desires to be delivered from it! At the same time, how forcibly did he feel the all-subduing, heart-constraining influence of the love of Christ, which he commended so warmly to others! How transporting his admiration of its incomprehensible dimensions! How firm his reliance on the mercy of God, and the merits of Christ! How triumphant his

* 1 Cor. ix. 23–27.

glorying in the cross of his Saviour! How unspeakably joyful and full of glory his hope of immortality! Ah! my brethren (whatever it may be with some of us), it was no cold notions that he delivered, when he discoursed of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, of the wrath of God which is revealed against it, of the curse of the broken law, of the sting of death, and of the fearful looking for of judgment; of the blindness of the natural man to the things of God, and his aversion to the righteousness of God; of the law in the members, the besetting sin, and the battle between the flesh and the spirit. It was no empty speculation with him when he descanted on the mysteries of redeeming love, on the blessedness of the man who has been pardoned and justified by the faith of Christ, on the life of faith, on the mortification of sin, on crucifixion to the world, on spirituality of mind and heavenliness of conversation, on rejoicing in tribulation and desiring to depart and be with Christ. You must have observed that it is his almost ordinary style to write in the first person, and that he frequently changes from the plural to the singular number. Other writers have had recourse to this method; but how different the effect produced on us by it! In them we are pleased with it as a *figure*, in Paul it strikes us as a *reality;* in them it is *painting*, in him it is *life*. This is the great charm in the style of Paul. I repeat what I said before, he is the most practical and experimental of writers. The truths of the gospel come forth warm from a heart that burned with love to them; the dictates of inspiration are pronounced by one who had previously made them his own, and fed upon them. Who does not perceive the difference between the constrained declarations of the son of Peor, and the productions of those "holy men who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," when they discourse of the "sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow?" The exclamation of Balaam is beautiful, and it would have been pathetic too, did we not perceive the eyes of the wretched prophet riveted, even when he was uttering it, on the wages of unrighteousness: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be as his!" But of the exclamation of Paul on the same subject,

we feel it a kind of desecration to say that it is sublime and beautiful, for it is more than both: "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate me from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." We can all join, my brethren, in the prayer of Balaam; but who among us is prepared, without faltering, to pronounce the assured, the unhesitating, the bold yet believing, the triumphant protestation of Paul?

II. Let us now enquire into some of the more minute and discriminating features in the character of Paul.

1. He was distinguished for humility. This may be considered as a virtue peculiar to Christianity, as it had no place in the most approved systems of morality among the Heathen. Every genuine Christian possesses it, and we have no reason to doubt that it shone in the conduct of all the apostles. But there are some circumstances which render the example of humility in Paul brighter and more deserving of our attention. The Pharisees were notorious for their pride, ostentation, and contempt of others; and our apostle, before his conversion, appears to have been strongly infected with the characteristical vice of the sect to which he belonged. The high office to which he was raised, the extraordinary revelations made to him, the eminent gifts with which he was endowed, the great sufferings which he endured for Christ, the abundance of his labours and the uncommon success with which they were crowned, not to mention his attainments in Christian knowledge and experience, were but too apt to kindle those embers of pride and vain-glory which remain hid in the hearts of the best men on earth. But he watched over these with the utmost jealousy, and by Christ strengthening him, he was able to keep them under. Instead of dwelling on the numerous proofs of his humility, it may be more profitable for you, and more illustrative of his character, to point out some of those means by which he was able to check and subdue the opposite principle which once reigned uncon-

trolled in his breast. In the *first* place, he cherished a habitual recollection of what he had been during the time of his ignorance and unbelief. Often do we find him holding this mirror up to his eyes in public, and we may believe he did the same in private. Whenever he had occasion to mention the honourable function to which he was called, or the exertions which he had made in it, he takes care to draw this shade over his eyes, as you may see in the verse next our text: "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." This humbling fact he introduces into each of his public apologies, and, what is more striking, we find him introducing it into one of the last epistles which he wrote. And how does he speak of it? As if it happened only yesterday, and as if he never had confessed it and mourned over it before: "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious." * *Secondly*, When he enjoyed that ecstatic vision referred to in 2 Cor. xii., he tells us, "Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelation, there was given me a thorn in the flesh." Some think he refers here to the ebullitions of that sanguine temper which was constitutional to him, and by which he was apt to be hurried into acts that grieved him. It is more probable that it was a bodily infirmity which impeded him in his public teaching, and rendered it less pleasing to his hearers. But whatever it was, he improved it as an antidote against pride, and a motive for constant dependence on divine aid; and accordingly he declares that he would "glory," not in his sufferings, or escapes, or revelations, but in his infirmity. *Thirdly*, The fickleness of those among whom he had laboured, and their ungrateful requital of his services, helped to keep him humble. The Christians in Galatia who despised not the "temptation which was in his flesh," but received him "as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus," and who

* 1 Tim. i. 18, 19.

would have "plucked out their own eyes and given them to him," when he first preached the gospel to them, suffered themselves to be so bewitched as to throw away "the liberty wherewith Christ had made them free;" and when he stepped in and would have undeceived them, they counted him an officious intermeddler and an enemy. The same kind of treatment he met with from the Christians at Corinth, to whom he had preached the gospel "with demonstration of the Spirit and power," and imparted a variety of supernatural gifts, but who, on his departure, suffered his character to be injured and his gifts disparaged by certain foolish, airy, and tumid teachers, who, to accomplish their own selfish ends, had insinuated themselves into their affections, and abused their Christian simplicity. He must be fond of applause indeed, who sighs for that which has been lavishly sprinkled on the most worthless, who is willing to be made a king to-day at the expense of being stoned to-morrow, who glories in being now saluted as a god, at the risk of being anon devoured by the worms that worship him. In the *fourth* place, He cherished a humble spirit by reflecting on his imperfections both in knowledge and practice. Though he was an apostle, though he had seen the Lord, though he had the gift of prophecy, "yet," says he, "I know but in part, I prophesy but in part." If he could say, "With my mind I serve the law of Christ," he found daily reason to confess, "I find a law in my members warring against the law of my mind." And, with respect to his general character, he solemnly and repeatedly disclaims all ideas of perfection even in his best moments: "Not that I have attained, either am already perfect." In fine, he had a habitual conviction that whatever was good about him was owing to the grace or free favour of God—a sentiment deeply engraven on his mind, and which he expresses twice in the verse before us.

By these and similar means the apostle repressed the emotions of pride, and grew in humility in proportion to his growth in knowledge and in all goodness. When it was necessary for him to speak of himself, he takes care that his language should be such as not to provoke vain-glory either in

his own breast or in that of others. Has he occasion to speak of his office? It is the grace of apostleship. Of his qualifications for it? They are gifts. Of his having laboured abundantly in it? "Not I, but the grace of God in me." Of his success? It is God that giveth the increase. Of his sufferings? He had borne them through Christ strengthening him. From the same principle we find him often using the plural number, and speaking in the name of his brethren, when he describes actions and qualities which were peculiarly his own. If he ever adopts language which appears at variance with his usual modesty, it is by constraint and for the purpose of silencing those who aimed at injuring the gospel by detracting from the credit of his ministry. On such occasions, instead of being puffed up, he appears humbled at being obliged to assume the style of his detractors. And withal, there is such an ingenuousness and frankness in his apology, such a delicate raillery and chiding of his friends for reducing him to the necessity of saying what, though true, ought to have come from other lips, that every one must perceive that his temper was equally abhorrent of vain boasting and of affected humility. "I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you; for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing." * The finest moral description falls short of this natural burst of feeling. In reflecting on what he had said he is covered with blushes; seeking to relieve his mind from the confusion and embarrassment which he felt, he is gradually led to use language even higher than what he had formerly employed; upon which he sinks at once to the expression of his native humility, wrapping himself in the mantle of self-denial and devout abasement. He begins by acknowledging that he had spoken as "a fool," and ends by acknowledging that he was "nothing."

2. The next feature of his character to which I would call your attention is disinterestedness. In taking up the cross of Christ he learned to "deny himself," and the whole of his

* 2 Cor. xii. 11.

subsequent conduct afforded a bright example of the purest and most disinterested benevolence. It was under the influence of this principle that he formed the resolution, upon which he continued to act during his ministry, of waving the right which he had, both on the principles of reason and revelation, to be supported by those whom he taught, and of sustaining himself and assisting his companions by exercising the trade of tent-making which he had acquired in his youth. His reasons for this were as wise and generous as the practice itself was disinterested. He felt averse to be "burdensome" to any—he was anxious to convince the heathen that regard to their spiritual advantage was his only motive for coming and remaining among them, and he was determined to preserve his independence as a servant of Christ by avoiding whatever might seem to prevent him from using the utmost freedom in admonishing and reproving the converts which he made by his preaching. Itinerant teachers who lectured for money were to be found at that time in all the cities of Greece. As the Pharisees "devoured widows' houses under the pretence of long prayers," so there arose at an early period among the Christians mercenary individuals, who, "for filthy lucre's sake," taught things which they ought not, subverting whole houses, fomenting divisions, and creating factions; and such, alas! is the infirmity of human nature, and such the smooth arts which mercenary men practise, and the flattering unction which they apply to the humours of men, that they often gained a greater ascendency over the minds of the Christians than the most gifted and useful of the apostles. This appears from the severe but friendly irony with which Paul expostulates with the Christians at Corinth, who had suffered themselves to become the dupes of their selfish artifice. "Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also; for ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise: For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you (eat you up), if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you in the face." * Knowing that he

* 2 Cor. xi. 18-20.

had a testimony in the breasts of those to whom he wrote, that his conduct had been the very reverse of this, with what boldness does he address them: "Receive us: we have wronged no man; we have corrupted no man; we have defrauded no man." * But to perceive fully the advantage which his keeping himself free from pecuniary obligations gave him in refuting the calumnies of his detractors, and in putting to shame those who had lent a too credulous ear to them, you must consult the different parts of his epistles to the Corinthians in which he alludes to that topic. His experience of this gave him much satisfaction in reflecting on the resolution which he had at first adopted on higher grounds.† By adhering to his original resolution, he also gave an example of disinterestedness to his brethren, and of industry to Christians in general, which we find him repeatedly pressing;‡ and he felt himself more at liberty to use exertions in procuring contributions from the Gentile churches in behalf of the poor saints in Judea, according to the engagement he had come under to the apostles at Jerusalem.§

Two circumstances connected with this subject throw considerable light on that feature of the apostle's character which we are contemplating. In the first place, though he did not choose to depend for his livelihood on the churches which he served, yet he vindicated the right which the ministers of the gospel had to such support. He did not hold out his own conduct as an example which ought to be universally imitated; he did not speak of it in such a strain as, in the slightest degree, to disparage or throw a reflection on those who found it necessary, or who chose to act otherwise than himself. He did not even leave their conduct open to challenge, or to be defended by themselves; but, knowing that such a vindication would come with a better grace, and would have more influence from his pen, he applied himself particularly, and of set purpose, to vindicate the right of his brethren to be supported by those among whom they laboured, on principles both human

* 2 Cor. vii. 2. † 1 Cor. ix. 12, 15, 18; comp. 2 Cor. xi. 7–12.
‡ Acts, xx. 33–35; 2 Thess. iii. 7–12; Acts, xi. 28–30; xxiv. 17.
§ Acts, xi. 28, 30; xxiv. 17; Rom. xv. 25–27; 1 Cor. xvi. 1–3; 2 Cor. viii. ix.

and divine. How different from the conduct of those who, imitating the Apostle according to the letter, in circumstances very dissimilar, show but too plainly, by their language, that they have not drunk deep into his spirit! In the second place, though he "did not desire a gift,"—though he had "learned both to suffer want and to abound,"—though he looked on it as his "reward" to "make the gospel of Christ without charge," and ordinarily acted on that principle, yet, whenever the assistance of others was requisite to enable him to discharge the high and indispensable duties of his office, or even to relieve him from great straits, provided it was offered cheerfully, and not as the price of his independence, he did not stand on the point of honour, nor proudly or cynically disdain the benevolence of individuals, or the contributions of churches. Nor did he seek to conceal any instances of this kind as if they had been discreditable to him, or inconsistent with the general principle on which he acted. Hence, referring to the aid which he had received from the Christians in Macedonia when he preached to the Corinthians, he says to the latter, in his strong, but easy to be understood language, "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service." * Hence the frank and warm manner in which he bears testimony to the uniform attention and kindness of the church at Philippi, in acknowledging the receipt of a recent contribution from them: "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. Notwithstanding ye have well done that ye did communicate with my affliction. Even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not that I desire a gift; but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound" (hold your hand—send me no more), "I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God." (Philip. iv. 10–20). Read the whole passage, my brethren, at your leisure. What a union of dignity with humility, of firmness with sensibility, of disinterest-

* 2 Cor. xi. 8.

edness with gratitude, of the finest feelings of the man with the most ardent devotion of the saint! We see him standing as a priest before the altar, and laying upon it the gift which he had received from the Philippians as a free-will offering, the odour of which, after refreshing himself, ascended to heaven, mingled with the incense of his thanksgivings and prayers. The disinterestedness of Paul was displayed in the receiving, as well as in the refusing, of favours. What was the return he was prepared to make to these liberal Christians? He tells them in the same letter. They had given him of their substance; he was ready to impart to them himself. "Yea, and if I be offered (poured out as a libation) on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all."

The disinterested spirit of Paul did not appear only in his readiness to renounce every pecuniary claim. He was prepared, and stood always ready, to make a sacrifice of his ease, his health, his strength, his reputation, his life, in prosecution of his high calling, and for the advancement of the spiritual welfare of those among whom he laboured; nor could their ingratitude and insensibility to his services cool the ardour of his generous determination to do them good: "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." * Nor was this disinterested benevolence confined to those who were Christians. If the maxim be just, "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," then his unpremeditated reply to King Agrippa is a convincing proof of this. Struck with his fervent appeal to him, and with the character of his whole appearance and defence, the king could not refrain from exclaiming, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."—"I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost and altogether such as I am, EXCEPT THESE BONDS." O how gladly would Paul have continued to wear "these bonds,"—how gladly would he have withdrawn his "appeal to Cesar," and consented to "go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged," provided he could have obtained but half

* 2 Cor. xii. 15.

his pious wish! My brethren, if that sentiment, instead of lying in this despised book, had occurred in a Greek tragedy or a Roman story, or had it proceeded from the mouth of a Socrates or a Cicero, instead of that of an apostle, it would have been quoted an hundred times in the writings of the age, as an effusion of the sublimest and purest benevolence. But, alas!—our wits have taste and feeling on every point but one.

How admirably qualified was our apostle for the work to which he was separated, by this part of his character! Wherever selfishness predominates, it mars every great undertaking. It must prove the ruin of every good cause, and lead to the dissolution of every society which is not held together by the palpable bonds of interest. Yet how general its prevalence in the world; so that we are forced to confess, that those systems of morality which are founded on it have their counterpart too exactly in the conduct of mankind, while all our better feelings revolt from their principles! How many humbling discoveries of it in the actions even of good men! How rare the instances of a person thoroughly and uniformly disinterested! The disappointments which he met with in this respect caused the most pungent grief to Paul. Hence his pathetic exclamation (which many, I am afraid, read without entering into the writer's feelings) on requesting Timothy to be sent to him: "For I have no man like-minded; for all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." * *All!* how that word should thrill our hearts, awaken our jealousy, and cause alarm! If it was so in the primitive times of Christianity, and among those who were around the apostle, what must it be now and among us? Doth not the spirit say expressly, "That in the last days perilous times shall come: for men shall be lovers of their own selves?" † Next to disingenuousness and fraud, nothing was so abhorrent to Paul's mind, and so apt to excite his resentment, as selfishness, and the partialities to which it gives rise. It was, I am inclined to think, a conviction, or apprehension, that he discerned the

* Philip. ii. 20, 21. † 2 Tim. iii. 1, 2.

working of this principle in the mind of Barnabas, which led him into that "sharp contention" which parted these dear friends, and hitherto most cordial fellow-labourers in the gospel; for Mark, whom Barnabas determined to take with them as the companion of their itineraney, was his own "sister's son." * But neither this circumstance, nor the consideration that his mother's house had been the asylum of the persecuted saints, † appeared to Paul to be a good reason for choosing, as an assistant on a religious mission, a young man, who had formerly deserted them and the work through levity or selfishness. He remembered the words of his Divine Master, "Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother;" and he was taught by them, that, though Christianity does not burst asunder the ties of kindred, it requires of all its followers that they be guided by higher considerations in advancing its interests. This may throw light on the bold expression which we find him elsewhere using, when he is speaking of the obligations which believers are under "not to live to themselves, but unto him which died for them and rose again:"—"Henceforth know we no man after the flesh; yea, though we have known CHRIST after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." ‡

We shall pause here for the present. In what has passed under our review, we have seen convincing proofs of the power of the grace of God; but much remains yet to be seen. "To God only-wise be glory, through Jesus Christ, for ever. Amen."

* Acts, xv. 37-39, comp. Coloss. iv. 10. † Acts, xii. 12.
‡ 2 Cor. v. 16.

SERMON II.

THE CHARACTER OF PAUL.

1 Cor. xv. 10.

BY THE GRACE OF GOD I AM WHAT I AM.

We have viewed Paul as an indefatigable preacher of the gospel, as a great sufferer for it, and as an advanced and experienced Christian; and, proceeding to take a nearer view of his character, we considered him as distinguished for humility and disinterestedness. Let me now call your attention to a higher quality.

3. He was of an elevated and enlarged soul. Of this, disinterestedness is an important and indispensable ingredient. He whose ruling passion is selfishness, or who forms his purposes, and regulates his conduct, chiefly with a view to his own interest, is incapable of noble efforts, or of generous and heroic deeds. But something more than this is necessary to constitute greatness of mind. Every good man is not a great man, and Paul was both. Some persons possess generous and benevolent dispositions, and, under their influence, are led to make sacrifices for the relief of others, or the promotion of a public cause; but, when they come to suffer hardships in consequence of this, and feel themselves unfit to conflict with "the sea of troubles" in which they are involved, they begin to "sigh and look backwards," regret the course which they have adopted, and, if they do not make good their retreat, sink into inactivity and dejection. If the apostle of the Gentiles had laboured under this want of firmness and elevation of mind, he would soon have desisted from his work, or have continued it with languor and reluctance, instead of glorying, as he did, in his labours, infirmities, necessities, and afflictions.

Paul, as we have seen, was distinguished for humility; but

humility is not meanness of spirit, nor is pride to be confounded with elevation of soul. When we say that a person has a noble spirit, we do not necessarily mean that he is either haughty or proud; we intend to convey the idea that he despises what is mean and base, and unbecoming his character, rank, or station; that he is above—that is, incapable of—an unworthy action; that his aims and pursuits are high, and that he delights in generous and heroic deeds. Persons of little minds and slender acquirements are most in danger of being puffed up with pride. Modesty is the inseparable attendant on great talents—or, at least, on greatness of soul. Those who have made the highest advances in true knowledge and virtue, perceive most clearly the vast disproportion between that which they aim at, and that which they have reached; they, accordingly, feel disposed to undervalue, rather than overvalue their attainments; and, compared with what is above them, the distance between themselves and those who are beneath them dwindles in their eyes, as they look first at the one and then at the other, to a span, to an handbreadth, to nothing. Yet they maintain their elevation, and continue to ascend higher. Self-complacency and self-glorification are the feelings of a person who has ceased to aspire. The very aspirations of a noble nature, and his efforts to rise, imply dissatisfaction with himself. And that this was the state of Paul's mind we learn from his own declaration:—"Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."* But though he had learned "not to think of himself more highly than he ought," and "in honour to prefer others," yet he knew how to vindicate his gifts and labours against those who invidiously disparaged them, and how to bring down vain and arrogant boasters to their proper level.† Though he scrupled not to call himself "the least of the apostles," yet, when some attempted to derogate from the authority of his office, by extolling those who had been the companions and brethren of

* Phil. iii. 12–14. † 2 Cor. x. 7–11; xi. 6–21; xii. 12.

our Lord, he could adopt a very different strain:—"Those who seemed to be somewhat, it maketh no matter to me (God accepteth no man's person); those who seemed to be somewhat, in conference added nothing to me."* A conscious dignity runs through his language and behaviour to believers and unbelievers, friends and foes. He knew what became him, and what he was entitled to as a man and a Roman, as a Christian and an apostle; and although he could "abase himself" for the good of others, and endure with patience and meekness both bonds and scourging, yet he did not think it his duty to expose himself to be trampled upon to gratify the humours of men, and neglected no opportunity of standing up for and maintaining his privileges. The most high-spirited Roman could not evince more jealousy in the maintenance of his rights of citizenship than he did at Philippi, at Jerusalem, and at Cesarea.†

I have made these remarks with the view of correcting certain mistakes on this subject which are far from being uncommon, and not because the quality of the apostle's mind, which I have at present in my eye, consisted in conscious dignity. It consisted in high aims, directed by enlarged views, and supported by generous and powerful principles of action. Religion, by calling men to the contemplation of a Being of infinite excellence, and making their chief duty and proper happiness to lie in resembling, pleasing, and enjoying him, tends naturally to generate such a state of mind. And Christianity, by the principles which it infuses, the examples which it furnishes, and the prospects which it opens up, is eminently calculated to elevate and ennoble. How can it be otherwise? Does it teach men that they have immortal souls, formed after the image of their Maker, and which, though fallen and ruined, are capable of being restored, and destined to be raised to a higher than their pristine state; that they have been redeemed, not with such corruptible things as silver and gold, but with a price of inestimable value; that they are born again from above; that their bodies are living temples in which God dwells; that they are sons of God, and heirs of an inheritance,

* Gal. ii. 6. † Acts xvi. 37; xx. 25–28; xxv. 8–11.

incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away;—does it teach even the poorest, that God hath chosen them; that the gospel is preached to them; that they are rich in faith, and heirs of a kingdom; that they are placed under a special providence, and favoured with the ministry of angels; that they are redeemed to be a royal priesthood to God; in short, that all things are theirs—the world, life and death, things present, and things to come; and can they believe these things, and live under the influence of them, and not have their minds elevated, enlarged, invigorated? Christianity is calculated to form characters of whom "the world is not worthy," and who look upon the whole world as not worthy to be an inheritance and portion to them; who would not be bribed by it to do an action which is dishonourable to the holy name which they bear, and the family in heaven and earth to which they belong; and who, though all its kingdoms, with all their glory, were laid at their feet, would not make it their god, or say to it, 'Thou art my confidence.' Brought to a close and entire dependence on God, they feel independent of all things else; and though ready to "become the servants of all men" for their good, "will not be brought under the power of any," by yielding them a slavish subjection. Reconciled to God, and assured that nothing can separate them from his love in Christ, they live above the world while in it; its changes do not essentially affect their happiness; they are prepared to quit it, and look forward to death as the period of their emancipation; and yet they look upon it as their high duty to glorify God here, and do not consider that they are at liberty to throw away their lives, or to leave their present station, until they are relieved and dismissed by him to whom they live and die. Secure in the protection of the Omnipresent, they fear no evil; assured of the help of the Omnipotent, they deem no task to which they are called hopeless or impracticable. Such is the genius of Christianity, and such the characters which it forms.

But every man in his own order. There is one glory of the sun, another of the moon, and another of the stars; and even one star differeth from another star in glory. All have

not the same clear and comprehensive knowledge of the gospel, all have not the same full and overpowering assurance of its truth; the hearts of all are not alike laid open, and kept open, to its influence, so as that it should "have free course and be glorified," by occupying and swaying their every faculty and power. "There is a diversity of operations," though "it is the same God that worketh all in all." Nature has endowed some men with a greatness of soul above others; and there is a similar diversity and gradation in the creations of grace. When Saul was anointed by Samuel to be king of Israel, the Spirit, we are told, came upon him, and "God gave him another heart;"—a generous, noble, princely spirit, qualifying him for the high station to which he was destined. And when the New Testament Saul was set apart to a high office in the church, "God gave him another heart;"—a magnanimity corresponding to the greatness of the work to which he was called, not only as an apostle, but the apostle of the Gentiles—the apostle of the world.

You may be disposed, my brethren, to compare the work allotted to Paul, to that of one who, in our day, sets out on a mission to convert the heathen. But they are, in fact, very different. The modern missionary must, no doubt, make sacrifices, and lay his account with difficulties; but he has great encouragements. He leaves behind him a multitude of friends, who take a warm interest in his welfare, and are ready to receive him back with cordiality, provided he is unsuccessful. He goes out from a country the very name of which is sufficient to procure him a ready reception and protect him from personal danger from the most distant and barbarous tribes. Above all, he has the satisfaction of reflecting, that Christianity is already established in the earth, and can be exposed to no risk from the failure of his expedition. But Paul left few friends behind him. His own countrymen were his greatest enemies; and, instead of offering him the prospect of an asylum, if he were forced to retreat, were the means of stirring up persecution against him wherever he went. He had no earthly protector or patronage to look to. "Christ crucified," who had been "to the Jews a stumblingblock," had not yet been "preached to the

Gentiles;" and that he should be "believed on by the world," was then in the highest degree improbable, according to all the views of human reason. The obstacles which resisted the propagation of the gospel presented themselves on every side, rising one behind another—the jealous policy of rulers, the pride of philosophers, the self-interest of a crafty and long-established priesthood, and the ignorance, superstition, and brutal rage of a licentious populace. What a combination of qualities did it require in the person of the individual, who, in the name of God, first attacked and broke through these barriers! What faith, confidence, and courage in making the attack! What firmness, self-possession, caution, circumspection, in keeping the ground which had been gained! What fortitude, resolution, and patience in enlarging it! It required a soul raised to a high pitch, not by sudden impressions and the force of a heated imagination, but by enlightened and steady principles; a soul wound up in all its faculties, intellectual and moral, regulated, balanced, sustained, and furnished with a spring which could bear the severest pressure, which would not wear itself away by its own motion, nor suffer derangement from the changes of external circumstances; a soul exalted above the world, and all those worldly motives by which men are ordinarily actuated, attracted, or repelled; and disengaged from all selfishness, effeminacy, envy, illiberality, and those narrow prejudices which are founded on the distinction of nations, classes, and conditions in life; a soul filled with supreme love to God, and ardent love to man, fired with heavenly ambition to advance the divine glory in the highest, and promote the eternal welfare of mankind, and which, in pursuing this noble object, was prepared to make all sacrifices, sustain all fatigues, run all hazards, endure all sufferings. And such, my brethren, was the soul of Paul. At the call of God, he went forth into the world, "bearing" (it was all his armour) "the name of the Lord Jesus"—not knowing whither he went, but prepared to go wherever Providence pointed the way, to the north, the south, the east, or the west; and not knowing what would befall him, nor moved by the warnings which he received in

every city, that bonds and imprisonments awaited him. His heart was enlarged to all the world, and he trusted to his Master to open before him the door of faith, and to preserve him as long as he had services for him to perform. Never did conqueror, whose breast swelled with the love of fame, pant so eagerly for a field on which to signalize his prowess, as he panted to enlarge the boundaries of the kingdom of grace, and to multiply the bloodless triumphs of the cross. When he had planted the gospel in one city or country, he took his departure to another, leaving it to others to enter on the fruits of his labours; and uninterrupted as his exertions, and rapid as his movements were, they were yet outrun by the celerity of his desires, which had marked out beforehand as the scenes of future labours, spots which, there is reason to think, he never reached during the limited period of his usefulness. Hear his own words to the Christians at Rome, whom he had not yet personally visited, and mark how he speaks of a projected expedition into Spain:—"I am debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise; so, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are in Rome also. Now, having no more place (of usefulness) in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you, whenever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you. And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ." * How was he sure of this? Because he had long felt, and at that moment continued to feel, that gospel flowing out of his heart in irrepressible desires to be the means of blessing them. What a strong expression of the state of his feelings! He knew the gift of God, and had drunk of that spiritual water, which was in his heart a well of living water springing up to the supply of himself and of many, and which, the more that was drawn from it, flowed the more freely and copiously, because it was supplied by the Spirit, from him in whom "all fulness dwells." But did he forget those churches which he had

* Rom. i. 14, 15; xv. 23, 24, 29.

planted, in his eagerness to christianize the barren and waste parts of the world? The frequent visits which he paid them, and the letters and messengers he sent to them from time to time, testify in the negative. The passion which he felt to convert souls was equalled by the agony (I use his own word), the agony which he felt for their conservation; so that, when thrown into doubt about their state, he "travailed in birth the second time." His capacious soul could admit, and received, so far as they were known to him, all the concerns, the joys, and griefs "of all the churches." Take only one instance among many which might be produced. From a tender and considerate regard to the good of the Christians at Corinth, he had determined not to revisit them until their unseemly heats and factions were allayed. How was he affected while he waited at Ephesus to receive the tidings of this longed-for, but protracted issue? "O ye Corinthians! our mouth is open unto you; our heart is enlarged!" What a picture of a heart! We see him standing on the shore of the Ægean sea, over against Corinth, with his arms extended towards that city, and in the attitude of speaking. We hear the words by which he seeks to relieve his overcharged breast, heaving and ready to burst with the fulness of those desires which he had long felt to come among them, satisfy them of the sincerity of his affection, and replenish their souls with the consolation with which he himself had been comforted. "O ye Corinthians, 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 (I speak as unto my children), be ye also enlarged." *

4. Our attention is particularly called to two qualities, by which, whether they are viewed as entering into the formation of magnanimity, or as produced by it, our apostle was eminently distinguished—intrepidity and independence. Elevated as his mind was, and borne up by such powerful principles, he felt as moving in a region which danger could not reach. Incased in the divine panoply of the gospel, he was

* 2 Cor. vi. 11-13.

inaccessible to those impressions which create apprehension and alarm. That which was most valuable and precious about him he had committed to one who, he was persuaded, was "able to keep it;" he was convinced that he had embarked in the best and most honourable of causes, in the behalf of which it was glorious to suffer and die; he believed that it would survive him, and that his sufferings and death, as well as his active services, would contribute to its advancement; he confided in the protection of Him whose cause it was, so long as there remained any thing for him to do in its behalf; he rested assured that, when he had "finished his course, and fought the good fight," he should "receive a crown of glory which fadeth not away;" and so filled was his soul with these high thoughts and animating feelings, that there was no room left for fear to abide or enter. Often was he "in perils" of every kind, but in the midst of them he possessed his soul in peace. He descended fearlessly into the arena, to "fight with wild beasts at Ephesus;" when surrounded by infuriated and fanatical mobs, he remained unmoved. On more than one occasion, his temper appears to have been ruffled by the illegal violence of his enemies, and the undutiful conduct of his friends; but we never read of his courage having been shaken, or of his having yielded to an unmanly and unchristian timidity. When urged by those who trembled for the safety of his valuable life, to keep at a distance from danger, his reply was similar to that of the noble-minded governor of Judea—"Should such a man as I flee?" On his last journey to Jerusalem, to discharge a debt of brotherly love, the premonitions and symptoms of his danger multiplied as he advanced, so that he could no longer resist the impression, that bonds and imprisonments, at least, awaited him; "but none of these things move me," says he; "neither count I my life dear, that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry that I have received of the Lord to testify the gospel of the grace of God." To face the danger was not so difficult to him as to break from the embraces of his weeping brethren, who threw their bodies in his way to divert him from a journey which they foresaw would prove hazardous to him, and he

was forced to summon up all his courage to effect his escape. "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." * After he fell into the hands of his unnatural countrymen, we find him displaying the coolest and most collected intrepidity in his appearances before governors and kings, and, lastly, before the Roman emperor;—not only keeping himself from every thing that was pusillanimous in language or demeanour, but avowing his faith and his innocence, defending both with amazing boldness and eloquence, and leaving on the minds of the most partial and unjust of his judges an impression favourable to his cause and to the dignity of his character.

And then, my brethren, you are to observe that his courage was characterised by prudence. It was free from rashness, vaunting, or foolhardiness. He did not, like some enthusiasts, court persecution, throw himself in the way of danger, or neglect or refuse to employ any lawful means of escaping or saving himself from them. When Festus, "willing to do the Jews a pleasure," asked him if he would go up to Jerusalem to be judged, he did not suffer himself to be betrayed into a consent to this proposal by the temptation of making a display of conscious innocence and boldness; but he replied nobly and wisely in language which conveyed a severe, though tacit, reproof of the insidious and dishonourable partiality of his judge: "I stand at Cesar's judgment-seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die; but if there be none of those things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Cesar." † What a contrast between this and the peevish reply of Festus, who felt himself reproved and humbled in the presence of his injured but dignified prisoner! "Hast thou appealed unto Cesar? unto Cesar shalt thou go." It is thus that men clothed with authority will sometimes make a merit of injus-

* Acts, xxi. 13.

† Acts, xxv. 9–11.

tice, and try to conceal the littleness of their mind by drawing themselves up on their chair of state, without reflecting that the concealment is seen through by those who pity more than they despise them.

Independence of mind is a still rarer quality than intrepidity. How many are the avenues, besides that of fear, by which corruption may enter the mind, and lower its tone and deteriorate its virtue! Pride may prove in some cases an antidote to timidity. But a stronger and more incorruptible guard is required to bar the entrance of the desire which all, and especially those who have been long harassed and tossed, feel for ease and quiet—of partiality to friends, an anxiety to gratify those whom we esteem and to whom we have been indebted, and deference to public opinion and the authority of those who are held in reputation by the wise and good. To disinterestedness our apostle had added a strict training and mental discipline. He had "learned in whatsoever condition he was, therewith to be content." He was accordingly independent of external circumstances, neither buoyed up by prosperity nor depressed by adversity, blinded by favours nor biassed by injuries, elated by honour nor cast down by disgrace.

The love of fame and desire of distinction has in every age prompted men to engage in the most fatiguing and hazardous enterprises. It was this passion which contributed to form the characters of those who were so highly celebrated in Greece and Rome as heroes and patriots. An attentive consideration of their conduct may convince us that the "immense desire of glory" held a higher place in their breast than the boasted love of country. Nor were they singular in this. To find a man who is "good without show" has been always easier than to discover one who is "above ambition great." Yet no man is truly great in whom this passion is paramount. It is of a more refined nature indeed than the sordid love of gain, but still it is selfish, and therefore low. The love of what is great, and not the desire of being thought great, constitutes greatness, and a thirst for applause argues a defect and emptiness in the breast in which it resides. Nor can any man be truly independent whose governing principle

is the desire of fame. He is a slave to those on whose good opinion his highest enjoyment depends—a slave, not to one, but to thousands. He must study to please them, and shape all his actions, not according to his own judgment, but theirs, and thus be under continual temptation to violate truth and sacrifice a good conscience. Paul was not indifferent to the opinion of the wise and good. He "commended himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God." He bestowed praise on others, and therefore could not despise it in his own person. But he aimed at something higher and nobler. The glory of God, the honour of Christ, the propagation of truth and holiness, the eternal salvation of his fellow-men, fidelity to the trust committed to him, the future approbation of his Divine Master, the reward which he would confer on him, and the testimony of his own conscience, occupied, all of them, a higher place in his regards than the approbation and applause of the world. He had too much good sense not to perceive that by embarking in the cause of Christianity he had baulked all reasonable hopes of obtaining this, and he did not seek to compensate for the loss of it by courting the favour of his new friends. Listen to the appeal which he makes to the Galatians: "Do I now persuade" (conciliate the favour of) "men or God? or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." * And his protestation to the Thessalonians: "As we were allowed to be put in trust with the gospel so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God, who trieth our hearts; for neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness, God is witness: nor of men sought we glory, neither of you nor yet of others." † Hence it came about that he moved forward in a straight course in the discharge of his public duty, without being drawn to the right hand or to the left by the desire of securing the favour or declining the displeasure of men. Hence he continued to "tell the truth" at the expense of being "counted an enemy" by those who had held him in the highest estimation, and "shunned not to declare the whole

* Gal. i. 10. † 1 Thess. ii. 4–6.

counsel of God, keeping nothing back," however offensive or ungrateful it might be to some of the hearers. Hence he was kept from imitating those who "corrupted the word of God," and from adopting any of their disingenuous methods for removing or lessening "the offence of the cross" in the eyes of the world, which was "crucified" to him and he to it. Hence he was under no temptation of acting on the system of pious frauds for advancing a good cause, but pronounces its fundamental principle damnable. Hence he withstood to the face such as were "pillars" of the church, and rebuked the most honoured of his brethren when they "walked not with a straight foot;" while, on the other hand, neither the ingratitude of his friends, nor the inveterate hostility of his adversaries, prevented him from praying and labouring for their salvation.

Yet his independence was not that of selfishness, pride, or affectation. He was condescending and indulgent to the meanest and weakest individual. In all things consistent with truth and duty, he endeavoured to "please not himself, but others, for their good to edification." Every thing recorded of him justifies the striking description which he has transiently given of this part of his character: "Though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more."* He had before reminded the Corinthians, that he "had not used the power" by which he might justly have claimed support from them; and now he informs them, that the freedom which he had acquired by such conduct he willingly laid at their feet, that he might promote their salvation. Here you have conscious power combined with cheerful self-denial, a noble freedom with the most rational subjection, the strictest independence with the most amiable indulgence. This is Christian virtue,—this is true magnanimity.

5. His heart was tender, and his affections warm. We are apt to regard a person of great talents with that species of cold thrilling admiration with which we look up to a mountain whose lofty summit is perpetually covered with ice and snow.

* 1 Cor. ix. 19.

Nor is this feeling altogether without reason; for such is the imperfection of human nature, that the great and gentle, the lofty and tender, are seldom seen united in the same individual. Among the apostles of our Lord, one was the Son of Thunder, and another, the Son of Consolation—one was distinguished for great, and another for good, qualities. Not that there is any real contrariety between these two kinds of qualities, or that they are absolutely incompatible. He who is the greatest is at the same time the best of beings, and is not only infinite in wisdom and power, but also "very pitiful, and of tender mercy." He upon whom "the spirit of counsel and might rested," could not refrain from melting into tears at the grave of that friend whom he was about to raise from the dead. "Jesus wept"—wept, too, over that city, the inhabitants of which were about to put him to a cruel death; and the thought of his own sufferings, which were at hand, was swallowed up in tender concern for theirs, which were at a distance. Paul had drunk deeply of this spirit of his Divine Master, and he displayed it towards his unbelieving, ungrateful, implacable countrymen, who had pursued him with the same hostility with which they had treated their Saviour. "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh."* Ah! my brethren, how difficult is it for us, "straitened," as we are, "in our own bowels," narrow and illiberal, selfish and indevout as our hearts are, to take the height of this aspiration, or penetrate the depth of its spring! There is more here than an effusion of disinterested benevolence, more than an expression of sacred patriotism. It is an ejaculation from a great heart, filled with all goodness, long-suffering, forbearance, forgiveness, compassion, tenderness; touched with a recollection of its own former sinfulness; alive to all the ties of kindred and country; crucified to every selfish feeling; quickened and inflamed by the knowledge-

* Rom. ix. 1-3.

surpassing love of Christ. No wonder that those who have contemplated it have taxed their ingenuity to find an interpretation of the language in which it is conveyed, which would bring it within the range of what they deemed practicable, or lawful to wish and utter. Certainly, we are not to understand them in a sense which would imply a violation of Christian principle, or a denial of the indissolubility of that union between the Redeemer and all his genuine friends, in which our apostle elsewhere triumphs; but neither, on the other hand, are we to reduce their meaning to the standard of our diluted and lukewarm affections. I am averse to admit any construction of the words, which would strip them of the resemblance which they bear to the patriotic and self-devoting request of the great Jewish legislator, * between whose character and that of Paul I think I observe such a striking coincidence, especially in the sacrifices which they made for the same cause, their "esteem of the reproach of Christ," and their exemplification of all that is amiable in union with all that is magnanimous.

The grace of God can soften the most insensible and obdurate heart, and make it overflow with loving-kindness, as the waters gushed from the rock smitten by the rod of Moses. But in the present instance it purified a heart which was originally open and affectionate, directed its streams into a new and more enlarged channel, and caused to flow in upon them, with irresistible and increasing force, a tide which raised them to a supernatural height of devotion and benevolence. The strength of his devotional feelings is apparent from the whole of his writings. With what mingled admiration and delight does he dwell on the discoveries of divine wisdom in the economy of redemption! How overpowered his mind when he attempts to describe the incommensurable love of Christ! Whenever he approaches such themes he yields to the power of their attraction, and is carried away by it with such rapidity that, if unattentive, we lose him, and are unable to track his flight. He cannot speak of them in an ordinary strain. When

* Exod. xxxii. 32.

employed in teaching men the deep things of God, he, as if unconsciously, addresses himself to God. His letters are written on his bended knees; and a system of divinity, comprising the most mysterious truths, is conveyed in the form of a continued prayer or thanksgiving. Of this the first chapters of the epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians are examples. Yet ardent, elevated, and even rapturous as his devout emotions are, there is nothing enthusiastical in the sentiment, or extravagant and unbecoming in the expression. Our judgment approves as excellent what he expresses in the most impassioned language; and we believe him when he tells us that he cannot reach the sublimity of his subject, just because he has raised our minds to that height which enables us to look upon it. There is nothing in his writings of the unintelligible jargon of mystics and essentialists. If it is necessary for him to "come to visions and revelations," instead of entertaining us with what he had seen and heard when "caught up to the third heaven," he has nothing to communicate, excuses his reserve by telling us that it was "unspeakable, and not lawful for a man to utter," and, introducing a subject which was more pleasing to him, because it is more edifying to us, he proceeds to descant, with his usual eloquence, on the infirmities, reproaches, necessities, persecutions, distresses, which he endured for Christ's sake.*

Nor was his philanthropy less ardent than his devotion. But philanthropy is a cold affection compared with that which the apostle felt for those among whom he laboured in the gospel of Christ, and which he evinced by his unwearied assiduities, his painful watchings, his anxious solicitude, his self-forgetfulness, his tenderness, his tears. "Though ye have ten thousand instructors" (says he to the Corinthians), "yet have ye not many fathers."† His was indeed parental affection, and that of no ordinary kind. "We were gentle among you" (he is addressing himself to the Thessalonians), "even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted to you not the gospel of Christ only, because ye were dear to us."‡ While feeding

* 2 Cor. xii. 1–10. † 1 Cor. iv. 15. ‡ 1 Thess. ii. 7, 8.

them with "the sincere milk of the word," he felt ready to pour out his blood for their sake. One would think that love could not have been more intense; and yet his removal from them caused it to burn with a more vehement flame, converting his concern for their spiritual welfare into an anxiety which grew to be agonizing and intolerable. Hearing of the persecution which raged at Thessalonica, and afraid that the confidence of his young converts might be shaken by it, he became impatient to visit them. "Once and again" he made the attempt, "but Satan" (says he) "hindered me." At last he could "no longer forbear," but sent Timotheus, his sole companion, from Athens, to establish and comfort them; and having received a favourable report from him, he was "comforted over them," amidst all his personal afflictions; "for now" (says he) "we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord." * His fears of their stability had almost exanimated him; the intelligence of their apostasy how could he have survived? for, as he says of another church, "ye are in our hearts, to die and live with you." †

The annals of the Corinthian church furnish us with still more striking illustrations of this part of the apostle's character. He had planted that church, been the means of converting many in it to the faith of Christ, conveyed to them a rich profusion of spiritual gifts, and left them in a most flourishing state. But after his departure, false apostles, deceitful workers, had entered among them, corrupted their Christian simplicity, and introduced many flagrant abuses. "Out of much affliction and anguish of heart he wrote unto them with many tears," expostulating with them on their conduct, and beseeching them to return to their duty. Scarcely had he despatched the letter when he began to "repent." The epistle contained nothing which was calculated to irritate them, and the object of the writer was, "not that they should be grieved," but that they "might know the love which he had to them more abundantly." ‡ But love has its jealousies, and sensibility its fears, for which they cannot account at the bar of cold reason. Something might have been done to abate the severity of rigid

* 1 Thess. iii. 7, 8. † 2 Cor. vii. 3. ‡ 2 Cor. ii.

reproof, to explain what was hard to be understood, and to ascertain the sense of what they were disposed to misconstruct. His presence among them would, in existing circumstances, add oil to the flame of contention, but another might be useful in preventing them from throwing themselves into the arms of designing leaders or abandoning themselves to despair. Accordingly Timothy is despatched to Corinth, and after him Titus is sent. In the mean time "a door is opened of the Lord" to the apostle to preach Christ's gospel at Troas; but, strange to relate! he who panted so earnestly for such opportunities, had neither heart nor tongue to improve the present. The expected messenger from Corinth had not arrived—he had "no rest in his spirit," and abandoning the rich harvest which invited his labours, he wandered into Macedonia. Nor yet did he find ease: "For when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears." At last Titus arrives with tidings from Corinth. The apostle's letter had been well received; it had produced the intended effects; a spirit of repentance had fallen upon the church; they had applied themselves vigorously to the correction of abuses; the love which they bore to their spiritual father had revived with additional strength. "*NOW!* thanks be unto God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place! Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great my glorying of you; I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation." * What a sudden change! What a wonderful transformation! Formerly we saw him, like a soldier, wounded, weak, disabled, dispirited, fallen to the ground: now he is lifted up, victorious, and borne on the triumphant car. Formerly, a retrospect of his toils imparted no joy to his heart, and he was ready to exclaim, "Surely I have laboured in vain, and spent my strength for nought and in vain:" but the tidings of Titus had the same effect on him which the

* 2 Cor. ii. 14; vii. 4.

tasting of the honey had on Jonathan, and now, on looking back on the same course, he sees only a train of victories and triumphs. Such alternations of feeling, and quick changes from fear to hope, and from grief to joy, on the account of others, are incident only to tender hearts.

The same feeling dictated that wise and winning mode of address which pervades the writings of our apostle, and which he adopts whenever he has occasion to reprove, or seeks to reclaim. He is ingenious in finding excuses for his brethren. He only "partly believes" the unfavourable reports of them. He "stands in doubt" of them—is "afraid of them;" but is unwilling to think the worst. "Have ye suffered so many things in vain, if it be yet in vain?" If he had been grieved, it was only "by a part" of them. "Ye have not injured me at all." This language is not the result of art, or of a frigid prudence, but flows from the warmth of his affections, and a delicate apprehension of saying any thing which might, in the slightest degree, mar the spiritual benefit of those who were concerned.—Let me add, that his affection was not limited to those among whom he had laboured personally, but extended to "as many as had not seen his face." He tells us that he felt a tender solicitude for all the churches, and for every individual in them. "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?"* But I would quote the greater part of his writings, if I were to produce all the proofs of this feature of his character.

Learned men have employed themselves in forming a key to the Epistles of Paul. Without despising their labours, or undervaluing the assistance which may be drawn from them for understanding what is obscure in his writings, I cannot help saying that attention to that quality of his mind which we are now considering is the best key to his works. It will enable us to unlock the cabinet which contains such rare treasures, and to find our way into some of its most concealed and intricate compartments. It will often do more than any instrument in the art of interpretation for explaining his pecu-

* 2 Cor. xi. 28, 29.

liar phraseology, his seeming tautologies, his puzzling paradoxes, his transitions, digressions, parentheses, and hyperboles. Without this sympathetic tact, the acutest critic and the most skilful divine will frequently fail in hitting his sense, following the strain of his discourse, or penetrating the depth of his argument; and they will certainly fail in perceiving his beauties. A ravishing persuasion of the sublime truths of Christianity, and an intense love to the souls of men, are the two elements which form Paul's eloquence, and by which his writings are distinguished from those of all other orators.

In fine, after what has been advanced, it is scarcely necessary for me to add, that his ardent zeal for religion was tempered with the greatest moderation. But as this part of his character is frequently brought forward in the evangelical record, it is proper that it should be distinctly stated here. Before his conversion, Paul was "exceedingly zealous of the traditions of his fathers;" but then his zeal was blind, bigoted, intolerant, and violent. His zeal for Christianity was equally ardent, but it was enlightened and liberal, and under the government of the mild and gentle principles of the religion which he had espoused. He was "very jealous" of the honour of his new Master, and wholly devoted to his interests; but then it was as became the servant of him who was "meek and lowly of heart," and who "came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." If "his spirit was stirred in him" when he saw the cities which he visited "wholly given to idolatry," and if he felt constrained in duty to teach that "they were no gods which were made with men's hands," this he did in the synagogues of the Jews, or in the forum, where it was customary to treat such topics; and there was nothing in his discourse which was calculated to excite sedition, or inconsistent with the decorum due to a worship founded on prescription, and sanctioned by the voice and laws of the public. If, under the influence of love to the truth and to the souls of men, he pronounced those "accursed" who should "preach another gospel," he was willing that the curse should fall on himself, provided he was found guilty of the sin. If he directed the church of Corinth to "deliver unto Satan" a vicious member,

it was "for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved." If he announced that the weapons with which he was armed were "in readiness to revenge the disobedience" of the proud and obstinate, he at the same time declares that he would not draw the spiritual sword until the "obedience" of the sound part of the church was "fulfilled," and time was given to all to repent.

What an eminent display of this temper did he give in the controversy respecting the observance of the Mosaical law, which divided the opinions and disturbed the peace of the primitive church! In maintaining the doctrine of gratuitous justification by faith, in opposition to those who would have made this privilege to depend on the performance of works, whether moral or ceremonial, he was inflexible; and he "gave place, by subjection, no, not for an hour," to those who sought to impose the yoke of Jewish ceremonies on Gentile believers. But, at the same time, he readily acquiesced in, and used his authority to execute, the decree of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem as to certain things which it was necessary for the Gentiles to avoid, in order to preserve communion with their Jewish brethren. With respect to believers of the Jewish nation, his conduct was different. He knew that the ceremonial law was virtually deprived of its obligation by the death of Christ; but he was aware that all who had embraced the gospel did not possess the knowledge and assurance of this truth, that it was the will of God that their minds should be gradually enlightened in it, and that they were accepted by him when they acted in this matter according to their conviction, and with charity toward their brethren. Accordingly, he exhorted them not to condemn one another on account of their different opinions and practices; but, at the same time, showed that it was the duty of the more enlightened to have a due regard to the scruples of their weaker brethren, and not to use their own liberty in such a way as to lay a stumbling-block before them, or to lead them into the commission of what they thought sin. In this way, while he instructed the more ignorant, and conducted them gradually to the knowledge of their Christian liberty and privileges, he repressed

the rashness, selfishness, and pride of the more knowing. And the doctrine which he taught on this head he was careful to exemplify in his own practice. While he proclaimed aloud, "I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean in itself," with the same breath, and in same tone, he declared, "If meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." Hence the maxim by which he regulated his conduct in such matters: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not." Hence the description which he gives of his uniform behaviour in every thing which was not in itself or by implication sinful: "Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without law, as without law (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ), that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." (1 Cor. ix. 20–22). Here zeal and charity meet together, and truth and peace embrace one another. Here we have a genuine and living exhibition of Christian liberality, which has been so often counterfeited and caricatured; for what is true liberality of mind but a good heart shining through a clear and enlarged understanding?

SERMON III.

THE ADVANTAGES OF ADVERSITY, ILLUSTRATED IN THE HISTORY OF JOSEPH.

Ps. cv. 17–22.

HE SENT A MAN BEFORE THEM, EVEN JOSEPH, WHO WAS SOLD FOR A SERVANT; WHOSE FEET THEY HURT WITH FETTERS; HE WAS LAID IN IRON: UNTIL THE TIME THAT HIS WORD CAME: THE WORD OF THE LORD TRIED HIM. THE KING SENT AND LOOSED HIM; EVEN THE RULER OF THE PEOPLE, AND LET HIM GO FREE. HE MADE HIM LORD OF HIS HOUSE, AND RULER OF ALL HIS SUBSTANCE; TO BIND HIS PRINCES AT HIS PLEASURE, AND TEACH SENATORS WISDOM.

WHERE, even in works of imagination formed solely to please, will we find a story so beautiful, and so delightfully told, as that of Joseph in the book of Genesis? Which of you does not recollect from a child the intense and never-wearying interest with which you listened again and again to the recital of the events of his checkered life—the tears of sorrow which you shed over the successive calamities which overwhelmed the amiable youth—and the tears of joy which flowed still more copiously at the unexpected turn of affairs which raised him from a prison to the second place in Egypt, and gilded the last hours of the venerable old man his father?

But the history of Joseph would not have obtained a place in the inspired volume, had it not been highly instructive as well as deeply interesting. Not to speak of the important moral lessons it conveys; such as the baneful effects of envy, especially among children of the same family; the force of religion in fortifying the mind against temptation, and sustaining it under the pressure of adversity; and the power of

conscience in awakening the remembrance of sins long ago committed and forgotten;—what a striking illustration does this narrative furnish of the mysterious way in which Providence accomplishes its designs by a concatenated series of second causes, including circumstances seemingly fortuitous, and the volitions of rational agents who mean nothing less than that issue which they contribute unconsciously to effect and secure. Had Joseph not told his dreams to his brethren—had he not been sent by his father to Dothan—had not the Ishmaelites passed by when he was in the pit—had he not been sold to Potiphar—had his mistress been a better woman, or his master a worse man—had he been thrown into any other than the king's prison,—in fine, had the officers of Pharaoh not incurred the displeasure of their master, Joseph's advancement could not have taken place, and the purposes of heaven to save much people alive, and to provide a settlement for Israel in Egypt, with all the varied and long train of grand results, embracing the happiness of all nations in all generations, which depended upon this, would have been deranged and rendered abortive.

It is not, however, my intention at present to dwell on these topics. What I intend is to illustrate another truth, taught by this history, and prominently exhibited in the text, viz. That those persons whom God has destined to be pre-eminently useful in advancing his glory, and promoting the good of his church and of mankind, he usually prepares for this task, by causing them previously, and often at an early period of life, to pass through scenes of severe affliction.

Affliction forms an essential part of the discipline of God's family, and to each of his children is allotted that share of it which infinite wisdom sees to be necessary and meet. This is the general law of the house, from which there is no exemption. Neither the instrumentality of word and ordinances, nor the implantation of gracious principles, nor the active cultivation of them, nor the superintending agency of the Holy Spirit, can supersede or render useless this severe but salutary process in forming the character of the "heirs of salvation."

We must not presume to "limit the Holy One," or invade his sovereignty in apportioning trials, as well as dividing gifts, "severally as he willeth." He will do what is best in every case, for his own glory, for the good of the individual, and for the benefit of many. But he hath prescribed general laws to himself, or, to speak more modestly, he usually acts after a certain way in the moral government of the world; and those who dutifully and humbly observe his operations, will, without pretending to scan them, be able to discover such reasons as serve, not only to vindicate his managements, but to display their manifold wisdom. As he "afflicts not willingly," nor to a greater extent than is necessary for gaining his wise and holy ends, we may safely conclude, that trials of a less severe and searching kind will be allotted to those who tread "the common walks of virtuous life," than to such as are called forth to more arduous service. The more conspicuous and enlarged the sphere in which any person moves, the more difficult are the duties which he has to perform, and the stronger the temptations to which he is exposed; and consequently he needs to pass through a severer course of disciplinary preparation. It may be added, that, though "no man liveth to himself," yet, comparatively speaking, the sufferings of the many are chiefly necessary on their own account, and as a preparative for heaven, and therefore may be endured by them at any period of their life; whereas the trials of the few are necessary for the sake of others, and as a preparative for doing their work on earth, and therefore are usually borne by them in early years, or at least before they have entered on that special service which Providence had assigned them.

The distinction now made may be confirmed, or at least illustrated, by referring to two distinguished characters in scripture history. The character of Job was intended as a pattern of patience in suffering affliction to all future ages. But this eminently pious person, who obtained this testimony from the mouth of God, "There is none like him," filled no official situation, and was not called to perform any service of a public kind in his generation. His life presented a picture of domestic piety, exemplified in the well-ordered economy of a

flourishing family, and in the varied beneficence which wealth enabled him to diffuse around his dwelling. Thus much we gather from the brief notice prefixed to the narrative of his sufferings, taken in connexion with the reminiscences of former days, which the insinuations of his over-suspicious friends called up and compelled him to reveal in his own defence. Accordingly his trials were delayed till an advanced period of his life, the fittest for displaying his integrity, and proving that it was equally independent on prosperity and adversity. It was quite otherwise as to another illustrious individual, who is generally supposed to have been contemporary with Job. Moses was destined to be the liberator of his countrymen from the cruel bondage of Egypt, to govern that "stiff and rebellious race" during forty years, in a wilderness, within a few days' march of a rich country which they had left filled with their terror, and to subject them to a code of laws which, though good and equitable, neither they nor their children were able to bear. His residence at the court of Pharaoh, his initiation into the wisdom of the Egyptians, and the practice of the arts of war and peace which he acquired during his early youth, were intended by Heaven to be subservient to his execution of its high behests. But neither these, nor his piety, nor the patriotism and generous indignation against tyranny which burned in his breast, suffered or could exempt him from passing through another education of a rougher kind, by which he might be freed from the impurities which he had contracted, and become qualified for his difficult task. It behoved him to be as many years an exile in Midian as he had been a courtier in Egypt, and was to be King in Jeshurun.

Your memory will supply you with examples from scripture which go to establish the truth of our proposition; and in particular you cannot forget "the apostle and high-priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." Though without the slightest taint of sin, though anointed with the Spirit without measure, though more than a man, though the Son of God, yet it behoved him to "learn obedience by the things which he suffered." If it became the Captain of Salvation to be made perfect through

sufferings, that he might lead many sons to glory, what subordinate leader can or ought to look for exemption?

To return to the person mentioned in the text—Joseph was selected to be the depositary of the secrets of heaven and the almoner of its bounty, in "saving much people alive," during a sore and protracted dearth, and also to be the instrument of providing an asylum for his brethren in Egypt until "the heritage of Jacob, their father," was ready for receiving them. The events which befel him were so arranged by Providence as at once to place him in circumstances to accomplish these services, and to train him for acting the part which became the patron of the chosen people, and the public benefactor of the age in which he lived.

It has often been observed, that the chosen instruments of Providence have given early indications of their high destiny, and that they or their friends have felt strong presentiments of this, which, by giving a direction to their education, and moulding their inclinations, have exerted a powerful influence on their future lives. Philosophers ascribe this to superstition, and are fond of displaying their ingenuity by tracing such impressions to external circumstances acting upon minds naturally ardent and aspiring. But the rigid eye of philosophy, clear as it is within its own range, is apt to be cold and feeble in its apprehension of moral influences in the divine government of the universe. Who made "the human face divine," and formed the spirit in man? Who assigned to individuals the age in which they should live, and their local habitation? Who brought them into contact with those circumstances which elicit thoughts and kindle feelings which otherwise would never have had an existence? Are we entitled to interrupt the Ruler of the world when employed in fashioning "the man that shall execute his counsel," and to say to him, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther?" May he speak to him by the whirlwind, the thunder, the earthquake, or the tumult of the people, but not by "the still small voice," inaudible by all but the ear into which it is whispered? Shall the free spirit of man be dependent on external circumstances, and liable to receive impressions from every thing that is

material and gross around it, and yet be independent on, and inaccessible to, the direct influences of the Father of Spirits? If this be philosophical, it sounds very like irrational, and seems to be at once derogatory to the Divine Being, and to man, whom, of all terrestrial creatures, he had formed with the capabilities of holding converse with himself.

"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child." They perceived something divine in the preternatural beauty and expression of his countenance. Looking along the bow of the promised deliverance, they saw it resting, and its beams playing on the features of their lovely babe, and faith united with natural affection in stimulating them to preserve his life, and afterwards to watch over his education. In like manner Moses, when he came to years, and was made acquainted with his lineage and miraculous preservation, conceived the idea that he would one day be the deliverer of his enslaved countrymen.

Similar aspirations, though of a kind more congenial to his gentler dispositions, and the nature of his destined employment, were indulged by Joseph, perhaps even before God "proved his heart, and visited him in the night" with dreams. Animated by these, schemes of future usefulness and glory would flit before his kindling fancy, and his benevolent breast would heave with the anticipated pleasure of nursing his affectionate parent in his old age, providing for his churlish but still beloved brethren, dealing bread to the hungry stranger, bringing the poor outcast into his house, scattering plenty over a barren land, and receiving the blessing of thousands ready to perish. With these feelings of his son Jacob appears to have sympathized, and accordingly, though he rebuked him for the apparent imprudence with which he revealed his nightly visions, we are told that "he observed the saying."

In addition to the most amiable dispositions, Joseph inherited the piety which had adorned and sanctified the character of his forefathers for three successive generations. The fear of God, which his father had betimes sedulously inculcated on

all his children, had, by the blessing of Heaven, taken root in the mind of Joseph, and blossomed from his tenderest years. Hence, instead of having "his good manners corrupted by the evil communications" of his elder brothers, he was grieved at their misconduct, and employed what appeared to him the best means for reclaiming them. Add to this that he had for "the guide of his youth" one who had seen affliction, and who knew what it was to incur the envy of a brother, and to suffer from the selfishness of relations, and consequently could impart to him in the most impressive manner the salutary instructions and cautions which he had learned in the hard school of adversity.

But neither his high aspirations, nor his benevolent dispositions, nor his early piety, nor the education which he had received under the eye of a parent trained in the school of adversity, could suffice to form the character of Joseph. To qualify him as "a polished shaft" in the hand of Providence, it behoved him to suffer sharper and more varied trials than any of his progenitors. Hated of his brethren, sold for a slave, falsely accused, thrown into prison, bound with irons, friendless and forgotten, "the affliction of Joseph" passed into a proverb. Before he had spent the period of youth, and while all the sensibilities of his nature were still tender, he had encountered all the storms of calamity to which the unfortunate are exposed during the course of a long life. How affecting his address to his fellow-prisoner whose restoration to liberty and honours he had predicted! "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. For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon." And it behoved his soul, already sick with hope deferred, to be pierced with the keenest dart in adversity's quiver—base ingratitude. Yet of all the hardships which he underwent none was unnecessary or supererogatory. Every pang which he suffered, and every moment of his tedious imprisonment, contributed its share to the formation of that character, which, when developed, proclaimed

him to be "the minister of God for good" to the church and mankind.

Before proceeding farther, let me simply mention two things to prevent mistakes. In the first place, I mean not to speak of the world's worthies, some of whom have learned in adversity the hardy virtues of patience, temperance, and fortitude, and by their wisdom and patriotism have earned "a mortal immortality," but I confine myself to those men of God whose virtues are grafted on genuine piety. In the second place, in speaking of the advantages of affliction, I suppose it to be accompanied with the sanctifying blessing of him who sent it, and thus yielding "the peaceable fruits of righteousness in those who are exercised thereby." Without this it would depress instead of invigorating the mind, irritate the passions instead of subduing them, and harden instead of improving the heart. Without this even the good would be tempted to murmur against Providence, "put forth their hand to iniquity," and have recourse to dishonest and dishonourable expedients to extricate themselves from calamities and straits by which they were "pressed above measure." I now go on to speak of the advantages to be derived from adversity.

I. It is a school for acquiring practical wisdom. When we are in eager pursuit of this world's enjoyments we have no leisure for serious reflection—when we have obtained these our minds are unfitted for it, and, though the price is in our hands, we have no heart to buy wisdom. Adversity has a tendency to sober the mind, disperses the illusions which prosperity had created, and induces thoughtfulness and meditation. He who bears the yoke in his youth sitteth alone and is silent, searches and tries his ways, and applies his heart to wisdom.

Practical wisdom comprehends two things—the knowledge of ourselves and of others, and both of these are most advantageously acquired in adversity.

How ignorant are even good men of themselves before they are put to the trial! How ready to mistake their character, to be deceived as to the motives by which they are actuated, and to overrate their talents and the strength of

their principles! How apt to think they are something when they are nothing, and to expose themselves rashly to temptation! Happy was it for Peter that his grand trial was over, and that the secrets of his heart were revealed to him before he was called to take a leading part in the propagation of the gospel, and to appear before kings and rulers for the name of Christ! It is true we would not be such strangers to ourselves if we listened to faithful counsel, and subjected our hearts to the test of an impartial and rigid self-examination. But still there is no knowledge like to that which is gained by experience, and no experience like that which is the result of tribulation. By encountering hardships we discover where our weakness lies, and in what quarter we are most vulnerable by the shafts of temptation—whether we are in greater danger of failing, in the hour of trial, from love to the world, timidity, a sense of shame, impatience, anger, unbelief, pride, or vainglory. The person who has been involved in "a sea of troubles," where "deep calleth unto deep," and one billow succeeds to another, is made to feel his weakness, and to exclaim—Ah!

> "This is no flattery; these are counsellors
> That feelingly persuade me what I am."

Next to self-knowledge, an intimate and accurate acquaintance with the characters of other men is of the greatest utility to those who are called to be "workers together with God." The knowledge of our own hearts offers us important aid in the study of human nature; but a person of conscious integrity and generous dispositions will meet with cruel disappointments in the estimates which he has formed on this standard. How much levity, inconstancy, and falsehood—how much hypocrisy, ingratitude, and treachery—are laid open by a change to the worse in our external circumstances! "A friend," says the old proverb, "is not known in prosperity; and an enemy cannot be hidden in adversity." Nor is insincerity the only shelf which we need to avoid.

Moses, when he first felt the fire of sacred patriotism stirring his breast, was inclined to undertake the vindication of

his countrymen's liberties forthwith, without waiting for an express commission, and began with avenging the wrong which he saw done by an Egyptian to a Hebrew, fondly supposing that his brethren would have understood, from the boldness of the action, that God, by his hand, would deliver them. But the incident which happened next day convinced him that he who would undertake the task must lay his account with as great obstacles from the folly of the oppressed, as from the fury of the oppressor. This was a lesson he had not learnt in the schools of Egypt; he had leisure to reflect on it during his subsequent exile; and was thus prepared for encountering the ignorance, the incredulity, the selfishness, the stubbornness, displayed by Israel in the wilderness.

The same benefit did Joseph reap from his adversities. In the short account given of his early years, we see great goodness of heart, combined with an unsuspecting openness, which, if not corrected by experience, would have made him through life the prey of the malicious, or the dupe of the designing. After he had reached his seventeenth year, we find him, with a child-like, and almost infantile, simplicity, relating to his brethren those dreams, which, as plainly pointing to his future exaltation over them, tended to inflame that hatred which the partiality of his father, and his own virtues, had already excited in their breast. Though made aware of their envy, still he could never have supposed that such cruelty dwelt in their hearts, as he found in the day of "the anguish of his soul, when he entreated them, and they would not hear him." This discovery, together with those made by his treatment in the house of Potiphar, and in prison, were blessed for curing him of his early infirmity, and for "giving subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion;" so that when he was released, Pharaoh found him qualified to administer the affairs of his kingdom, and to "teach his senators wisdom." Without having recourse to supernatural communications, it is surprising what knowledge of human character a mind disciplined, but not broken, by adversity, will acquire in circumstances not the most propitious; although indeed Joseph had the advantage of contemplating human

nature in various aspects, and conversed with all classes, from the first military officer to a common turnkey, from those who had been in king's courts, to the most degraded inmate of a jail. And, though the comparison may not be deemed flattering, what is the administration of a kingdom but the economy of a family, combined with the discipline of a prison, on a larger scale?

While intercourse with the world soon corrects that credulous simplicity to which the young and inexperienced are incident, this advantage is usually gained at the expense of better principles. But the piety and benevolence of Joseph prevented the knowledge which he acquired from swelling into misanthropic pride, or degenerating into worldly policy and cunning. In his character, as unfolded in his mature age, and after it had gone through the severe process of refinement, we behold a rare example of the union of genuine goodness with consummate prudence—the wisdom of the serpent matched with the harmlessness of the dove. We are accustomed to speak of his *policy* to stay his brethren; and on the occasion referred to, he certainly did display an address and fineness of management, which, in other hands, would have been perverted to effectuate the worst of purposes, "like a sharp razor working deceitfully." But the policy of Joseph was dictated by the purest motives, and directed to the best of ends. The difficulty which we feel in reconciling some of his expressions to the strict laws of truth, is, perhaps, not greater than that which we find, at first sight, in reconciling some parts of his conduct to the principles of filial affection, which yet we know he felt very strongly. An enlightened sense of duty, and a conscientious regard to the high obligations imposed on him as the confidential servant of Pharaoh, and minister of Providence, restrained him from taking earlier measures to acquaint his father with the honours to which he had been raised. The substantial acts of kindness which he did to his brethren, and his turning from them, once and again, to give vent to the tide of affection which rushed to his eyes, showed the violence which he did to his feelings, while he constrained himself to wear the mask of severity, with the view of correcting the

vices to which he knew them to be addicted, and preparing their minds for the happiness he had planned for them. How much knowledge of human nature, joined to considerate love, was wrapt up in his admonition, on dismissing them laden with good news and presents,—" See that ye fall not out by the way." We find the same virtuous prudence in the measures he adopted for obtaining them a commodious settlement in the district of Goshen; by which he secured them against incurring the hatred of the Egyptians, and provided, at the same time, for their retaining their pastoral simplicity of manners, together with the pure religion of their fathers. Nor must we overlook the wise and liberal policy which he pursued in his treatment of the native population, now at the mercy of their sovereign, who, by listening to his advice, or rather to the counsel of Heaven communicated by him, was in exclusive possession of the necessaries of life. According to the maxims of policy at that time established in all the great monarchies of the world, the people must have become the slaves of the prince, bound to the soil, and condemned to labour it for an absolute lord. While he showed all fidelity to the interests of his royal master, Joseph provided wisely for those of the people. Instead of allowing them to eat the bread of idleness during the seven years in which it was fruitless to till the ground, he removed them to cities where they could acquire useful arts. And in the last year of the dearth, he furnished such as chose a country life, with seed corn, and gave them back their lands on a new tenure, which reserved to the crown a fifth part of their produce; an arrangement (corresponding to the double tithe afterwards established among the Israelites) which displayed the wisdom and impartiality of a Heaven-chosen umpire, balancing the claims of sovereign and subjects, giving to the former all the advantage which a virtuous individual is entitled to expect from his prudent foresight, while he took care that the latter should not be reduced to slavery in consequence of a calamity which, but for a divine premonition, would have proved ruinous to both; and by the standing law which he procured on the occasion, leaving a memorable lesson to the people of the benefits of forecast and

economy, and to princes, of a wise moderation in the use of power, and a disinterested regard to the welfare of their subjects.

Do you ask, whence had this young man all this wisdom? and where did he learn it? I answer, not in a palace, but in the pit of Dothan; not in a council of senators, but in a caravansery of Ishmaelitish slave-traders; not under the arched roof of a college, but within the gloomy walls and dark cells of a dungeon. The philosophers of Greece and Asia were accustomed to travel into Egypt in quest of wisdom; but what was all the occult science and abstruse speculation which they learnt, by conversing with its priests, and decyphering its hieroglyphical symbols, compared with the sound practical knowledge which Joseph acquired in its prisons, by ruminating on the ways of God to man, and examining the secret springs and multiform movements of the human heart?

II. Adversity is useful for subduing and regulating the passions. He who is not emancipated from the slavery of his passions cannot be either truly great or truly good. Without this, knowledge is like a sharp instrument in the hands of a furious person, which only enables him to do the more mischief to himself or others; and benevolence is like a wandering star, or a cloud without water, carried about of winds. Self-government is an essential qualification for ruling over others. How can he take the lead of others, who is himself like a vessel without a rudder, the sport of wind and waves, and filled moreover with combustible materials, ready every moment to take fire? The subjugation of the passions is one of the greatest conquests of religion, in the achieving of which, this divine principle does not disdain to call in the aid of the corrective discipline of Providence. While prosperity inflames the passions by multiplying the objects of their gratification, adversity allays their ardour by blowing away or burning up what ministers fuel to them. Under its "iron scourge," and during its "torturing hour," the fiercest breast is tamed temporarily, is made to hear the voice of reason and conscience; and from the privations which he is forced to suffer,

the patient is taught the practicability and usefulness of self-denial and voluntary restraint.

The grand practical difficulty in education, and that which attaches to every system of moral culture discovered by human ingenuity, is to hit the due medium between restraint and indulgence, or rather to combine the two modes of treatment in such just proportion as to form the character to virtue. If you pursue the plan of restraint, you either break the spirit of your pupil, or you create habits of cunning and dissimulation. In the former case, you have an Issachar—an ass crouching down between two burdens; in the latter case, you have a Dan—a serpent by the way, biting the horse's heels, so that the rider falleth backwards. If you have recourse to the opposite plan of indulgence, you either give loose reins to youthful passion, or else you foster vanity by bribing the more violent principles to rest. In the former case, you have a Reuben, who, unstable as water, shall not excel; in the latter case, you have a character such as Joseph was when he was taken from the hands of his father, and who, notwithstanding his goodness, had provoked the resentment of all his brethren, with the exception of the individual who had been trained in the same easy school with himself. The history of education in many families exhibits little else than the alternate adoption of these opposite methods in regular succession. Even when we have placed the golden mean before our eyes, how ready are we to err from it in practice! To "correct, but with judgment," to soften the severity of reproof with the precious oil of kindness, and to adapt the degree of restraint or indulgence to the temper and disposition of the individual, is a delicate task for which few tutors, natural or delegated, are qualified, and which at the best can be but imperfectly executed by "men of like passions" with those who are placed under their tuition and government.

The discipline of Providence is not pressed with these difficulties. For, in the first place, under the corrections of heaven, we feel ourselves smitten by an invisible hand, which we can neither resist nor escape. The most irreligious have been awed into submission by the visitations of the Almighty, and

the stoutest heart has been made to quail at the thunder of his power. "It is the Lord." "Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth: wo unto him that striveth with his Maker." In the second place, the consideration of the equity and goodness of the Ruler of the Universe composes the mind, and prepares it for reaping benefit from his severest corrections. We sometimes find this impression partially made on those reprobate characters who have "sold themselves to work wickedness." "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me?" But it produces its full effect on those who are under the habitual influence of the fear of God. Reverencing his judgments, they are excited to search and try their ways, humble themselves under his mighty hand, and own that he hath punished them less than their iniquities have deserved. The reverence we feel for the best "fathers of our flesh" must suffer an abatement from our consciousness that, during the "few years" that we were under their authority, they not unfrequently corrected us "after their own pleasure," at the irregular and capricious call of passion; but the shadow of this infirmity never passes over the impartial eye of the Father of spirits. Even when his inflictions proceed immediately from men, and in this view are unmerited, the godly person recognises the secret direction of a higher hand, and thus is preserved from those embittered feelings which would have been fatal to his improvement. "Let him curse, for the Lord hath bidden him." In the third place, the discipline of God is administered with infinite wisdom, combined with the most compassionate tenderness. He adapts the remedy to the disease; and never treats one case exactly as he treats another. While "he is wise, and will not hold back his hand" until his salutary object is gained, he is merciful, and will not crush the prisoners of the earth, nor afflict beyond what they are able to bear. "In measure," when their corruption "shooteth up, he will debate with it; he stayeth his rough wind in the day of his east wind;" he acts like a skilful physician who, when he finds it necessary to prescribe a severe course of cathartics, judiciously administers at intervals an emollient or a gentle opiate, to allay irritation, and recruit the exhausted strength of his

patient. This is beautifully illustrated by "the affliction of Joseph." He was first thrown into great anguish by the apprehension that his brothers meant to take away his life, from which his being sold to the Ishmaelites was a relief. After being subjected to the drudgery and indignities of a slave, he was raised to a reputable situation in the house of his master. When thrown into a dungeon, God gave him favour in the eyes of his keeper, who released him from the galling fetters with which he was bound, and treated him with all the honours of which a prison admitted. The despondency which a tedious imprisonment, without any prospect of release, is apt to engender, was warded off by the incident of Pharaoh's officers. And at last, when the hopes which he had formed from the gratitude of the chief butler, after the expiry of two long years of forgetfulness, were about to give up the ghost, "the king sent and loosed him, even the ruler of the people set him free." "Lo! these are parts of his ways." And those who are well-instructed in divine history, and have been attentive observers of Providence, can easily add to their number.

Every one has his ruling passion, by which he is ready to be brought into bondage, in consequence of his being constitutionally addicted to it, or placed in circumstances which exposes him to its attacks. Softness and effeminacy, cherished by the ease of pastoral life, and a fondness for the fine arts, appears to have been the besetting sin of David. If he had been left to his own inclinations, and to choose his lot, he would have occupied himself in "inventing instruments of music, chanting to the sound of the viol, and (if he had risen to rank) lying on beds of ivory, drinking wine out of bowls, and anointing himself with the chief ointments." This love of ease and pleasure must have quenched any higher feelings in his breast, and disqualified him for governing a great and warlike nation. But it was corrected by the wise arrangements of Providence, placing him in a situation in which he learned to "scorn delights, and live laborious days," and was trained, amidst hardships and perils, to self-denial, temperance, fortitude, and vigilance. The education which Moses received at the court of Pharaoh was calculated to increase his native

elation of spirit, prompting to daring and generous deeds, but marked with precipitation and haughtiness. During his forty years' exile, his pride was subdued, his zeal was tempered by self-command, he was qualified for interposing between the haughty tyrant and the helpless victims of his oppression; and "now the man Moses was meek above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." Vanity appears to have been the vice to which Joseph was most addicted, or under the dominion of which he was in the greatest danger of falling. His personal beauty, his early endowments, the dreams of future glory which haunted his pillow, his father's partiality, and even his brethren's envy, had all a tendency to feed a passion so natural to the youthful breast. Had it not been checked, who can say into what follies, or even vices, it would have betrayed him? If he had been suddenly raised to honour, or had he fallen into the hands of artful and interested flatterers, the counsellor of Pharaoh might have turned out a courtly coxcomb, and the favourite son of Jacob a spoilt child of larger growth. But the sore and repeated humiliations he met with not only mortified but subdued his vanity, so that when he was exalted in due time, he was able to bear all the honours heaped on him with meek and humble dignity, not for personal ostentation, but to the glory of God and the good of mankind.

It is one of the greatest proofs of the advantages resulting from sanctified affliction, that it sometimes produces such a change on the temper and dispositions of a man, as to render it extremely difficult to discover the vice to which he was originally inclined. To those who had known Moses only from the time that he undertook the conduct of Israel, what a surprise must it have been when they witnessed him at Rephidim smiting the rock violently, and crying, "Hear, ye rebels; must we bring you water from the rock?" Ah! that was a flash, produced by a sudden temptation reaching, in an unguarded moment, the remains of an old fire, long smothered, but not yet extinct.

III. Affliction, while it purifies and strengthens the higher,

serves to improve the softer qualities of the mind. To fit a person for great deeds, he must possess the hardy virtues of patience and constancy, and the nobler qualities of disinterested devotion to the public, and an independence of mind raising him above the mastery of external circumstances. Without these there can be no patriotism, sacred or secular. Not to tax your patience, I shall confine the illustration to one of the qualities mentioned, which, in its pure and unalloyed state, is more precious than the gold of Uphaz. Selfishness is one of the most subtle principles in our nature, and appears under a great variety of modifications. It is not so difficult to find persons who are elevated above the servile fear of danger, and the sordid love of gain; but how rare the man of whom it can be truly said, that he is "good without show, above ambition great!" The storm which overtook the fugitive prophet, and engulfed him in a living grave, set him free from the fear of man, but not from that selfishness which led him to conceive a mortal chagrin at the supposed discredit reflected on his ministry by the clemency of heaven. To purify their minds from this alloy, Providence causes its elect ones to pass through the furnace of affliction, and it is not until they have suffered a series of keen disappointments, and humiliating reverses, that, extricated from "the last infirmity of noble souls," they mount to the region of pure and disinterested benevolence. Repeatedly baulked, as Joseph was, in their most sanguine hopes, stript of all in which they boasted, cut off from all whom they loved, and cast off by all in whom they confided; deserted, betrayed, persecuted; they are made to feel the vanity and deceitfulness of the world, and their souls are disenchanted and disenthralled from its fairest and most fascinating allurements. Its applause is as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal to him who has experienced its hollowness and insincerity. Its sweetest incense is insipid, yea nauseous, to him who has seen it lavished on the most worthless, or who has himself felt its intoxicating and deleterious effects. Shall he court or feed upon the airy, light, inconstant, deceitful, polluted breath of public favour, whose heart yet aches from the reproaches with

which it has been broken—whose face still reddens with the recollection of the shame which covered it—whose best actions have been calumniated—his purest motives misrepresented—and his most unfeigned professions branded as hypocrisy and a lie? O, no! his soul has escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowler, and is already in mid-heaven, and, still looking upward, scents celestial odours, and seeks the honour that cometh from God only.

But sanctified affliction, while it raises the person above all that is low and earthy in his motives, does not incapacitate him for acting his part on earth, or for mingling with suffering and erring mortals. He comes out of tribulation a nobler being, but still a human being. It has taught him that he is a man, and to look upon nothing that flesh is heir to as foreign or indifferent to him. While it hardens the soul to virtue, it softens the heart and melts it to pity and love. In this manner was Joseph qualified for being the almoner to the famished Egyptians, the protector of his brethren, and the tender nurse of his aged parent. He "knew the heart of a stranger," and what it was to be in straits, and suspected, and falsely accused, and treated as a felon; and, therefore, he felt sensitively and strongly for such as were in these circumstances. This appears from the whole of his conduct to his unnatural brothers, but from no part of it so much as that which succeeded the burial of Jacob; when, dreading that, after that event, he might resent their former cruelty to him, they sent a deputation to him to say that their father, before his decease, had charged them, in his name, to beg forgiveness of their trespass. "Joseph WEPT when they spake unto him." The drops that fell from his eyes at this time were more precious indications of a tender heart than all the tears with which he bedewed the necks of his brethren when he made himself known to them. 'Ah! my brethren, you know not that you now wound my heart more deeply than did all your unkindness at Dothan. Forgive your trespass? That I cannot now do. It was done long ago; and the deed was ratified on that day when, unknown to you, I listened to your penitential confession, since which time the trace of the offence has not passed across my

remembrance except in thanksgivings to Him who over-ruled it for good to me and to you.' So saying, he "comforted his brethren, and spake kindly to them." And as he did so, his "stern rugged Nurse"* dropped a tear on her favourite child, and she turned not aside to hide it.

But, my friends, I would have given you a partial view of the character of Joseph, and concealed one important element that enters into the characters of all who belong to the same class, unless I added, as I now do,

In the *last* place—that sanctified adversity produces strong confidence in God. We find Joseph, from the first time he is introduced to our notice, acting under the influence of the fear of God; but this filial fear grew, in the course of his trials, into unshaken confidence in the favour and help of the Almighty. He had been in deaths oft; but he who had shown him great and sore troubles, quickened him again, and brought him again from "the depths of the earth." The depth of the distresses into which he was plunged had the effect of disengaging him from the vain confidence which he was apt to place in himself or in other men; the height of his deliverances confirmed his confidence in that divine arm which had been so visibly displayed in his behalf. To this we find the venerable patriarch referring when he poured his dying benediction on the head of Joseph, and the crown of the head of him that was separated from his brethren:—"The archers sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him; but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob, who kept watch around the stone of Israel."

It is this high but well-grounded confidence which has raised the characters of those illustrious men whose names are enrolled in the inspired records or in the pages of the faithful history of the church, who have done, and dared, and suffered, and sacrificed so much for the honour of God and the best interests of mankind.

* Gray's Ode to Adversity.

This divine principle is the basis upon which are reared that patience, and constancy, and fortitude, and courage, and magnanimity which have risen above all Greek, above all Roman fame. It imparts to those who possess it a strength of mind beyond that which constitutionally belongs to them. It arms them with omnipotence itself; for, in every thing to which they are called, they are "strong in the Lord and the power of his might." And though clothed with humility, and ready to acknowledge they are nothing, yet through Christ strengthening them they can do, and dare, and suffer every thing for the glory of God and the salvation of men. Such were those "who through faith 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, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." * And such was he who could say, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me.—Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me." †

From this subject we may see—

1. One way in which Providence authenticates the call of its chosen ministers. It is not enough to warrant a person to undertake a public service, especially of an arduous and extraordinary kind, nor is it enough to warrant others to countenance him in undertaking it, that he feels a strong inclination to the work. This, allowing that it proceeds from the purest motives, may be enthusiastic, or founded on a very mistaken estimate of his gifts. There is a course of preparation which persons must go through to fit them for the occupation to which they are destined; and that is the completest course which is practical as well as didactic. Luther, no doubt with a special regard to the circumstances of his own time, but not exclusively, makes one of the three qualifications for a preacher of the gospel to be *temptation*, an art which is not to be acquired in any college or hall of divinity. The advocates of the papacy were accustomed to press the reformers on the le-

* Heb. xi. 33, 34. † 2 Tim. iv. 16, 17.

gitimacy of their vocation to the work which they had undertaken, and tauntingly asked them to produce the proofs which the apostles gave. Little did they consider that the men whom they reviled and resisted, without pretending to be apostles, had one of the signs of apostleship on which great stress is laid in the New Testament, both by them and him that sent them. "He is a chosen vessel" (said the Lord to Ananias, who scrupled to go in to Saul of Tarsus) "to bear my name to the Gentiles; *for* I will show him how great things he shall suffer for my name." "Are they ministers of Christ?" said the same person to those who "sought a proof of Christ speaking by him," and preferred his detractors. "I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes beyond measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft." This is the test to which their divine Master puts their qualifications; and their enduring it is the stamp of his approbation. He "causes them to pass through fire and water." This is *the judgment of God*, for which men, in the dark ages, mistook the symbols. In this way the self-indulgent, the effeminate, the feeble-minded, as well as the faithless and false-hearted—the lovers of ease and honour, as well as the lovers of wealth and pleasure, are detected and separated from those choice and resolute spirits who are prepared to do, and suffer, and sacrifice every thing for God and public good. If when brought to the mouth of the furnace they blanch and become pale, if they look back or look strange on the fiery trial, they are not fit for their high and heavenly calling. "Every one shall be salted with fire." One is required to part with worldly goods, and becomes sorrowful—"the Lord hath refused him." Another is required to part with friends, and thinks it a hard saying—"neither hath the Lord chosen him." Another shrinks from pain, another from shame, another from death—"the Lord hath not chosen these." But is there one who, when brought to the trial, is "moved by none of those things?" "Arise, anoint him; this is he."* The enduring of affliction is the impress of heaven, set on the objects of its choice; the seal appended to the commission of those to

* 1 Sam. xvi. 7–12.

whom it has delegated its powers of dispensing good. It is at once the warrant to the delegate, and his answer to all challengers. "Henceforth let no man trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus."

2. One reason why there are no great men in our time—there have been no great trials. We have been born, we have been reared, we have lived, each under his vine and his fig-tree, none making us afraid. "No temptation hath happened to us but what is common to men;" and, therefore, we are common men and common Christians, common statesmen and common churchmen. We have men of great talents, but not of great characters; of enlarged, or rather improved understandings, but of little souls. So far from being lifted above the more refined and spiritualized selfishness of the world, it is rarely, and with difficulty, that we rise above its grosser atmosphere. How far inferior, in point of self-denial and devotedness, of faith and patience, of firmness and resolution, of noble daring, and still nobler doing and enduring, to those patriots, confessors, and martyrs, to whom, under God, we owe our religion and liberties, and (what many among us value more highly than these) our knowledge and science. We flatter ourselves that we could teach them and correct them; but O how we would have marred that great work which they achieved! They were men, and they had their faults, and there is no sanctity about their faults, rendering it unlawful to point them out; but let us remember, that it is one thing to *perceive* them and another thing to *judge* of them; for this last requires, that we be able to take the altitude and circumference of those virtues with which they are connected. What renders a pigmy hunch-backed, would be but a small wen on a giant. We should also recollect that we are in danger of falling into the error of the tyro in the use of the telescope, who fancied he had discovered a new spot in the sun when it was only a speck of dust which he had unskilfully left on the lens of his instrument.

But let us not, in attempting to do justice to those men whom Providence has honoured to be instruments of good to mankind, forget ourselves and our duty. There is no degree

of purity, or strength of piety, to which any may have attained by the aid of corrective discipline, which is not incumbent on us; for we are bound to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and our neighbours as ourselves. But we have to do with a being of infinite wisdom and mercy, who, in carrying on his plan of recovering us from the misery of our natural state, graciously accepts us in his beloved Son according to the improvement we make of the means which we enjoy, forgives our failures, and helps our infirmities. Let your aims be high, though you should come short of the mark. Think upon those ancients who have obtained a good report, and recollect, that, great as they were in some respects, "God hath provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." O, what obligations lie upon us as Christians, as Protestants, and as British Protestants. Consider yourselves as almoners not only of the temporal, but also of the spiritual bounties of Providence. Remember that Joseph was raised up, not only to provide a habitation for his father's house, but to save much people alive, in the land of Egypt, and in all the surrounding countries. Think on the magnanimous sentiment which was committed to writing in a tent-maker's shop in Corinth, and sent by Phœbe, a female member of the church at Cenchrea, "I am debtor, both to the Greeks and to the barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise: So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."*

In fine, my friends, has God exempted you from afflictions? Sympathize with those who suffer, as being yourselves in the body, and remembering that you have more need of liberal communications from the Spirit of all grace to preserve you from temptation; pray to God without ceasing, "that ye may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that ye may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing."

* Rom. i. 14–16.

SERMON IV.

CHRISTIAN FRIENDSHIP.

2 Tim. i. 16–18.

THE LORD GIVE MERCY TO THE HOUSE OF ONESIPHORUS; FOR HE OFT REFRESHED ME, AND WAS NOT ASHAMED OF MY CHAIN: BUT WHEN HE WAS IN ROME HE SOUGHT ME OUT VERY DILIGENTLY, AND FOUND ME. THE LORD GRANT UNTO HIM THAT HE MAY FIND MERCY OF THE LORD IN THAT DAY: AND IN HOW MANY THINGS HE MINISTERED UNTO ME AT EPHESUS, THOU KNOWEST VERY WELL.

Of all the circumstances which accompany adversity, none give more acute pain to a person of sensibility and generous mind than the unkindness and desertion of friends. His distress on that account does not arise so much from the loss of the assistance and advice, or even of the society and sympathy of those on whom he had been wont to rely, although he feels this sensibly, but it arises chiefly from those dark and gloomy views of human nature with which the infidelity of friends is apt to fill the soul, inducing the deceived individual to dread the most sincere professions, and sometimes shaking his reliance on Providence itself. Such feelings are peculiarly apt to be excited in his breast by the violation of those friendships which were consecrated by religion, and in which the parties had become bound to one another by pledging their common faith to a Higher Power. In this case his firmest confidences being uprooted, and his holiest affections cheated, he feels at the same time desolate and oppressed—he feels as if all things were moved from their foundations, and "the earth, with all the inhabitants thereof, were dissolving," while he labours to "bear up the pillars of it." Such appears to have been the state of the Psalmist's mind, and he mentions

it as the acmé of his trouble when he describes these words as bursting from him in the haste and agitation of his spirit, "All men are liars." It was in a paroxysm produced by this cause that Jeremiah cursed the day of his birth. And hence also another prophet was led to exclaim in strains which partook more of the bitterness of grief than of anger: "Wo is me! The good man is perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men. The best of them is as a brier, the most upright is sharper than a thorn-hedge. Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide." The minds of the best and most pious of men would be overset by this temptation, if they were left to their own resolution and reflections. But God is faithful, and will not suffer them to be tempted beyond what they are able to bear; he tempers the severity of their trial, and in his wisdom provides such external means as he knows to be best calculated to restore their peace of mind and re-establish their confidence. And who can express the delight which they feel in this deliverance! How joyfully they shake off the damps which oppressed them, while their relieved spirits rise, like a bird which has escaped from the snare, to their native element of unbounded confidence, expressed in gratulations and in prayers poured out for those who have been the honoured instruments of effecting their reseue—let the words of the apostle which we have read to you declare.

Few minds have been so formed for relishing and imparting the refined and elevated enjoyments of Christian friendship as that of Paul. This is apparent, to mention no other proofs at present, from the tender manner in which he salutes those with whom he had formed a sacred intimacy in the different places which he had visited, and the evident pleasure with which he transmits, in his letters to them, the salutations of those who surrounded him. It is observable that these are most numerous in his earlier epistles, and that they become rare in those which he wrote towards the close of his apostolical career: Not surely that this holy affection burned with abated ardour in his breast, but because the objects of it were diminished. As he approached the termination of his course, and as his sufferings increased and his danger became greater

and more imminent, he found the ranks of his friends gradually thinned, until at last he was left to stand and fight the good fight alone. To this he repeatedly alludes with deep feeling, but at the same time with a composure which shows that he had overcome the distress which it once gave him, in this epistle to his beloved son Timothy, written during his second imprisonment at Rome, and only a short time before the martyrdom which he endured there for the name of Christ. "All they that are in Asia be turned away from me," says he. "Only Luke is with me. At my first answer no man stood by me, but all men forsook me." The selfishness, inconstancy, and cowardice, which were thus brought to light, could not but wound the spirit of Paul; but the wound was healed. Though cast down he was not dispirited—though deserted by his friends he was not left destitute. He could say with his Divine Master, that, though they left him alone, yet was he not alone, and he felt no lack. "All men forsook me—nevertheless the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, and I was delivered from the mouth of the lion." At the bar of the Emperor he was enabled to "open his mouth boldly" in confessing and pleading the cause of Christ; and when remanded to his prison, and when his timid friends in Rome stood aloof from him, the compassionate Master whom he served brought from a distance a friend whose seasonable and divinely arranged visit banished every remains of gloom from his mind, and inspired him with fresh alacrity for the approaching crisis of the combat. When Paul had landed in Italy, some of his brethren in Rome came out to meet him, "whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage."* How ravishing to salute dear friends after escaping from the perils of a storm! And, amidst the wreck of our friendships, when, on first recovering from the shock which it produced, we thought of opening our eyes on blank desolation, how reviving to find standing by our side one friend whom we had not seen for a long period of time, but who had never lost sight of us, and who, heaven-directed, had flown as on angel wings to succour and comfort us! One "friend who loveth at

* Acts, xxviii. 15.

all times," and whose visits are paid in the season of adversity, is sufficient to compensate for the loss, if loss it can be called, of ten thousand of those giddy pretenders to friendship who buzzed about our ears in the noon of prosperity, whom the slight shower brushed away, and who, in spite of all our caution, left upon us the spots of their vain and vitiating flattery. Such a friend Paul found in Onesiphorus. From the manner in which it is here mentioned, we perceive that the kind visit and Christian conversation of this friend had left a fragrance behind him which continued still to refresh the spirits and cheer the solitude of the apostle. He dismisses the Asiatic deserters with a single sentence: but having mentioned the name of Onesiphorus, he did not know how to break off; so much did his heart overflow with gratitude and affection to his ancient and steady benefactor.

In point of expression and structure this episode possesses great beauty, not that which consists in the choice and arrangement of words, but a beauty which art in its highest finishings cannot reach, the impress of the moral and religious feeling which dictated it. The breaks and the repeated changes in the form of address forcibly depict the feelings of the writer—the eagerness and impatience which he felt to express his gratitude to that good man who had shown that he was not ashamed of the cross of Christ, nor of himself, his prisoner and champion, at a time when so many timid and worldly professors had deserted both. It is a rare example (the only one I know) of prayer and narrative, an address to God and to men intermingled, and in which the familiarity used with the latter does not diminish in the slightest degree the reverence due to the former, who "will have mercy and not sacrifice." He begins with an address to Heaven in behalf of his friend's family: "The Lord give mercy to the house of Onesiphorus." But he interrupts this solemn address to acquaint Timothy with the obligations which he was under to him: "For he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain; but when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me." He then resumes his prayer for him in still more solemn and fervent accents: "The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord at that day." And

he concludes by adverting to his early kindness and benefactions with which Timothy was already well acquainted: "And in how many things he ministered to me at Ephesus thou knowest very well." Here, my brethren, you have two portraits drawn with the same pencil and by the same strokes; and it is difficult to say which is most worthy of being admired and imitated—the Christian beneficence and constancy of Onesiphorus, or the Christian gratitude and piety of Paul. Let us contemplate each of them for a little.

I. Of the conduct of Onesiphorus.

This benevolent Christian was an inhabitant of Ephesus, and a member of the church there. Like many of his fellow-citizens, he most probably "owed his own self" to the Apostle; and he testified his love to the gospel, and his gratitude to his spiritual instructor, by ministering to him liberally of his substance during the time that he preached in that city. It appears from Paul's farewell address to the elders of the church at Ephesus, that, with the view of not being burdensome to them, he had laboured with his own hands for his support.* But as his labours were interrupted by public teaching, and by persecution, an opportunity was afforded to benevolent individuals to relieve him from straits, which, although his fortitude and self-denial would have enabled him to bear them, could not have failed to distress his mind, and to hinder him in the discharge of his official duty. In imparting this relief, Onesiphorus had distinguished himself, being, as is most likely, a person in good or opulent circumstances. Though the Apostle did "not desire a gift," and had learned to "suffer need," as well as to "abound," yet he "desired fruit to abound to the account" of those among whom he laboured. Hence he "rejoiced in the Lord greatly" that "the care" which the Christians at Philippi showed him, at their first acquaintance, had "flourished again" after a season of suspension; and he calls the things which were sent from them, "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God."† On this account it "refreshed" him to

* Acts, xx. 33–35. † Philip. iv. 10–18.

recollect the kindness with which Onesiphorus had treated him at Ephesus. He does not tell us in *how many* things he had ministered to him. This it would not have been easy for him to do, if it had been necessary. In how many ways, my brethren, may we serve others, and contribute to their comfort, even though our means be slender and scanty! Nameless, countless are the kindnesses performed by a zealous and vigilant benevolence, exerting itself in the spirit and after the example of Him who "prevents us with blessings of goodness manifold!" It is not the magnitude or costliness of gifts that proves the goodness of the donor, or does most good to the recipient; it is their number, their repetition, their seasonableness, and the considerate and delicate manner in which they are conferred. The goodness of Heaven, in nature and in grace, steals upon us, and its choicest blessings descend in drops so small as not to be perceived, and with such gentleness as scarcely to be felt. Largesses may be bestowed in such a way as to chill the heart and lacerate the feelings, while small and comparatively inconsiderable favours drop like the rain, and distil like the dew, which refresh and saturate the earth.

The early beneficence of Onesiphorus was not forgotten by Paul. But what he was most desirous to record, was the kindness he had lately shown him in Rome. In the many proofs of affection which he had formerly given, he had "done virtuously;" but this last "excelled them all." And wherein did its surpassing excellence lie? It proved him to be a friend indeed; one who "sticketh closer than a brother." A person may be capable of deeds both disinterested and generous—romantically generous, and yet he may want that quality without which he is not entitled to the sacred name of friend. Constancy is the cardinal, the crowning property of friendship, the only inimitable and imperishable impress of its genuineness. Though a man should be willing to give all his goods to feed another, yea, and his body to be burned for him, yet if he is liable to be fickle and changeable in his attachments, he is no friend,—he cannot be depended on. And here it is, my brethren, that the professions of regard and friendship which abound in the world fail, and are found to be nought. Behold

this have I found, counting one by one to find out the account, which yet my soul seeketh, but I find not: One man that is generous and disinterested among a thousand have I found; but a man that is constant and unalterable among all those have I not found. True friendship keeps pace with time; changes not with the changes of fortune; sinks not with the opinion of the world; rises superior to offences; views its object with the same unaltered eye through the atmosphere of good report and of bad report, in the light of honour, and under the cloud of disgrace. A man may grow old, and his visage and form be completely altered, he may fall into poverty and under reproach, he may incur the odium of mankind, and see reason to be displeased with his own conduct; but he cannot hate or forget himself; and as he is, so is his friend, who, in this respect, partakes of his personal identity. Paul continued to be the same to Onesiphorus that he had been on the first day of their acquaintance,—the same at Rome as at Ephesus,—the same when deserted as when surrounded by his followers,—the same when a despised prisoner as when an applauded preacher,—the same when chained with criminals as when seated among Apostles on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

It is not said that he came to Rome for the express purpose of visiting the Apostle. Christianity does not require such works of supererogation; nor are such romantic deeds of generosity necessary to the maintenance of Christian friendship. However much Paul was gratified at seeing his old friend, he would have been displeased, we may venture to say, if he had undertaken such a journey merely for his personal gratification. It was enough, that, being in Rome, he did not forget his revered teacher, now the prisoner of the Lord, but sought him out very diligently, and visited him oft.

"I was in prison, and ye came unto me," is the top of the climax in that beautiful description which our Saviour gives of those who shall be acknowledged as his friends at the last day, and to which he subjoins this explanation, "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." This was a stronger proof of friendship than giving him meat when he was hungry, or

drink when he was athirst; and it was the only proof which, in the circumstances stated, could be sustained. If Onesiphorus had made some enquiries after Paul, but on finding it difficult to discover the place of his confinement, had desisted from them, and left with some member of the Roman church his affectionate salutations to the Apostle, together with a sum of money to support him in prison, think you, my brethren, that this would have been accepted as a sufficient token of regard, or that it would have refreshed the soul of the prisoner? Verily no. In that case, Paul would have been disposed to reply to his message in the words which a poet has put into the mouth of a female mentioned in the New Testament,— "Visit me, and retain thy gifts." The present would have been regarded as an affront, and the salutations as a renunciation of friendship. Nothing, we may be sure, which was needful to relieve the temporal necessities of the Apostle, or which could help to lighten his chain, or alleviate his sufferings, would be withheld by this affectionate and munificent friend. But if any thing of this kind was given, it was not thought worthy of being mentioned at the same time with his personal visit. Upon this Paul set a higher value than upon "all the substance of his house." To see the face of his ancient benefactor before he died, to receive his cordial and Christian embrace, to hear again his well-known and never-forgotten accents, to learn from his own lips, what he had heard from the report of others, that he retained all his former love to Christ, to his gospel, to his servant, this—"this was the refreshing." This made all the garments of his visitant to smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia; and converted his narrow and gloomy cell into an ivory palace, in which he could entertain and make glad his guest.

Though an Apostle, though endued with such deep insight into the mysteries of the gospel, that the very chiefest of the Apostles "added nothing to him in conference," and though now grown old in Christian experience, Paul did not think himself above receiving consolation and spiritual benefit from the meanest saint. In "giving and receiving" this, he was always ready to communicate with his brethren. Hence he

assigned this reason for wishing to visit the Christians at Rome,—" that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me."* We cannot doubt that he was " refreshed" on the present occasion by the conversation which he held with Onesiphorus. And what might the nature of that conversation be? Not, perhaps, exactly that which we might at first suppose it to have been. When Moses and Elias appeared with our Saviour on the Holy Mount, though he was transfigured before them, they did not entertain him with the glories of the celestial city from which they had just made their descent; but " they spake of the decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem." Paul and Onesiphorus would not spend the precious moments in talking of the passing news of the day, nor even in recalling the incidents of their former life when they knew one another in happier external circumstances. Their communings would be on higher themes; nor would their countenances be sad while they discoursed of Him who died for them, and rose again, and was now at the right hand of God,—and of his love, from which no distance of place, or depth of distress, or form of death, could separate them,—and of the triumphs which the cross had gained over the powers of darkness, and the still more signal triumphs which awaited it in its irresistible progress,—and of the death by which Paul was shortly to glorify God, and to seal his preaching, now " fully made known to the Gentiles,"—and of the comforts which would make him more than a conqueror in the closing conflict,—and of the joy of his Lord, into which he would immediately enter. On these high and heart-ravishing themes would they dilate, while the hours fled unheeded away, until the faint glimmerings of the lamp, reflected from the walls of the cell, discovered to them the haggard faces of its fierce inmates subdued into a temporary tameness, while they listened with fixed attention to the strange things which now for the first time saluted their ears; and while their every feature expressed the surprise and astonishment which they felt at witnessing the joy and tran-

* Rom. i. 18.

sports of a detested criminal, who had the prospect of speedily terminating his life in the midst of the most excruciating torments.

But though the conversation of Onesiphorus must have imparted high pleasure to Paul, it was not the chief source of the gratulation which he expressed at his visit. What conveyed the most lively joy to his heart, was the testimony which his Ephesian friend had given of his love to the gospel, by "despising the shame" with which its imprisoned apostle was then loaded. "He refreshed me," for "he was not ashamed of my chain." You may feel some difficulty in entering fully into the force of this reason. If the apostle had said, 'He was not afraid of incurring my bonds,' you could have understood him more easily. This was included; but there is great propriety in expressing the whole of the sufferings to which Christians were then exposed by this part of them; for in reality shame was the gall of its bitterness. Hence the language in which Paul addresses his exhortation to Timothy in the context: "Be not thou ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel:" and hence, too, his declaration concerning himself, "I suffer these things, nevertheless I am not ashamed." You will err exceedingly, my brethren, if you suppose there was any resemblance between Onesiphorus's visit to Paul, and those which charitable and pious individuals are now accustomed to pay to prisons, with the laudable view of alleviating the bodily sufferings, or ministering to the spiritual wants of their wretched inhabitants; visits, which, so far from exposing them to disgrace, greatly enhance their reputation. Nor are you to imagine that the shame was incurred by a man of respectable rank visiting and conversing with a prisoner in chains, or that it arose in any degree from the worthless character of the malefactors with whom the apostle was confined. So far was this from being the case, that it was then much less disgraceful to suffer as a thief or a murderer than as a Christian. It would lead us away from our subject to enquire into the causes which co-operated in producing this feeling. Suffice it at present to

say, that it appears from the concurring testimony of civil and ecclesiastical history, that from a variety of causes (not involving the conduct of its professors), Christianity had at this time fallen under extreme odium at Rome, the most diabolical calumnies against its friends were industriously circulated and greedily believed; and they were regarded, by the multitude, magistrates, and philosophers, with a mixture of hatred, horror, and contempt not to be described. During his first imprisonment, Paul was kept under an easy restraint, lived in his own hired house under the guard of a soldier, received his friends, and preached the gospel, without any hindrance. But it was quite otherwise now during his second imprisonment. He was thrown into chains, capitally arraigned, and although he had miraculously escaped at his first appearance before Nero, yet he looked every day for the pronouncing of his doom. Accordingly all his brethren, even those who had hitherto stuck most closely by him, had withdrawn and left him to his fate. No man knew him. It was only after a long search, and many fruitless enquiries, that Onesiphorus could discover the dungeon in which he was confined, and trace him to his cell, where he was shut up with the most depraved of the criminals who swarmed in the metropolis of the world—"men-stealers, murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers," who yet shunned his society, and looked on themselves as they were looked on by others, as felons less foul than—that Christian.

Come hither, my brethren, draw near, and look on infant Christianity, "the mother of us all." Do ye recognise her? Her cradle a cell, her clothing rags, her swathing-band an iron chain, her nurse a gaoler, her mates and betters the vilest of the malefactors! Here let us humble ourselves, and try whether we be Christians indeed. Ah! how little know we of suffering shame for the name of the Lord Jesus! Which of us would be able to bear the proof, if, to testify our attachment to him, it were necessary for us to submit to be made a gazing-stock by reproaches and afflictions, or to become companions of them that were so used? It was this proof of love to the gospel, and of unextinguishable affection

for himself on the part of Onesiphorus, that penetrated the heart of Paul, and filled it with exultation. "He was not ashamed of my chain." Ashamed of it? No: he gloried in it, embraced it, called it the chain of his blessed Saviour, and protested that for his sake he would willingly bind it about his neck, and wear it as a badge of distinction more honourable than the diadem of Cæsar.

II. Of Paul's return for the kindness of Onesiphorus.

Alas! what return could he make for such rare and disinterested goodness? Although it had been possible to discharge the debt, he was at present utterly destitute of the means. His feet were fast bound in the stocks; and he could not even testify his gratitude in that way in which the meanest pauper feels a pleasure in doing it, while he accompanies his benefactor to the door of the hovel which he had cheered by his presence. All his friends had deserted him; and there was not an individual within the walls of the crowded city to whom he could delegate the performance of the rites of hospitality due to the friendly stranger. Did there then remain to Paul no way of expressing his gratitude? Yes, there was one, and that more excellent and efficient than all those to which we have alluded. He could not follow Onesiphorus to the door of his cell; but he could follow him whither-soever he went with his prayers. He could give him no assistance in the secular business which had brought him to Rome; but he could further his views in the more lucrative traffic which he carried on with heaven. He could not say to him, as the prophet to his Shunammite hostess, "Wouldst thou be spoken for to the king or the captain of the host?" * But he had interest at a higher court than that of any king or emperor, and could speak for him to the Captain of Salvation. True he was in bonds; but he was "an ambassador in bonds;" and those who had dared to throw into prison the ambassador of the King of Kings, and to interrupt him in the discharge of his embassy, could not prevent him from maintaining an intercourse

* 2 Kings, iv. 13.

with the court of heaven by prayer, or from recommending to it any individual who, by showing kindness to him, had befriended its interests. Paul had it not in his power to testify his gratitude to Onesiphorus, as David did to Barzillai, by receiving his son into his family; * but he recommended his whole household to the tutelage and mercy of the bountiful Master whom he served.

"The Lord give mercy to the house of Onesiphorus!" It appears from the close of the epistle, in which the apostle sends his salutations "to the household of Onesiphorus," that the head of the family had not yet returned to Ephesus, being most probably still detained in Italy on the business which had brought him from home. Like every good man he would feel anxious about the safety of his family in his absence, and would be much engaged in supplications to God in their behalf. Now what things he sought for them, these Paul also sought for them in this brief but comprehensive petition: 'The Lord be a father and head to them during the absence of their earthly protector and guide! Because he hath made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, his habitation, let no plague come nigh his dwelling! Shield them from sickness and violence, and every evil! Above all, preserve them in the paths of righteousness, in which they have been trained to walk! My God, supply all their need out of thy riches in glory by Jesus Christ!' Wonder not that I consider this as applying to the effects of mercy in time, for in this sense the apostle uses the expression elsewhere, with reference to an individual to whom he was greatly indebted: "Epaphroditus was sick nigh unto death; but God had mercy on him (recovered him); and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow." † How much would it have added to the weight of Paul's chain, if any thing distressing had happened to the family of his friend during this journey! Doubtless, however, this petition was not confined to temporal blessings, but included what we find him next supplicating for Onesiphorus himself.

* 2 Sam. xix. 31-38. † Philip. ii. 27.

" The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day!" And what could Paul say more? What could the most liberal soul devise more liberally than this? Enlarged as his desires were, big, swelling, and overflowing with gratitude as his heart at this time was, could he ask any thing greater for his Christian friend and benefactor than that at the great day of accounts, when he should stand before the bar of the universal Judge, and await the sentence fixing his eternal condition, he should " find mercy of the Lord,"—be mercifully acquitted, and accepted, and rewarded? He had shown mercy to the apostle in the day of his trial, and he prays that mercy may be shown to him in the day of his trial. He had " refreshed him oft," and he prays that the great day of decision may be to his benefactor a " time of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." The apostle had just been expressing to Timothy his persuasion that he to whom he had " committed" his own soul was " able to keep it against that day;" and what higher testimony of his regard could he give to Onesiphorus than to commit him to the same all-sufficient and faithful Redeemer? He had parted with him expecting to see his face no more until the day that they should appear at the same judgment-seat; and, therefore, he " commends" him, as he had done the elders of the church to which he belonged, " to God and to the word of his grace, which was able to build him up, and to give him an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."* This is Christian gratitude.

The repetition of the name of the person to whom he addresses himself, and from whom he implores mercy to Onesiphorus, is expressive of the fulness of the apostle's heart, and the ardour of his affection. But my object was not to bring forth all that is implied in the expressions, but to unfold the characters delineated in the passage. Let us now improve the subject.

The improvement is twofold. We have here exemplified the power of Christianity on two individuals placed in very

* Acts, xx. 32.

different situations—the one a private member of the church, the other an apostle; the one in affluent circumstances, the other in the most destitute condition; the one at liberty, the other in chains, and about to be led out to an ignominious death. The grace of God shines in both with a beautiful variety. Their features differ, and yet they are evidently children of the same family. In the charity and constancy of the one, in the piety and gratitude of the other, and in the faith and fortitude of both, you may see what the gospel is capable of effecting, and thus have your confidence in its truth confirmed. But the subject is to be improved also in the way of imitation, by Christians in circumstances differing very widely. I shall point out a few of its lessons.

1. Learn to look more on the bright than on the dark side of the picture of your lot. The mind easily catches the impression of the objects on which it habitually dwells: if they be dark, it will be gloomy; if they be light, it will be cheerful. Who so deeply and so uniformly involved in afflictions as Paul, and yet who so uniformly and so joyfully elevated as he? One secret of this we perceive in the passage before us. He was in bonds; but Onesiphorus was not ashamed of his bonds. He had been deserted by his friends; but there was one who had diligently sought him out and found him. And he dwelt on the last until the remembrance of the first was completely obliterated from his mind. Go thou, Christian; do likewise; and then, "though sorrowful, thou wilt be always rejoicing."

2. Learn that Christianity does not extinguish any of the innocent feelings of human nature, and improves those which are amiable. It is natural for us to be dejected when we are forsaken and left alone; and to be cheered and refreshed by the visits, the conversation, and the sympathy of friends. Such is our weakness here—the weakness of the strongest—that we are easily dejected and easily elevated. God can support the heart by his gracious assistance and the consolations of his Spirit; but such is the respect which he has for our frame, that he often condescendingly and seasonably provides for us external cordials. Paul tells us on another occasion that,

when he was in great distress, "God, who comforteth them that are cast down, comforted him by the coming of Titus." Beware, my brethren, of sullenly rejecting any thing of this kind when it is offered to you, or refusing to rejoice in it because it falls short of the proper consolations of the gospel. It is from God; the refreshing of your animal spirits may be introductory to spiritual joy; and by means of both you may be helped to glorify him. Our blessed Redeemer himself, when he went to the garden of agony, took three of his disciples along with him to watch with him while he prayed; and when they fell asleep, there appeared unto him an angel, strengthening him. And as Christianity does not war with the innocent, so it improves the amiable feelings. Instead of weakening, it strengthens parental affection, excites it when it is dormant, checks its excess, raises it from an instinct or a passion into a virtue, and expands it into a warm and active concern for the spiritual and eternal welfare of its endearing objects. This is true, also, of friendship and of gratitude. They are not swallowed up in a feeling of universal benevolence, but purified and exalted by an infusion of Christian principle. Onesiphorus had doubtless performed acts of beneficence to many others besides Paul. Why are the latter only mentioned? To afford you an example of Christian gratitude.

3. Learn that beneficence is a native fruit of Christianity, and a leading test, especially in the affluent, of Christian character. What is the gospel but the discovery of the love and kindness of God to man? Will not then the unfeigned belief of it produce philanthropy, or a disposition, "as we have opportunity, to do good to all men, especially the household of faith?" Who can resist the force of this divine logic,—"If God so loved us, we ought to love one another," and that not in word and in tongue, but in deed, "as he loved us, and gave his only begotten Son?" Do *they* "know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," or have they "tasted that he is gracious," who are not disposed to be gracious and merciful to their brethren? Can *they* be said to believe that Christ "gave himself for them" and "delivered them from the wrath to come," and that they are "blessed with all spiritual blessings in

heavenly places in him," who will give nothing, or what is to them next to nothing, to relieve their fellow-creatures and fellow-christians from temporal distresses and want? Can *they* believe that the Son of God came from heaven to earth on an errand of mercy, and gave himself a ransom for men of all nations, who cannot extend their regards beyond those who are of their own neighbourhood and country? Can *they* believe that he gave himself for sinners, whose love and its exertions are confined entirely to the righteous and the good? True Christianity supplants an inordinate affection to the things of the world by means of the love of God, banishes that selfishness which disposes persons to retain whatever they possess, and, by enlarging their hearts, makes them to give without grudging, and to feel the words of the Lord Jesus, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Such was the influence of Christianity on the primitive believers, when "great grace was upon them all—neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own." Such was its influence on the Macedonians, who contributed for the relief of their brethren in Judea "to their power, yea, and beyond their power." Such was its influence on the Hebrews, whose "labour of love in ministering to the saints," is commended by the apostle. And such will be its influence in every age upon all who are savingly acquainted with it. Without this, no attainments in religious knowledge, no orthodoxy in point of sentiment, no zeal of God, no correctness of moral conduct, no warmth of religious affections, no disconformity to the world in its sinful fashions or vain amusements, no mortifications or abstinence from the pleasures of life, will be a sure mark or safe criterion of Christian character.

4. Learn from this subject what is the best expression of gratitude. It is proper to testify our sense of favours received by acknowledgments to our benefactors; but the apostle, in the passage under consideration, "shows us a more excellent way," while he pours out fervent supplications to God in behalf of Onesiphorus and his family. He that does the former does well; he that neglects not the latter does better. There is less danger of its being ceremonious or merely compliment-

ary; and surely it promises to be more effectual and available. Those whom Providence has placed in such circumstances as to require the assistance of others, should beware of failing in this duty, or of performing it in a listless and cold manner. If you are subjected to hardships from which your richer brethren are exempted, they are exposed to temptations from which you are exempted. Pray for them that their table, instead of becoming "a snare to them," may be sanctified, and that they may not have all their good things in their life-time. If you are deficient in making a return for gifts which you have received, you have yourselves to blame. A Christian can never be a bankrupt, for he can always draw on heaven. If you cannot pay your debts of gratitude yourselves, you can by means of prayer transfer them to one who is able to discharge them. Access to "the throne of grace" is a precious privilege to all saints, but it is doubly so to the poor; for it enables them to relieve themselves from a load which cannot fail to be oppressive to every feeling mind.

5. Those who are in ability are encouraged by this subject to be kind and compassionate to necessitous and afflicted Christians. By such conduct you draw out their desires to God in your behalf; and the prayers of the righteous in such cases have the force of promises, as their complaints against the cruel and oppressive have the force of curses. Christians pray for all men, including their enemies; but they do not, and cannot pray for all with the same warmth and confidence. When mentioning his desertion by his brethren at his appearance before Nero, Paul says, "I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge!" But there is a marked difference between that prayer and this in our text. "The prayer of a righteous man availeth much" when it is "fervent." Your acts of kindness will excite their religious affections, cause them to remember you every time they bow their knees to their heavenly Father, and fill their mouths with new arguments for enforcing their petitions. Falling into their souls, your beneficence will refresh them, open them to the rays of the sun of righteousness, and thus make them send up their fragrance to heaven, like the earth when it has been refreshed by a shower. Their prayers

will be to your alms what the oil and frankincense was to the meat-offering under the law; and both will ascend as "a sweet savour unto the Lord."*

In fine, you may learn from this subject that deeds of beneficence and charity are not meritorious in the sight of God. Those who teach the merit of good works learned it not assuredly either from the doctrine or the prayers of Paul; for when his heart was penetrated most deeply with a sense of the kindness of Onesiphorus, and when he prayed most fervently that he might be rewarded for it, he employed in each petition the plea of *mercy*. Your "goodness reacheth not unto God but to the saints;" and shall a few temporal favours which you have been enabled to do for "the excellent of the earth" assume that mighty importance in your eyes as to merit the kingdom of heaven? Guard against legalism as well as anti-nomianism; and, O! beware lest your vessel, fully furnished with every good work, strike on that rock which has proved fatal to the hopes of so many. "Put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercy, kindness," but put on also "humbleness of mind." "When you have done all, say, We are unprofitable servants, we have done no more than we ought to have done." "God is not unrighteous to forget your labour of love." Verily you shall have a reward; but then it will be a reward of grace and not of debt. Those who deserve best of their fellow-creatures are most deeply impressed with a sense of their ill-desert in respect of God; and those who are the most faithful "servants of righteousness," instead of claiming "eternal life" as "wages" due to them, will be most disposed to receive it as "the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Cherish this disposition, and it will cause you to be not slothful but zealous and diligent followers of them who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises, and thus you shall make your calling and election sure to yourselves. "Ye beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

* Lev. ii.; Philip. iv. 18.

SERMON V.

THE PRAYER OF THE THIEF ON THE CROSS.

LUKE, xxiii. 42.

AND HE SAID UNTO JESUS, LORD, REMEMBER ME WHEN THOU COMEST INTO THY KINGDOM.

WHEN a friend whom we tenderly loved, and to whom we are deeply indebted, has died at a distance from us, we are anxious to have the fullest information respecting the manner and circumstances of his death; and we peruse, with a lively interest, the letters of those who relate what they saw and heard on the melancholy occasion. We wish to know the immediate cause of his death, the degree of pain which he suffered, the treatment he received from his attendants, the conversation which he held with them, his dying sayings, his last words, the day and even the hour of his expiry, and the manner in which the final duty was paid to his earthly remains. All this information respecting the best friend of men has been transmitted to us in the narratives which the four Evangelists wrote of the death of Jesus Christ. His death, indeed, differs widely from that of all other men; it stands by itself, and is altogether peculiar in its causes, and the designs which Providence intended to effect by means of it. "It is appointed to all men once to die," and every one dies for himself and not for others; but Christ was once offered "to bear the sins of many;" and was "cut off, but not for himself." This is the proper light in which that event ought to be viewed; and of such magnitude and interest is it, that it might seem, at first sight, to exclude and banish the thought of every thing else as trivial and unimportant. 'Christ died for our sins (you may be apt to say), and that is enough for us to know.' But, my brethren, it is otherwise. The circum-

stances of his death were fixed by the divine decree, as well as the event itself; they were revealed before-hand to the prophets; and we are furnished with minute details of them in the historical books of the New Testament. They must therefore have a claim on our devout attention. Nor is this all. It will be found on examination, that they all contribute, in one way or another, to throw light on the grand design of his dying, and to disclose or brighten the displays of the wisdom of God in that unparalleled event. There was not a circumstance of ignominy or pain in his sufferings which did not form an ingredient in that cup of wrath which he drank for us; not a circumstance of alleviation about them which did not enter into the cordial which was needful to support him in the arduous work of achieving our redemption; and it is only in the way of our surveying the whole, that we can attain to a complete and comprehensive acquaintance with the enormity of our own guilt, and with the breadth and length and height and depth of that knowledge-passing love which prompted him to undertake our cause. Nor is there one of these circumstances which, when rightly viewed, will not help to increase our faith, and to strengthen those feelings with which we ought always to contemplate and remember the Lord's death.

The most important and prominent of these circumstances (if circumstance it can be called), is the kind of death which he suffered—that of the cross. By this we are instructed in the nature and design of his sufferings, agreeably to what was announced before-hand in a divine statute, referred to by the Apostle,—"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us; as it is written, cursed is he that hangeth on a tree."* This holds true, also, of the circumstances of his crucifixion, whether antecedent, concomitant, or consequent. Convinced of the innocence of the person brought before his tribunal, and yet desirous to gratify the Jews, the Roman governor thought to relieve himself from the embarrassment in which he was involved by releasing Jesus, according to a custom which had been long observed at the annual feast of the Passover. But the chief priests instigated

* Gal. iii. 16.

the populace, with loud voices, to demand the crucifixion of Jesus, and the release of Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a notorious felon, who had been guilty of sedition, a crime which rulers are usually inclined to visit with exemplary punishment, and of murder, which banishes sympathy for the criminal from the breasts of all classes of men. The circumstance of such a malefactor being preferred to Jesus, while it showed the malice of the priests and the infatuation of the people, was, at the same time, a proof of the deep degradation of "Him whom the man despised, and the nation abhorred." Accordingly, it is mentioned by the Apostle Peter, in one of the sermons which he preached to his countrymen after the Resurrection: "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you."*

But this was not all the indignity done to him. It was determined that he should be crucified along with two malefactors,—thieves, highwaymen or robbers, as the original word properly signifies. Now, this circumstance, as well as the crucifixion itself, happened according to the prescient and wise appointment of Heaven, and served as an external indication of the character in which he suffered as the surety of sinners. Accordingly, the Evangelist Mark states it as a fulfilment of that scripture which saith, "He was numbered with the transgressors, and did bear the sins of many."† We might have thought it likely, that the lives of some of his disciples would be sacrificed along with Jesus, and that they would have been the companions of his cross; but this was prevented for wise reasons by Him who "maketh the wrath of man to praise him." For the holy hand of God did not extenuate the guilt of his murderers, who acted freely under the influence of their own malice and cruelty, and whose object it was, by this arrangement, to cover him with ignominy. They crucified him with the malefactors, the one on the right hand, and the other on the left, and Jesus in the midst, to intimate that he was the greatest criminal of the three. By this means they excited against him the odium of the populace, who, always

* Acts, iii. 14. † Mark, xv. 28. Comp. Isa. liii. 12.

ready to judge from appearances, would conclude that he was of the same abandoned character as his fellow-sufferers: a piece of hellish policy in which the Jews have been imitated by the court of Inquisition, who brought out those whom they stigmatized as heretics, and committed them to the flames, along with persons guilty of unnatural and detestable crimes. By this means, too, the murderers of Jesus sought to aggravate his sufferings, by exposing him to be disturbed in his last moments by the groans, and shrieks, and blasphemies of such godless and impious wretches.

And in this they were not disappointed. For we are told, in verse thirty-ninth, that "one of the malefactors which were hanged, railed on him, saying, If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us." Consider, my brethren, the situation in which Jesus was now placed. The chief priests and rulers of the Jews, mixing with the mob who surrounded his cross, encouraged them to load him with taunts and bitter mockery, crying, "He saved others; himself he cannot save. If thou be the Christ, the king of Israel, come down from the cross, and we will believe on thee." The soldiers who had crucified him, having parted his garments, and cast lots for his vesture, had joined in reviling him. And now at last, his fellow-sufferer, who hung by his side, bursts forth in that horrid expression, which has in it more of the irony of the fiend than the agony of the sufferer,—"If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us." Now Jesus must have felt himself to be sunk low indeed, when he was become the scorn of the most abject of the abjects. Now he might be said to have descended into hell, and to endure the pains of hell, the inhabitants of which are exposed to the reproaches of their companions in torment. Ah! how difficult was it to believe, at this moment, that he was the Holy One of God! Surely there was need of an attestation to his personal innocence. And was there none given? Yes:—For a voice was suddenly heard silencing the storm of ungodly scorn and blasphemy, and vindicating the oppressed and meek sufferer. And whence was it? Was it the voice of an angel, sent from heaven to rebuke the madness of mankind and comfort the dying Saviour? Did

it proceed from one among the crowd who had formerly felt the healing virtue of his word, and whose gratitude would not suffer him to be longer silent? Was it the voice of the disciple whom Jesus loved, who ordinarily lay on his breast, and who had come to witness the crucifixion? Or, was it that of Peter, who, having recovered from the panic into which he had been thrown, and escaped from the toils of Satan, was pressing through the multitude, determined to confess his Master more openly than he had of late denied him? No; the gates of heaven were shut, and the angels were commanded to stand at a distance. The friends of Jesus were scattered; and such of them as were present, had their lips sealed with grief and fear. Did the voice then proceed from the rocks? and was the prediction of Jesus, "If these hold their peace, the stones shall cry out," now fulfilled? Yes; it was fulfilled in a manner more striking than if that had happened which was literally expressed by his words. The voice proceeded from the lips of an ignorant and lawless robber—the fellow of the hardened malefactor, whose blasphemous tongue had just been heard from the cross above the clamour of the infuriate rabble which raged below. And what did this new confessor say? He rebuked his partner in language which intimated that they were partners in crime no longer, in solemn accents, but with a meekness which showed that his soul had already held secret converse with him who hung silent by his side. He confessed his past crimes, and the justice of the sentence under which he suffered, and without the least murmuring, or palliation, or discrimination between himself and his obdurate companion in guilt. Having exhibited these tokens of credibility, he justified the person who had been condemned to suffer along with them, and bore an unhesitating testimony to his spotless innocence. And then turning his eyes to Jesus, he said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Who can tell what these words conveyed? None but he to whom they were addressed, who saw into the bottom of the speaker's heart, approved of his confession, and answered his petition exceedingly above what the petitioner could ask or think, when he replied,

" Verily, I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." It was not a time, my brethren, for many words. But O how much is expressed by these two short sentences, spoken from such hearts, and in such circumstances! What a colloquy was this! What a communion! What a respite from torture! What a foretaste of paradise! What a feast on a cross between earth and heaven! There was no opportunity for salutations or embracing, or the exchanging of the symbolical cup. But what an exchange of tender looks! What a conjunction of hearts! What an intimate friendship on so short an acquaintance! What a joyful farewell before so awful a parting! Think you, my brethren, that either of the twain felt at this moment the nails with which they were transfixed to the tree? The soul of the penitent thief was filled with a joy unutterable which must have swallowed up all sense of pain. He rejoiced in the death by which he now glorified God. He gloried on the cross, and " in the cross." True, he was crucified, but then he was " crucified with Christ," and that in another sense than his unhappy companion was, or than any of the spectators of the scene knew or apprehended. This was to him matter of ineffable gloriation. ' Blessed day on which I was overtaken and seized by the pursuivants of justice! Blessed sentence, which brought me into the company and acquaintance of the Saviour of sinners, of the chief of sinners, and advanced me to the high, the distinguished honour of suffering along with him!' At that moment, too, Jesus rejoiced in spirit. He saw of the travail of his soul, and was satisfied. He felt that he was a conqueror. He had already begun to divide the spoil ravished from principalities and powers, which he made a show of openly, triumphing over them on his cross. In the conquest which he had just achieved, he beheld an earnest of his subsequent triumphs over the god of this world, and, exhilarated with the prospect, he " endured the cross, despising the shame." The address of the believing, penitent malefactor, was, at the same time, a prayer, a confession of faith, and a sermon. But no such prayer had been offered up since " men began to call on the name of the Lord:" no such confession of faith was ever

made by council or assembly of divines: no such sermon was ever delivered by the most powerful and eloquent preacher. And then the Saviour's reply! Many a compassionate, benignant, and seasonable answer had he vouchsafed to those who invoked him, and who professed their faith in him. But none of them equalled this. Pleased with the confession of Nathanael, he said to him, "Thou shalt see the heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." To Peter he had said, "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven." To the Syrophenician, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt." To the Roman Centurion, "I have not found such faith; no, not in Israel." And to his disciples, "Henceforth I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in the kingdom of God." But to none of these did he say as unto this poor, converted, crucified thief, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise." He had made many converts during his personal ministry, when he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. But of this man he had made a convert on the cross, in the midst of great agony of body and soul; and, therefore, he rejoiced in him above all his fellows. He was his Benoni, the son of his sorrow; and, therefore, he made him his Benjamin, the son of his right hand.

But let us examine more coolly and attentively this singular address of the convert on the cross. Let us consider, in the *first* place, who he was, and the circumstances in which he was placed; *secondly*, the situation in which Jesus was when he addressed him; *thirdly*, the profession of faith which it contains; and, *fourthly*, the prayer which it expressed.

I. Consider the person who made the address, and the circumstances in which he was placed. He was a thief and a robber—one who, by his own confession, merited the ignominious death which he was suffering. Abandoning the path of honest industry, he had betaken himself to the highway, and procured his livelihood by preying on the property and life of the peaceable. When we consider the character of Barabbas,

whom they preferred to Jesus, and the design for which his fellow-sufferers were selected, we may be sure that they were criminals of the worst sort, whose practices had excited general hatred and terror. We all know what the characters of those who have devoted themselves to this mode of living are —how reckless of life—how destitute of principle—how enslaved to every base and malignant passion—how dead to all the feelings of honour, reputation, compassion, or compunction—how insensible to the remonstrances of conscience, or the lessons of experience—how regardless of God or man—how disposed to mock at every thing that is sacred, at death, judgment, and eternity! You cannot point to a class of men from whom you could select an individual less likely to be affected with the scene of the crucifixion, or to sympathize with the meek, and patient, and forgiving Jesus. The conduct of the thief who reviled him, and the words which he is represented as having used, are just what we would have expected from such a person in such circumstances.

Matthew and Mark, in their account of the crucifixion, say, "the thieves also who were crucified with him reviled him," and "cast the same in his teeth;" from which we might conclude, that both acted in the same manner when first affixed to the cross, but that one of them underwent a sudden change in his sentiments, which produced a complete alteration on his language, and led him to justify and pray to the Saviour whom he had a little before reviled and outraged. This is no impossible thing. Transformations as wonderful and as sudden have been effected. Saul of Tarsus was arrested in the middle of his mad career, and he who was "breathing out threatenings" against all who called on the name of Jesus of Nazareth was found the next moment invoking that name of which he had been "a blasphemer," and with the most humble and implicit submission, praying, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The jailer of Philippi is another example. Having found the prison-doors open, and supposing that Paul and Silas had escaped, he was in the very act of sheathing his drawn sword in his own bowels, when on a sudden, on the speaking of a few words, the weapon of destruction dropped

from his hands, and the bold and determined suicide hung trembling on the knees of his prisoners, and under a deep concern about the safety, not of his body but his soul, cried out, " Sirs, what must I do to be saved ?" The same power which was so visibly exerted in these instances could easily have purified the fountain of ungodliness in this man's heart at the very moment that the words of bitter derision were flowing from his tongue, and made them to be followed by the sweet and salutary strains of blessing and prayer streaming from a smitten, softened, opened, and sanctified soul. But as the evangelist Luke gives the most circumstantial narrative of the extraordinary incident, it is more natural to consider his detail as qualifying and explaining the general statement of his brethren ; and he represents only one of the malefactors as reviling Jesus, and the other as vindicating him. Nor is it uncommon in scripture to affirm that of a number of persons or things of the same kind, which is true of one of them only. Thus we are told that the ark " rested on the mountains of Ararat," that is, on one of them ; that Lot " dwelt in the cities of the plain," that is, in one of them ; that " the soldiers ran and filled a spunge with vinegar," that is, one of them did so. In like manner we are told " the thieves railed on him," that is, one of them did it.

Although, however, the person mentioned in our text did not join in the blasphemies of his comrade, we have every reason for thinking that the cross was the place of his conversion ; and that he came to it with no more knowledge of Jesus, and no more love to him, than his fellow had. But while he was suspended on the cross his heart was changed—he was convinced of sin, enlightened in the knowledge of the Saviour, who was crucified along with him, humbled, sanctified, and made a new man. That the influence by which this was brought about was divine, there cannot be a moment's doubt. The only question is—as the spirit of God does not ordinarily produce this change on the minds of adults without the intervention and use of external means—by what instrumentality was this man converted, and how did he attain that knowledge

of the truth concerning Christ which he displayed in his address to him?

When Jesus began to teach in the synagogue of his native place, his townsmen were astonished, and exclaimed, "Whence hath this man this wisdom? Is not this the carpenter's son? Whence then hath he all these things?" There is reason for putting the same question as to this thief, and under a similar feeling of astonishment. Like others who have followed his unlawful trade, we have every reason to think that he was brought up in ignorance and profaneness, and that he was as destitute of religious knowledge as he was of moral honesty. He was too much occupied with his trade to attend on the sermons, or witness the miracles of Jesus; and his exclusion from all sober and decent society must have prevented him from hearing of them by the report of others. By what means then did he acquire the knowledge of him? In his prison he might hear of his arraignment and sentence; and after he knew that he was to be crucified along with him, curiosity would induce him to enquire into the cause of his condemnation. This might perhaps satisfy him that Jesus was no evil-doer—that he had been guilty of no murder, or theft, or sedition, and that the envy of the chief priests had delivered him up to Pilate; and it is probable that his companion also knew all this, and had the same conviction in his breast, although he railed on him as an impostor. But it was at Golgotha, and when hanging on the accursed tree, that he acquired that knowledge which issued in his conversion. And what were the means of his instruction? None that I can discover or tell you of, my brethren, but what he was able to glean from the speeches of those who were below, from the few words which Jesus had spoken, and from the inscription on his cross. The first he had heard say, "He saved others;" and who can tell what light this saying might let into an understanding opened by the Spirit of God? He had also heard them speak of him, although with incredulity, as "the Christ, the King of Israel, the Son of God, who trusted in God that he would deliver him." He had heard the remarkable and heart-melt-

ing prayer which Jesus offered up for his murderers, when they were in the act of nailing him to the tree, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do;" and he had a practical commentary on them in the meekness and patience with which he "endured the cross, despising the shame." And he had an opportunity of reading the inscription which was written over his head in legible characters, in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, "This is Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." This, my brethren, was at once the text and the sermon by which the thief was converted; and, accordingly, the language of his address and prayer is borrowed from it. He believed that he was "Jesus," a Saviour. He believed that he was a "King;" and he believed that his cross was the way to his crown, for it witnessed of it, and it pointed to it. And believing this, and encouraged by it to put his trust in him, he said, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." Think it not strange, or at least think it not incredible, that the words of scorn and derision spoken by an infatuated, infuriated mob should be made the means of so much good to this man's soul. They were truth, saving truth, and contained the substance of the gospel, and of what Jesus had taught concerning himself. Think it not incredible, that the inscription devised by an unbelieving and unjust judge should have been the means of delivering a criminal, whom he had condemned to an excruciating death, from a doom still more awful. It contained the very truth which the person to whom it referred had testified when he stood at the bar of Pilate, and it was devised and written at the secret instigation of Him whose "determinate counsel" the Roman governor executed in this as well as in other parts of this divinely-ordained transaction. Many an excellent, savoury, and saving sermon has been preached from the insidious saying of the arch-priest Caiaphas, "It is expedient that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." And why, in that year, and on that day, which was big with the eternal destinies of a world, to which all the prophets and holy men from the beginning had looked forward, and all holy men

to the end shall look back, why at such a time should not a Pagan magistrate have been made to prophesy as well as a Jewish priest? And why should not his prophecy have been the means of enlightening the mind of a robber, and qualifying him for confessing the dying Redeemer of sinners, both Jewish and Gentile?

But, my brethren, we are to remember that it is one thing for us to perceive the meaning of this inscription, possessing, as we do, the whole New Testament, yea, the whole Bible, as a commentary on it, and having leisure to compare the commentary with the text; and that it was quite another thing for the thief, without any such helps, to decypher its language and extricate its sense; and that, too, while he hung on the cross in a state of exquisite bodily pain. That he should have been able to do this, and by what process of thought he came to the conclusion which he drew, will continue always to be matter of wonder—a monument of the inscrutable wisdom and amazing grace of Him who works by whatever means it pleaseth him to employ.

II. Consider the situation in which Jesus was placed when this man addressed him in the words of the text.

During his personal ministry, the rays of his glory often pierced the veil of his outward humiliation, so that those that saw its manifestations had all their doubts dissipated, and were assured that he came from God, and was the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. But this man became acquainted with him, and beheld him, not at Jordan, where heaven pronounced him its Son; or at Cana of Galilee, where he manifested forth his glory; or by the lake of Tiberias, where he fed the multitude; or in Bethany, where he raised Lazarus; or in Tabor, where he was transfigured: but he beheld him for the first time at Golgotha, where, instead of speaking as never man spake, he was dumb as a sheep before her shearers, and, instead of doing mighty works, was crucified through weakness. At this time his glory was not merely under a cloud: it was in an eclipse, and seemed to have set never to reappear. It was the hour and power of dark-

ness. Formerly he had been followed by multitudes, who crowded to him and thronged him, and when he withdrew they followed him and sought him out with great eagerness—the whole world was gone out after him, and they talked of making him a king, so that the chief priests became alarmed, and his disciples, seeing matters in so prosperous-like a train, thought it high time to look out for themselves, and to secure the most honourable places in that kingdom which he was about to erect. But this flattering prospect had evanished. The multitude which followed him for a time had melted away gradually, until he was left alone with the twelve; and at last he was forsaken by them also. One of them betrayed him, another abjured him, and all the rest fled, and were scattered; and their unfaithful and cowardly desertion had affixed a stigma on his pretensions, which all the malice and misrepresentation of his open adversaries had not been able to inflict. When he was arraigned before the high priest, hopes of his safety still remained; for the Romans retained the power of life and death in their own hands, and Pilate was not only disposed to let him go, but laboured to accomplish his release. Even after he was condemned to die, the case did not appear desperate; for those who had witnessed his miracles, and seen the band sent to apprehend him struck to the ground, merely by his saying to them, "I am he," might flatter themselves that his enemies would be unable to carry their sentence into execution. This last hope had proved fallacious. He had suffered himself to be led as a lamb to the slaughter. He was now affixed to the tree, and was fast bleeding to death. There he hung between two notorious malefactors, disowned by all his former friends, insulted over by his enemies, heaven shut against his prayer, hell gaping for him as its prey. It was in these circumstances, when the cause of Jesus was in the most desperate-like condition, that this man, openly and for the first time, professed his faith in him.

III. Consider the import of the profession contained in his address.

Had he merely professed his belief that Jesus was an innocent man—that he had done nothing amiss or worthy of death, it would have been a great deal. Had he avowed that he thought him no impostor, but a true prophet, this would have been more than could have been expected, considering the circumstances in which both were placed. How hesitatingly and suspiciously did the two disciples, on the road to Emmaus, express themselves on this subject:—"We TRUSTED that it had been he that should have redeemed Israel." But this man went far beyond this point in his profession. He addressed him as "Lord." The chief priests and rulers of the Jews spoke of him in the most contemptuous style—"this fellow" and "that deceiver." When Peter was challenged as one of his disciples, he said that he knew not "the man." The highest epithet that the disciples could give him after they had received a report of his resurrection was, "Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet mighty in word and deed." The thief addresses him now by that title which the apostles gave him after he had shown himself to them by infallible proofs. They could say, "the Lord is risen;" but they could not, like this thief, call him Lord, when he hung on the cross. Nor was this a mere title of respect. The cross was no place for complimentary or ceremonious language. In such circumstances, he would not have owned him at all, if he had not been persuaded that he was the Lord of all, of life and death, of heaven and hell. And as he addressed him as Lord, so he avowed his conviction that he was going to take possession of a kingdom. Wonderful faith! A dying man, a worm and no man, reproach of men and despised of the people, the lowest of the people, he addresses as Lord, and worships him. One whom he had seen arrayed in derision with the mock ensigns of royalty, and then stripped of them and led away to be crucified, whom he had heard taunted with his kingly claims, and in vain desired to come down from the cross to give a proof of their validity, he nevertheless saluted, in deep earnest, as a king; and while God had set up the right hand of his adversaries, made all his enemies to rejoice, shortened the days of his youth, covered him with shame, and profaned his crown by casting it to the ground,

he, strong in faith, staggered not, but, against hope, believed in hope, and avowed his confident assurance that he was about to ascend the throne of his kingdom. Verily, such faith as this had not been evinced from the days of the father of the faithful.

And then how superior do his conceptions of the nature of Christ's kingdom appear to have been! The Jews of that time had very gross and carnal notions of the reign of Messiah. They imagined that he would appear as a temporal and earthly monarch, emancipate them from the thraldom of a foreign yoke, and make the nations tributary to them. The disciples of Jesus had imbibed some of these prejudices, to which they clung pertinaciously, in spite of all the instructions of their Master; nor were they altogether weaned from this erroneous and fond conceit by his crucifixion, as appears from the question which they put to him after he was risen, "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" How superior were the views which the converted thief acquired on this subject in a short time, to those of the disciples after they had for years listened to the spiritual doctrine, and contemplated the heavenly character of their Master. The prospect of his death was repugnant to all their ideas, and destructive of all their expectations of his kingly glory; and when they saw him led away to be crucified, their hopes died away within them. He owned him to be a king in the lowest step of his abasement, and believed that his cross was the pedestal by which he would mount to his throne in the highest heavens.

IV. Let us, in fine, consider this address as a prayer.

It was said of Saul of Tarsus, after his conversion, and as one mark of that change which he had undergone, "Behold, he prayeth!" He had never prayed aright before that period, though, as a strict Pharisee, he had no doubt often practised the external form. But this was probably the first time that ever the thief had engaged in the exercise—the first time in his life that he had offered to God the sacrifice of the lips. Prayer is not an employment reconcilable with the trade which he had followed. It is necessary for such persons to

banish the fear, and consequently to exclude the thought, of God. If that sacred name had come into his mouth, it would be in the form of hellish oaths or blasphemies. But now, behold he prayeth! and that in deep earnest. He prayed to Jesus, whom his fellow-criminal was blaspheming, invoked him as Lord, and begged of him the greatest favour which, as a dying man, he could ask. Criminals have often been seen praying on a scaffold, and they have earnestly begged for a pardon, or a respite, or some other boon from their judges; but this is the only instance in which a criminal was found supplicating and praying to his fellow-sufferer. And what was the petition which he presented? It was not for deliverance from death or for any temporal blessing. He did not even seriously prefer the request of his comrade, "Save thyself and us." He was perfectly resigned to his fate. He was willing to endure the punishment due to his crime by the laws of God and man, and to expiate, by his own death, the offence which he had done to society, while he who hung beside him expiated the sin which he had committed against heaven. 'Lord! I have no desire to live. It is good for me to be here. It is better for me to die with thee, than to reign with Cæsar. All my desire is to be with thee where thou art going; and O remember thy unworthy fellow-sufferer when thou art come into thy kingdom!' What unfeigned and contrite humility does this petition breathe! He prays as became one who felt and had confessed himself to be a great sinner, and who could have no possible claims but what were founded on the mere and unbought benignity of him whom he addressed. When the two sons of Zebedee requested to be permitted to sit, the one at the right and the other at the left hand of their Master in his kingdom, he asked them, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? or can ye be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" Here was one who was drinking of his bitter cup, and baptized with his bloody baptism; but he had no such ambitious wish, and presumed to present no such arrogant request. His heart was not haughty; his eyes were not lofty; neither did he aspire to great things. A genuine convert, his heart was like that of a weaned child. All that he ventured

to ask was, that Jesus would remember him when he came to his kingdom.

But though presented with the profoundest humility and expressive of the greatest submission, still this was a great request. O how much, my brethren, is included in these two words, addressed by a convinced sinner to the Saviour, "remember me!" The eternal salvation of a sinner hangs upon them. If he remembers him, all is well; if he forgets him, wo unto him, for it shall be ill with him. Had not Christ remembered and thought upon us in our low estate, and undertaken our cause, we would have been hopeless. Had he not remembered his people, and borne their names on his breastplate, when he approached God as the great high-priest to make reconciliation for iniquity, their guilt would have remained. Did he not remember them, when they are lying polluted in their blood, and say to them, "Live," they would die in their sins. Did he not continue to remember them, and pray for them, and help them by his Spirit, he that desires to have them as his prey would gain his object, and they would never see the kingdom of heaven. Had the penitent thief dropped out of the memory of Christ, he would have dropped into hell at death, along with his blaspheming companion; for "nor thieves nor revilers shall inherit the kingdom of God." How could he, an ignorant, lawless, God-despising, heaven-daring profligate, presume to lift up his eyes, or to apply at the gates of paradise, unless he had ground to believe that his gracious and merciful fellow-sufferer would remember him? But if he continued to think of him and own him, what might he not expect? In fine, this prayer was offered believingly as well as fervently. He believed that Jesus had the highest interest with the Father, who would not refuse any thing which should be craved by him who had laid down his life at his command; that he was about to be put in possession of all power in heaven and earth; and that this included authority to bestow its honours and rewards on whomsoever he would. And he believed that such was the grace, condescension, and compassion of the dying Redeemer, that he would not reject the application of a poor, convicted, condemned criminal, but wash him from his sins in his blood, and sanctify him by the power of his

Spirit, and present him faultless before the throne of his glory with exceeding joy. Nor did he believe in vain, nor was the answer of his prayer long delayed or dubiously expressed; for Jesus instantly said to him, "Verily, I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

In reviewing this wonderful scene, a variety of reflections, all conducive to practical improvement, crowd upon the mind. Let us dwell a little on a few of them.

First, We have here an indisputable instance of real conversion. Examples of this change have occurred in every age, as to the genuineness of which we have no reasonable ground of doubt. But the case of the penitent thief is accompanied with evidence the most irresistible and convincing. Who can doubt that on the cross a sinner was converted from the evil of his ways, a soul saved from death, and a multitude of sins hid? When the Lord writeth up the people whom he hath formed for himself, he will count that this man was born again on Calvary. While I run over the credible marks of a saving change which he exhibited, let it be your employment, my brethren, to examine and see whether they are to be found in you also.

He confessed himself to be a sinner and worthy of death, when no creature exacted this confession, and when it could be of no earthly advantage to him. His heart was penetrated with a reverential fear of God, which made him not only refrain from offending him himself, but shudder at hearing what was offensive to him from the lips of another. He entertained just, and high, and honourable views of the Saviour. He looked to him on the cross, and placed all his hopes of salvation on his merciful remembrance of him. He prayed to him, and committed his soul to him, as the Lord of the invisible world. He gave every evidence which was in his power of the truth of his faith, repentance, and love. His hands and feet were immovably fixed to the tree. Nothing was left free to him but his heart and his tongue, and these he dedicated wholly to God and employed to the honour of Christ. His conduct corresponded to the inspired criterion, and verified it: "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." He not only deplored his

own sin, but he also faithfully, yet meekly, reproved the sin of his companion and of the multitude which surrounded him, and used all the means which were in his power to arrest their ungodly career and to bring them to repentance. He was clothed with humility. His affections were set on things above and not on things on the earth. His conversation was in heaven. No corrupt communication proceeded from his mouth, but that which was good to the use of edifying. All bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking he put away from him, with all malice; he was kind, tender-hearted, forgiving; and was not this a proof that God, for Christ's sake, had forgiven him? Who imagines that if this man had been let down from the cross, he would have returned to his old companions and his old practices? Who doubts that he that stole would have stolen no more, but have wrought with his hands that he might give to him that needeth; that he would have been a bright and living example of renovation; that he would have joined himself to the apostles, and continued stedfastly in their doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer? Would to God that all that hear me this day were both almost and altogether such as this malefactor was, except the nails by which he was affixed to the tree.

Secondly, We have here a distinguished proof of the power of divine grace. Speaking of what he had been, and contrasting it with what he had become, Paul exclaims, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ was exceeding abundant!" We cannot think of the conversion of this man without making the same reflection. He had been a great sinner, an ignorant, profane, ungodly, lawless, hardened ruffian. But O! how changed from what he was! So much so, that his former associates, who had known him most intimately, could not now know him to be the same person. He is, indeed, become a new man, a new creature; "old things are passed away, behold all things are become new." The lion, who had gone about seeking whom he might devour, is changed into the lamb; the blasphemer into a preacher of righteousness; the robber into a reprover of vice. And how sudden the transformation! He came to the cross with all the evil passions rankling in his

breast, and he had scarcely been affixed to it, when their poison was plucked out, and they gave place to mildness, gentleness, and compassion for the sufferings of others; he came to it with his mouth filled with cursing and bitterness, and when upon it, we find him employed only in praying and exhorting; he was lifted up on the cross polluted with the blood of others, he was taken down from it washed from his sins in the blood of Christ; he was suspended as a malefactor, and he died as a martyr. What can withstand or resist the power of the grace which produced such a change as this? What is too hard, what can be difficult for it? It can pardon the greatest sins, subdue the strongest corruptions, eradicate the most deep-rooted prejudices, cure the most inveterate habits; in a word, change the most desperately wicked heart.

Thirdly, Contemplate in this scene an instance of late conversion. It was the last hour with this malefactor. His days were numbered, and the last of them had dawned on him in as hopeless a condition as ever,—with all his sins upon him, unrepented of, and unpardoned, without the smallest preparation for appearing before his righteous and impartial Judge. He was brought out of his cell, he was led away to be crucified, he was lifted up upon the cross, he hung over the yawning pit which was ready to receive him, when the Saviour, who was at his right hand, had compassion on him, apprehended him by his grace, and plucked him as a brand from the fire. Miraculous escape! Wonderful intervention! Ineffable expression of the patience and mercy of him who is God and not man! In one and the same day, this man was in the gall of bitterness and in the delights of paradise, associated with felons and admitted into the society of angels, in concord with Belial and in fellowship with Christ. This singular fact is recorded in scripture, and we know, that whatever was written aforetime, was written for our learning. It teaches us by example what our Saviour taught by parable, that persons may be called into God's vineyard at the last hour, and that he will bestow upon them the gift of eternal life through Christ Jesus, as well as upon those who have borne the burden and heat of the day. And shall their eye be evil because he is good? Or,

shall we be ashamed or afraid to produce this example, and to point to the encouragement which it holds out, because some will speak evil of the good ways of God, or others will abuse his tender mercy to their own perdition? No; while there is life there is hope—while sinners are on God's footstool, they may look up to the throne of his grace. He waits to be gracious; his long suffering is salvation. This message we are warranted to carry into the cell of the convict—to the bedside of the dying profligate—and to proclaim it in public to persons of all ages. The most hoary-headed sinner in this assembly may find mercy of the Lord. Though thou hast provoked God, and grieved him for forty, fifty, sixty, seventy, fourscore years, yet to-day, after so long a time, to-day, if thou wilt hear his voice, and not harden thy heart, thou shalt enter into his rest, and be received into his glory. You need not say, who shall ascend to heaven to bring Christ down. He who was near to the thief on the cross, is near to you in the preaching of the cross. O then delay not to improve the precious season which will not last long, which passeth away, and will soon come to a close; look to him, believe on him, cry to him, confessing your sins, "Lord, remember me, now when thou art come into thy kingdom." Look on him whom you have pierced by your iniquities, until your hearts are smitten with the sight, and you are made to mourn as for an only son, and to be in bitterness as for a first-born; and he will heal you by the virtue of his stripes, and by the sovereign efficacy of his free Spirit.

But this example, while it invites to repentance, gives no encouragement to presumption. It has been justly remarked, that one instance of conversion at the latest period of life, has been recorded in the Bible, that none may despair; and but one instance, that none may presume, or delay this important work to the last. Not to insist on the singularity of this man's situation, and the propriety of the Redeemer displaying the power of his grace, and the virtue of his blood, when hanging on the cross, by a signal and extraordinary act of mercy; the history of the converted malefactor, affords not a shadow of encouragement or excuse to those who resist the calls of

the gospel, and procrastinate repentance; for he had not enjoyed these calls, nor is there any good reason for thinking that he ever heard or saw the Saviour before. It is sinful to limit the Holy One, and to despair of his mercy and ability to save in the most extreme case; but it is awfully sinful, it is a fearful tempting and provoking of the most High, to delay repentance in the hope of finding mercy at a future period. When put into plain language, it just amounts to this, 'I will continue in sin because the grace of God abounds: I will go on to disobey him, and rebel against him, and affront him, in the confidence, that he will pardon me whenever I shall be pleased to turn to him, and that he will receive me when I am weary of sinning, and can no longer find pleasure in it.' If this is not to "sin wilfully after having received the knowledge of the truth,"—if it is not to "sin the sin unto death," it is something very like it. What can such persons expect but that God will pronounce against them his fearful oath of exclusion, cease to strive with them any longer by his Spirit, say to the ministers of his word and of his providence, "Let them alone," and give them up to the uncontrolled operation of their own corruptions, increased and aggravated by indulgence, and by the influence of the god of this world? How know you that you shall have time for repentance? You may be struck dead in a single moment, in the very act of sinning with a high hand. Or you may be struck motionless and senseless, without a tongue to confess your sins or your faith in the Saviour,—without an eye to read the record of salvation—without an ear to hear its gladdening sounds from preacher or friend—without a memory to recollect what you have heard or known of it. Although time for reflection should be granted you, and though the gate of mercy should stand open before you, yet your soul may be so filled with darkness, and unbelief, and remorse, that you cannot perceive the way of escape, and may die, like Judas, in despair. Though quaintly expressed, there is much truth in the saying, 'True repentance is never too late, but late repentance is seldom true.' How many instances are there of "repentance" in sickness, and in the prospect of death, being "repented of." Judicious

persons who have had occasion to deal with the irreligious in such circumstances, have a saddening report to make of the result of their experience. How many of them have died as they lived, ignorant, insensible, hardened! Of those who survived, and were delivered from the terrors of death, how many "returned, like the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire!" And among those who died with the accents of penitence on their lips, of how few can they speak but in the language of trembling hope! We often hear of the contrition of condemned malefactors, and it is not uncommon to represent them as having exhibited decided marks of conversion in their cells and on the scaffold; but there is reason to think that credulity is mingled with charity in these reports. Charity should dispose us to form the most favourable hopes of individuals; but when we speak on this subject, and especially when we make our sentiments public, we should recollect, that charity for the dead may be cruelty to the living. If such persons were to be pardoned and restored to life, we may judge what would be the result with multitudes of them, from what we see in the case of those who have been recovered from a dangerous sickness. How rarely do we meet, in such cases, with the unequivocal proofs of sincere repentance which were evinced in the crucified malefactor!

Fourthly, See here a striking example of the different effects produced by the preaching of Christ crucified. To the one malefactor the cross was the savour of life unto life, to the other it was the savour of death unto death; to the former, it was the power of God unto salvation, to the latter, it was a stumblingblock; it softened the heart of the former, it hardened the heart of the latter,—it prepared the one for heaven, it rendered the other two-fold more a child of hell. Here we perceive the exceeding riches of sovereign grace, and the desperate depravity of the human heart, when left to its native operation. O the blindness, the infatuation, the obduracy of this impenitent malefactor, whom neither the reproofs and contrition of his companion, nor the meekness and patience of Jesus, nor the acts of grace and clemency which he witnessed, could soften! He saw the rich treasures of grace opened; he

heard the humble petition of his comrade; he heard the gracious return made to it, granting him more than he had ventured to ask; he was a witness to the kingdom of heaven being bestowed on a fellow-convict;—and yet he remained proud and impenitent, and would not bend his mind to ask what he might have freely received. Yet this is no strange or uncommon thing; it is every day verified in multitudes who enjoy the gospel.

Fifthly, How mysterious and manifold the ways by which God imparts the knowledge of his mind to men—makes those that are blind to see, and those that see to be blind! He opened the eyes of an Eastern astrologer to behold afar off "the Star that should come out of Jacob, and the Sceptre that should rise out of Israel;" and when, blinded by "the wages of unrighteousness," he rushed on obstinately in the path of wilful disobedience, disregarding the messenger of death who opposed him, the mouth of the dumb ass was opened to rebuke the madness of the prophet. When "the scornful men" who ruled the people of Jerusalem rejected "him who came in the name of the Lord to save them," shut their eyes against the light of his heavenly doctrine and of his divine works, blasphemed both the one and the other, and persecuted their author to the death, a heathen ruler was made to confess his innocence, and to predict the glory of his kingdom; and although he meant not so, but it was in his heart to mortify those, who yielded him a feigned and reluctant obedience, and had urged him on to an act against which his conscience remonstrated, yet Providence overruled his designs and actions to the accomplishment of its own purposes; and in consequence of this, the inscription which he had ordered to be affixed on the cross, and which he refused to recal or to modify, became the instrument of savingly enlightening an ignorant malefactor, and enabling him to silence and still the increasing tumult of those who maliciously or ignorantly reviled the Holy One and the Just. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

Sixthly, What a small portion of truth will be of saving benefit to a person when accompanied by the blessing of the

divine Spirit! Who teacheth like God! When the vision of all is to the learned as a sealed book, and the eyes of the prophets and their rulers and seers are covered, he can unveil its mysteries to the most ignorant and uninitiated. By means of a few words he can make the outcasts of society wise to salvation, while those who despised and cursed them have "precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little and there a little," and yet all the effect is that they "fall backwards, and are broken, and snared, and taken." What slender means will prove successful when God puts his hand to the work! What a small portion of truth will irradiate the mind of a sinner, and dispel its darkness, when the Spirit of God makes way for it, and accompanies it home with his secret and irresistible influence! At the beginning he had only to say, "Let there be light, and there was light;" and a single word will call a sinner from darkness into marvellous light. "Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig-tree, I saw thee," said Jesus to Nathanael, who instantly replied, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel;" a reply which drew an expression of surprise from Jesus. The effect of electricity is not more instantaneous. "Thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thine husband," said the same divine preacher to the Samaritan woman; and what was her report to her townsmen of the effect produced by this saying? "Come, see a man that told me ALL things that ever I did." Who can calculate the extent of the wonderful discoveries which the smallest portion of divine truth entering into the soul will produce! Let in the light of day by the smallest chink into a dark room or cellar, and you will see ten thousand motes floating and dancing in the circling wave of its beams. Every portion of truth is a ray from the Sun of Righteousness, and his rays, like those of the natural sun, are divisible to an inconceivable degree, and every the minutest particle possesses the essential properties of the luminary from which it emanates, and accordingly is capable of enlightening, quickening, cheering, invigorating, and making fruitful in every good work. All things that are reprovable are made manifest by the light, for what-

soever doth make manifest is light. No doubt, where the word of truth is clearly revealed, and where it is faithfully preached and unfolded according to the ordinance of heaven, free from any mixture of error or of human inventions, we have reason to expect that the most extensive good will be done. But we must not limit the Spirit of truth, who hath wrought hitherto, and doth work, and will work, sovereignly as he willeth. When persons are placed in unfavourable circumstances, we know not what small means may produce saving effects. Though we are commanded to "cease from the instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge," and are not to receive into our houses, or bid God speed to the teachers of "another gospel," yet the Spirit of God, who is present where we cannot be with safety, or without sin, may bless (and we doubt not he has blessed) such portions of divine truth as proceed from erroneous teachers, to the conversion or sanctification of his chosen. Yea, words spoken without any serious or fixed design, perhaps thrown out in the way of scoffing and derision, may fall into the conscience and heart of a sinner, take root there, and bring forth fruit unto life eternal; and when this is at any time verified, both the word and the power by which it is made effectual, appear the more evidently to be of God.

SERMON VI.

THE CONFESSION OF THOMAS.

JOHN, xx. 28.

"MY LORD, AND MY GOD."

THE Sun of righteousness rose, like the natural sun, early but slowly, gradually scattering the darkness and the clouds. First the grave of Christ was seen to be open; then it was seen to be empty; and then the grave-clothes were found lying, carefully wrapt up, denoting that the illustrious prisoner had neither been taken away by violence, nor gone out hastily or by flight. First, an angel announced his resurrection, and then he showed himself alive. First he appeared to one of his disciples, next to two of them, and lastly to them all. In this chapter, we have an account of the first appearance which he made to his disciples collectively. They had already received a message from him by Mary Magdalene; one of their number had also seen him; but still they doubted. Now, he not only appeared in the midst of them, and spoke to them, but he showed them his hands and his side, the former bearing the mark of the nails by which he had been fixed to the cross, and the latter the scar of the spear by which he was pierced. And now all the doubts of those present were dissipated. "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord."

But one of their number, Thomas, called in the Greek Didymus, was absent during this interview. On his arrival, his brethren informed him that they had seen the Lord. One would have thought that the concurring testimony of so many would have commanded his belief. But he remained incredulous; and expressed his unbelief in very strong terms,—"Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and

put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Next Lord's day, the disciples being assembled, and Thomas with them, Jesus appeared in the midst of them, and having saluted them, desired the faithless apostle to take the satisfaction which he had required. "Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing." This was irresistible; and Thomas cried out in a transport, "My Lord, and my God!"

The great secret, my brethren, of profiting by ordinances, is to wait on them in the faith of Christ's spiritual presence in them, according to his promise, "Lo, I am with you alway:" and our assembling together at this time will be for the better and not for the worse, if the words read shall be blessed for correcting our unbelief and strengthening our faith. Let us then, in dependence on the Spirit who testifies of Christ,

I. Make a few observations from the text in its connexion.
II. Open up the import of the exclamation.

I. 1. The text in its connexion leads me to observe, that our Lord Jesus put peculiar honour on the first day of the week. On that day he rose from the dead; and by that very act it was distinguished from all the other days. As God rested from all his works in creation on the seventh, so did Christ rest from his works in redemption, and declare them complete, by rising from the grave on the first day. On this day he appeared to the women, to Peter, to the two disciples travelling to Emaus, and to the ten apostles. The evangelist is very particular in naming the day; for though it had been mentioned before, he does not satisfy himself with saying, "Now the same day in the evening," but adds, "being the first day of the week." On the ensuing first day he renewed his visit. And it was on the same day of the week, that the Spirit descended on the apostles. These acts were sufficient to dedicate that portion of time to a sacred use; for divine authority having already set apart one day in seven, there was

no necessity for such an express appointment in transferring the Sabbath from one day of the week to another. The analogy between the works of creation and redemption, as recognised in Scripture,—the reason of the thing,—the example of Christ and his apostles,—and the name given to that day by the Spirit of God, constitute an ample warrant for our faith in keeping it holy to the Lord, as the Christian Sabbath, and for our expecting his spiritual presence on it. There is no superstition in looking for a special blessing on the first day of the week. There is a hallowing influence in the thought, "This is the LORD'S DAY;"—"This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save *now*, I beseech thee, O Lord! I beseech thee, send *now* prosperity." The highest attainment on this side heaven, is to be "in the Spirit on the Lord's day."

2. It is good to be found in the meetings of the disciples of Christ, especially on his own day. It was when the disciples were assembled, that Jesus came and stood in the midst of them, and said "Peace be unto you," and, breathing on them, said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost." In like manner, on the day of Pentecost, "they were all with one accord in one place," and were all filled with the Holy Spirit. In consequence of Thomas being absent when his brethren convened on the first Lord's day, he missed a meeting with Christ, and remained in a state of painful suspense, or rather positive unbelief, so far as the great fact of the resurrection was concerned. And it was not until he was found with his brethren on the following Sabbath, that he obtained relief and a cure. The fearers of the Lord have always felt a desire after, and a delight in, public ordinances. The Lord loved the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob; and accordingly "thither the tribes went up to Israel's testimony, to give thanks to the name of the Lord." And a special promise is attached to Christian assemblies, however small: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Every true worshipper has the promise of Christ's presence; but "two are better than one, and a threefold cord is not easily broken." If a number of per-

sons should be invited to an entertainment by a great man, though he should not make his appearance at the time of their assembling, yet, on comparing their cards of invitation, they would be confirmed in their expectation of seeing him. We do not know what a loss we sustain by carelessly or unnecessarily absenting ourselves from public ordinances, even for a single diet. Perhaps Thomas was with his brethren in the forenoon, but he was absent in the afternoon of the day, when the Lord came among them.

3. Remark, again, that however genuine the experience of others may be, and whatever advantages may be derived from their report of what they have seen and felt, yet these will not supply the room of personal observation and experience. The disciples no doubt acquainted their absent brother with all that they had seen and heard—what Jesus said to them, and what he showed them—but it produced no effect. One glance of an object, or a slight tasting of it, will give us more satisfactory acquaintance with it than the most minute and lengthened description. "O taste and see that God is good." The greatest prejudices have sometimes fled at the hearing of a single sermon—a single sentence. "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" said Nathanael. "Philip saith unto him, come and see." Jesus had only to say, "When thou wast under the fig-tree I saw thee." —"Rabbi! thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel." "Come," said the woman of Samaria, "see a man which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"—"Now," said her countrymen, "we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." Reported sermons, and notes of sermons, are generally insipid; like dry crusts, they would require a keen appetite. We may recollect the words, but perhaps the feeling with which we heard them is gone, or greatly abated. "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?" It is easy to repeat words; not so easy to impart feelings.

4. Let us observe that unbelief is very unreasonable and

extravagant in its demands. How strikingly do we see this exemplified in the conduct of this disciple! He had a sufficiency of evidence already in the testimony of his brethren, whom he knew to be honest men, well acquainted with their Master, and not more prepossessed with the hope of seeing him alive again than he himself was. And then he was not called to rest his faith on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God; for the resurrection of Christ on the third day had been testified beforehand by the Prophets and by Jesus himself. If not contented with this testimony, one would have thought that all he required would have been to see his Master with his own eyes and talk with him. But no, this would not satisfy him. Well, suppose thou shouldst see the print of the nails on his hands, will that do? No; "I must put my finger into them." Is that all? No; "I must thrust my hand into his side, else I will not believe." Never, sure, was there any thing so near to total and wilful unbelief as this! And had it pleased Infinite Wisdom, that these memorials of humiliation should have been laid aside, had the Saviour not chosen to bear the marks of the nails and the spear on his resurrection body, where, Thomas, would have been thy faith, and where thy salvation? Here, as in a mirror, you may see the unreasonableness of infidelity in every age. Its demands increase as they are answered; its objections resemble the heads of the fabled monster, which were no sooner cut off than others, as hideous as the former, rose in their place. What a salvation did God work at the Red Sea! But they no sooner wanted water, than they murmured. Behold, He clave the rock, and the waters gushed out; "but can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?" —"If the Lord would make windows in Heaven, might this thing be?"—"What sign showest thou, that we may see and believe thee?"—"If he be the King of Israel, let him come down from the cross, and we will believe him." O! how like is the language of the friends of Christ sometimes to that of his enemies! How stumbling to weak disciples! how hardening to the ungodly!

5. Observe that the Saviour is very condescending, as well

as forgiving, in curing unbelief. It was prophesied of him, "The bruised reed he will not break, and the smoking flax he will not quench;" and often did he verify this part of his character in his treatment of the weak and dejected. But here is a case which does not seem to come under that rule. Here is a proud, conceited, obstinate disciple, who thinks himself strong, and despises his brethren as silly and credulous men. But the strength of men is weakness in the sight of God, and our Lord pitied him in his fancied elevation. He knew how to mortify his pride by curing his unbelief. He had much to forgive all his disciples. They had forsaken him in the hour of his trial; they had forgotten the words that he had spoken unto them while he was yet with them. And how does he resent this? He puts them to shame by kindness and condescension—by doubling his favours to them. While they continued with him in his temptations, he only called them "friends;" but now "he is not ashamed to call them brethren." "Go to my brethren, and say, I ascend unto my Father and your Father." But the grace of our Lord was conspicuous in the case of Thomas. Great spirits will not be dictated to by their inferiors; but Christ accommodates himself to the foolish fancy and wayward humour of this disciple; suffers himself to be prescribed to; grants the demand made on him in all its extent; bares his wounds, and exposes them to be raked and roughly handled, to heal an inveterate and morbid incredulity. "This is not the manner of man, O, Lord!" And so it was felt by the humbled and convicted disciple, when he exclaimed, "My Lord, and my God."

6. Observe finally, that there is sometimes a very sudden change effected in the minds and exercise of erring and undutiful Christians. Sometimes it is gradual. While they are musing or listening to the word of God, the fire begins to burn, and gradually increases until it bursts into a flame which cannot be contained, as in the case of the disciples on the road to Emaus. At other times it breaks forth all at once, as in the case of Thomas. In a moment all his doubts had fled, and the triumph of faith was proclaimed in the exclamation which he uttered, "My Lord, and my God."

II. Let us open up the import of the exclamation. And in doing so, it is not enough to consider the import of the words; we ought to enter into the feelings of the speaker, and thus to make them our own, and, as it were, light our torch at his flame. It was not any single sentiment or feeling, such as faith, or love, or joy, which actuated the apostle at this moment; but a mixed emotion, in which various feelings were blended together, and heightened each other. Let us analyze the complex emotion.

1. The exclamation is expressive of the fullest and most satisfying persuasion. Thomas is no longer faithless but believing. He is now fully persuaded of what he formerly doubted and disbelieved. Conviction has flashed on his mind. The evidence is irresistible and overwhelming. Not the shadow of a doubt remains. 'It is the Lord himself, and not another. This is no spectre or phantom—there is no imposition or illusion here.' All his brethren could not formerly persuade Thomas that his Master was risen; but the whole world could not now have persuaded him that he was in his grave.

And thus it is when the Spirit of Christ opens the understandings of men to understand the Scriptures, which then bring their own evidence along with them, and produce a clear, lively, and unhesitating conviction of their truth, and of the certainty of the things contained in them. Those who formerly disbelieved or stood in doubt, cry out, "Now we believe —we believe and are sure." They cavil no more, they contradict no more, they enquire no more. They acquiesce in and set their seal to what God reveals, are so satisfied of its truth that they can venture their all, for time and eternity, upon it; and although their knowledge may be but slender and imperfect compared with that of others, yet their faith is strong and adhesive, like that of the female martyr, who said, 'I cannot dispute for Christ, but I can die for him.' And this persuasion is most satisfying to the soul. A state of unbelief is to all, but especially to the Christian who has once tasted the peace of believing, a state of bondage and oppression. To be in suspense is to be in pain; to be in suspense as to any thing on which our happiness depends, is to be in agony. When once

persuaded, the believer feels as if a millstone had been lifted off his heart. He breathes freely, he speaks boldly. "I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted." "We that have believed, do enter into rest."

2. It is expressive of ingenuous shame and deep contrition. Thomas was convinced that he had been "faithless," and this was now no trivial or excusable thing in his eye. The same word, and the same symbols, which conveyed the evidence of the resurrection and presence of his Master to his understanding, carried a sharp rebuke to his heart. 'Fool that I was, and slow of heart to believe! How many proofs had I of his power—of his divinity! Did he not rebuke my unbelief at the grave of Lazarus? Having seen him raise others, why should it have appeared a thing incredible that he should rise himself? Did I not hear him say, "The Son of man must be killed, and rise on the third day? I have power to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again." I have erred, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.' This was exercise pleasing to Christ, and which he took care to excite and to cherish, by upbraiding him because of his unbelief, in the mortifying, but salutary language, "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

There is the closest connexion between the exercises of Christian belief and godly sorrow. No sooner is the eye of faith opened and fixed upon a pierced Redeemer, than it is to be seen glistening with the tear of repentance. The Spirit reproves the world of sin, because they believe not on Christ. Though there were nothing which a believer had to acknowledge but his unbelief, it would be sufficient to cover him with the blush of confusion. If you never felt shame and compunction for your former unbelief, you have reason to fear you have not yet believed. The well-affected believer feels at resisting the lowest evidence of the truth;—not only at making God a liar, but at giving the lie to his fellow-creatures. "I said in my haste, all MEN are liars." Instead of pleading ignorance as an excuse, looking upon error as innocent, or pronouncing unbelief involuntary, he is ready to acknowledge that his igno-

rance, and error, and unbelief, proceeded from the depravity of his heart, creating prejudices against the truth, or making him careless and indifferent about it;—from his pride, presumption, earthliness, selfishness, sluggishness,—from his forgetfulness of, and aversion to divine things, and enmity to the character of God, as exhibited both in the law and in the gospel. A recovered believer is at once confounded and humbled in looking back on his criminal and inexcusable behaviour—and even on his doubts, his perplexities, his ignorant mistakes, and hasty misconstructions of the word and works of God. "So foolish was I and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee." "Surely I am more brutish than any man, and have not the understanding of a man. I neither learned wisdom, nor have the knowledge of the holy."

3. It is expressive of clear and enlarged views of the character of Christ. It is erroneous to say, as some have said, that the disciples of Christ, during his personal ministry, did not believe his divinity. There is abundant proof to the contrary. "The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." "He manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed on him." He taught them that he and his Father are one; and that he who had seen him had seen the Father; and to the disciple speaking in our text, he said, "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also, and henceforth ye know him and have seen him." "Thou," said Peter in the name of the rest, "art the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Their knowledge of this, however, as well as other truths, was then less clear, and was sometimes overclouded. The veil of his humiliation and sufferings hid the splendour of his deity, and rendered it difficult for them to apprehend it distinctly and steadily. But he was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. He rose as the sun emerges from a dark cloud, or rather a fearful eclipse, and in his own light they saw him clearly to be—"the Word which was from the beginning, which was with God, and which was God." Accordingly, Thomas not only recognised him as

his Lord or Master, but as his Divine Master—"My Lord, and my GOD."

Faith is knowledge, and all true and saving knowledge of Jesus Christ is gained by believing the testimony of God. But faith may be increased, both intensively and extensively. There is not only a deep or firm conviction of what was hesitatingly believed, but there is also a more enlarged view of the objects believed. This last is commonly called Christian knowledge, and we are exhorted to add it to faith. "I know whom I have believed." Besides "the full assurance of faith," there is what the apostle calls "the full assurance of understanding." When a Christian has his faith restored and reinvigorated, it is commonly accompanied with an enlargement of his knowledge. The very proofs which are necessary to restore our confidence in a friend, after we had suffered it to be shaken, furnish us with new and additional information of his character. We know him better than ever. When Christ stretched out his hands, and bared his side to the view of his disciples, he shed a flood of light as to his real character upon the opened mind of Thomas. 'What is this? This is none other but the grace, the condescension, and kindness of God!' —"my God!"

4. It is expressive of warm affection. The appellations are endearing and tender. Not like, "Lord, is it I?" or that of Thomas on a former occasion, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?" That was like a cold, though respectful address to a stranger or wayfaring man. Some have supposed from the language of Thomas about the death of Lazarus, and during our Lord's valedictory discourse, that he was "a man of rough, morose temper, and apt to speak peevishly." I should rather be inclined to think that he was naturally of a warm, affectionate disposition, and open withal, though somewhat suspicious and fearful. There was love to Christ in the heart of this disciple, during his most gloomy and sullen mood of incredulity; and though it may appear paradoxical, it is true that, if he had loved Jesus less, he would not have been so incredulous as to his resurrection, or at least would not have expressed his feeling so strongly.

The common proverb indeed says, "what we wish, we easily believe." But a wish is one thing, and a desire is another. The objects of vulgar credulity are generally matters which engage the fancy rather than the heart. When, however, we have lost any object on which our affections are much set, and in which our happiness is bound up, it is not so easy to believe its restoration. When the patriarch's sons returned and told him, "Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt," "Jacob's heart fainted, for he believed them not." He thought it too good news to be true. Similar to this was Thomas's state of mind. 'Do not mock me, my brethren. Ask me not to believe it; I would not believe my own eyes; for I would be afraid that my heart had misled them.' And this suggests a difference between the infidelity of unrenewed persons, and the fits of incredulity into which genuine Christians fall. The former may be traced to hatred against the truth, or settled indifference to it; the latter are consistent with love to the truth, which may be discerned through the doubts and objections of a saint, as the sun may be discerned through a cloud. As there was a great difference between Peter's denying, and Judas's betraying of his master, so between the behaviour of Thomas in disbelieving the resurrection of Christ, and the conduct of the Jews who contradicted and blasphemed. I say not this to excuse unbelief or even doubting in any. There is always culpable ignorance and weakness in such exercise; and there is sometimes not a little pride and obstinacy. "Be not faithless, but believing."

Though there may be love, genuine love to Christ, where there is partial unbelief and darkness and fear, yet these feelings have always a tendency to weaken its influence. Love exists: but it exists, not by them, but in spite of them. It exists like fire under ashes, and when they are blown away, it manifests itself, kindles, and blazes forth. What is altogether unknown or discredited cannot excite our love, and what is indistinctly perceived, and imperfectly believed, will excite it but feebly.

There is much selfishness in our regret for departed friends,

and our felt loss makes our love to them appear greater to our minds than it really is. But when a lost friend is restored, and we again embrace him, our selfishness as well as our regret is swallowed up in the overflowings of disinterested affection. There was something in the feelings of Thomas at this moment resembling the love of the blessed in heaven, which alone can fully answer the description of the beloved disciple. "There is no fear in love; for perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."

"Faith worketh by love." There are, too, in the manifestations by which the Christian is recovered from his incredulity, such proofs, on the part of the Redeemer, of goodness, faithfulness, forbearance, forgiveness, condescension, and tender compassion, as cannot fail to melt the heart and add gratitude to affection. 'My Lord, and my God, how much hast thou done and suffered for me, since we last parted, ingrate and faithless that I am! What are these wounds in thy hands? Ah! those with which thou wast wounded in the house of thy friends—wounded *by me!* This is thy body, broken for me. By thy stripes I am healed.' Thus Thomas loved much, because he was forgiven much.

5. It is expressive of heartfelt joy. "Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord." And what had hindered our disciple from sympathizing with them, and sharing of their pleasurable emotions? Nothing but his unbelief. They had all reason for joy when they saw him again. The report of his resurrection was like a new gospel to them—glad tidings of great joy. The doctrine of his decease was transfigured before them! What they could not formerly bear to think of, was now all their salvation, all their desire, and all their gloriation. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." The offence of the cross has ceased, and been changed into attraction. "He was delivered for our offences, and he has been raised again for our justification." The height to which our joy rises upon any reverse, is in proportion to the depth of our previous grief and dejection; and in this respect, that of Thomas must have been

very great, in consequence of the strength of his former doubts, and the duration of his suspense. That which strengthens faith, exhilarates the heart. "Believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." And there is sometimes a tumult of joy which needs to be allayed, and causes a conflict with faith, like opposing tides in a frith. "They believed not for joy: Then he said to them again, Peace be unto you!" Compose yourselves, as if he had said, and listen to the commission and instructions which I have to give you.

6. It is expressive of homage and adoration. This is implied in the name which the disciples gave to him commonly, The Lord; but it is more decidedly expressed in the appellations in our text, "My Lord, and my God." It is said of the women to whom he first appeared, that "they held him by the feet and worshipped him." We are not told that this was the posture in which Thomas made his confession, but we can scarcely doubt that it was. At any rate, no bodily attitude could express adoration so strongly as the exclamation which burst from his lips, as soon as the scales of unbelief fell from his eyes.

It is not by an act of subjection or allegiance to Christ as a King, that a sinner is justified: faith in him as a priest is the justifying act; but if the first gracious act is believing, the second is an act of obeisance and dedication, and both may be expressed by the same words, and these the first words which proceed from the opened lips of a converted sinner, or a recovered saint. "I am the Lord's." "Truly, Lord, I am thy servant."

7. It is expressive of an appropriating claim. I mention this last, because it is interwoven with, and runs through all the feelings we have been describing. What would it have availed our disciple to be persuaded that Jesus had risen, had he not looked on him as his Redeemer? Conceive for a moment, the horror which Judas, if he had been alive, must have felt at the sight of the print of the nails and the scar! It was the relation in which Thomas stood to him that deepened his shame, as it did that of Ezra: "O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God." This imparted an unction to

all the new discoveries which he had obtained of the glory of Christ—"the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, *my Lord*." This was at once the cause and the token of his love to Christ. He loved him because he was his Lord, and he called him his Lord because he loved him. There is the *my* of love, as well as of faith, and this accented both his joy and his adoration. "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour."

The inferences that might be drawn from this subject are many; let the following suffice:

1. See a proof of the divinity of Christ. The indirect proofs of this doctrine, incidentally occurring in Scripture, are not of the least convincing and satisfying nature, and of these the one before us is not the least striking. It is but a poor evasion of the enemies of this doctrine, to say that our text is the language of ecstasy, and not to be understood in a strict sense. Christ surely was calm and composed, but instead of correcting and guarding the language, he sanctioned it. "Thomas, because thou hast seen, thou hast believed"—and thou hast done well, though tardily—"blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed." Believed what? Just what Thomas had confessed him to be—his God.

2. The subject furnishes a proof of the divine authority of the gospel. The doctrine of Christ's resurrection is the corner-stone of our faith, whether it be considered in relation to the truth of Christianity, or to the reality and perfection of the atonement. "If Christ be not risen," says the apostle, "then we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ;" yea, Christ himself would have been a deceiver or deceived, for he gave this out as the sign of his being the Messiah, that he should rise on the third day. And, in like manner, if Christ is not risen, "our preaching is vain, and your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins." On both these accounts the Scripture is full and explicit in its statements of the evidence on which this truth rests. Of the external and direct evidences, the apostle gives a summary in 1 Cor. xv. 5–8. But there are certain circumstances, specified in the evangelical records, tending strongly

to corroborate the testimony of the witnesses of the resurrection, one of the chief of which is their backwardness and aversion to believe the fact; showing that they were neither impostors, nor of that disposition of mind which would have exposed them to be the dupes of deception, by listening to idle reports, or mistaking a phantom for the reality. Of this we have, besides other instances in this chapter, a striking illustration in the case of Thomas. And in all this we see the manifold wisdom of God, in bringing good out of evil, and overruling the infirmities and faults of good men, for the illustration of his own glory, and the strengthening of the faith of his people.

3. Let us see the great value and use of faith. It is the mainspring of Christian activity. It sets the whole soul in motion toward Christ and God. Until faith is produced, or revived, all the affections are locked up, or lie dormant. It enlarges the understanding, it melts the heart into godly sorrow, warms it into love, and elevates it into joy and adoration. Without faith it is impossible to please God, to improve Christ, to enjoy ordinances, or discharge aright any duty. To the incredulous disciple, every molehill is a mountain. All things are possible and easy to him that believeth.—Precious faith! Some think that we dwell too much on this grace in our discourses; and when we appeal to the Scriptures as the pattern which we follow, they feel disposed to bring the same charge against the writings of the evangelists and apostles. They do not reflect that faith is the eye of the soul, which takes in all the glories of the spiritual world, and sheds their influence over the mind. Talk to a man born blind of the ravishment which you derive by looking on a beautiful landscape, he can form no idea how a simple movement of those eyeballs, which never imparted to him a single pleasurable emotion, can produce such effects; but let his eyes be opened, all will be light and life without and within. Thomas believes and recognises God his Saviour, and rejoices in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

4. The subject affords matter of reproof. We are astonished at the incredulity of this disciple; in reading the account

of his behaviour we feel offended; we redden with indignation at his infidel avowal, and are apt to think that there was a waste of condescension on the part of our Lord in acceding to the presumptuous demand with which it was accompanied. But are we better than he? Are we among the blessed ones, who have not seen and yet have believed? Have we not reason to blush for ourselves when we reflect how slow of heart to believe we have been? Are we even yet prepared to join in the believing exclamation of the recovered disciple, now when our Lord is giving us, in the ordinance of the supper, confirmations to our faith similar to that with which Thomas was favoured; and when he is saying to us, "Behold my hands and my side—the emblems of my death, and the evidences of my resurrection—and be not faithless, but believing"—are we ready to say with this disciple, "My Lord, and my God?"

In fine, my brethren, let us see what it is that renders ordinances effectual—the presence of Christ in them, and the manifestation which he makes of himself through them. The disciples could do nothing towards casting the evil spirit of unbelief out of their brother. It was when Christ was present in the assembly, to speak and to present the symbol, that the cure was effected. O be earnest for this! We have his own promise to plead, "Lo I am with you alway!" And if this day our unbelief is cured, our distressing doubts dissipated, our darkness removed, our heart enlarged, and our mouth opened to make the confession of Thomas, it will be a proof that Christ's presence has been with us—it will afford good evidence of our being benefited by his ordinances—and it will furnish matter for the delightful reflection in future, "O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord and my God."

SERMON VII.

LOVE TO CHRIST.

JOHN, xxi. 17.

"PETER WAS GRIEVED BECAUSE HE SAID UNTO HIM THE THIRD TIME, LOVEST THOU ME? AND HE SAID UNTO HIM, LORD, THOU KNOWEST ALL THINGS; THOU KNOWEST THAT I LOVE THEE."

THE explanation between two friends after a variance, is always an interesting scene, and often throws great light on the character both of the offended and offending party. When a person of a generous mind has offended a friend for whom he feels sincere affection and respect, he will look forward with extreme anxiety to his first meeting with him, and though he may be assured that he has been forgiven, he will not be completely at ease until he has heard this from his own mouth, and until mutual explanations and assurances shall have buried the difference. The parting scene between Jesus and Peter was a very distressing one. Just as the disciple had finished his denial of his suffering Master, Jesus cast upon him a look which awakened in his breast a train of unutterable emotions. "The Lord turned and looked upon Peter, and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, and Peter went out and wept bitterly." What his state of mind was during the time that Jesus hung upon the cross and lay in the grave, it is easier to conceive than to describe. All that we know is, that though distressed he was not in despair; for the words which he remembered were a source of comfort, as well as of contrition: "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." The special message which the angel sent to him by the women from the

sepulchre was fitted to remove his doubts as to forgiveness: "Go your way, tell his disciples *and Peter* that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you." And this was soon confirmed by his appearing to Peter, before he was seen by the rest of the disciples.* What took place at that interview we are not told; but from the silence of Scripture we may infer that nothing was said on the painful subject. This was a proof of the tenderness of our Lord, who would have Peter fully assured of his unabated love to him, before he wounded his spirit by an allusion to his fall. One interview passed after another in the same way. But as the time drew nigh when Jesus was to take his leave of the disciples, he at last came to an explanation. And how delicately is it managed by the compassionate Redeemer! The fall of Peter is not mentioned, while the questions proposed to him, both in their import and in their number, bear upon it, and are calculated to elicit replies which remove the offence he had given by a threefold denial of his Master. All this is done in the presence of his brethren, who had been staggered by his fall, and failed in their duty to their Master, though not so flagrantly as Peter. And now the counsel of Christ begins to be verified in him, "Thou, when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

Three several times was the question proposed, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" The words of our text relate, first, the effect which this question produced on the mind of Peter when it was repeated the third time; and, secondly, the reply which he gave to it. To each of these we now propose to direct your attention.

I. The effect of the question on the mind of Peter.

When first proposed the question must have startled the apostle. The solemnity of the interrogation, and the particularity with which it was addressed to him, could not fail to excite something more than surprise. This emotion would be heightened when the question was repeated. But when the

* 1 Cor. xv. 5; comp. Luke, xxiv. 39.

same question was proposed a third time, a new feeling arose in his mind, and became conspicuous to all who were present. "Peter was *grieved* because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me?" Let us enquire a little into the causes and character of this feeling.

1. He was grieved because the repetition of the question seemed to intimate a suspicion of his love. 'Else why ask me the same question again and again, after it has been answered in the affirmative? Does not this imply that he who knows my heart doubts of the sincerity and truth of my profession? Can it be that I have deceived myself,—that I am still deceived,—and that there is still lurking within me some idol, which as a rival divides my affections with my Saviour? If so, then my repeated assurances will be offences, and will dishonour instead of honouring him. Once have I spoken, yea, twice; but I will proceed no farther. Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me.' The Lord, who knoweth all things, did not doubt Peter's sincerity; but it was one great design of his interrogatories to produce these thoughts, and to lead his disciple to look more narrowly into his own heart. The neglect of this, or want of a due jealousy over himself, was one cause of his late fall, and had appeared in the rash and repeated protestations of inviolable fidelity which were made by him.

Self-examination is an important Christian duty, and with the same view which our Lord had in thrice putting the question to Peter, does the apostle press this duty, with importunate repetition, on the Corinthians, "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith—prove your ownselves—know ye not your ownselves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" With this view also it has been established as a standing law in the celebration of our Lord's supper: "Let a man examine himself." But we are here taught that it is not confined to preparation for the communion. We need to examine ourselves after supper—to be questioned after solemn professions and vows. "*So when they had dined*, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Nor

is this duty called for only when we are attending ordinances. Christ puts his disciples to the question by deeds as well as by words. For example, when he sends affliction upon them, he upon the matter says, "Lovest thou me?" When he lays his hand heavily upon them, and visits them with breach upon breach, they are ready, like Peter, to be grieved, and to conclude that he suspects their integrity. This was Job's trial, when he was tempted to think that God treated him as an enemy, and was thus led to self-examination: "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me?" And herein lay the victory of his faith, and the proof of his sincerity, that even in the face of this dreadful suspicion, suggested by the fiery trial to which he was subjected, he could answer Christ's question in the affirmative: "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him—till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me." * This is the reason why afflictions are called trials; they put us to the question: they urge us to self-inspection. "Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord." †

2. Peter was grieved, because the question brought his former failure of love to his remembrance. It is painful to have our friendship suspected; but especially so if we are conscious of having given reason for this suspicion. His kind and forgiving Master had not upbraided him with his fall; but Peter had not ceased to upbraid himself. His sin was ever before him. The wound was closed, but it was still green and tender, and felt the gentlest touch. No sooner was the question asked a third time, than he thought of his denying his Master thrice. This renewed the scene, and revived his former feelings. He heard the cock crow. He saw the look which had pierced his heart. And for a moment he felt his former agony. "Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, Lovest thou me?"

The Lord does not afflict or grieve his people willingly. He has no pleasure in giving them pain. Having freely forgiven them all their offences, and cast them behind his back, he has no delight in bringing them to their recollection. But

* Job. xiii. 15; xxvii. 5. † Lam. iii. 39, 40.

this is indispensably necessary for their own good and that of others, as well as for his glory. It is necessary that they should give glory to God by confessing their sins, and renewing their professions of attachment. It is necessary that their public offences should be visited with public marks of displeasure. Hence, while he forgives the iniquities of his children, he takes vengeance on their inventions. How often was David, in the course of Providence, reminded of his foul fall, particularly by the conduct of Amnon and Absalom! Indeed it is impossible for believers to discharge the duties of their station, to worship God, to go to the throne of grace, to the house of God or to a communion table, without having their sin brought before them, and being forced to say, 'I remember my faults this day. In this place, and in this ordinance, I dishonoured my God and Redeemer.'

3. The grief of Peter on this occasion, though a painful, was a salutary feeling. It was good for him that he was thus afflicted. How much better for him to have his wound probed by the gentle hand of his Master, that it might be closed up for ever, than to have it left in a state which would have exposed him to suffer from the rough handling of others, whether friends or foes! How much better was it that he should be reminded of his fall by One who was ready to accept of the assurances of his love, and to confirm him in his office, than to have the offence afterwards thrown in his teeth by his own conscience! In fulfilling his ministry, he was often obliged to charge others with the very sin of which he had been guilty. Twice in one of his sermons, preached after the day of Pentecost, we find him using the very word which, but for the interview before us, might have unfitted him for finishing the sentence he had begun, and made his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth: "Ye DENIED him in the presence of Pilate when he was determined to let him go; but ye DENIED the Holy One and the Just."* This was also the case with Paul, who had to reprove his countrymen for persecuting Jesus in his followers, and contradicting and blas-

* Acts, iii. 13, 14.

pheming his name, though he himself "was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious;" but then he had to add, "I obtained mercy."

Such recollections, though for the present not joyous but grievous, cannot fail in the end to be profitable to Christians. They serve to deepen their sense of sin, their humility, their holy fear and jealousy. What Paul says of his first Epistle to the Corinthians, may be applied to the intentions of our Lord in awakening such feelings in the breasts of his penitent disciples: "I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance. For behold, this self same thing that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you; yea, what clearing of yourselves; yea, what indignation; yea, what fear; yea, what vehement desire; yea, what zeal; yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter." * I may add, that, after shameful falls, such reflections are useful in reviving a sense of Christ's love, and by leading to renewed professions of attachment, tend to restore confidence between the parties. Grieved as Peter was at being so closely interrogated, his mind would not have been at ease, and he would not have been so familiar with his Master as he had been, if he had not been led at this time to renew his protestations of friendship.

4. Before leaving this branch of the subject, let me observe that the grief of Peter was an evidence of his love to Christ. It answered the question before his lips were opened. Had he not been grieved, it would have been a proof that he did not love his Master. Had he not loved him, and that too in a very strong degree, he would either have answered the third question, as he had the two former, without being visibly hurt by it, or if it had created an unpleasant feeling, it would have been of a very different kind: It would have been anger, not grief. It is only when our love is called in question by a

* 2 Cor. vii. 9, 11, 12.

friend, or when we are reminded of a wrong that we have done to one whom we really love, that we are grieved. But of this more afterwards. We proceed to consider—

II. Peter's answer to the question. The question was, in itself, highly appropriate, and calculated to draw forth various emotions, besides that of grief. We might have supposed that it would have been 'Art thou sorry for having denied me?' But it was proposed by him who knows how to touch the chord which makes the whole soul to vibrate, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Had Peter been irritated or displeased by this close examination, he would either have repeated his former offence, and broken for ever with his Master, or he would have preserved a sullen silence, or he would have given (as we say) a short answer. But he replies as before, only with somewhat more fervour and earnestness. Formerly he had said, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee;" now he says, "Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee." His grief, instead of preventing, prompted him to this profession. He was anxious to remove every shadow of suspicion—and his generous breast would have burst, had he not relieved it by avouching attachment, for the third time, to Him whom he had thrice denied. Let us meditate a little on the manner and matter of the answer which Peter returned to this question. With respect to its *manner*, let me observe,

1. The answer is pertinent and explicit. It is an answer to the question put to him. Lovest thou me? Yea, or nay? And he said, "Yea, Lord." He does not say, "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." That was a pertinent answer to the question formerly proposed to him, but it would have been impertinent on the present occasion. Had he said, 'I own thee as my Master, I honour thee as my Lord and God. I am willing to serve and to follow thee. Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' Jesus might have said, 'That's not to the purpose; I will afterwards lay my commands upon thee; in the mean time, I wish to be assured of that without which there can be no obedience ac-

ceptable to me. Lovest thou me? Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart.'* To this Peter answers directly and explicitly, and we should be prepared to do the same, especially when we are interrogated. Formerly Peter, of his own accord, and without any requisition from his Master, was forward in his professions, and he was reproved. But now profession is obediential, and is accepted. "There is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak."

2. It is made with the deepest respect. "Yea, LORD, I love thee." There is no undue familiarity, or bold fondness in the manner of expressing his affection. Christ is called God's "dear Son," but he is never once called "our dear Saviour" in the New Testament. When expressions of endearment are employed by the Church, they are modestly veiled under the language of allegory. He was not ashamed to call his disciples "brethren," but the tenderest name by which any of them called him, either before or after his exaltation, was "My Lord," "God, my Saviour," names expressive of love blended with reverence. "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am." "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master; if then I be a Father, where is mine honour? if I be a Master, where is my fear?"† He has become bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh; but he is our Elder Brother, and has "a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father."

3. It is humble. Peter does not say, 'I love thee fervently, supremely, or beyond all that I can express.' Even when the question was at first put to him in terms which seemed to call for some epithet of this kind, the degree of affection was modestly dropped or softened into a simple profession of love: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me *more than these?* Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee"—and the rest died away in the echo. But it was not lost to him who searcheth the heart, as appears from the rejoinder,

* 2 Kings, x. 15. † John, xiii. 13; Mal. i. 6.

"Feed my lambs." 'Yes (as if he had said), I know what is in thee, and therefore I will commit to thy care those of mine which require the tenderest and most affectionate nursing. Heaven is the throne on which I am about to sit down, and the earth on which I have been a wanderer is to become my footstool; but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite heart, and that trembleth at my word.' But though thus encouraged, and as it were provoked to it, Peter never rose in his replies to a higher degree. What a contrast to the vociferous and unmeasured, as well as uncalled for, protestations made by him on a former occasion! There is no word here of not being offended, though all should be offended, or of going with him to prison and death. True love delights to express itself in few and simple words. Presumption, hypocrisy, and treachery are loud and loquacious in their professions of friendship and loyalty: they expect to be believed for their much speaking.

4. It is solemn. "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." This is an appeal to the omniscience of Christ—a profession made upon oath. To take away all suspicion, and to give the highest possible pledge of his love, he appeals to Him who knew his heart. He had before given his testimony, now he turns his declaration into a deposition, by adding his oath, which, "for confirmation, is an end of all strife." He had formerly accompanied his denial of Christ with an oath, and it was proper that his renewed profession of attachment should be made with the same solemnity. Formerly he had abused this religious ordinance to support a falsehood; now he employs it for its legitimate purpose, to confirm a truth. Formerly he had used it profanely—"he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man;" now he uses it religiously, and with the utmost reverence—"Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." The abuse of any ordinance, or the prostitution of it to a bad purpose, is no good reason against the use or application of it to a lawful or holy purpose. What Christians can say to God or to man, they may say, and they will be ready, when properly called, to say with all possible solemnity; what

they can say on their knees in their closet, they will be ready to say at the Lord's table; and what they can say there, they will be ready to ratify by their oath and subscription. "In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of Hosts." "One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel."*

Nor is there any thing in all this that is inconsistent with Christian humility, or with a sense of our own insufficiency and of the deceitfulness of the heart; for all that is attested by the appeal is the sincerity of the profession, and it implies a reference to the judgment of the Searcher of hearts, and a desire to obtain his impartial and unerring verdict.

5. It is a true and unfeigned profession. When Peter denied his Lord, conscience charged him with falsehood in the very act of uttering the words, "I know not the man;" and a single look from Christ covered him with confusion. But now, though grieved at the third question, and though he knew that the omniscient eye of his Master was at that moment penetrating and perusing his inmost soul, he replies, with the unflinching firmness of sincerity, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." And he to whom the appeal was made, acknowledged its honesty, by committing to Peter anew the precious trust, which he ever afterwards faithfully kept. Hypocrites make a profession of love to Christ, and sometimes with great solemnity and warmth. There are not a few who, like Judas, say, Hail, Master! and kiss him, only that they may betray his cause by their ungodly lives, their inconsistency, and tergiversation. And beside these, there is a more refined hypocrisy, of which the persons themselves are not conscious at the time, but which displays itself afterwards. It was said of the Israelites of old, that "their words were good, but their hearts were not sincere." And the Most High himself is introduced saying, "The people have well said all that they have spoken;" but

* Isa. xix. 18.

then he adds, " O that there were such an heart in them!" But the unbelief and hypocrisy of some does not disprove the fidelity of others; and, because many who made high professions have proved perfidious, we must beware of involving all who do so under a sweeping charge of hypocrisy. " I said in my haste all men are liars." " Ephraim compasseth me about with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit; but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the saints."*

We might now advert to the *matter* of Peter's answer—love to Christ. And, in general, I would say that this love is composed of the following elements: It includes, first, a high esteem of him on account of his intrinsic excellences, divine and human, as "the chiefest among ten thousand, yea altogether lovely." And secondly, it implies a lively sense of the benefits which he has purchased and bestows, and of the love from which these flow. It proceeds upon a believing view of his free and rich love in undertaking the cause of his people from everlasting, in appearing in the fulness of time to plead it, in dying for them, in visiting their souls and calling them by his grace, in taking them into a near relation to himself, appearing for them in heaven, and dealing kindly and faithfully with them while they are in the world. It is this persuasion and experience of his love which constrains them to love him, and binds them to him by the ties of gratitude.

But, without dwelling on these things at present, I shall merely mention some characteristic marks of genuine love to Christ, with the view of enabling you to return a true answer to the question proposed to Peter, " Lovest thou me?" This question is proposed to us all, and every individual must answer it for himself; and it is one of the deepest importance. Sincere and supreme love to Christ is an indispensable qualification and sure mark of true discipleship. Nothing will compensate for the want of it; and it draws all after it. Christ does not say to Peter, 'Dost thou fear me? Dost thou honour me? Dost thou admire me? Dost thou trust me?' He did not ask, 'Simon, son of Jonas, how much hast thou wept?

* Hos. xi. 12.

How often hast thou fasted?' But, "Lovest thou me?" This is the proof at once of the genuineness of faith, and of repentance. If we love not Christ, we are none of his, the profession which we make of his name is a lie, and all our religion and attendance on divine ordinances is just so much time wasted and labour lost. Let us then examine ourselves by the marks which characterise this love when it is genuine.

And, in the *first* place, love to Christ is intelligent. This property distinguishes it from all enthusiastic emotions, which are sometimes confounded with devout affections, and which spring either from a heated fancy, or the working of animal feelings. These may be produced on susceptible minds by means of warm addresses to the passions, without due care being taken to instil the knowledge of the truth into the understanding. Such rapturous ecstasies are excited equally by truth and error; and accordingly you will find those who are subject to them, as warm and devout when they have embraced an unscriptural system of doctrine, as they were when they professed the doctrine of Christ. Of such persons it may be said, they love they know not what. This kind of feeling our Lord, instead of fostering, uniformly sought to discourage and repress. When one said to him, "Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest," our Lord, who perceived that this ardour was not accompanied with any adequate knowledge of what was implied in the engagement, replied, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." * When a woman in the crowd, ravished with his doctrine, cried out in an ecstasy, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked!" he said, "Yea, rather blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." † When Peter was confident and warm in his professions, he said to him, "Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice." Such also was the strain of his apostles: "This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." ‡

The genuine Christian does not talk like one beside him-

* Luke, ix. 58. † Luke, xi. 27. ‡ Phil. i. 9; Col. ii. 2-4.

self or possessed, but speaks the words of truth and soberness. If he feels deeply, he also perceives clearly. He can give a reason of his love to Christ, as well as of the hope that he has in him, and renders both with meekness and fear. Though in one sense he loves him whom he hath not seen, yet in another, and no less true sense, he "hath both seen and known him." He has seen him in the word of truth. He makes no pretensions to any knowledge of him which he has not received from the scriptures, and gives heed to no spirit which would lead him away from "the law and the testimony."

Secondly, Love to Christ seeks an increasing knowledge of him. This is the food on which it lives, and by which it grows: nor is it ever satisfied with what it has attained. "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord."

Thirdly, Love to Christ delights in his ordinances, and leads the person in whom it dwells to observe them regularly and conscientiously. These are the places where he meets with his people, and holds communion with them. True love will fly with eagerness to seek its object wherever it is to be found, and will linger fondly about the spot where it expects to meet him. When the disciples heard of the resurrection of their Master, without waiting to go into Galilee where he had promised to meet with them, they hasted to the place where he had been laid. "Then arose Peter, and ran to the sepulchre;" and though the beloved disciple outran him, Peter was the first to venture into "the place where the Lord lay."* On another occasion, such was his eagerness to meet his Lord, that "he girt his fisher's coat unto him, and did cast himself into the sea." If a person is careless in waiting on public ordinances, if he can absent himself from them on the most trifling account, if he has more pleasure in loitering at home, in traversing the fields, or in visiting his friends, how dwelleth the love of Christ in that man? O how unlike him who, at twelve years of age, remained behind his parents in the temple, and said, "Wist ye not that I must be about my father's business?"

* John, xx. 3–8. Luke, xxiv. 12.

Fourthly, Love to Christ displays itself by a conscientious and universal obedience to his commandments. These are not confined to the moral precepts which he specially inculcated in his personal ministry, such as brotherly love, the forgiveness of injuries, or charity to the poor. The whole moral law of God, which was within his own heart, and which he magnified by obeying its precepts and bearing its penalty, is taken into the administration of grace, and becomes the rule of his government over his redeemed, and the standard of their duty. Consequently, the obedience which they yield to it is a necessary test of friendship and fidelity to him. "If ye love me, keep my commandments. He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." Mere professions of love are a mockery and insult to him who "knoweth all things." "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." It is not meant that none are the friends of Christ who transgress any of the commandments; but they yield an habitual obedience to them, and do not live in the allowed violation of any of them. "Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect to all thy commandments." The character of acceptable obedience is, that it proceeds from love; and the character of evangelical obedience is, that it proceeds from the faith of Christ's love. "The love of Christ constraineth us."

A variety of other marks might be insisted on, which I shall state more briefly. True love to Christ displays itself by a fear of displeasing him, and unfeigned sorrow when we have done what has this tendency. It is more afraid of displeasing him than all the world. Peter wept bitterly; and his were the tears of love as well as of penitence. It displays itself by the distress which it feels at whatever dishonours him. Christ and the believer have common friends and common foes. "This thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."—"Do not I hate all those that hate thee?"—"Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law." It discovers itself by earnest desires and strenuous endeavours to be like him. Love has an assi-

milating tendency. We naturally imitate those for whom we have an affection, especially if that affection is blended with esteem and respect. "Be ye followers of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us." It discovers itself by honouring, loving, and delighting in those who bear his image. "Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." She is not an affectionate wife who does not love her husband's relations. And this love must show itself according to the circumstances in which they are placed, and as if Christ himself were in their circumstances. "Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me."—"My goodness extendeth not unto thee, but unto the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight." In fine, true love to Christ will manifest itself in suffering for his sake, and according to his will; in cleaving to him, and confessing him under all circumstances; in grieving that we love him so little; in adoring and meditating on his love; and in desiring to be with him in the sanctuary above, that we may enjoy his society without interruption, behold his glory without the intervention of means, and celebrate the praises of his redeeming love, world without end.

Having laid these marks before you, I may conclude by again urging you to reply to the question of Christ, "Lovest thou me?" Difficult as the question may be, it admits of a satisfactory answer. Had it not been so, Jesus would not have put the question. He would not have pushed the matter to a third interrogatory, if he had not known that the disciple could reply in the affirmative without hypocrisy, without his heart condemning him. Nor would he have appointed an ordinance which was intended only for his friends, and enjoined them to observe it, if he had not promised that his Spirit, witnessing with their spirits, should enable them to say, with truth in the inward part, "We love him who first loved us." The real friends of Christ may have great doubts of their actual believing, and of the genuineness of their love to him. They are deeply grieved on account of the many evidences which they have given of indifference and even

of enmity to him. The proofs of their ingratitude, forgetfulness, and unkindness, stare them in the face, and sometimes seal their lips. They complain, and they have good reason to complain, of the coldness of their hearts, and the deadness of their affections. But though they cannot say, in so many words, "Thou knowest that I love thee," still they can say, "O Lord, the *desire* of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee." And when urged by him, they cannot refrain from crying out, "Lord, I love thee; help thou my want of love." To the question, "Will ye also go away?" they instinctively and resolutely reply, "To whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." And if offered their liberty to leave him, they would say, with the manumitted slave under the law, "I love my master, and I will not go free."—"Truly, O Lord, I am thy servant; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid: thou hast loosed my bonds." And *that is love.*

'But,' methinks I hear some hesitating soul reply, 'I do not feel that warmth of affection for Christ which is due to him.' You cannot; for his love passeth returns, as it passeth knowledge.—'But I do not feel that love which others have felt for him, and have had freedom to express.' Neither durst Peter speak strongly on this head; and the Saviour graciously dropped the clause in the first question, expressive of the degree of his love, and instead of "Lovest thou me more than these?" simply asked, "Lovest thou me?" He is a condescending catechist—puts the question in different forms—and helps the confused and timid disciple to an answer.—'But I have acted an ungrateful part towards him.' So had Peter; and yet the Lord, overlooking his past conduct, and covering it with the mantle of forgiveness, questioned him as to his present exercise, and the disciple, though humbled, was able to give a suitable reply.—'But I am afraid I may falsify my profession.' And had not Peter as much reason for that fear? "Blessed is the man that feareth always."

Think on what he is, and what he hath done for sinners. Do you not love him? Can you say that you do not? Would

you not wish to love him? Can you but love him? Would you not be ashamed of yourself, if you did not love him? Is it not your desire and prayer that all should love, honour, and serve him? And have you not such a strong sense of the high obligation which all are under to this exercise, that you can join with the apostle in saying, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema, maranatha"—accursed of the Lord at his coming?

SERMON VIII.*

THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

REV. I. 5.

"UNTO HIM THAT LOVED US."

WE have lately spoken of love to Christ, as an essential feature in the character of all who belong to him, and the efficient principle of all evangelical worship and acceptable obedience. We are now to enter on a higher theme—to ascend from the stream to the fountain—from the love of a creature of yesterday, to that of the Father of eternity—"unto Him that loved us." A delightful, but a difficult task! We are forcibly reminded here of our Lord's saying to Nicodemus, when he was staggered at the doctrine of the new birth: "If I have told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" Love to the person of Christ appears so strange to some, that they would expunge it from the catalogue of Christian virtues, and discourage all pretensions to it as extravagant and enthusiastical; while others, who acknowledge its reasonableness and obligations, are afraid of presumption in laying claim to such a high and mysterious feeling, and think that none but such persons as Peter and Paul and John can return an affirmative answer to the question, "Lovest thou me." The doctrinal error of the one class, and the practical defect of the other, are to be cured in the same way in which Jesus cured the unbelief of Nicodemus—by revealing the higher mystery. "For," added he,

* Preached before the dispensation of the Lord's Supper, Edinburgh, Nov. 6, 1831.

"God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life." If persons believed the wondrous love of God to sinners, the highest expressions of love to him would not appear unreasonable or extravagant; and if we were more occupied in believing contemplations of that wonderful subject, we would feel our hearts warmed and inflamed by it, and would be constrained to cry out, "We love him, because he first loved us." Come then, and let us light our torch at the rays of the Sun of righteousness, as concentrated in the glass of our text.

Well did it become the inspired writer of this book to speak on such a theme! Who so fitted for discoursing of the love of Christ, as he who was admitted to enjoy such endearing proofs of it, both during the time that he dwelt on earth, and after he went to heaven? He was the disciple whom Jesus loved, on whose breast he usually leaned at supper, and by whose mouth his brethren sought to know their master's secrets. He was also honoured by a personal sight of the Redeemer in his heavenly glory, and with a revelation of the principal events which should befall the church from that time to the end of the world. He was, therefore, a chosen vessel to contain this "good ointment," and to convey it, in all its purity and fragrance and strength, into the souls of others. No wonder that love, the love of God and of Christ, and love to God to Christ and the brethren, was a favourite topic with John, in his gospel, in all his epistles, and in this book which shuts up and seals the vision and the prophecy. Not that in this book or elsewhere he dwells on the personal marks of affection with which he was honoured, or imparts the secrets which were whispered into his ear in familiar conversation with his Lord. No; he was ready to join with his brethren in saying, "Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more." What he had seen and heard and handled of the Word of life, he declares unto us, that our fellowship may be with him; and here he speaks of that love, and those proofs of it, which were common to him with all believers.

In the preceding context, we have a preface and a salutation. The preface relates to the whole book. The salutation is addressed immediately to the seven churches of Asia, to whom he sent the letters dictated by the Son of God who appeared to him in glory. In its matter, it agrees with the ordinary salutations of the inspired writers, being a prayer for "grace and peace" to them; but its description of the object of the prayer is borrowed from the visions with which John was favoured. Instead of begging the blessing of grace and peace from the Father, Son and Spirit, he implores it "from Him which was, and which is, and which is to come" (that is, the Father), "and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne" (that is, the Holy Ghost in the diversity and plenitude of his divine influences), "and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth." He departs from the order usually observed by the sacred writers, and mentions the Son last, because he meant to dwell on his blessed name, and to prepare the mind for the vision which he was about to relate. Accordingly, he immediately breaks out in this fervent doxology, or ascription of praise, "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."

The redemption of sinners originated in the free and sovereign love of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, whose love is one, though exerted variously, according to the order of their subsistence, in the voluntarily established economy of grace. The love of the Father has been justly called "the eternal disposing cause of redemption," and to it accordingly is ascribed in Scripture the purpose of saving sinners, the selection of the objects of mercy, the appointment of the means, and the predestinating of the elect, in the Mediator, to the enjoyment of eternal life. The love of the Son is the eternal spring of all that God did in the impetration of redemption; as the love of the Spirit is the spring of its application. And in the manifestation of the love of Christ we see also that of the Father and of the Spirit. While we are warranted to

take a distinct view of divine love as displayed by each person of the adorable Trinity, we can thus view it as the love of one glorious being. We do not detract from the love of the Father and Spirit, when we say, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood—be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen."

Christ is God, and "God is love." Divine love, however, could not have been known but for its effects, which manifest its reality and magnitude. It would have remained hid in God, and have been exerted only in those immanent acts of mutual complacency and delight between the Father and Son by the Spirit, of which we have some faint discoveries in the method of redemption, though veiled in "light inaccessible and full of glory." But how gloriously has the love of the Son of God shone forth, and manifested itself through his incarnation! Who were the objects of it? The sinful, the vile and degraded. Those that were lying in guiltiness and defilement. And how did he save them from their sins? Not by an act of mere grace and power; but by giving his life a ransom for them. Not by blotting out their sins in his mercy, as the sun blots out a cloud by the strength of his rays, but by "washing them from their sins in his own blood," which he shed for this purpose. And not contented with redeeming them from all iniquity, and restoring them to favour and happiness, he hath raised them to the highest dignity and honour—hath made them "kings and priests unto God and his Father"—consecrated them as priests and crowned them as kings, making them partakers of the glory which he himself inherits, while he sits as "a priest upon his throne"—at once ministering to God and reigning with God.

These are the fruits of the love of Christ—they are the love of Christ unfolded, realized, and perfected. His love is the golden thread, which, running through all that he hath done, and all that he hath procured, binds believers to him in love and gratitude. He might have done all this merely in obedience to his Father's will, with a view to his own honour, or in despite of Satan; but the Scripture every where assures us that he did it also from love to sinners.

To the contemplation of this Love, as developed in the purchase of redemption, we propose confining ourselves at present, without entering upon the effects ascribed to it, further than may be necessary for the purpose of illustration.

In discoursing on this subject we propose, first, to speak of the manifestation of the love of Christ; and, secondly, to make some observations illustrative of its nature and properties. And all with a view to our practical improvement of the subject, in the prospect of the ordinance, in which we are this day to celebrate it.

I. With respect to the manifestation of the love of Christ, we may remark, in general, that love was the spring of all his mediatory acts. No doubt, he chiefly sought the glory of his Father, and testified his love to him by fulfilling his will. But in prosecuting these objects he was gratifying his own love. "I and my Father are one"—one in nature, one in will, one in love. And so far as we are concerned, we can find no other motive for his conduct, than pure, rich, and overflowing benevolence. What "the spirit of the living creature" was in the wheels of Ezekiel's vision, that was the love of Christ in the work of redemption,—it actuated, impelled, and directed all his motions. It was love that brought him into the manger, that conducted him to the temple at twelve years of age, that presented him before John at Jordan, that led him into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, that carried him up and down Judea teaching and healing, that constrained him to go up to Jerusalem at the last passover, that drew him to Gethsamane and Golgotha, and that laid him in the grave. More particularly,

1. It was love that induced the Son of God to undertake our cause in the counsels of eternity. Thither must our thoughts ascend, to discover the first outgoings of this wonderful love, which, like those of its subject, "were from of old, even from everlasting." The fall of man did not surprise the Almighty, or render it necessary for him to have recourse to new counsels. He had foreseen the apostacy of Adam, with the consequent ruin of his whole race, and had determined how to act on the

emergency. The human family might have been allowed to perish, as they deserved, without any reflection on divine justice, and without any disparagement to that divine goodness, which had created them happy, and placed them in a situation the most favourable for securing and perpetuating their happiness. Still they were recoverable by that wisdom, mercy, and power, to which nothing is impossible; and their recovery, though not necessary to the vindication of divine goodness, held forth an occasion for illustrating it, in the exercise of boundless grace and compassion. To permit the whole race of mankind to perish, in consequence of their representative having been seduced, when a large portion of the angelical order were mercifully preserved from seduction, did not seem good to that Being who is Love. Hence the purpose which God purposed in himself to recover a number of the fallen family on earth, and to re-unite them to the preserved family in heaven, and so to fill up the ranks which had been thinned by the rebellion of those exalted but proud spirits who kept not their first estate. But how shall this be accomplished, so as to vindicate the honour of the divine government, and to stamp reprobation on that revolt which, after having been put down in heaven by exemplary punishment, hath now broken out upon earth? How shall the mighty breach be rēpaired? How shall an honourable peace be made? "Whom shall I send? and who will go for us?" "Here am I," said the Son of God; "send me." 'I undertake the task, and will see to the execution.'—'Thou shalt go and prevail, thou shalt destroy the works of the devil, by finishing transgression, making an end of sin, and bringing in an everlasting righteousness; and therefore thou shalt be extolled, and exalted, and made very high.' Thus the council of peace was between them both, and the everlasting covenant was ratified. We must speak in the language of time, when the question is of that which was before time began its course, always protesting that we speak as men; and in this the Spirit of God hath set us an example. Thus he who was manifest in these last times for us, that he might shed his blood as a lamb without blemish and without spot, was "verily foreordained before the foundation of the

world." Thus, "in the purpose of God, grace was given us in Christ Jesus," and "eternal life was promised before the world began." *

Well may Christ say to his redeemed, "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love." In his omniscience, he saw them lying in their blood, without an eye to pity, or a hand to help; and he voluntarily undertook their deliverance, and prevented them with his mercy. Viewed as miserable, they were the objects of his compassion; and viewed as recoverable, he felt a willingness and readiness to save them, independently of any engagement which he came under, or of any appointment which he received from his Father.

2. The love of Christ appears in the delight he took in the prospect of the work, arduous and grievous as it was, which he had engaged to perform. True, there is nothing difficult, nothing grievous to the divine nature. But then it was necessary for him to assume an inferior nature, in which he should be humbled and suffer. "It became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Yet in the prospect of this, he expresses the highest satisfaction and desire. Why? Because in that way he would have an opportunity of bringing a revenue of glory to his Father, and securing a treasure of happiness to lost men; or, in other words, of evincing his love to his Father, and to the objects of his gracious choice. This is described most graphically in the eighth chapter of Proverbs. "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his ways, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was." The Son of God was naturally and necessarily the object of his Father's love and complacency, as of the same essence and possessing the same perfections with himself; but in these words he speaks of himself as "set up," that is, ordained, or appointed. As the appointed Mediator, and lying under an engagement to become incarnate, there was a mutual complacency between him and his Father.

* 2 Tim. i. 9. Tit. i. 2.

"I was by him, as one brought up with him, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him." Though perfectly blessed as "the only begotten in the bosom of the Father," he looked forward with unspeakable satisfaction to the accomplishment of his work of grace and mercy in time: "Rejoicing in the habitable parts of the earth, and my delights were with the sons of men." O blessed Saviour, didst thou thus think of me, in the midst of that glory which thou hadst with thy Father before the world was! Before I had a being, "before the earth was made, or the fields, or the highest part of the dust of the world!"

The period which elapsed from the fall of man to the fulness of the time fixed in the decree of heaven, was a period of love deferred, during which the Son of God, by personal appearances, by promises, by types and prophecies, and, though last not least, by the faith, hope and desire which he produced in the hearts of the Old Testament saints, gave intimations of his gracious design, and made preparations for the accomplishment of his eternal undertaking. It was his Spirit who spake by the prophets, while they testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. And as the time of the pregnant promise drew nigh his voice was more distinctly heard:—"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord;—and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day." * "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in; behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts." †

3. His love appears in the assumption of our nature. When the time arrived, he rent the heavens and came down on the wings of love; the everlasting mountains were scattered before him, the perpetual hills did bow. "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God," was his language when he put on that body which his Father had prepared for him, and in which he was

* Zech. ii. 10., iii. 9. † Mal. iii. 1.

to fulfil his eternal engagement. As God, he was incapable either of obeying or suffering. For this end it behoved him, not only to assume an inferior nature, but to become man, that so the law might be fulfilled, and all its demands satisfied, in that nature which had sinned. He took our nature upon him with all its sinless, but sin-like infirmities, and appeared in a state of weakness and abasement and subjection and dependence. This is what the apostle describes in such striking language, when pressing Christians to the exercise of love and humility: "Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man he humbled himself." O what a stoop was there! This was humiliation indeed! There is nothing like it—nothing to which it can be compared. A King coming down from his throne, baring his royal head, exchanging his robes for the tattered garments of a beggar, and embracing a dunghill—what is that to Him who was in the form of God, taking upon him the form of a servant; to him who was equal with God, making himself of no reputation, "a worm and no man;" leaving his Father's bosom to lie in the womb of a mean woman, and exchanging the throne in heaven for a manger, a cross, and a grave on earth? This is the mystery of mysteries. Angels looked into it with holy wonder, and needed to be roused from their amazement to worship the incarnate God; devils were thrown into perplexity, and trembled, when constrained to believe that this was the Son of God; none of the princes of this world knew it, else they would not have sought the young child to destroy him, nor have crucified the Lord of Glory.

But there is something beyond all this—something which is calculated to excite a higher feeling than wonder and astonishment. It is not the depth of the descent, it is not the contrast between the original greatness of the person and the meanness of the state into which he came, it is not even the effects which it produced, glorious and blessed as they are, which should

chiefly fix our attention and engage our faith; but it is the cause from which all this proceeded. It was the love, the great love wherewith he loved us, which induced, which impelled the incarnation. There was more in it than condescension. Love turned this cloud into a pillar of fire, from which a voice, similar to that which addressed Moses from the burning bush, was to be heard, saying, "I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people, and am come down to deliver them."

God is love; Christ is the incarnation of love. In him the love of God dwells bodily; it is brought down to earth, down to our conceptions and our feelings,—love which can be seen, and heard, and handled. Now those ancient descriptions, which formerly were figurative, are true in the very letter: "In all their afflictions he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he bare them and carried them." Now the desire and prayer of the church is granted, "Oh that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother!" * "For both he that sanctifieth, and they that are sanctified are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." †

4. The love of the Redeemer appears in the whole of his obedience unto death. To this were all the actings of his love directed. To this he engaged in the eternal counsel. To this he looked forward with desire and delight. To this end was he born, and for this end did he come into the world, "not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

He went through an arduous course of sinless, unceasing, universal, and perfect obedience to the precept of the law, as a servant fulfilling all righteousness, in a state of deep humiliation and manifold temptation. And yet, all appeared as nothing to him, for the love which he bare to those whom he came to save.

He bore the penal sanction of the broken law as well as obeyed its precepts. And how great were his sufferings, both

* Cant. viii. 1. † Heb. ii. 11.

of body and mind! He suffered in all ways—by hunger, and thirst, and weariness, by contradiction, and reproach, and ingratitude; and he terminated a life of sorrows by a painful, ignominious and accursed death. He suffered from all quarters—from earth and hell and heaven—but especially from the hand of his own Father as a righteous judge, inflicting upon him the punishment due to those in whose room he stood and whose sins he bore. The hiding of his Father's countenance, and a deep sense of his righteous but awful indignation, were the wormwood and the gall in his cup of suffering, which wrung from him those bitter cries, heard in the garden and from the cross, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful; and what shall I say? Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" He was made a curse for us, fell a victim to divine justice, and had his blood shed as a sacrifice on the altar of an offended Deity. The Scripture everywhere celebrates this as the grand proof and effect of his love. "The Son of God loved me, and gave himself for me." "Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins IN HIS OWN BLOOD, be glory and dominion for ever.—Amen."

II. Having taken this view of the manifestation of Christ's love, I shall make a few remarks for illustrating its nature and properties.

1. It is the love of a Divine Person. The love of the Son in undertaking the work of redemption, in coming into the world, and in laying down his life, was of the same kind with that of the Father in appointing him to be the Saviour, sending him into the world, and delivering him up to the death. Of both it is true that "God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." And the love of the Son is expressly called the love of God; "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us." * But this leads me to observe that

* 1 John, iii. 16.

2. It is the love of a Divine Person in human nature. The body which was prepared for him was animated, not by his divine nature, but by a human soul, and in this body he was to make his love effectual by means of all the inward affections, as well as external actions which were peculiar and proper to it. His human nature was furnished immeasurably with all grace, and especially with love, pity, and compassion to fallen and lost men. There was a universal love, or benevolence, exerted in doing good to all within his reach, and in loving and forgiving his enemies, which was the soul of his obedience, and the fulfilling of the law. But there was also in his human soul a peculiar love to those who were given him by the Father, which exerted itself in strong, fervent, and irrepressible desires for their salvation, and which urged him on, and gave him no rest, until he had completed it by "giving himself an offering and a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour to God." "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." "With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer." * So strong did the manifestations of this desire become as the hour of its consummation approached, that the disciples, and especially those that were with him in the garden, might have said, in the language of Naomi, "The man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day." † Now, in meditating on the love of Christ, we are not to confine our thoughts to the eternal actings of his divine nature (for all the acts of his love, as God, must be eternal), but are to take into view also its temporal acting in the human nature. In undertaking our cause from everlasting, and in becoming man, the love of the divine nature only was displayed; but subsequently to the incarnation there was a concurrence of the two natures in the expression of love, and though the acts of love in these two natures were infinitely distinct, yet, in virtue of the hypostatical union, they were acts of one and the same person. If the bodily actions of Christ were the acts of his divine person, surely his mental acts were so also; if the act of laying down his life, so also

* Luke, xii. 50. xxii. 15. † Ruth, iii. 18.

the cheerfulness and delight with which he made the sacrifice, from regard to his Father's glory, and from love to sinners. "God purchased the Church with his own blood."*

3. The love of Christ is transcendently great. Many examples of disinterested love have been exhibited among mankind, degenerate as they are, which have called forth the admiration and gratitude of their fellow-creatures. Friends have devoted themselves for their friends, patriots for their country, and martyrs for their God and Redeemer. But the love of Christ exceeds unspeakably that of friends, and patriots, and martyrs. It passes understanding, it exceeds all ordinary belief. It is incredible to all but those who have been taught from above. Even saints require to be "strengthened with might by the Spirit in the inner man," before they are "able to comprehend what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." It is but a little that we can now say of it, and O how poor and unworthy of the theme is that little!

In the first place, consider whose love it is. John had described him as "the faithful Witness, the first-begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth;" and we find Christ afterwards saying of himself, "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last." The favour or love of an earthly king is highly prized. But he who loved us is fairer than the children of men, and hath a more excellent name than the angels. He is "the blessed and the only potentate, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords,—the King eternal, immortal, and invisible." "By him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be 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."† And his love is like himself, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.

In the second place, consider who were the objects of this love. Not creatures of an exalted order, like the angels,—

* Acts, xx. 28. † Colosians, i. 16, 17.

cherubim and seraphim, who were made pure and fervent as a flame to surround the throne of the Eternal. He passed by the angels, and set his love on the sons of Adam, beings of a far inferior grade, and partly allied to the beasts that perish. Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man that thou visitest him? Dost thou open thine eyes on such a one? and deignest, from the height of thy sanctuary in heaven, to cast a glance upon him?—But this is a small matter. The objects of his love were fallen and ruined, sinful and self-destroyed. And this unveils other properties of Christ's love, still more wonderful than those which we have mentioned. It was sovereignly free, and independent, and preventing. It is no wonder to find God taking pleasure in his holy angels, and rejoicing over them to do them good. He cannot but love his own image, and bountifully reward those who have always served him, without ever transgressing his commands. To such it is natural for him to say, "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."* But he foresaw nothing amiable about his chosen objects, except what should be the fruit of his love, and the effect of his gracious operation. On the contrary, they presented every thing that was obnoxious and offensive. Theirs was the image of the devil; they were the children of disobedience and of wrath. Read the beginning of the second chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians, and then mark what follows:—"But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ—by grace are ye saved." The love of creatures is founded either on some favour received, or, when most disinterested, on some good quality or excellency, real or supposed. Not so the love of God and his Son. "Christ died for the ungodly." "Scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man, some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

The love of Christ is enhanced by the consideration that

* Luke, xv. 31.

the wretchedness of its objects was as loathsome as it was deplorable. Who ever heard of a prince selecting as a spouse one who was at once diseased and deformed, drowned in debt, "wretched and miserable, and poor and blind and naked?" Yet this did the Son of God for you, Christian. You have a very just, though figurative, description of your natural condition in the prophecies of Ezekiel.* "Thou wast cast out into the open field, to the loathing of thy own person, in the day that thou wast born." We can scarcely conceive a state of greater distress than that of a new-born infant, deserted by its unnatural parents, and exposed in the open fields without having one of those services performed to it which nature requires: Yet such a case is not desperate; some benevolent passenger may commiserate the helpless outcast. Such, however, was not your condition. "No eye" (says Christ) "pitied thee, to do any of these things to thee." Thy state was too repulsive to excite ordinary compassion; and thou must have inevitably and speedily perished. But, says he, "when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thy blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; and behold thy time was a time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee: yea I sware unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine." "Is this the manner of men, O Lord?"

In the third place, apply what has been already said as to the ways in which he has manifested his love,—how unparalleled is it in this respect! In undertaking the desperate cause of his people, condescending to unite himself with them by assuming their degraded nature, and in it performing such hard service, and laying down his precious life for them! No creature ever made such sacrifices, for none ever had so much to sacrifice. None ever stood so high, and none could have stooped so low. And to these we might have added the proofs of his love which he is still giving and will continue to give to his church, were it not that we confine ourselves to what relates to the purchase of redemption.

Lastly, add to all this the precious and inestimable blessings

* Ezek. xvi. 5—8.

which he has purchased for them. In general, he obtained eternal redemption for them. He hath procured, by his obedience and death, the forgiveness of all their sins—reconciliation to God and restoration to his favour—holiness—adoption, with all the rights and privileges of the sons of God, enlarged and enhanced and heightened by their union with him who is the only-begotten Son of God and the heir of all things, so that they are made heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ. And who can conceive what is included in these prerogatives? "Eye hath not seen, neither hath ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what God hath prepared for them." They shall inherit all things.

III. Let us attend to the practical improvement of this subject.

1. We may see one proof of the deep depravity of mankind. This is to be found in the reception which the gospel and the Saviour whom it reveals meets with from the world. The gospel contains a revelation of the love of God, not only by word but by deed. "Herein is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." But he is neglected, despised, rejected, blasphemed. Men speak great things in praise of charity, or love. Believe them, and you would think that if it were to appear in a bodily shape on the earth, all the world would fall down and worship the heavenly visitant. Charity did make its appearance on the earth in all its celestial attractions. It dwelt among men in the person of Jesus Christ; it went about proclaiming peace, breathing good-will, and performing works of mercy. And what was the reception which it met with? Instead of worshipping, they crucified it.—But this was not the worst. By an amazing display of divine wisdom and mercy, that death which, as inflicted by men, was the greatest crime ever committed under the sun, proved the expiation of sin; Christ was raised from the dead, and repentance and the remission of sins were, by the commandment of the everlasting God, preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And what was the consequence of this? Why, that the Saviour should

be crucified afresh by the unbelief, impenitence and ungodliness of the greater part of those to whom he was proclaimed with all the demonstration of his matchless love! And this is still the treatment which Christ receives in his word. His salvation is neglected, the report of his sufferings is heard as an antiquated tale, and his love is slighted and contemned. This is ingratitude of the darkest hue; and there is not a surer mark of depravity than ingratitude. Woe to the world called Christian, because of this ingratitude! There is no such sin among heathens. The devils are not chargeable with it. They were guilty of deep ingratitude to the Being who placed them in such an exalted rank; but they never poured contempt on the love of a Saviour. They instigated the death of Christ, but they believed that he was come to torment them before the time.

2. Here is food for faith. "We have known and believed the love that God hath to us," says John; "God is love." If you would know the love of God you must believe it. There is no other way of becoming acquainted with it. This is "the hidden manna." Sense cannot perceive it; reason cannot discover it; man cannot teach it. "Unto you which believe, he is precious." "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." Without faith, we cannot receive or feed on any of the truths of the gospel; and provided we have true and saving faith, the love of Christ will, in some degree, be apprehended and appropriated. The all-sufficiency and suitableness of Christ as a Saviour, his ability and willingness to save all that come to him, with the warrant which all have to do so, are the first things which call the attention and engage the faith of a convinced sinner. But he cannot rest there; he rises, with a heavenly instinct, from the stream to the spring. "It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." And why did he come on this errand? From love, mere love, is the answer. If the fact be true, and the report worthy of all acceptation, is not the love, which was the impulsive cause of the whole, worthy of our faith also?

Yes; "the Son of God loved me, and gave himself for me." And who art thou that speakest so boldly, and appropriatest so confidently? "I am less than the least of all saints—the chief of sinners—for I was a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy."—And why not *me* also?

3. Let us see the reasonableness, and the duty, of love to Christ. What is the first and main thing we owe "to him that loved us," and loved us at such expense? A child can answer, Love. Nature, under the influence of the common feelings of mankind, cries out against those who do not requite love for love. "For sinners also love those that love them." Those who profess to believe the great doctrines of the gospel, and feel no gratitude and affection to the Saviour, have denied the faith and are worse than an infidel." Pagans and profane godless men will rise up in the judgment and condemn such Christians. "Love" (says one) "is that jewel of human nature which commands a valuation wherever it is found." Though a person be far beneath us, though we have little or no need of his good offices, though he has it not in his power to confer any benefit upon us, though he fail entirely in his endeavours to serve us, yet if his love be real, sincere and constant, and is evinced to be so by his exertions, it commands our respect and esteem, and we feel our hearts instinctively making some return in kind, if they are not utterly debased by habits of depravity. But if the person be of a superior rank, if he possess personal excellences, if his love to us has exposed him to great inconveniences and charges, and if it has procured for us and ours the most substantial and precious benefits, the whole world would cry shame upon us, if we did not evince a reciprocal affection. Need I say that all these enhancements are to be found in the love of Christ, to such a degree and height as is unparalleled in the whole creation?

The genuineness of our love to Christ is proved by the obedience which we yield to his will, according to his own saying, "If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments." But the keeping of the commandments of Christ is one thing, and love to Christ is another. The latter is the spring and principle from which the former proceeds. Those are not to

be listened to, who would represent obedience as all the return which Christ expects, and who would set aside or decry all feelings of the heart towards the person of the Saviour. If there is any truth in the gospel, if there is any reality in what it says of the love felt and shown by Christ, then love to his person forms an essential part of genuine Christianity. He is not a Christian, he knows nothing of the power of the gospel, he knows nothing of the grace of God in truth, he does not believe one article of the Christian faith aright, who does not perceive and feel the love of Christ pervading the whole with its sweet and attractive and heart-penetrating odour; and he is not sensible of the love of Christ, nor values it, whose affections are not drawn out to him. "Because of the savour of thy good ointments, thy name is as ointment poured forth; therefore do the virgins love thee. Draw us; we will run after thee. The king hath brought me into his chambers: we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee." "We love him, because he first loved us." It is the grief of the heart of every true believer, that he loves the Saviour so little; and he is ashamed, as well as grieved, that there is such a disparity and distance between—not the love of Christ, for that is infinite—but between his knowledge of the love of Christ and the returns which he makes to it. They turn the gospel, and indeed all religion, into a skeleton,—they squeeze from it the very marrow and life's-blood, who exclude from it love to God, and who discountenance and discourage, under the name of enthusiasm, the most intense and fervent affection to the person of Christ, arising from a persuasion and sense of his love. "I had rather" (says a writer, whose warm piety was balanced by the soundness of his judgment, and his deep insight into the mystery of the gospel), "I had rather choose my eternal lot and portion with the meanest believer, who, sensible of the love of Christ, spends his days in mourning that he can love him no more than he finds himself able, in his utmost endeavours for the discharge of his duty, to do,—than with the best of them whose vain speculations, and a false pretence of reason, puff them up into a contempt of these things."

Live, my brethren, in the believing contemplation of this love. It is not by a single act of faith, nor by occasional acts, but by a life of faith, that our love to Christ can be strengthened, and become the habitual and constraining principle of our obedience. "The life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." "Keep yourselves in the love of God." And beware of a carnal, sensual frame of mind, which is incompatible with it. The mind must be fitted and prepared for such contemplations, by rising above the gross conceptions of sense, as well as the grovelling lusts and malignant passions of sin. Let your whole souls be given to the meditation of the love of Christ, and in coming forward to his table, let the heart of every one accord with the grateful and adoring ascription, "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood—to him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever.—Amen."

SERMON IX.

THE SYMPATHY OF CHRIST.

HEB. iv. 15.

"FOR WE HAVE NOT AN HIGH PRIEST WHICH CANNOT BE TOUCHED WITH THE FEELING OF OUR INFIRMITIES; BUT WAS IN ALL POINTS TEMPTED LIKE AS WE ARE, YET WITHOUT SIN."

THE salvation which the gospel reveals is equally adapted to all mankind. There is not one gospel to the Jew, and another to the Heathen—one doctrine of salvation for the devout and sober, and another for the profane and profligate. As all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, so the same Lord is rich unto all that call on him, justifying them freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and saving them by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. But while the apostles of Christ preached every where and to all the same gospel, they varied occasionally, "according to the wisdom given to them," the motives by which they urged the reception of the truth, and steadfastness in adhering to it when received.

The principal motive to steadfastness in the gospel is the great salvation which it makes known, and this is common to all Christians. Yet we may observe a difference in the exhortations to this duty which the apostles addressed to Gentile and Jewish believers. In addressing the former, they reminded them of the gross ignorance and idolatry in which they had at one time been plunged, and from which they were recovered by the sudden shining of the true light on their minds. In dealing with the Jews, again, they insisted much on the great improvement which the gospel had made on their former privi-

leges. They possessed all they had enjoyed under the law, or first covenant, and much more. In point of revelation, they had, in addition to Moses and the prophets, Christ as the Apostle of their profession, that great Prophet whom God had promised to the fathers that he would raise up to declare his will more perfectly. Under the former dispensation, they had sacrifices by which they were allowed to draw near to God; but now they had that sacrifice which, once offered, had for ever put away sin, and in the faith of which they might serve God acceptably all the days of their life. Formerly, they had a priesthood divinely appointed to serve at the altar, and particularly a high priest, who once a-year went into the holy of holies with the blood of atonement, and stood before the mercy-seat as the representative of the congregation; but now they had a high priest, greater than all the priests under the law. This is the argument by which the apostle urges constancy in the Christian faith on the believing Hebrews in the verse preceding the text. "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." The high priest under the law was a mere man of like passions and subject to sin as his brethren: our high priest is "Jesus the Son of God," a person of infinite dignity and spotless purity. The Jewish high priest passed through the veil into an inner apartment of a material and earthly sanctuary: the Christian high priest "is passed into the *heavens*," there to appear continually before God for us. The dignity of his person, and the exalted place which he occupies, reflect the highest honour on our profession; they secure to us the highest privileges, and therefore the consideration of them ought to animate us in adhering to him, and fortify our minds against apostasy.

But then, the very things which constitute the pre-eminence of their high priest, and which are necessary to the perfection of his office, may also operate as a discouragement on the minds of Christians. If he is so great and exalted, and so far removed from us in place (they will be ready to say), how can we suppose that he will interest himself in our affairs,

or that he will look down from the height of his glorious throne in the heavens upon those who dwell on earth, and are compassed about with manifold infirmities? Against such discouraging fears or doubts, the words of our text furnish an antidote and remedy: "For," says the apostle, "we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Though he be great, he is also condescending; though he be exalted, he is also compassionate and sympathizing; though he be as far removed from us, in his human nature, as heaven from earth, yet is he connected with us by a real though invisible tie, which draws down his regard upon us and prevents him from forgetting us for a single moment—this is sacred, tender, and strong sympathy. He not only loves his people with a divine love, but bears to them the affection of a brother, "bone of their bone and flesh of their flesh;" feels for them, not merely with the active benevolence of a perfectly good man, but also with the impassioned feeling of "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"—of one who knows what it is to suffer, from his own experience—who "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Under his greatest sufferings and temptations he never sinned, as we are all apt to do; but this is the single point of disparity; in all other points the resemblance holds between him and his brethren. There is not an infirmity, or pain, or grief which they bear, that he did not bear before them; and in consequence of this he is capable of feeling for and along with them. By the "infirmities" of Christians we are to understand every thing, including their sufferings, which has a tendency to make them faint in their Christian profession. And when it is said, "we have not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities," the negative form of expression is to be understood as having the force of a strong affirmation. Though we have a great high priest who is passed into the heavens, let us not suppose for a moment, that he is such a one as cannot be touched—*he is* tenderly, powerfully touched with a fellow-feeling of our infirmities: He *sympathizes* with us, as the words literally read.

The text teaches us, that one of the distinguishing qualifi-

cations of Christ as our high priest, is the sympathy or compassion which he feels for the infirmities of his followers, in consequence of his having passed through the trials to which they are liable, with this single difference, that he sinned in none of them. Let us, in the first place, explain this sympathy of our great High Priest; and, in the second place, state some of those points in which he was tempted like as we are, and is therefore qualified for sympathizing with us.

I. The principal work of Christ as our High Priest was to make reconciliation or atonement for our sins. For this purpose he assumed our nature, and through the Eternal Spirit offered himself without spot unto God. This was typified by the sacrifices under the law, the offering of which formed the great employment of the Levitical priesthood. And without this we could have derived no comfort from the intercession and compassion of Christ. But it behoved him to be not merely a proper, but also a merciful high priest. Sinners needed not only to be saved from their sins by his blood, but to be relieved, favoured, and comforted by his grace. They needed a Saviour who would not only undertake for them, and be able to perform what he had undertaken, but also would do all his work with condescension, tenderness, and pity. They required to be "saved" and "pulled out of the fire" with "compassion."* They were destined, after being redeemed, and before coming to a state of final safety in heaven, to travel through the wilderness of this world, subjected to various trials, hardships, and temptations; and accordingly it was necessary that they should be placed under a leader who, being made perfect through suffering, would treat them with all the care and tenderness which flow from sympathy. Such is the fine description given of the divine care about the children of Israel, after they were brought out of Egypt, and during their peregrination in the wilderness: "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them: and he bare them

* Jude, v. 22, 23.

and carried them all the days of old." * And again it is said in brief and summary narrative: "His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel." † As applied to God, these and similar expressions are used according to that strong figure of speech called *anthropopathy*, by which he is described as feeling after the manner of men. Properly speaking, there can be no such feeling in the divine mind as sympathy, or suffering with the miserable: when ascribed to God, it can only mean his knowledge of their misery, with his will or determination to relieve them. But in Christ there is literal sympathy; and herein does the grace and wisdom of God appear, that he has provided us with a high priest, who not only knows our miseries, but is touched with the feeling of them.

1. The sympathy of Christ is both natural and moral. It is a law of our nature, and a striking proof of the wisdom and goodness of our Creator, that when we see our fellow-creatures in distress, we are irresistibly affected with a feeling similar to theirs, which excites us to interest ourselves in their behalf, and to do all in our power for their relief. When they exhibit symptoms of suffering pain, the pang goes to our heart; when they weep, the tear starts into our eye; and we cannot find relief but in the way of relieving them. We sympathize, that is, we suffer with them. The foundation of this lies in our participation of a common nature; the proximate and immediate cause of it is the revival of those feelings which we ourselves had experienced on the same or similar occasions. The feeling is partly natural and involuntary, but it is connected with the moral and benevolent affections. We may repress, or we may cherish it. Hence we read of persons who "shut up the bowels of their compassion," and of others who take compassion. Hence also it is commanded as matter of duty, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body." ‡

Now the sympathy of our Lord partakes of both of these

* Isa. lxiii. 9. † Judg. x. 16. ‡ Rom. xii. 15; Heb. xiii. 3.

qualities. His holy soul is full of good-will, benignity, tenderness and mercy, disposing him to relieve and comfort those that are in distress. This was the effect of the immaculate purity of his human nature, and of that abundance of grace which was poured into it by virtue of its union with the person of the Son of God, and its unction by the Holy Spirit without measure. But then this disposition is excited by that fellow-feeling which arises from his having been himself a sufferer. And this is one of the reasons on account of which he assumed our nature with all its sinless infirmities, and still continues to wear it with all its essential affections and feelings :—"In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren ; for in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." * He had the heart of a man, all the affections of a man, and that in the highest state of sensibility and tenderness. Whatever a human soul can suffer under grief, sorrow, shame, fear, disappointment, regret,—he felt it all. We are apt to think, that because he was in the form of God, this, or the consciousness of it, must have borne off from his spirit, or counterbalanced the afflictions which he met with, so as that he felt little trouble from them. The language of Scripture about these, and the manner in which he expressed his own feelings, testify that this is a great mistake. So far as his sufferings were purely penal, he shunned them not, he shielded not himself from them. He bared his breast to the shafts of affliction, and allowed its bitterness and gall to soak into the inmost parts of his soul. He gave many proofs of his sympathy with those who laboured under distress both bodily and mental. "When he saw Mary weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her," he was troubled, groaned in spirit, and wept; "and again groaning in himself he cometh to the grave of Lazarus." † He "was moved with compassion on the multitudes when he saw that they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." ‡ And when he beheld the city of Jerusalem, we are informed that "he wept over it." § His feelings on that occasion were

* Heb. iv. 17, 18. † John, xi. 33-38. ‡ Mat. ix. 36. § Luke, xix. 41.

those of deep regret, of disappointed benevolence, of tender commiseration, of pungent distress for the doom which that obdurate people had drawn down on their own heads; feelings which could be expressed in no language but his own mysterious and melting strains of sorrow: "If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes." On another occasion, while he could not forbear to denounce the sin, he gave full vent to his compassion for the sufferers. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under wings, and ye would not!"*

2. The sympathy of Christ is not the less perfect, nor does it yield the less comfort to us, that he was "without sin" in all his sufferings and temptations. He was "tempted like as we are, yet without sin." In the following chapter,† the apostle mentions that every high priest taken from among men "can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity." And that he refers here to moral infirmity, or proneness to sin, appears from the next verse, in which he says, "by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins." But we must not infer from this that our Lord wanted any motive or incentive to compassion which they possessed. So far was this from being the apostle's conclusion, that he afterwards shows that, in this respect, Christ was superior to the legal priests: "For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins."‡ No doubt the consciousness of their own moral infirmity, or liability to sin, would make the priests under the law, and should make the ministers of the gospel still, tender in their dealings with fellow-sinners,—"considering themselves, lest they also be tempted."§ But whatever use is to be made of it in this way, yet sin dwelling in

* Luke, xiii. 34. † Ch. v. 2. ‡ Heb. vii. 26, 27. § Gal. v. 1.

any man is in itself an evil, and in proportion as it prevails, instead of helping, hurts the exercise of compassion, as well as of every other good disposition, rendering him less qualified for discharging his duties to others. From this sinful infirmity our Lord was perfectly free; yet being made sensible of its power over us, by his having felt all the natural infirmities which are connected with sin, and by which we are often drawn into its commission, he is perfectly qualified for sympathizing, not indeed with the sin, but with the weakness which yields to the temptation. The subject requires to be treated with delicacy and caution; and therefore I shall explain my meaning by an example. In the wilderness, our Saviour was "an hungered."* The tempter took occasion from this to solicit him to work a miracle for the mere purpose of relieving himself from the painful feeling. From this Christ knows the influence of the cravings of appetite in tempting his people to have recourse to unlawful methods of relief. As a person who successfully resists the violence which may be used by another to draw him off the king's highway, knows the strength of the assailant, better than one who yields with little or no resistance; so Christ knows the force of temptation which he uniformly resisted, better than we who easily comply with it.

3. His sympathy is not impaired in his glorified state, nor is its exercise incompatible with the felicity which he enjoys in Heaven. It forms one of his official qualifications as our high priest, and as the office still continues, so must the qualification be permanent. Hence the numerous instances in which he gave proofs to his followers, of his retaining the same nature in which he suffered. On appearing to them after his resurrection, when "they supposed that they had seen a spirit," he would have them to satisfy themselves of his personal identity, and the sameness of his human nature, by appealing to the testimony of their senses. "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."† When he left the

* Mat. iv. 2. † Luke, xxiv. 39.

world, the angels testified to the gazing disciples that "that same Jesus should so come in like manner as they had seen him go into heaven."* When he met with Paul on his way to Damascus, he announced himself as suffering in sympathy with his church on earth;—"I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." When in the isle of Patmos he appeared to John in his glory, to comfort his awe-stricken disciple, and convince him that he was the same kind master on whose breast he had reclined, he "laid his right hand upon him: saying, Fear not; I am he that liveth, and was dead."—His compassion is essentially the same that ever it was. A change doubtless has, to a certain degree, taken place on the mode of its exercise. Every thing that was painful in it, as felt by him during the days of his flesh, is now removed. He no longer weeps or groans—for all tears are for ever wiped away from his eyes. But he still retains a lively recollection of all that he suffered on earth, and of the manner in which he was affected under it, which, acting on the essential feelings of humanity, prompts him to exert his boundless mercy and power in supporting, relieving and comforting his afflicted people. This sympathy is inseparable from the nature which he still wears on the throne, and from the relation in which he stands to all his followers, and which no distance of place, no addition of glory, can dissolve or lessen. A friend will not feel the less for us that he is in a distant land, provided he is in the knowledge of our distress; and we are as much assured of his sympathy by the affectionate letters which he sends us, as we could be by his words if he were with us. Jesus, the Son of God, is perfectly acquainted with our griefs and sorrows, and we are assured of the tender interest which he takes in them, from the immutability of his character, and from his own declarations, which, in the experience of his people, he seals from time to time by his Holy Spirit, the Comforter whom he hath sent to supply his place. Accordingly, the apostle, in the text, speaks not of the sympathy which he showed during the time he was on earth, but of that

* Acts, i. 11.

which he feels and displays, since he "passed into the heavens." "We *have not* an high priest which *cannot be* touched with the feeling of our infirmities."

II. Let us consider some of those points in which he was tempted like as we are, and is therefore qualified for sympathizing with us. The apostle does not merely say, in general, that he was tempted, but that he was "in all points tempted like as we are;" plainly intimating that we may take comfort in our distresses, whatever they may be, from the consideration that our high priest was in the same or a similar situation.

1. The Lord Jesus is touched with the feeling of our bodily infirmities and pains. There is not a sinless infirmity cleaving to our mortal frame with which he is not experimentally acquainted; nor is there a stage of life in which that infirmity is most felt which he may not be said to have passed through. "He grew up as a tender plant;" he was a weak and helpless child, and increased in wisdom and stature. He can sympathize with those who are tender in years, and is still to be considered as saying, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not." And though he did not reach the years of old age, yet it would appear that his labours and griefs had brought its infirmities prematurely upon him. He knew what it was to serve his Father and minister to men, in a weak body, which sunk under fatigue, and was exhausted by long-continued labour. He experienced hunger and thirst and weariness. He had, therefore, compassion on the multitude when he saw that "they had nothing to eat," and he wrought a miracle to feed them; for, said he, "I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint by the way."* When the three disciples, exhausted by the fatigue of the preceding day, fell repeatedly asleep instead of watching with him in his agony, he, with the most tender sympathy, tempered his reproof and apologized for their conduct: "The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak." And what severe bodily pain he endured, particularly at the close of his life, is well known. Take the

* Mat. xvi. 32.

short account of it in the prophetic language of the twenty-second Psalm, which is descriptive at once of great pain and extreme exhaustion : " I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint ; my heart is like wax ; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws." What comfort may Christians derive from these words when they are suffering in a similar way !

True it is that we do not read of his labouring under certain defects and diseases to which we are subject. But he is not on this account the less qualified for sympathizing with his people under them. Our sympathy is founded on what we have suffered, but it is extended and increased by what we see in the sufferings of those with whom we have to do. Now who were the persons who surrounded him, whom he admitted into his presence, and whose distresses he made his own by examining and relieving them ? Were they not the blind, the deaf, the dumb, the lame, the leprous, and persons afflicted with " all manner of sickness and all manner of disease ?" And hence the Evangelist, after describing the cures he effected on such persons, represents it as a fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah, " Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."*

2. Our Lord is touched with the feeling of the trials which we endure in our worldly circumstances. " God hath chosen the poor of this world." Christians have not only generally been among those who earn their bread by the sweat of their brow, but they have often been in straitened circumstances, and distressed with the apprehension of being reduced to absolute want and beggary. But here they have the sympathy of Him who had to complain, " I am poor and sorrowful."† None are more to be pitied than those who have been reduced from affluence to poverty and dependence. But this was the case with our high priest : " though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor." In the early part of his life, he sustained himself by labouring at the trade of a carpenter, and

* Mat. viii. 16, 17. † Psalms, lxix. 29.

during his public ministry he was supported by the contributions of his friends. And as this slender fund was intrusted to one who proved "a thief," we need not wonder that his supplies occasionally failed, and that he could not answer the demands that were made on him. This seems to have been the case when the tribute money was asked from him at Capernaum, and when he wrought a miracle to discharge the claim —a thing which we never read of his doing, and which on one occasion he refused to do, to relieve his personal wants. Accordingly we are told that "when Peter was come into the house, Jesus prevented him." * The disciple was aware that the funds of his master were completely drained, and he did not know how to announce the demand made on him by the officer; but Jesus kindly anticipated him by introducing the subject. And in a similar way does he still prevent the complaints and allay the apprehensions of his followers, by assuring them of his sympathy with them, and of the relief which is at hand though it may be unseen. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom;" and will he suffer you to perish for want by the way? "The earth is mine and the fulness thereof. All things are put under my feet, all sheep and oxen, and the fish of the sea. Be not distressed about what ye shall eat or drink:—your bread shall be given you, and your waters shall be sure."

3. He is touched with the feeling of what we suffer in the distress and the loss of our relatives and friends. He wept and sobbed and groaned, along with Mary and Martha at the death of their brother, to such a degree as to excite the surprise of the bystanders, who said, "Behold how he loved him!" It was foretold to his mother, at the time of his birth, that "a sword should pierce her soul," and this was fulfilled when she saw the "holy child," for whom she had magnified the Lord, and on whose account she expected that all generations should pronounce her blessed, delivered into the hands of sinners, and transfixed and bleeding on the cross. He knew the anguish which wrung her heart, and touched with

* Mat. xvii. 25.

the same feeling, he said to the disciple whom he loved, "Behold thy mother," and to her, "Behold thy son." Think on this, ye who have been bereaved of dear relatives, and who refuse to be comforted. Did ever mother mourn such a son? Did ever son feel such anguish for a mother? Behold, and consider if there be any sorrow like unto his sorrow, and think how well qualified he is to sympathize with you in a similar situation.

'But this does not come near my case, nor meet my loss, of which he could have no experience.' I know what you mean, daughter of affliction; but you are wrong in your apprehension. In the course of his journeyings, our Lord met a funeral. It was that of a young man, the only son of his mother, and she a widow. When Jesus saw her following the body in speechless agony, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And going forward he touched the bier, and the bearers, awe-struck, as if the father of the deceased had come to demand his child, stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead arose, and he delivered him to his mother.* O, the transport of delight which now made the heart of that widow to sing for joy! But this is not the feeling to which I wish to direct your attention. No: it is the sympathy which produced it, and which still beats in the breast of Him who, regarding all his people with the affection of a "kinsman" as well as a Saviour, continues to say, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me."†

4. Our Lord is touched with the feeling of what his people suffer under persecution and reproach from their enemies. It has been the lot of his followers in some periods to suffer these in very aggravated inflictions. Their names have been cast out as evil, they have been traduced as the worst, and vilified as the basest of men,—they have been spoiled of their goods, deprived of their liberty, tortured and put to death in every form that ingenuity could devise or inhuman violence could inflict. And even in more peaceable times, they are not alto-

* Luke, vii. 11–15. † Jer. xlix. 11.

gether exempted from this species of suffering. "Yea, all that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution." But they may expect the sympathy of Him for whose sake they are thus treated. He incurred the hatred of the world, and met with its very worst treatment. He was reproached, misrepresented, insulted, derided, accused of the most flagitious crimes—gluttony, drunkenness, sabbath-breaking, sedition, blasphemy, and compact with the devil. He was arraigned, condemned, scourged, and put to an ignominious and accursed death. And all this treatment he received because he faithfully bore witness to the truth, glorified his Father, and went about doing good to men. "Consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." Not an insult can be offered, not an injury done to the meanest of his followers, which he does not sensibly feel. He that toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye.

5. He sympathizes with his people in the trials they meet with from friends. These are often the sharpest sufferings of Christians. They can bear the malice and abuse of open enemies; but oh! 'tis hard to endure the coldness, the ingratitude, undutifulness, infidelity, and irreligion of those who are intimately connected with them, and bound by many ties to act a very different part. "It was not an enemy that reproached me; then could I have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company."* But Christ suffered also from this quarter. When he began his public ministry, none opposed and discouraged him more than his fellow-citizens, and even his own brethren. Those that had seen his miracles and eaten his bread, lifted up the heel against him. Multitudes of those who had professed the greatest attachment to his person and mission, took offence and left him. How much was he grieved with the ignorance,

* Psalms, lv. 12, 13.

unbelief, worldliness and inconstancy of his chosen disciples! And when the hour of his greatest trial came, one of them betrayed him into the hands of his enemies; another denied him with oaths and curses; and the rest forsook him and fled, so that he was left without a single earthly friend or comforter. Though this should be your situation, Christians, you need not be afraid to be left alone;—you have the sympathy of one who is "a brother born for adversity"—"a friend that sticketh closer than a brother."* "I will not leave you comfortless"—I know what it is to be deserted and left forlorn; and "I will never,—no, never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

6. Our Lord has a fellow-feeling with what his people suffer under temptation. All afflictions may be considered as temptations, because they try the faith and constancy of those who suffer them, and through their corruptions draw them into sin. In this sense, Christ calls the whole of his personal ministry a time of temptation, "Ye are they that have continued with me in my temptations;" and the same name is given to the afflictions of Christians, "No temptation hath taken you but such as is common to man." But besides these trials, there are seasons in which they are more directly tempted by the solicitations which their spiritual adversary, availing himself of the circumstances in which they are placed, addresses to their souls, and by which he endeavours to entice them to the commission of sin, to the dishonour of God, and the marring of their own peace. This is the plain import of many declarations and warnings of Scripture; and nothing is more alarming to them than the apprehension of such onsets, nothing more distracting than the experience of them. But in all they have relief and refuge in the sympathy of their High Priest. "In that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted."† Among his other sufferings, he was assaulted and sore tempted of the devil, especially at the commencement and close of his course. He knows from experience both the wiles and the violence of this

* Prov. xviii. 24. † Heb. ii. 18.

arch adversary—the baits by which he allures, and the fiery darts by which he distracts the mind. At the beginning of his ministry, Satan tempted him chiefly to presumption and pride; at the termination of it, to despondency and despair. Every temptation was addressed to some principle of human nature, and although our Lord resisted them, and never yielded to them in a single instance or in the slightest degree, yet he knows from what "he himself suffered, being tempted," the tendency which they have, not only to distress the hearts of his people, but to seduce them from obedience to God, and they may rely on his compassion under them. "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have thee that he might sift thee as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not."

7. He has a fellow-feeling with his people under divine desertion. Job not only had to mourn that God had permitted Satan to afflict him, but was distressed by the suspicion that he himself counted him as an enemy; and we find other saints complaining often of the hiding of God's countenance and the anguish which this created. But under this severe trial they have the sympathy of their Head; for this also he suffered, particularly at the close of his life; and none of all his sufferings drew such a bitter complaint from him as this did. When the multitudes that had followed him went back and walked no more with him, he could calmly turn to the twelve with the question, "Will ye also go away?" When Judas came to apprehend him, he merely said, "Betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?" When Peter denied him, he only gave him an upbraiding look. And he was silent before the high priest and Pilate, under all the false accusations brought against him. But when his Father forsook him, he was thrown into an agony, and cried aloud—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!" This was equivalent to the pains of hell; and therefore, short of remorse and despair, which are rather sins to be forgiven than sufferings to be compassionated, there is no distress of mind which he did not experience, and with sympathy for which he cannot be affected.

8. Our Lord has a fellow-feeling with his people under the fears of death. Death is what the best of men must under-

go. From the beginning of time, two individuals only, and that for high ends, have been exempted from the common fate of fallen man. Sooner or later, Christian, by one path or another, you must descend into the valley of the shadow of death. The frailties and diseases which we feel are all proofs and admonitions that this earthly tabernacle, in which our souls reside for a little, must be dissolved. Nor is it a light thing to die. The prospect of it is naturally calculated to excite serious thoughts, and alarming apprehensions. Death breaks asunder the closest ties which bind together the nearest relatives, separates us from all in this world, from all that we have known and loved and enjoyed and delighted in, and ushers us into a new state, and a new world, of which we know but little. But in this case also we are warranted to expect the sympathy of the Redeemer. He felt the shrinkings of nature in the prospect of death; and "in the days of his flesh, offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death." Nay, "he tasted of death" itself, in all its bitterness. This is, as it were, a new reason for Christians dying—there is a blessed necessity for it, that they may be, "in all points," conformed to their Redeemer. Without this they would not be in every respect like him. There would be a want of harmony between them. They must follow him, not only through a suffering life, but through death, into heaven. This ought to reconcile them to that event, especially when it is considered that his death contains an antidote to all their fears of death. In dying they only drink of his cup, and though they should meet with a violent and bloody death, they are only baptized with his baptism.

In reviewing what has been said, several reflections naturally suggest themselves.

Do not we perceive here a strong analogical proof of the divine origin of the scheme of redemption which the gospel reveals? For the preservation of the human body, God has established a sympathy between the head and the several members, and by a similar bond has he linked together the members of the great body or family of mankind, and thus provided for their associating and being mutually helpful by

bearing one another's burdens. This provision we find also in the mystical body, or family of grace, and especially in the personal and official qualifications of Him who is constituted its life-giving and governing head. He was made in all things like to his brethren, not only by taking part of the same nature with them, but by participating also of the sufferings which they endure in it, that he might be capable of sympathizing with them, and be in all points qualified for the discharge of his office towards them, in a merciful, considerate, and tender manner. Did it not "become Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things," to qualify in this way the Captain of salvation, chosen by him to lead his sons to glory? Say now if the God of nature and the God of grace be not the same? Is it probable that this arrangement could have entered into the mind of man? Could it have been conceived by untaught and simple fishermen? Let your minds dwell for a little longer on this point, my brethren, and you will perceive additional traces of a divine hand rising up. Consider the various purposes which are accomplished by the sufferings of Christ. By them reconciliation was made for sin, and an offended lawgiver propitiated. By them an example of meekness, patience, and fortitude, was left to all his followers. And by them their Redeemer and Forerunner was fitted for sympathizing with them under those adversities, which they should endure before they come to the place which he is preparing for their reception and eternal rest. It is a mark of superior wisdom to accomplish several ends by one contrivance. And may we not perceive here a resemblance to "Heaven's easy, artless, unencumbered plan" in the frame and government of the universe?

Here also we have a confirmation of the doctrine of Scripture respecting the divine nature of our high priest and its union to ours. If this were not true, there could be no proper meaning, or at least no real comfort in the declaration in our text. Christ has passed into the heavens, which must retain him till the restitution of all things. He is far removed from us in respect of his humanity. If he were a mere man, how

could he now sympathize with the various and innumerable infirmities of his disciples on earth, or how could they take comfort from being told that he was touched with the feeling for them? But in the light of the truth respecting his person, commonly received among Christians, every thing is easy and intelligible. As the omniscient God, he is perfectly acquainted with their distresses; and as clothed with our nature, he feels for them as a friend and brother.—Wonderful condescension to our infirmities, in providing a Saviour in whom we have every reason to confide! Though God is essentially true, yet he has condescended to swear, that we might have an additional confirmation of our faith. And, though infinite in love and mercy, he has condescended to provide for us an High Priest, who, in addition to these perfections, possesses human sympathy!

We have here one great source of relief, support and consolation, to Christians under their infirmities and afflictions. It is a relief to be pitied in our distress—to see persons feeling for us—to hear from their lips the words of sympathy, although they may not be able to remove the cause of sorrow. And as this is in itself a great alleviation, the want of it is no slight aggravation of trouble. Hence Job exclaimed feelingly, "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me."* It was a fresh arrow which went to his heart, to find that they were not touched with a feeling of his heavy and uncommon afflictions. Hence also the complaint of David, as the type of Christ, "I am full of heaviness; I looked for some to take pity on me, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none."† A compassionate word spoken into the ear of those who were going to the stake, has been the means of strengthening them, and they have been refreshed with the knowledge that their friends in the crowd, or in their own houses, were sympathizing with and praying for them. How much more refreshing and consolatory to be persuaded that they shared the tender sympathy,

* Job, xix. 21. † Psalms, lxix. 20.

never inactive nor ineffectual, of their exalted High Priest, who was praying for them within the vail, and strengthening them with all might by his Spirit in the inner man!

Finally, we may see of what temper and disposition Christians ought to be,—sympathizing and compassionate. What Christ has proved himself to be to them, they will show themselves to be to others, and especially to their Christian brethren. This is one proof of their belonging to his mystical body. If one member of the human body suffer, all the members suffer with it; and so is it with the church, which is the body of Christ. Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, "even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Remember the address of the Lord to the unmerciful servant: "Shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?"* Compassion for the temporal distresses of our fellow-creatures is not a sure mark of godliness; but the want of it is an indubitable mark of ungodliness. "For whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" Beware of selfishness, which contracts the heart, and renders it insensible and callous. "Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of another." Thus will the same mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus, for "he is not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

* Matt. xviii. 33.

SERMON X.

THE LOVE OF THE SPIRIT.

ROM. XV. 30.

NOW I BESEECH YOU, BRETHREN, FOR THE LOVE OF THE SPIRIT.

THE volume of nature has the name of its author inscribed upon it, and every where bears the most distinct and legible marks of his Godhead and perfections; but it conveys no information to us of his subsistence in three persons. In the unity of design apparent in the works of nature, and in the nice and admirable adaptation of all parts of the universe to accomplish the same grand ends, which we perceive the more clearly in proportion to the increase of our knowledge, we have a proof of the unity of God which yields satisfaction to a plain and unsophisticated understanding; but there is nothing either in the work of creation, or in the works of common providence, which indicates any personal distinctions in the Godhead, or, in other words, makes known the doctrine of the Trinity. The knowledge of this mystery we owe to the volume of inspiration, which not only teaches it doctrinally, but reveals and describes a work calculated to illustrate it, and to give us clear, though necessarily from its nature, inadequate conceptions of the subject. Redemption is the work of one God, but of that one Being existing according to distinct relations of an intrinsic kind, which we, for want of a fitter word, and to guard against the opinions of those who would explain away the whole mystery, are forced to call personal.

The doctrine of the Trinity, as revealed in the Bible, is far from being a mere speculative truth. It lies at the foundation

of our hope ; our blessedness is wrapt up "in the love of God, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Ghost." It is supposed in all acceptable worship, for "we have access to the Father through the Son, by one Spirit:"—"our fellowship is with the Father, and his Son Jesus Christ," and this is the fellowship of the Spirit. And as our worship is animated by the distinct consideration of what each person has done for our salvation, so the duties of obedience are enforced upon our minds by the same consideration. Hence the apostle, in entreating the prayers of the Christians at Rome in his behalf, employs the plea in our text, "for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit."

By the "love of the Spirit," I understand that love which the third person of the Godhead has displayed in the economy of redemption. Some indeed are of opinion that it refers to that brotherly love, which is the production of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers, and binds them together as members of the same mystical body, so as to feel a deep interest in one another's welfare. Even though it should be allowed that this was the more immediate meaning of the word in this passage, we might still take occasion from it to speak of that love which is the spring of all the Spirit's operations. We judge of the qualities of a fountain from the waters which it sends forth, and of a tree from its fruits. "The fruit of the Spirit is love;" and what must be the love resident in and flowing from that divine Person, who is the author of every affectionate feeling toward God or toward man! But I apprehend the connexion in which the words stand fully justifies the other interpretation: "I beseech you from regard to what the Lord has done for you, and the love which the Holy Spirit has shown to you, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me."

We often speak of the love of the Father in not sparing his Son, and the love of the Son in giving himself for us; and we do well, for we cannot speak of them too often, nor with too much fervour of gratitude and admiration. But the love of the Spirit is more rarely the topic of public discourse or

private converse, and there is reason to fear that it is too little in our thoughts, for "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." May not this deficiency have a hurtful effect upon Christian experience? God draws his children to himself "by the cords of love," meaning his own love; but if one of the threads in "this threefold cord" be relaxed, must not the influence of divine love upon our hearts be weakened and impaired? If we are deficient in this part of Christian exercise, it assuredly does not arise from any defect in the proofs and illustration of love on the part of this divine Agent. The subject seems entitled to our particular attention.—Let us then, trusting to the aid of the Spirit, without whom we can neither speak nor hear aright, in the *first* place, contemplate the manifestations of the love of the Holy Ghost; and *secondly*, exhibit the influence which a due sense of this love would have on our minds and conduct.

I. Contemplate the manifestations of the love of the Spirit. The work of redemption, or of recovering man from the ruin into which he had fallen by his transgression, is to be traced to the spontaneous and boundless love of God. This wonderful love is held forth as exerted in distinct acts by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To the Father we ascribe, agreeably to the analogy of the word, the purpose and superintendence of the plan of redemption, to the Son its purchase, and to the Spirit its application. The love from which the Spirit acts is equally divine with that from which the Father and Son act; indeed it is the same, for the love of God, like his will, is one. "There is none good but one, that is God;" and this epithet is repeatedly applied to the third Person, in an absolute sense: "Thou gavest them thy good Spirit"—"Thy Spirit is good." The love of the Spirit is eternal, unchangeable, sovereign, independent; and in its breadth and length, and depth, and height, it passeth knowledge.

1. The Holy Spirit displayed his love in the readiness with which he undertook his mission and work. We speak of the covenant of grace, as made between the Father and Son, because in contemplation of the Son's assuming human na-

ture, there was an engagement and a promise, a work and a reward. But we must not overlook the concurrence of the Blessed Spirit, and the delight which he took in the prospect of his work of grace and power. As the Son was sent by the Father, so the Spirit is sent by the Father and the Son, and on this account is called economically their Spirit; but he was as free and cheerful in undertaking and engaging in his work, as He who said "Lo I come, to do thy will, O my God." When Jesus was about to leave his disciples, he said, "I will pray the Father and he will give you another Comforter—if I go not away the Comforter will not come, but if I depart I will send him unto you." Observe, he is not only said to be "sent," to intimate the established order of the economy of grace, and the certainty of the gift, but he is said to "come," in order to point out his willingness to engage in the work. "When he is come, he shall convince the world." Hence the prayer of the Old Testament Church, "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." * And hence on the day of Pentecost, "Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a mighty rushing wind, and there appeared unto them cloven tongues as of fire, and it sat upon each of them." These were the emblems of the "love of the Spirit," in its ardour, impetuosity, and irresistible power. And as he was voluntary in undertaking, so he is sovereign in carrying on his work, "dividing severally to every man as he will." When we pray the Father to give us the Holy Spirit, we should remember that he whom we ask to dwell in us is a free and independent agent. "Uphold me with thy free Spirit." †

2. The love of the Spirit appeared in dictating the Scriptures. Saints in every age have loved the Word of God, and from the time that it was first committed to writing, they have not ceased to take the highest delight in reading and meditating on its contents. In the Bible they find their meat and their drink, the life and the health of their souls. They could not live without it, and having it they can be contented with a

* Cant. iv. 16. † Ps. li. 12.

slender portion. "Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart." * The longest Psalm that ever David composed, is entirely occupied in expressing his esteem for the written law; there are few of his spiritual songs in which he does not commend it; and, remember, brethren, his Bible was a small one compared with ours.

All Scripture was given by inspiration, or dictated to the sacred penmen by the Spirit. "Prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;" and as they spake they wrote. This is true, not only of prophecy strictly so called, or the prediction of future events, but of all the contents of his inspired volume, whether given in the form of doctrine, reproof, exhortation, promise, or even history. Hence the formula used in quoting from any of the books of the Old Testament, "The Holy Ghost saith," whatever prophet was the penman.† Even those parts of Scripture which proceeded immediately from the mouth of the Redeemer himself, come to us through the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, who brought them to the remembrance of the evangelists; and to each of the letters which Christ ordered his servant John to send to the seven Churches of Asia is subjoined the same admonition:—"He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

Would you have a sensible sign and proof of the love of the Spirit? Here it is. Could there be a greater proof of love than the giving of this Book, so stored with every thing that is necessary, and able to make wise to salvation the most simple? There are three distinguishing gifts of God—the gift of his Son, the gift of his Spirit, and the gift of his Word—and as to each of them we may say "Herein is love." Without the Scriptures, you would have been sitting in the region and shadow of death. Without the Scriptures, you would have known nothing of the plan of mercy and way of salvation:—you would never have heard of the love of God, of the

* Ps. cxix. iii. † Mark, xii. 36; Acts, xxviii. 25; Heb. iii. 7, and ix. 8.

person, the undertaking, the incarnation, the sacrifice, the sufferings and glory of Christ; you would never have heard of remission of sins, of peace with God, of the adoption of children, of the inheritance laid up in heaven. If then at any time you have felt your consciences pacified, your difficulties cleared up, your fears dissipated, your minds fortified against temptation, strengthened for duty, or comforted in tribulation, your faith increased, your hope quickened, your love inflamed, your patience promoted, by any thing contained in this precious volume—think, oh! think, of the "love of the Spirit." Christian children, who have been taught the first principles of the oracles of God, think on the love of the Spirit. Christian young men, who from your earliest years have known the Scriptures, think on the love of the Spirit. Christian fathers, who are strong because the word of God abideth in you, think on the love of the Spirit.

3. The love of the Spirit was manifested in preparing and endowing the human nature of the Saviour. All the operations of the divine Spirit in forming those holy men who were raised up for carrying on the work of God under the Old Testament, such as Moses, and David, and Solomon, Isaiah, Zerubabel, and Joshua, who were eminently furnished with gifts and graces for the faithful and wise discharge of their important functions, were nothing compared with this. In the miraculous conception, the Spirit "created a new thing in the earth," bringing "a clean thing out of an unclean," and from a corrupt mass forming a body which was without the least taint of, or tendency to, sin, and thus fitted for becoming the immaculate and blessed body of the Son of God. "The Holy Ghost 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." This was the beginning of those miracles of love, which were wrought with such heavenly profusion and prodigality during our Saviour's abode on earth. According to ancient predictions, the Spirit descended upon, and dwelt in that holy nature which he had formed: "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear

of the Lord." And the miracle which accompanied our Lord's baptism held forth emblematically the source, and nature, and design of this unction. "The heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the spirit of God descending, like a dove" (the emblem of love), "and lighting upon him." In the glorious person of the Redeemer next to the grace of union, which is the effect of the assumption of human nature by the Son of God, the grace of unction is the most wonderful object of contemplation. "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth: I have put my Spirit upon him." If the oil poured on the head of Aaron, which descended to the skirts of his garment, was precious, how much more precious was this heavenly oil which was poured on the Head, and was to descend to the meanest and least member of the mystical body; for God gave not the spirit by measure to him, and he was given to be imparted to all that believe on him. "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." This was the holy anointing oil which was poured on his sacrifice; and as it was through the Eternal Spirit that he offered himself without spot to God, so was he "justified in the Spirit" by his resurrection from the dead.

4. The love of the Spirit is shown in the first visit which he pays to the soul of a sinner, when he comes to take possession of it. When he first enters the place of his future residence, he finds it in a very wretched and repulsive condition. The sinner himself, habituated to his own impurity, can form no conception of the disgust which this heavenly visitant must feel on approaching it, and is apt to wonder at the strong terms in which he has described it. No dungeon, at once dark and cold and filthy,—no lazar who from the sole of the foot to the crown of the head is covered with wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores,—no corpse which has lain for days in the earth, is half so loathsome to the senses, as such a soul is to the Holy Spirit who is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity." He finds the heart dead to all that is good, yet alive to all that is evil, the mind filled with ignorance of God, and enmity to him, the whole

man as proud as poor,—as obstinate as foolish,—as impenitent as guilty. His first approaches are shunned, his overtures rejected, his convictions stifled, his entreaties despised. Yet he perseveres in his gracious design, until he has conquered all opposition, won the soul to Jesus Christ, and formed the heart for a habitation to himself—"the temple of the living God!"

5. The love of this blessed Agent is further seen in keeping possession of the soul. There is more love displayed in this, than in taking possession of the soul at first. We expect nothing but resistance and hostility from an enemy, but "he that hath friends, should show himself friendly." Is this then what the saint evinces to his merciful deliverer? Alas! No. How often has the Holy Spirit reason to say, "Is this thy kindness to thy friend?" Who but the blessed guest himself can tell what indignities and provocations he meets with from the time that he takes up his habitation in the heart of a believer? We can scarcely read the history of the unbelieving, ungrateful, and rebellious conduct of the Israelites in the wilderness without being provoked; yet it is a true picture of our own conduct; "He gave them his good Spirit to instruct them, but they rebelled, and vexed his Holy Spirit." And how often do professing Christians, and genuine saints themselves rebel, and vex and grieve the Spirit by their slowness of heart to understand and believe the word which he has spoken, and brought to their remembrance, by despising the hidden manna with which he has fed their souls, by indulging the wish to return to spiritual Sodom and Egypt, by calling in question those promises which he has sealed on their hearts, by quenching his motions, and acting contrary to those principles which he has implanted within them! On these accounts he is provoked to withhold his sensible and comforting influence, and threatens to withdraw from them. And yet he abides with them. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." "Many waters cannot quench his love, neither can the floods drown it."

6. We have an additional proof of the love of the Spirit in

the peculiar work which he carries on in the hearts of believers. "The sanctification of the Spirit" is the comprehensive phrase under which his gracious work is held forth in Scripture. "We are bound always to give thanks for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God has chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit."* The blood of Jesus is the meritorious and procuring cause of our title to eternal life, but there is a meetness for, as well as a title to eternal life, and the one as well as the other is necessary to our enjoyment of this beatitude. It is the work of the Spirit to renew us after the image of God—to conform us to the image of his Son, to make us partakers of a divine nature, and thus fit us for divine fellowship. And he it is who renders all the means of producing this effectual, whether the word, or sacraments, or prayer. "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."† Those who preach the gospel, or dispense the sacraments, have only a ministerial instrumentality in advancing this work of God. The Spirit is the efficient agent and author of it. "Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God."‡

There are many things comprehended in this work by which the Spirit manifests his love. He takes of the things of Christ—his atonement and righteousness, and shows them unto believers, giving them fellowship with the Redeemer in his death and resurrection—he sheds abroad the love of God in their hearts—he gives them access to God with boldness and confidence, enabling them to cry Abba Father, and helping them in their prayers—he seals them as the chosen of the Father, and the redeemed of the Son, and preserves them from the allurements of the world, the temptations of Satan, and every thing which would entangle or draw them aside in their Christian course. His residence in their hearts is an earnest of the heavenly inheritance to which they have been

* 2 Thes. ii. 13. † 2 Cor. iii. 18. ‡ 2 Cor. iii. 3.

predestinated, and his operations are the first fruits of that glory which awaits them.

Here we are particularly to call to mind his character as the Comforter, in which he was promised by Christ, and the manner in which he discharges it in all the distresses, afflictions, and tribulations, outward and inward, to which believers are exposed in the present state. In none of these is the comforter, who only can relieve their souls, far off. All the peace, and solace, and joy which they feel under their trials, and by which they are sometimes made to glory in them, are to be traced to this source. Hence we read of "the comfort of the Holy Ghost," and "joy in the Holy Ghost."

In fine, the Spirit manifests his love, by the termination to which he brings his work in believers. "He that hath begun the good work will perfect it unto the day of Jesus Christ." He will make their souls perfect in holiness at death, and their bodies in which he has resided here as a temple, he will raise up at the last day, fashioning them according to the glorious body of Christ. "If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you."*

II. I now proceed to exhibit the influence which the love of the Spirit ought to have upon us. It is calculated to have an influence upon the whole of our life and exercise. The person who feels it, will "live in the Spirit," will "walk in the Spirit." There is no duty which it will not enforce, no sin from which it will not dissuade. I shall select a few instances by way of specimen.

1. It should excite us to love the Spirit. Love begets love; "we love him because he first loved us." Love and gratitude, as terminating on the Holy Spirit, and created by his gracious acts, is no less a Christian grace, than love to the Father and Son. Indeed, love to the Spirit is included in love to the Father and the Son. It is the work of the Spirit

* Rom. viii. 11.

to open up the fountain of redeeming love, and the wide and deep channel in which it flows to sinners in all its refreshing and salutary streams. He cannot be dishonoured, or his work be contemned, if the Father and the Son are loved and glorified. Yet there is an honour and a duty which we owe to him, and which ought not to be withheld. Perhaps the believer's experience in this matter may be illustrated by a familiar example. If a stranger should come to any of you with the intelligence of the safety of a son in a foreign land, whom you had given up as dead, you would be so overjoyed with the message, and so occupied in reading the letters, and looking on the pledges transmitted by your absent child, that you might forget the messenger, and allow him to stand at the door; but no sooner would the paroxysm of joy subside, than you would recollect yourself, receive the messenger with due respect, and load him with marks of gratitude for the kind service which he had performed. In like manner, the believer may at first be so rapt in the contemplation of God, even the Father who hath loved us, and of the Son who gave himself for us, as for a time to overlook the divine Agent who opened his eyes upon such a discovery of grace; but when he recollects himself, he cries out, "Is it thou, Lord? Come in, thou blessed of the Lord, why standest thou without?"

The self-evidencing light of the gospel, shining into the soul in the day of conversion, may be so strong, and overpowering, that the person may wonder that he should ever have resisted it for a moment; his conviction of its truth may be so clear, and his reception of it so cordial, that he may be apt to overlook the supernatural agency on his soul, and to think that he can never again call it in question. It is not till he has lost sight of it, and relapsed into partial unbelief and darkness, that he becomes thoroughly aware that he owed his discoveries to the illumination of the Spirit, and that this is necessary to preserve and revive them. Then he is ready to say, "O, blessed Spirit, thou didst visit me when I was an outcast, and lying in my blood; I was dead in trespasses and sins, and thou didst quicken me; I was blind to the things which belonged to my peace, and thou didst unseal the eyes of my

understanding; my heart was filled with enmity to God, and thou didst cleanse me in the laver of regeneration; I was diseased as well as loathsome, and thou didst heal all my diseases by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, and by thy precious ointments. By thy grace I am what I am. What shall I render unto thee for all thy benefits unto me?"

2. It should beget love to the brethren. All true saints are in common the offspring and workmanship of the Spirit; and "he who loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him." There is a union among true Christians, and this is the unity of the Spirit. "There is one body, and one Spirit." "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ; for by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body, and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." True believers are all united to Christ by the same Spirit. They are brought to the knowledge of the truth, and the love of the truth, and the comfort of the truth by the same Spirit. By the same Spirit they live and move, and have their being, in Christ. The love of the Spirit is, as it were, the common blood which flows in all their veins, binding them together as one family, and affectionately causing them to cleave to, and sympathize with one another. "If there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." In vain do we pretend to the Spirit, if we have bitter envying and strife dwelling in us; for the love of the Spirit cannot dwell with these malevolent passions; but "if we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us."

3. It should encourage us to depend upon and apply for the influences of the Spirit. Without him we can do nothing; he works in us both "to will and to do of his good pleasure." Every thing that is good about any person, faith, love, purity, patience, is of his production. When a Christian thinks of the duties incumbent upon him, their number and importance,

and at the same time reflects on his own weakness, he is ready to exclaim, "Who is sufficient for these things?" In such circumstances let him think of the love of the Spirit, and that he is not only able, but willing to "do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

The Spirit is promised, and we are encouraged to pray the Father for him. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him." O! is not this encouraging, that so far from being reluctant to the work, he is as ready to go, as the Father or the Son is to send?

Christians complain of their unfitness for duty, and they sometimes make this an excuse for neglecting it. There might have been some show of reason in this excuse, had not God made such rich and suitable provision to relieve our necessities, and help our infirmities. You are unfit for duty, even indisposed to it? Granted; but is not the Spirit able "to strengthen you with all might in the inner man?" And is he not willing, and waiting for employment? Have you applied to him particularly? If not, you have not received, and justly, because you have not asked. Or if you have asked, you have not asked in the faith of his love; you have had doubts of this, and these doubts have prevented you from relying on his influences.

4. It should excite us to abound in prayer. It is in reference to this duty, that the Apostle in our text avails himself of the argument from the love of the Spirit. "I beseech you, brethren,—for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me." There is a twofold argument here; one bearing on the duty of praying for one another, founded on the Spirit's being the bond of union among all the members of the mystical body, which we have already adverted to; the other bearing on prayer in general, whether for ourselves or others. This implies that the consideration of the love of the Spirit is a great inducement to prayer. And how? Because one way in which he manifests his love is by

assisting us in our addresses to the throne of grace. On this account he is called the "Spirit of supplications," * and is said to help our infirmities in this duty. "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." †

He sheds abroad the love of God in the heart, and thereby encourages us to come to him, as our heavenly Father. Christ by his mediation has procured access for us to God; the Spirit gives us access by discovering to us the living way consecrated by the blood of Christ, and powerfully brings us near: "through Christ we have access by one Spirit unto the Father." The Holy Spirit is promised in the character of a Comforter, or, as the word also signifies, a patron or advocate. What rich and superabundant provision has a God of grace made for us in the new covenant! How inexcusable, if we do not come to the throne of grace! We have an advocate without us, and within us, in heaven and in our own breasts. It is a great encouragement to prayer, that we have in Christ an advocate with the Father, who is ready to present our petitions and to obtain a hearing for us. But is it not an additional incentive that in the Holy Spirit we have one who will draw up our petitions, and help us to put them into the hands of Christ? And this last is agreeable to the will of God, as well as the former: "And he that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." ‡

How great an encouragement to prayer this is, those only know who have felt enlargement of heart and confidence in prayer, and who have also felt the want of these. Formerly they were dragged or driven to the throne of grace by conscience, or the urgency of external circumstances; now they come to it of their own accord and cheerfully. Formerly they thought it enough, that they prayed publicly and at stated times; now they embrace every opportunity of engaging in

* Zech. xii. 10. † Rom. viii. 26. ‡ Rom. viii. 27.

the exercise, and "pray always." Formerly their prayers were formal and cold, now they pour out their hearts to God, order their cause before him, and fill their mouths with arguments. This is prayer—"praying in the Holy Ghost."

5. It should make us careful to avoid every thing that may grieve the Spirit. We are uncommonly tender of offending a person who has done us a kindness, and will deny ourselves many things which are agreeable from an apprehension that our indulging in them would grieve him. The very expression "grieving the Spirit," points to his love. An enemy is provoked if we injure him, and he is gratified if he see us injuring ourselves; it is a friend only, one who really loves us, and wishes our welfare, who can be *grieved* at our improper conduct. Unregenerated persons vex the Spirit; believers grieve him. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption." *

A persuasion and feeling of the love of the Spirit will dispose believers to act in such a way as is pleasing to him, and to avoid every thing which grieves him. Nor is it difficult to know what pleases him on the one hand or what offends him on the other. Saints know it by a divine instinct—the Spirit witnesses to it with their spirit. The fruit of the Spirit and the works of the flesh, are as much opposed as light and darkness. All sin is displeasing to him, but there are some sins, which are eminently offensive in his sight. He is the "good Spirit," and therefore all wrath, malice, and envy are opposed to him. He is "the Spirit of truth," and therefore all falsehood and lying are dishonouring to him. He is "the Holy Spirit," and therefore all impurity in heart, speech, and behaviour are offensive to him. You will see all these sins warned against, as grieving to the Spirit, in the fourth chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians.

This subject affords matter of self-examination and exhortation. Let me ask you what know ye of the love of the Spirit? There are persons present, I am afraid, who have

* Eph. iv. 30.

no part or lot in this matter, who "have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost" *—who never saw any need for his gracious influences—who never were concerned to obtain them; who never read or prayed, or performed any other duty in the Spirit. "These be they who are sensual, having not the Spirit." † Let such consider the solemn declaration of an inspired writer, "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." ‡ Those who are strangers to the work of the Spirit are strangers to the work of the Saviour. All who are in Christ, and to whom there is no condemnation, "walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

But though you know him not, you have to do with him, and he with you. He speaks to you in the Scriptures, he speaks to you by the preaching of the gospel, which is the "ministration of the Spirit." The apostle Peter tells us, that "Christ was put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit, by which also he went, and preached to the spirits in prison, which sometime were disobedient, when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah." The inhabitants of the antediluvian world thought that they had to do only with Noah, and that it was easy for them to contend with him, and despise his warnings and exhortations. But it turned out at last that they had been resisting one infinitely greater: "The Lord said, MY SPIRIT shall not always strive with man;" and this added greatly to their sin and condemnation. This was the great sin of the Israelites in the wilderness, and it is still the sin of gospel despisers; "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost." There are two things which aggravate the guilt of the finally unbelieving and impenitent under the gospel, and render their doom unspeakably more dreadful than that of the heathen. First, they have despised and repudiated the love of God manifested in the death of his Son; and secondly, they have resisted and quenched the motions of the Holy Spirit, and poured contempt upon his

* Acts, xix. 2. † Jude, v. 19. ‡ Rom. viii. 9.

love in the application of redemption. "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" Contemptuous resistance of the motions of the Holy Spirit is the crowning part of their sin. And justly so; for (and this is the reason why the sin against the Holy Ghost is irremissible) it is an offence against the love of God in the last and the most ample display of it. O bring not down this fearful doom upon your head, gospel hearer! and there is only one way in which you can avert it, by yielding to the call of the gospel, and believing on the name of the Son of God. Whether can you go from the Spirit of God, or flee from his presence? Though you should resolve never to hear another sermon, never again to open a Bible, though you should resolve to leave a land of gospel privileges, and hide yourself in the darkest thicket of heathenism, you would carry in your bosom, like the stricken deer, the arrow of conviction and death. You have heard of a Saviour, and have rejected him; you have become the subject of the Spirit's calls, and have resisted them. But my text leads me to employ the allurements of the gospel, rather than the terrors of the law. "I beseech you by the love of the Spirit" to comply with the calls of grace—to come to the Saviour. "The Spirit and the bride say, come; and let him that is athirst, come; and whosoever will, let him come, and take of the waters of life freely."

Believers should not be contented with owning the nature, and work of the Spirit; they should seek to know and believe his love, to taste that he is gracious. Have you ever had the love of God shed abroad in your heart, Christian? Has Christ been precious to you? Has the word been sweet to your taste? Have you had freedom at the throne of grace? Have you been made to eat at a communion table of the things wherewith the atonement was made? Have you been comforted under affliction? These are just the fruits of the Spirit, and the evidences of his love. Lay open your hearts

to his benign influences; cherish his motions, and honour the Spirit, even as you honour the Father and the Son. Let others scoff at the doctrine of divine influences, and the inhabitation of the Spirit, as the effect of enthusiasm; "But, ye beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

Finally, let us be instructed where to look for the cure and rectification of all the evils which afflict the Church in our day!—to the love of the Spirit. By our misimprovement and abuse of our privileges, by our unchristian temper and carriage, by our worldly spirit, and untender conversation, we have provoked the Spirit to withdraw from us, and the consequence has been that the glory has departed from our Israel, and ordinances have become in a great measure inefficacious and unsuccessful. "Who hath believed our report, and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" Who is convinced of sin? Who cries out, "What must I do to be saved?" Who receives the word gladly? Who brings forth fruit to perfection? Where are the fruits of the gospel, even where it is purely preached? "Wo is me! for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape gleanings of the vintage; there is no cluster to eat; my soul desired the first ripe fruit. The good man is perished out of the earth; and there is none upright among men."* Our carelessness, our conformity to the world; and our mournful divisions, have wasted and nearly consumed the vitals of true Christianity, and left us little more than a spiritless and unsightly skeleton. "Our leanness, our leanness, wo unto us! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously, yea the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously."†

Yet there is hope in the love of the Spirit. It is divine, and therefore infinite, sovereign, and free. He is God and not man; he will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities, and cast all our sins into

* Micah, vii. 1. † Isa. xxiv. 16.

the depths of the sea. Let us lament after the Lord, the Spirit, and implore his return. Come from the four winds, O breath of the Lord, and breathe upon the slain that they may live! Wilt thou not revive us again, that we may rejoice in thee? The love of the Spirit shed abroad in the heart would quicken, and restore, and soften, and sanctify. It would correct all the evils among us, private and public. It would remove all grounds of division, and, what is more difficult still, it would remove all that spirit of alienation, and enmity, and jealousy, which our controversies have engendered, even in the hearts of those who have been contending for truth and purity. It would be like oil poured upon the waters of strife, stilling the noise of their waves, and the tumult which they have excited. It would induce the contending parties to confess their faults one to another, or rather bring both to their knees before God, in joint confession, and inspire them with a holy emulation to strive who should be first in repairing the desolations of Zion, and in bringing back the King of the Church to his own house.

SERMON XI.

CHRISTIAN WATCHFULNESS.

MARK, xiii. 37.

AND WHAT I SAY UNTO YOU, I SAY UNTO ALL, WATCH.

IN the word of God every duty is enjoined and enforced by suitable motives; but you must have observed that certain duties are more frequently introduced, and dwelt upon with greater particularity and earnestness, than others. They are stated and re-stated, enjoined and re-enjoined, enforced and illustrated, in such a manner as to impress them on our memories and imaginations, as well as on our hearts and consciences. From this we have reason to conclude, either that they are of superior importance, intrinsically or relatively, or else that we are in peculiar danger of overlooking and forgetting them. Of this description is the duty inculcated in the text. It is often brought forward in the discourses of our Lord, who has enforced it by examples, and illustrated it by parables. He enforced it by the history of the inhabitants of the old world, and of Sodom and Gomorrah; and he illustrated it by the parable of the ten virgins, and, in the passage before us, by the parable of the lord of a household, who, on undertaking a far journey, assigned to all his servants their several employments, and commanded the porter to watch.

He "commanded the porter to watch." This does not merely mean that, in allotting to each in the family his specific task, he ordered them to keep the door and preserve the house from the invasion of thieves and robbers, but it intimates, that he kept the time of his return a secret, enjoining the porter to be ready to open to him, on whatever night, and at whatever hour of the night, he might arrive; so that the charge to the por-

ter was a warning to the whole household—to those who were in authority, and to those who were under authority; to the former that they should not become unfaithful, extravagant, or tyrannical; to the latter that they should not prove careless, idle, or unruly, lest their master should come upon them unawares, and find them in fault. Thus, what he said to one of them—the porter—he said to all. It was as much as if he had gone round the whole, and said to each, Watch, watch, watch. This, at least, is the application which our Lord makes of the parable. "Watch ye, therefore; for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping." The words of the text may be viewed as an answer to the question which Peter asked—"Lord, speakest thou this parable to us, or even to all?" It is particularly addressed to those who are watchmen by office in the church; but not to them exclusively. What is primarily addressed to the angels of the churches, is spoken to all in the churches. He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear; for to him it is said, Watch.

I propose, first, to explain, and then to enforce, the duty of Christian watchfulness.

I. To watch is, literally, to keep from sleep; and it has come to signify, metaphorically, to apply the mind to any thing with great care, diligence, and intensity.

1. Christian watchfulness, or vigilance, is that state of mind by which we are prepared to seize every opportunity of doing our duty, and to discover and avoid every impediment in the way of this. It does not lie in any particular exercise of the mind, like believing, loving, hoping; but it is a settled frame or posture of the soul, capacitating it for putting forth these and other exercises in the best manner, according to circumstances. It is not confined to looking out for the coming of Christ to us at death and judgment. We are to "watch in all things,"* "watch unto prayer," and other duties, and watch against temptation.

* 2 Tim. iv. 5.

To be a Christian is one thing; to be a vigilant Christian is another. A man, though alive, may be asleep, and his property may become the prey of the thief when he is in this state, as easily as if he were dead; and as one may be alive without being lively, so one may be awake without being wakeful. Christian vigilance is combined with wisdom, producing a perspicacity or quick understanding in matters of judgment, and a circumspection in matters of practice. "See that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise; wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is." * Diligence and vigilance are closely connected in the Christian life, but they are not the same. Diligence is mere activity. A man may be busily employed, and yet to very little purpose, or in a way different from that in which he ought to be employed. Vigilance has a special respect to the occasions and opportunities of action, which it enables to discover and improve.

The husbandman is vigilant, when he observes and improves the proper seasons of ploughing, sowing, reaping, and other agricultural employments. The merchant is vigilant, when he seizes on the proper times for buying and selling, for laying in and disposing of his stock. The man of business, whatever his employment may be, is vigilant when he looks well into his affairs, examines his books, strikes his balance, and ascertains exactly whether, and to what extent, he is gaining or losing. The soldier is vigilant when he observes the motions of the enemy, guards against surprise, and embraces the most favourable opportunity for an attack. The mariner is vigilant when he is prepared to take advantage of wind and tide, and cautiously avoids the rocks and shoals to which his vessel is exposed. The Christian is vigilant when he exercises every grace, performs every duty, and waits on every ordinance in its proper season; when he is aware of the sin that easily besets him, and keeps his eye on the temptations to which he is peculiarly exposed; when he walks wisely, warily, circumspectly; when, guarding against extremes,

* Eph. v. 15–17.

he joins trembling with his mirth in prosperity, and mingles joy with his sorrow in the day of affliction; when, sensible of the value of time, he redeems it by improving the precious moments to the best purposes; when he is ready to turn every event which befalls himself or others to his spiritual improvement; and, in fine, when knowing the uncertainty of life and its enjoyments, he stands prepared, or endeavours to prepare himself, for eternity.—This is Christian watchfulness.

2. Christian watchfulness is a duty of great importance. You may have some idea of its extent from the general description which we have just given. It reaches to all our internal exercises and all our external actions. It keeps the gracious dispositions in action, and the corrupt dispositions in check. It maintains an animating superintendency over both the natural and the spiritual senses. It makes the Christian "ready to every good work;" and is a chief means to "preserve him from every evil work." Would you recover from the spiritual decline into which you have fallen? "Be watchful; and strengthen the things which remain and are ready to die."* Would you preserve your spiritual attainments? "Look to yourselves, that ye lose not the things which ye have wrought, but that ye receive a full reward." †

The occupation of a porter or door-keeper, is inferior in respectability to other offices in a great establishment; but the duty intrusted to him is nevertheless of great importance. His negligence lays the house open to every intruder. If the sentinel falls asleep at his post, the whole army may be surprised and cut off. If the man stationed at the gate is unfaithful, the fortress may be taken without assault, and the whole garrison put to the sword. A man ignorant of the management of a ship, when he sees all hands busily at work—some climbing the mast, others hoisting the sails, and others plying at the pump, will be apt to look on the pilot as a lazy supernumerary who spends his time in gazing idly at the stars, and amusing himself with turning a piece of timber from side to side; not aware that this man's services are of all others the most essen-

* Rev. iii. 2. † 2 John, 8.

tial to the progress of the vessel on her way, and to the safety of all who are on board. In like manner, though there are Christian graces and duties which are of greater dignity, vigilance is of the greatest utility. Your faith, Christians, will fail, your hope languish, your love wax cold, if your vigilance be relaxed. Your knowledge will puff you up, your confidence will become presumptuous, your humility distrustful, if you slacken your vigilance. You will flag in prayer, and be weary in well-doing—the slightest temptation will be an overmatch for you,—and though strong as Samson, you will become weak as any other man, if in an evil hour your vigilance be laid asleep. Vigilance is the sentinel of the soul, which guards all the graces and excites them to activity. It is like the watchman going his rounds announcing the hours as they pass, telling "what of the night," proclaiming that all is well, or sounding an alarm at the appearance of danger.

3. If you would comply with the exhortation in the text, you must avoid every thing which induces unwatchfulness. Indulgence in any sin has this effect. It acts as an opiate on conscience, grieves the Spirit, and produces carnal security. Intemperance in sensual pleasures is in a special manner to be avoided, as it has an equal tendency to inflict a bodily and a spiritual stupor. Of the sober Christian it may be said, "He sleeps, but his heart wakes;" the reverse is true of the intemperate man. Hence the admonition of our Saviour: "Take heed to yourselves lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and that day come upon you unawares." "Let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober." Unless you "be sober," you cannot "be watchful." Those of other occupations can make a shift to perform their tasks, though they are not patterns of sobriety; but a watchman *must* be sober. A single instance of intoxication will cost him his post; in time of war it will cost a sentinel his life. Remember too, that a slight degree of intemperance will be sufficient to banish spiritual vigilance. It is not necessary to this that you become a drunkard, or even that you be drunken. You may retain the use of your natural senses, and yet lose the use of your spi-

ritual senses; you may be capable of performing your civil duties, and yet be incapable of performing religious duties; you may be able to converse with your fellow-creatures, and yet be very unfit for conversing with your God; you may see and avoid the stone which lies before your feet, and yet fall headlong over the stumblingblock of iniquity; you may be able to ward off the blow aimed at your body, while your better part is left unshielded and exposed to the fiery darts of the wicked.

If you would be vigilant you must also guard against anxious and distracting solicitude about the world, which carries away the mind from spiritual things, and leads it into temptation before we are aware. Though temperate in meat and drink, and every other corporeal enjoyment, yet your thoughts may be so engrossed with secular concerns—with your lawful employments, that you are quite absent in spirit at a throne of grace, and when sitting in the house of God as his people sit, your hearts may be going after their covetousness. Hence our Lord, in assigning the reasons why the day of the Son of Man comes upon some unawares, joins "the cares of this life" with intemperance. Self-confidence has also a great tendency to throw a Christian off his guard. This was the cause of Peter's unwatchfulness, and fall; and it seems to have exerted a dangerous influence, along with "the pride of life," on the minds of his two brethren, the sons of Zebedee. To the question of their master, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I drink of?" they replied boldly and inconsiderately, "We are able;" and yet they "could not watch with him one hour." "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." In fine, you should guard against immoderate grief. Whatever oppresses the body or exhausts the animal spirits, brings on drowsiness and sleep. When Jesus returned to the three disciples in the garden, he found them "sleeping for sorrow." A paroxysm of grief is sometimes succeeded by a fit of lethargy. Nor is this confined to sorrow for worldly losses and calamities. Even grief for sin may be carried to excess; and we ought to comfort ourselves and others by the doctrine of forgiveness and its uses, "lest being swallowed

up of overmuch sorrow, Satan should get an advantage of us, for we are not ignorant of his devices." *

4. Be diligent in those duties which have a tendency to keep you watchful. If a person sit down and fold his hands, he becomes drowsy. If the watchman were to seat himself in his sentry-box, he would be in danger of falling asleep, and therefore he keeps himself awake by walking about. It is the same in the spiritual as in the natural world. This is the reason why the duty in our text is so often connected with prayer. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not in temptation." "Watch ye and pray always." And in the words preceding the text, "Take ye heed, watch and pray." We are to watch that we may pray, and to pray that we may be kept watching. Had the disciples imitated the example of their Master, they would not have proved disobedient to his command,—"Watch ye here, while I go and pray yonder." Nor is prayer the only remedy against unwatchfulness. Give yourselves to reading, to meditation, to praise. Warning the Christians at Ephesus against being drunk with wine, the apostle adds, "but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." Carnal men, when heated with wine, keep themselves awake and make merry, by singing profane and lewd songs; Christians are to express their joy by singing praises unto God. Though you are to maintain a becoming consistency of behaviour, your exercise will not be monotonous and wearisome, but varied according to your circumstances and the calls of Providence. "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms." Christian converse is another means of preserving vigilance. When two persons watch together, they keep one another awake by conversation, and were Christians to speak to one another about spiritual things more frequently and more frankly than they do, they would be in less danger of unwatchfulness. "Consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

* 2 Cor. ii. 7–11.

Nor are we to exclude activity in secular duties from the means of preserving us in this frame of spirit. Slothfulness, in all its forms, is the enemy of Christian vigilance. If the devil find a man idle, he will set him to work, or else lay him asleep. It was when Joseph went into the house, in the discharge of his duty, that when his chastity was attacked, he withstood the temptation: David fell before the same temptation, when "he abode at Jerusalem, and walked on the roof of the king's house," unmindful that the ark was lodged in a tent, and that his servants were encamped in the open fields. Be "diligent in business," if you would be "fervent in spirit;" for it is only by obeying both injunctions, that you will be found faithfully "serving the Lord." Under the influence of superstitious and mistaken notions, some have kept frequent and protracted vigils, or spent the greater part of their time in meditation, prayer, and other religious duties, to the neglect of their secular duties in the family or the world, or to the injury of their bodily health and animal spirits. This error, in the way of excess, though less frequent among us, ought to be avoided as well as the opposite extreme. Besides necessary employments of a worldly kind, there are lawful and innocent recreations, the moderate indulgence of which, so far from injuring, tends to promote spiritual watchfulness. The watchman must have his due hours of rest; and in the present life the soul can no more continue in a healthful and vigorous state without relaxation, than the body can without sleep. I may add, that it is a mistake to suppose that Christian vigilance consists in keeping the mind constantly and intensely fixed on death and judgment. This would unfit you for living, and for consecrating your lives to the glory of God. You should think of them as a traveller thinks of home, in such a way as to induce him to push forward on his journey, and despatch his business in the several towns and villages on the road, with all due diligence and convenient expedition.

5. You must watch in dependence on divine keeping. While dutiful in keeping your hearts with all diligence, and in exciting them to vigilance, you need to commit yourselves "unto

him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless." To the heart may well be applied the words of the Psalmist: "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh in vain." The most vigilant person may be thrown off his guard, or overpowered with sleep, and so be taken by surprise. What a privilege is it, and what an encouragement ought it to be to unremitting diligence, that we have an ever-watchful and faithful friend to pray for us, that our faith fail not in the hour of trial, and to ward off danger from us when we are in those states of body or mind which incapacitate us for using the means of protection. "Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he will bring it to pass. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved; he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul."

II. Having explained the duty, I shall endeavour to enforce it by a few considerations.

1. You have vigilant adversaries. You live in an evil and ensnaring world, like the wilderness through which Israel was made to pass, "a land of deserts and of pits, wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions." * You live in the midst of enemies who wait for your halting, and are ever ready to take advantage of the least instance of precipitation or inadvertence in your conduct. It becomes you to take heed to your ways, and to set a watch before your mouth, because of observers, including not only the openly wicked, but also false brethren, unawares brought into your fellowship, who come in privily to spy out your liberty, and to whom you should be careful to afford no occasion of slander or reproach against your good profession. And at the head of all your adversaries is one who is experienced in wiles as he is inveterate in malice and cruelty. "Be sober, be vigilant; for your adversary the Devil goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."

2. You have weak and deceitful hearts, easily intimidated, and

* Jer. ii. 6; Deut. viii. 15.

easily seduced. Surely that fortress ought to be guarded with double care which is surrounded by a powerful enemy, and has inmates who are disposed to open the gates to the besiegers through cowardice or treachery. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool."

3. Consider what you have to lose. Not worldly wealth, or honour, or life; but your souls, an incorruptible inheritance, a crown of life that fadeth not away, eternal glory; the precious seed of the word sown in your hearts, the grace of God, your peace of mind, your reputation, attainments and experiences. In one unguarded moment you may throw away the fruit of the toils, and sufferings, and sacrifices of many years; and though you should find mercy to recover, and bring you to repentance, you will lay up matter for long regret and bitter sorrow. How many favourable seasons do we lose by unwatchfulness! opportunities of doing good to others, and of promoting our own spiritual advantage, which, when allowed to slip, never return! How quicksighted is the watchman, and how correct the report which he makes: "He cried, A lion: My lord, I stand continually upon the watch-tower in the daytime, and I am set in my ward whole nights; and behold, here cometh a chariot of men with a couple of horsemen, a chariot of asses, and a chariot of camels; and he hearkened diligently with much heed." * If the King of Israel was surprised, it was not the fault of his servant, who said, "I see a company; and the driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi; for he driveth furiously." †

4. Consider your profession, privileges, and prospects. You profess to be of God, to have renounced this world, and to have become the followers of Christ Jesus. You have enlisted under the banners of the Captain of Salvation, and sworn allegiance to him. You have set out fair, and run well. "Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed." The reward set before you is unspeakably glorious, and your

* Isa. xxi. 7, 8, 9. † 2 Kings, ix. 17, 20.

encouragements high. You have exceeding great and precious promises, and examples of the noblest and most animating kind. Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider Christ Jesus, and the great cloud of witnesses with which ye are compassed about. Watch ye; stand fast in the faith; quit you like men; be strong.

5. Consider that ye have an omniscient eye continually upon you. We may contrive to escape or conceal ourselves from the scrutiny and observation of friends and foes—of parents, ministers, fellow-Christians, and, what is still more difficult, of Satan; but there is one eye which we cannot elude, and which is fixed upon us every moment, by night and by day, in solitude and in society, in the church and in the world. O that we could live under the habitual belief and impression of this strange but undoubted truth! Then would there be little danger of our falling into slothfulness and carnal security. "These things, saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire; I know thy works: be watchful."

6. You know not how soon you may be called upon to give in your accounts, and to appear before the bar of your Judge. This solemn consideration is often brought forward as an enforcement to the exhortation in our text. It is repeatedly urged in the context, "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man. Take ye heed; watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is. Watch ye therefore; for ye know not when the Master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning, lest, coming suddenly, he find you sleeping." And in the book of Revelation, he saith, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments." That "we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, to give an account of the deeds done in the body," is a most undoubted truth, and a truth which ought to excite us to unwearied diligence, and unremitting watchfulness. Such was its effect on the minds of the apostles; and should it exert a weaker influence on ours? "It is appointed to men once to die, and after death the judgment." We know not what time shall elapse

between our death and the general judgment; but we know that no change can take place on our state for eternity between these two periods; so that, as to all practical purposes, we should view them as coincident. How solicitous, then, should we be to be ready for this event, though we were assured that our lives should extend to threescore and ten, or fourscore years!

But have we any security for this? Ah, no! So far from it, nothing is more uncertain. We know not the hour, the day, or the year. This is carefully concealed from us; and why? For this, among other reasons, that we may watch, and be always ready. How many striking and loud warnings of the uncertainty of time do we receive in the course of providence, by the sudden removal, not only of the aged, the infirm, and sickly, but of the young, the healthy, and the strong—our equals or juniors—our intimate acquaintance—those who had spoken to us the word of the Lord, or to whom we had spoken it, who had less appearance of being dying men than many of us have, and perhaps had as little thought of dying as the most careless person present has at this moment. In such events the Lord's voice crieth, and the men of wisdom understand it. But, alas! where are they? How few hear the rod, and him that hath appointed it! Such warnings, when they occur, form the subject of talk—often vain, idle, and unprofitable talk—for a little; but within a few days, a few short days, they are forgotten, and the thoughts of preparation for death are lost in the bustle of worldly business, perhaps drowned in the intoxicating cup of pleasure. We are like persons in a deep sleep, who have been roused by a sudden noise: they start up, gaze round, and eagerly listen. But the noise has ceased: they lay themselves down again, and sink into a profounder sleep than that from which they had been awakened.

In this manner some sleep on until they "open their eyes in hell, being in torments"—open their eyes to shut them no more for ever, in a state in which they shall invoke sleep, but it shall fly from them. Others may be aroused by the harbingers of the king of terrors, but, like the foolish virgins in

the parable, too late for the preparations which they require, and so distracted with terrors, that they "cannot find their hands." Even genuine Christians, in consequence of their being sinfully off their guard, may be taken by surprise, thrown into alarm, and hurried in great confusion into the presence of their Lord, like persons overtaken by a storm, and caught up by the whirlwind, who are amazed to find themselves, they know not how, in a place of refuge and safety.

What is the improvement which we should make of such warnings? Surely, to be ready for the call whenever it may be addressed to us. And this preparation is two-fold—habitual and actual—as to state and as to exercise. That person is *habitually* prepared for death who has acquainted himself with God and is at peace with him, whose sin is pardoned, whose nature is renewed, and who has a relish for the enjoyments of heaven. That person is *actually* prepared who knows whom he has believed, who is living near unto God, maintaining intercourse with heaven by faith and prayer, who is occupying the talents which God hath given him to his glory, and doing the work which God hath assigned him.

Christ says, "*Watch* therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."* And again, to the same persons he says, "Be ye also *ready:* for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."† This intimates that more is necessary than watchfulness. We wake in vain unless we make ready. We have our Lord to attend, and must be attired—we have a cause to be tried, and must have it ordered—we have a reckoning to make, and must have our accounts prepared—we have an inheritance to receive, and must be meet for it.

"Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." He is the resurrection and the life; and the hour now is, when under the gospel "the dead shall hear his voice and live." Turn not a deaf ear to his entreating voice, lest he give you up, and say to you, "Sleep on now and take your rest." Resist not, quench not the

* Mat. xxiv. 32. † Mat. xxiv. 44.

motions of the good Spirit of God, lest, grieved and wearied out, he withdraw from you.

Let not the saints sleep as do others. Awake to righteousness. Cast off that sluggishness which may have fallen on your spirits. Carelessness, lukewarmness, and security, are highly unbecoming those who are the people of God and heirs of glory. "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light." I do not call on you to entertain or give way to a slavish fear of death; from this Christ died to deliver you. But keep your death in your eye; look it in the face; meditate on it: —and remember that while it is of all things the most certain, yet as to the time of it, nothing is more awfully uncertain. Let your loins be girt, and your lamps burning. "For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ." *

* 1 Thes. v. 7, 9.

SERMON XII.

THE FEAR OF DEATH.*

HEB. ii. 15.

AND DELIVER THEM WHO THROUGH FEAR OF DEATH WERE ALL THEIR LIFETIME SUBJECT TO BONDAGE."

THERE may be a tacit allusion in the preceding verse, to the deliverance of the Israelites from the danger to which they were exposed on the night before they left Egypt. "Through faith," says the apostle in another place, "Moses kept the passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the first-born should touch them."† The Jews call the angel who went through the land on that fearful occasion, *Samael*, or the Destroyer. That angel had the power of death for a night, and he was prevented, by the appointed means, from touching the first-born of Israel. But the devil has been a murderer from the beginning; and Christ, our passover, not only foiled him by plucking the prey from his teeth, but he destroyed the destroyer—stripped him of his deadly weapons—and caused his power to cease by removing the foundation of it in the expiation of sin: It may be in reference to this event, therefore, that our apostle says, "That through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

The same allusion may be kept up in the words of the text. The children of Israel had been held in a state of grievous oppression by the Egyptians; but previous to their deliverance they were brought into a new species of bondage, through fear of death. In this state of mind must they have continued, more

* Delivered before the Communion, May, 1826. † Heb. xi. 28.

or less, from the time that they heard of the messenger of destruction who was to march through the land. And though God had assured them that he would make a difference between them and the Egyptians, and appointed an ordinance in the observance of which they were to find safety, yet this could not set their minds at rest, especially when the solemn night approached. It was natural for them to fear lest, in consequence of having omitted some of the prescribed rites, or otherwise thrown themselves out of the divine protection, the destroying angel might break in upon them. This apprehension would be increased by the prohibition, "None of you shall go out at the door of his house until the morning,"* which would sound in their ears like the command which was afterwards so frightful to them, "And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart." But from this fear they were set free. The Lord passed over; the angel of death entered into none of their houses; and the same night put an end both to their mental and their corporeal bondage. This was a great deliverance—it was like life from the dead. The night in which it was wrought was "a night much to be remembered," and was commemorated by the children of Israel throughout their generations. But vastly greater is the deliverance accomplished by the death of Christ. It was in itself but a temporal death which the Israelites dreaded; as sinners we are obnoxious to death eternal. They, through the fear of death, were kept in bondage for a night, or at most a few days; sinners, through the fear of death, are detained all their lifetime subject to bondage.

View the matter in another light. By the passover, the children of Israel were delivered from death only in one form and on one occasion; they were still exposed to its ravages and its alarms. The angel of death hovered around their camp, and fed on the carcasses which fell in the wilderness. His terror overtook them before they had gone far on their journey. "Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness!"† was their fearful exclama-

* Exod. xii. 22. † Exod. xiv. 11.

tion on finding themselves between the pursuing Egyptians and the Red Sea. And they were haunted by the fears of death during the whole period of their wanderings in the wilderness. "Behold we die," cried they on one occasion, "we perish, we all perish."* And at mount Sinai, "Let not God speak to us, lest we die."† Such was the nature of that dispensation, so far as it exhibited the covenant of works. Hence we read of "the covenant from the mount Sinai which gendereth to bondage," in opposition to "Jerusalem which is above and is free."‡ Not that we are to suppose, with some, that the church was then under a covenant of works, or that believers were then under the spirit of bondage; but such was the character of the law as threatening death, such the spirit of those who sought life by it; and in its external revelation, in its ordinances of worship, and in the distance at which worshippers were kept, there were so many memorials that atonement was not yet actually made. In this respect it was "the ministration of death and condemnation;"§ and it may be in allusion to the effects which it produced on the blinded children of Israel, who "could not look steadfastly to the end of that which is abolished," that the apostle says in the words before us, that Christ hath "delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

But the description in our text is not confined to the ancient Israelites. It portrays the miserable state of those whom Christ came to redeem, and is applicable to all men in their natural condition. As true believers, though they lived under the law, were pardoned, brought nigh to God and made spiritually free; so unbelievers, though they live under the gospel, are at a distance from God, and "are, through fear of death, all their lifetime subject to bondage." But from this state the Christian is delivered. To raise your views of the deliverance wrought for us by Christ, and prepare you for commemorating that death by which it was effected, let us consider, in the first place, the description here given of the wretched condition of

* Num. xvii 12, 13. † Exod. xx. 19; comp. ch. xix. 12. ‡ Gal. iv. 24.
§ 2 Cor. iii. 7, 9, 13.

those whom Christ came to redeem; and secondly, their deliverance from it.

I. Consider the wretched condition here described: They "were through fear of death all their lifetime subject to bondage." Fear is that painful perturbation of mind which is felt at the apprehension of any approaching evil. All the passions, and even the desires, are apt to produce uneasy feelings in the breast. But as the object of desire is something agreeable, its image yields an alleviation to the uneasiness felt, and produces a kind of pleasing tumult; whereas the object of fear being evil, nothing is presented to the mind under its power but a succession of gloomy and hideous imaginations. Fear is a feeling which is purely painful. And of all the evils of this life, death is the most fearful, and the apprehension of it subjects the soul to a state of the most distressing bondage. Other evils threaten us with the loss of some of our present comforts; death threatens us with the loss of them all. Other evils may hurt our life; death destroys it.

There is a fear of death which is natural and unavoidable, springing from the principle of self-preservation which is implanted in all creatures endued with the vital spark. It is nothing more than the love of life manifesting itself in retreating from that which endangers it, and seeking to ward off the blow which aims at its destruction. This feeling is common to all living creatures, rational and irrational; and among the latter it is felt by the strongest and boldest, as well as the feeble and timid. The lower animals feel it less strongly, in consequence of their views being confined to present things, and their being, in a great measure, free from apprehensions as to the future. Man being endowed with reason, imagination, and foresight, is susceptible of this fear in a stronger degree; and would accordingly be more miserable than the beasts, provided he had no means of escaping or counterbalancing the evil. The more that any person is sensible of the blessings of life, the more painful must be his apprehensions of death, if he have not the hope that it will usher him into a better state of existence.

But this is by no means the principal light in which the subject is to be viewed, nor that in which it is presented to us in the text. I proceed therefore to observe, that there is a guilty fear of death. By this we do not mean that which is sinful, but that which proceeds from a consciousness of sin. This fear is both an evidence of guilt, and a part of its punishment. Death is not only an evil, it is also a penalty. "The wages of sin is death." We call death a natural evil, as distinguished from sin, which is a moral evil; and we speak of a natural death in distinction from a violent one. But, properly speaking, death is not a natural thing; it is unnatural; a violence done to nature. It is one of the errors of the pestilent system broached by Socinus, that man was created mortal; and, if I am not mistaken, it was the fountain-error of the system, the venomous egg from which all the rest were hatched. For if man would have died though he had not sinned, then a perfectly just man may die—then there is no need to have recourse to substitution to account for the sufferings of Christ—and if no atonement, then no need to have recourse to the supposition of his divinity. This, at any rate, is a most dangerous error. It is one of "the depths of Satan"—an after-fetch of the arch-deceiver, since he has been deprived of the power of death. First he said, "Ye shall not surely die, though ye eat." Then, after the sentence took effect,—'Ah! God knew that ye would surely have died at any rate.' Oh it fears me, my brethren, that this error prevails extensively in these days of little faith; not theoretically, but spreading, and creeping, and lurking, like a deceitful cancer, under a fair and florid profession, and eating out the very vitals of Christianity! It is little less than blasphemy to allege that the work of God, as it came from his hand, tended to corruption—that he made man to be born and die. No: he planted him wholly a right seed;—if diseases and death sprung up in him, we may be sure that "an enemy hath done this." If Adam had maintained his innocency, he would not have died, and he would not have felt the pangs of the fear of death. This was implied in the threatening. It was only in the way of his eating of

the forbidden fruit that he became obnoxious to die. Death was the penalty threatened; and in consequence of the violation of the precept, it became the punishment inflicted. And no sooner had he sinned, than he fell under the fear of death, and, like a felon, conscious of his guilt, he fled from the face of him into whose hand he had forfeited his life. In the same light is death to be viewed as coming on all the posterity of Adam. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

In harmony with Scripture, conscience bears witness to this truth. It confirms the judgment of God in his Word, and tells men that those who commit such things as are contrary to the law made known to them, "are worthy of death." The mere bodily pain connected with it is not that which makes death so terrible; for it may sometimes be a deliverance from bodily pain: nor is it the thought of its being an extinction of being; for, in some cases, that would be a relief to the mind. The real root of this dread is a consciousness of guilt, which produces an apprehension of punishment. This the apostle teaches elsewhere when he says, "The sting of death is sin." What is it that makes a serpent dreadful? Not its size, or its strength, or its hideous appearance; but its sting. Take away this, and "the noxious snake" would cease to be an object of horror—we could handle it and look on it with indifference, if not with pleasure. To say to the conscience of a convinced sinner, as was said to David, "The Lord hath put away thy sin," is the same as saying to him, "Thou shalt not die." * It extinguishes the fear of death.

This fear is a well-merited punishment—an evil which we have justly incurred, and brought upon ourselves by transgression. The death of a criminal and that of an innocent or good man, may be the very same in their external circumstances; but how different are they in their moral nature, and in the feelings which they produce on the minds of the respective sufferers—the execution, for example, of a traitor

* 2 Sam. xii. 13.

and a patriot, of a murderer and a martyr! Both may be tried by the same forms, bound with the same chain, locked up in the same cell, tortured by the same instruments, led to the same scaffold; both may be doomed to the same kind of death, to be hung up, beheaded, drawn and quartered, impaled, or burnt alive. This has been the lot of the best of men, as well as the worst of malefactors. But the former met death without fear, often with exultation, and have been heard singing praises in their prisons and on their scaffolds; while the latter were overwhelmed with shame, confusion, and horror. Why this difference? The former were conscious that they had done nothing worthy of death; the consciences of the latter told them that "they received the due reward of their deeds." And thus it is with sinners who are guilty before God, and have incurred the sentence of death.

We have been speaking of criminals, who fall into the hands of men who shall die themselves, and who can only kill the body; but sin is a capital crime against the living God, who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell. Death, as threatened in the code of Heaven's criminal jurisprudence, means something very different from its legal acceptation among men. In the last sense it is no death compared with the former, and no object of fear. "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." * If the curse of the law of God were exhausted by natural dissolution, and sin exposed to nothing more than the extinction of animal life and the separation of the soul from the body, there would be no such great reason for apprehension. But conscience, when it is not stupified or its voice smothered, conspires with Scripture in testifying aloud that this is not the case—that there is a hereafter—that the soul does not cease to live when the body ceases to breathe—that the spirit appears before the bar of a just and holy God, and has sentence passed upon it according to the deeds done in the flesh. The Heathen had a deep conviction of this. They had their Tartarus, or hell, and their Rhadamanthus, or judge before whom departed spirits appeared;

* Mat. x. 28.

and although superstition mixed up its dreams, yet conscience was to be heard speaking through these dreams; and the workings and the expression of their terrors were like the startings and the monologue of a murderer in his sleep—proclaiming the apprehensions, which haunted him during his waking hours, of falling into the hands of justice, and demonstrating his guilt, though more incoherently, yet no less convincingly, than the judicial evidence that may be afterwards led against him on his trial. Revelation, while it more clearly reveals our duty, has also lifted up the veil which covers the invisible world, and disclosed to sinners the punishment which awaits them there. It declares that "the soul that sinneth"—the *soul* is the sinner—"it shall die." It denounces "indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil." And the prospect it presents to all that know not God and obey not the gospel is "a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries"—that the dead, small and great, shall be raised and appear before the judgment seat—that the wicked shall go away into everlasting punishment, and shall have their portion with the devil and his angels, in that place where "their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched."

Let these things, which are the true and faithful sayings of God, be believed, and "the sinners in Zion will be afraid, and fearfulness will surprise the hypocrite, like a woman in travail." Let them realize these things, and they will feel what it is to be "in bondage" through the fear of death. When a man is in a passion, we say he is not master of himself—he is a slave for the time to his anger. All the passions have the effect of enslaving those who yield to them; but none of them have such a power over the mind as fear when it rises to a height. Hence the common expression applied, justly and almost exclusively, to this emotion, *slavish fear*—a fear which makes slaves of us. We do not speak of *slavish love*, or *anger;* to these passions we pay a voluntary homage, by wilfully indulging them. But "of whom a man *is overcome*, of the same is he brought into bondage." Fear unmans the person. It locks up all the senses—it paralyses both body

and soul; so that the person cannot flee from danger, cannot move an arm in his own defence; can neither speak, nor hear, nor see. No prison, no guards, no bars, no bolts, no chains which a tyrant can invent or employ, are so efficient as fear. This is the adamantine chain with which God has bound the devils, and in which he reserves them unto the judgment of the great day. O how easy for Him to put this hook into the nose, and this bridle into the jaws, of his proudest and fiercest enemies! He has only to lift himself up—to show himself—to look through the cloud of darkness which is on their minds; * he need not speak to them with the voice of thunder, he has only to whisper into the ear of conscience, "I am the Lord; it is I!" and instantly their hearts quail, their countenances are changed, their thoughts trouble them, the joints of their loins are loosed, and their knees smite one against another. † A Felix, a Herod, a Belshazzar, a Pharaoh, a Cain, are examples of this. Nay, whole hosts have in this manner been discomfited; "the stout-hearted have been spoiled, and none of the men of might have found their hands;" so that "one has chased a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight;" ‡ yea, "the sound of a shaken leaf has chased them, and they have fled, as fleeing from a sword, and fallen when none pursued." §

But (it may be said) are such fears generally felt by sinners? Do not we see multitudes living at their ease, putting the evil day afar off, enjoying themselves as if they were never to die, or as if there were nought to dread after death? Are there not many persons, giving no evidence of religion, who are fearless of death, and expose themselves to jeopardy every hour? Is it not said of the wicked that "they have no bands in their death," and do they not often depart without any apparent horror or apprehension on their spirits?

There is truth in all this, and I am not unaware of the difficulty which it involves. It must be allowed to be a fact, to a confounding degree, that multitudes speak peace to themselves, though they walk after the imagination of their own

* Exod. xiv. 24. † Dan. v. 6. ‡ Deut. xxxii. 30. § Lev. xxvi. 36.

hearts. And if the understanding be darkened and perverted, if conscience be "seared as with a hot iron," what can be expected to succeed but a fearless apathy? It may be remarked, however, in the first place, that the hardihood which some display, may be traced to fear. They wish to brave out the matter, and affect to despise both death and hell, when in reality they are all their lifetime in bondage through fear of them. It is not always true courage that prompts persons to expose their lives in scenes of peril; in many instances it can be traced to necessity, avarice, a false sense of honour, or, in other words, the dread of the world's laugh, which is in truth the strongest symptom of cowardice. It is the same with the fool-hardy sinner. And with respect to the apparent fortitude which some wicked men exhibit on a death-bed, it may be remarked, that fear may sometimes rise so high as to overcome itself, and to produce a species of fearlessness. The timid hind will turn upon her pursuers, and make an obstinate resistance, when she perceives that she can no longer escape. How many instances are there of condemned criminals anticipating the day of their execution! The jailer of Philippi, under the apprehension of the punishment which awaited him for allowing the prisoners to escape, was on the eve of killing himself. Despair, like a parricide, will sometimes destroy the fear which produced it.

In the second place, many plunge into dissipation and profaneness, that they may drown the fears of death, and banish all thoughts of a hereafter. Those who are most courageous over their cups, are often the most dastardly when sober. We have heard of generals who have distributed intoxicating liquors to their troops on the eve of a battle; and certain it is that some of Satan's most determined men are in a state of almost continual intoxication. The loud laugh, the noisy revel, the horrid imprecation, the profane and coarse jest at heaven and hell—what are they but the Devil's martial music, by which he contrives to put spirit into his faint-hearted troops, and without the aid of which the stoutest of his champions would sometimes lose courage, and drop their weapons in their war against the Almighty? We may trace the secret influence of

the same principle in the eager pursuit of the world, exemplified in the conduct of those who haste to be rich, or who greedily surfeit themselves with sensual delights. Like cattle who have broken into a forbidden pasture, from which they know they will be speedily driven, aware that their time is short, afraid that death will overtake them, and having hope only in this life—"behold! joy and gladness, slaying oxen and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine: Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die." *

Finally, the apathy and composure of those sinners who do not run to this excess of riot, is still irrational; it is a species of sober madness. Whether it spring from pure thoughtlessness and inconsideration, or assume the air of superior wisdom, the possessors of this supposed fortitude are really chargeable with brutish folly. They become fearless, only in proportion as they approach to the rank of the brutes, who fear not death because they are incapable of foreseeing it, and have nothing to look to beyond it. They are driven to death with stupid unconcern, "as an ox goeth to the slaughter," or plunge into it with blindfold impetuosity, "as the horse rusheth into the battle." And as for those would-be wise, who boast that they have risen above the prejudices and fears of the vulgar, what is the amount of their great discovery? Why, one which we should think sufficiently humiliating, and which shows that the wisdom of this world soars only to sink the lower—that all men, and they among the rest, "perish like beasts, and are laid in the grave like sheep;" or, as the wise king expressed it for them long ago: "As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me: and why was I then more wise? How dieth the wise man? As a fool. For that which befalleth the sons of men, befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath: so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast." † There lies the pride of modern philosophy! "How art thou fallen, O Lucifer, son of the

* Isa. xxii. 13. † Eccles. ii. 15, 16; iii. 19.

morning!" "Ah, his glory!" To divest himself of the fear of God and of an hereafter, man, proud man, will be contented to die like an ox, and to be "buried with the burial of an ass!" *

But is it always so? Are ungodly men, small or great, always able to meet the King of Terrors with an undismayed heart? Far from it. There are well authenticated and undeniable proofs to the contrary. There are instances innumerable in which all the dreams of superstition, the flatteries of friends, and the various appliances to which men have resorted to ward off the thoughts of death, have failed in the trying hour to pacify conscience, and the death-bed of the sinner has presented a scene of the most harrowing description. And if the curtains of the sick-bed were drawn, if the friendly guards were removed, and we were permitted to receive the dying confessions of those who have lived without God in the world, we could produce more numerous examples. Certain it is that the most careless and undaunted of the votaries of sin have their moments of alarm, indicating too surely the state of bondage in which they are held. That man cannot be said to be, for a single hour of his lifetime, free from the fear of death, who is liable every moment to be seized with terror at its approach, to startle at its shadow whenever it crosses his path, and to be filled with consternation when it overtakes him. In him the curse has truly taken effect, "Thy life shall hang in doubt before thee; and thou shalt fear day and night, and shalt have none assurance of thy life." †

II. Of the deliverance from this misery. "Through death," *i. e.* his own dying, "he delivered," or ransomed, "them, who through fear of death were all their life time subject to bondage." On this part of the subject, we shall not, at present, dwell particularly.

The deliverance is twofold—from death itself, and from the fear of death, through which sinners are kept in bondage. It

* Jer. xxii. 18, 19. † Deut. xxviii. 66.

was the promise of Christ, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction."* But this could not be effected by mere power or force. Sinners were legally and justly doomed to death, and a ransom behoved to be paid to justice. This ransom was the life of the Redeemer. By becoming their surety, assuming their nature, and taking their place, he became obnoxious to death. "The Lord laid on him the iniquities of them all"—inflicted on him the punishment due to them. The death which they had incurred, he endured in all its extent—not merely the separation of soul and body, but the second death. It was not necessary that his punishment, like theirs, should be eternal, because his sufferings and death had an infinite value in them, arising from the divinity of his person. But the cup put into his hand, and which he drank, had all the essential ingredients of that which was prepared for them. Accordingly, he suffered in his soul, not only from the malice of men and devils, but by the hand of his Father, as a righteous Judge, pressing sore on him. He fell under the fear of death, and was bound with its cords, though it could not make a slave of him, nor reduce him to despair. "In the days of his flesh, he offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared."† In the prospect of his death, "he began to be sore amazed and to be very heavy," and cried out, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." He not only suffered from the terrors of death, but endured its stroke. And by dying he satisfied divine justice, expiated sin, and obtained eternal redemption for his people. Meritoriously he perfected their deliverance on the cross; and this was judicially declared by his resurrection from the dead, when God loosed the pains of death, and justified him in the Spirit.

By his death, the apostle tells us, in the preceding verse,

* Hos. xiii. 14. † Heb. v. 7.

our Lord " destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." All the power which Satan possessed was owing to sin—this was the sceptre of his dominion. By the expiation of sin, Christ undermined the throne of Satan. These words, " It is finished," uttered on the cross, and accompanied by the act which verified them, " bowing his head and giving up the ghost," were like the handwriting on the wall to Belshazzar, *Mene, Tekel.* They carried the sentence of death into the conscience of Satan; he felt his strength taken from him, his kingdom departed. After this, he had no power by death to injure one of those for whom Christ died. Though allowed to inflict on them the stroke of natural death, still he could not harm them; for sin being taken away, death becomes powerless, as a venomous creature which has lost its sting. The seed of the woman hath bruised the head of the serpent. Strange victory! Wonderful deliverance! Who could have supposed that any person would have destroyed the power of death by becoming its prey? There have been many instances of combatants wresting from an enemy his weapon, and by means of it inflicting on him a deadly blow; but when was it heard that a person killed his enemy by receiving the death-blow himself? Christ was vulnerable only in the heel of his humanity. Satan saw this, and aiming the stroke successfully, brought him to the dust of death; but that fall proved fatal to himself!

Now, this redemption is applied to sinners in the day of believing, when they are justified or legally acquitted. Then they are actually set free from the sentence of condemnation, and adjudged to life. " He that believeth on the Son of God shall have everlasting life, and shall never come into condemnation, but hath passed from death unto life." And while, through the death of Christ, they are delivered from the penal consequences of death,—through faith in his death they are set free from the fear of death, and from the bondage which it engenders. God, who sent his Son to redeem them from the curse of the law, sends the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, enabling them to approach him as a reconciled God, with the fearless confidence of children. They " have not

received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father." Thus are they brought into the glorious liberty of the children of God, and, amidst all their tribulations, are made to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. They have still to endure the external stroke of temporal death, but its "bitterness is past," or rather it is extracted by their Redeemer. Its moral nature is altered. It comes to them in the channel, not of the old, but of the new covenant—not as a curse, but as a blessing. They are exalted above the slavish dread of the last enemy, and are enabled to raise the song of triumph, even before the victory is achieved, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be unto God, which giveth us the victory, through Jesus Christ, our Lord!"

Perhaps it may appear strange that I should have insisted so long on the first part of my subject, and so as to abridge the time due to the second part, which is of greater importance in itself, and much more agreeable. But I have my reasons for this, both general and particular. Suffice it to say at present, that to those who have never felt aright the misery which we have been describing, the gospel will not be glad tidings. Though all unrenewed men are subject to the fear of death, and are kept in bondage through it all their life-time, yet such is the fallacious and hardening nature of sin, that it prevents them from realizing the full extent of their misery and danger, and lulls them into a temporary security, disturbed only by vague and undefined alarms. There is, therefore, a salutary fear of death, which it is one design of revelation to awaken in the breasts of sinners, and without which they would never be induced to flee for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before them in the gospel. For this purpose does the law of God unfold to us our real condition as sinners, and discover to us the miserable bondage in which we are held, by revealing to us "the terrors of the Lord."—If the sorrows of death have not compassed you, if the pains of hell never got hold of you, so as to make you sensible of

this bondage, you can feel no interest in the salvation which the gospel reveals. This is one great reason why we ministers labour in vain, and our report is believed by so few. We preach Christ to you,—we tell you of his incarnation, of his gracious errand, his sorrowful life, his accursed death. You hear all this, you allow it to be true: you feel obliged to so benevolent a friend, and desirous to testify some gratitude to him. We tell you farther, that this person was the Son of God, the Maker of heaven and earth, and yet he humbled himself, and paid for our redemption a price of infinite value—the blood of God. This throws an air of mysterious solemnity over the theme, and converts your gratitude into astonishment. But is this the faith of the gospel? Is this gladly to receive the word? Is there any thing here corresponding to the avidity with which the thirsty soul comes to the cooling spring? with which the captive hears the proclamation of liberty? with which the man-slayer, pursued by the avenger, fled to the city of refuge?

If, however, we can once succeed in convincing men of their sin and danger, in fixing the sentence of death within their consciences, and in making them cry out, under a sense of their guilt, and apprehension of future wrath, "What must we do to be saved?" our work is half done. When the arrows of the Almighty have entered their soul, and the poison thereof has drank up their spirits, O how ardently does the parched conscience pant for the refreshing tidings of pardon! How eager to receive the proffered cup of salvation, yea, to snatch it, ere it be half filled, from the hands of the administrator!

SERMON XIII.

THE DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

NUMB. XXIII. 10.

"LET ME DIE THE DEATH OF THE RIGHTEOUS, AND LET MY LAST END BE LIKE HIS."

THERE are two things which, provided we could establish them on good evidence, would go far, with all considerate minds, to settle the question as to the value of practical godliness. The one is the pleasure which it yields during life, and the other the advantages which accrue from it at death. Now I know not more competent and unexceptionable witnesses to the former than the persons who have led a godly life; and if you were to take their solemn depositions on their death-bed, though some of them might be disposed to express themselves with great diffidence as to their future prospects, yet you would find all of them ready to bear witness that the happiest hours which they spent on earth were those which they devoted to religion; and that their only regret was that the things of God and eternity had not occupied more of their time and attention. Thus far "wisdom is justified of her children." And with respect to the second point—the advantages of religion in death—can you, my brethren, direct me to a witness more worthy of credit than an ungodly man, in the possession of health and the pursuit of riches? Well, then, you have the testimony of such a man in the text, bearing directly on the question, expressed in the most decided manner, and filling up the only blank which the humility or the timidity of some of

the former class of witnesses had left in the evidence: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

It was God's usual method (and it became him) to convey the knowledge of his will to the church by "holy men." Not that their character constituted the ground on which their messages were to be received; for our faith must rest on the authority of God, and not on the goodness or wisdom of men. But, on the other hand, their good qualities are not to be altogether overlooked. "They believed, and therefore spake." They enquired and searched diligently into the things revealed to them, and imparted them with lively impressions of their truth, necessity, and importance. They staked their own eternal interests upon them. Knowing the terror of the Lord, they persuaded men to flee from coming wrath, and comforted others with the consolations wherewith they had themselves been comforted. In this respect they added, as it were, their own personal testimony to that of the Spirit of God, under whose inspiration they spake and wrote. But it pleased God, for holy and wise reasons, sometimes to communicate portions of his mind by men of an opposite character; such as Caiaphas under the New, and Balaam under the Old Testament. The latter seems to have been a man of great gifts, and held in high reputation in his age. He was one of those without the pale of the Israelitish commonwealth, who, as appears from the history of Job, still retained the knowledge of the only true God. But he held the truth in unrighteousness. Knowing God he glorified him not as God, and instead of being thankful for the gifts conferred on him, sought only to make gain of them. His heart was so exercised with covetous practices, that the dumb ass on which he rode rebuked the madness of the prophet, while he ran greedily in the way of error. Permitted by Heaven to visit the King of Moab, under an express injunction to say nothing but what God should bid him, he had recourse to every art of divination and enchantment to procure such a response as would entitle him to the rich presents by which Balaak sought to inflame his avarice. Yet into the mind and mouth of this godless man was the Almighty

pleased to put his precious word; and while he prevented it from being corrupted or contaminated in passing through such an impure channel, he glorified himself by constraining one of the greatest adversaries of his people to predict their future felicity, and repeatedly to bless them in the hearing of that prince who had hired him, by the most tempting offers, to devote them to destruction. What has been said of the benediction which Balaam pronounced on the people of Israel, is applicable to his declarations respecting the death of the righteous man. It involves a twofold testimony. We have in it the testimony of the Spirit of God, under whose inspiration he spake for the time. In this view it coincides exactly with the voice which the beloved disciple heard from Heaven, saying, "Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; yea, saith the Spirit." But we have also the testimony of a man who was himself estranged from the life of God, and an enemy of all righteousness. And you know that a favourable testimony from an enemy is of all others the strongest.

The text is not a mere figurative description of the blessedness of a righteous man's departure. It has a different character from the rest of the inspired oracle. It is "aside" from the prediction. It is more personal than prophetic. It resembles, though breathing a different spirit, the parenthetic exclamation of the dying patriarch, when announcing the fates of his children, "I have waited for thy salvation, O God." It is an ejaculatory prayer, in which the feelings of the man are blended with the raptures of the prophet. Though in a trance his eyes were open; the divine efflatus did not suspend his consciousness; the prophet felt that he was a man; and while he described in ecstasy the prospects of the people whose God was Jehovah, and saw that the latter end of the righteous is peace, his heart was delighted, ravished, softened—the fascinations of sin seemed to lose their charm, he felt for the moment as if he could have renounced "the wages of unrighteousness," and without coming to the choice of suffering affliction with the people of God, he expressed an ardent wish to be numbered with them in their death. Nor, my brethren, was this peculiar to Balaam. There are many instances still of godless men,

who in moments of serious thought, and particularly when bending over the sick-bed, or standing at the grave of a saint, breathe the sigh of the text: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

Three things claim our attention in the text—there is a comfortable truth held forth, the desirableness of the death of the righteous—an important caution given us as to our exercise in reference to this;—and a deeply interesting subject of examination as to the character of those whose death is desirable.

I. Of the desirableness of the death of the righteous. Here we shall view the event in the light of God's word, not confining ourselves to those points which excite the wishes of worldly men, who are strangers to the mystery of that change which death produces on the godly. The Spirit of God intended to lead our minds to prospects beyond those which struck the shortsighted eye of Balaam. On the other hand, we shall confine ourselves to those things which belong to the righteous man's death as such; separating whatever may be common to it with that of others, and leaving out of view what may be the peculiar and distinguishing privilege of some saints in their last moments.

It was the contrast between the righteous and wicked at death, which, darting across the mind of Balaam, drew from him the exclamation in the text. But we are not to conceive of this as lying in the external nature or circumstances of the death of the two classes of men. In both it is a disruption of the component parts of human nature; the soul quits the body, which is laid lifeless in the grave, and becomes the prey of worms. The death of either may be effected by the same diseases or calamities—by a fever, a consumption, or an apoplexy—by a shipwreck, a sudden fall, a stroke of lightning, an earthquake—by the violence of man, or the visitation of God. Nay, the bodily sufferings of the dying saint may be more protracted and agonizing than those of the ungodly, who in this sense may be said to "have no bands in their death." It is in the moral character of the event, and in the relation

which it bears to eternity, that the contrast properly consists. If there were nothing after death, as the object of hope or fear, there would be no ground for the wish in our text—no difference between the death of a righteous and a wicked man, or rather no difference between the death of both and that of a beast; for it might then be equally said of them all that they are perished and extinct for ever.

"Lazarus died; the rich man also died, and was buried."* Here no difference is to be perceived, or if there be any, it is on the side of the worldly man, who had fared sumptuously during life, and was honoured with a funeral after his demise. But look after them with the eye of faith. "The beggar was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom; the rich man lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torments. And beside all this, between them there was a great gulf fixed"—their several states of happiness and misery were irreversibly and unalterably determined for ever. Such is the contrast delineated by the compassionate Saviour of men, delineated parabolically indeed, but in a parable which presents a striking and unexaggerated picture of the awful reality. "Thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted and thou art tormented." "He is comforted:" All the evil things he endured are forgotten, or, if recollected, serve only to enhance his joys. "Thou art tormented:" All thy good things are gone, and the memory of them serves only to aggravate thy misery. From this general description, who can hesitate in his choice between deaths which have such different issues?

"Now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." Observe, my brethren, nothing is said of the comfort of Lazarus, or the torment of Dives, on his deathbed. This suggests another point which we mean to set aside in stating the contrast, and in making up our judgment as to the preference.

There are wicked men who have had the flames of hell kindled in their conscience before leaving this world, and have been fearfully distracted in consequence of their sins being set

* Luke, xvi. 22.

in array before their eyes. But it is a mistake to suppose that they are all the victims of remorse, or filled with terrors at that solemn hour. The hope of the hypocrite usually perisheth at the approach of death; but even he, though more obnoxious to alarms than the profane, may go down to the pit with a lie in his mouth and in his right hand, deceiving others, himself deceived. Have you not heard repeatedly of persons whose lives were forfeited to the justice of their country by the commission of the most atrocious crimes, spending the last night of their mortal career in merriment, and conducting themselves on the scaffold with an indifference and levity which was appalling to the spectators? Many causes may be assigned for that calmness and even courage which ungodly men display in their dying moments. Some have seared their consciences by a long course of abandoned living, so that, when they come to die, they are "past feeling." Others are so fatuously ignorant that they go to an eternal state, as a bird hastens to the snare, or an idiot to the correction of the stocks. Some welcome death as a relief from pain, others are weary of a world which they can no longer enjoy. Some lull themselves asleep with the strong opiate of infidelity, or assume an unnatural hardihood to conceal those misgivings of mind, which, if betrayed, would wound their pride. Nor must we overlook the awful, but righteous judgment of the Almighty, by which those who take pleasure in unrighteousness and love not the truth are given up to strong delusions to believe a lie—a judgment not more severe on themselves than on those who have imbibed their principles and imitate their example. If men will not believe Moses and the prophets—if they shut their eyes on the clear light in which life and immortality, and judgment to come, are placed by the gospel of Christ, they shall not have the deathbed repentance and recantations of their associates to arouse them.

On the other hand, though "the latter end of the upright man is peace," it is not always accompanied with joy and sensible comfort. Blessed be God, the instances have not been rare in every age of righteous men dying not only peaceably, but joyfully and triumphantly. Though far from

boasting of their own righteousness, or relying on it as any part of their title to heaven, yet by a diligent and patient continuance in well-doing, they made their calling and election sure. Knowing whom they have believed, and persuaded that he is able to keep what they have committed to him, their conscience bearing them witness that with godly sincerity they have endeavoured to keep the faith intrusted to them, and having the earnest of the spirit, they look forward with humble but joyful confidence to the gracious reward which he hath promised. Having weathered the storms and escaped the perils of their spiritual voyage, they dismiss their fears at the end of their course, summon all that is within them to contemplate the blissful prospect which they are gradually nearing, and spreading the sails of their faith and hope and desire, for the last time, to the heavenly gale before which they are borne, enter the haven of eternal rest, with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it!"

But this is not always the attainment of the genuine saint. The unexpected approach of the householder may throw into confusion and alarm the faithful steward, who is conscious that every thing is not in that state of order and preparation which he could have wished; and even the kind assurances of the master that he is pleased, and takes the will for the deed, may fail for a time to soothe the disturbed feelings of the anxious servant. The believer may be overtaken by death at a time when his views of an interest in Christ, and his prospects of eternity, are far from being clear and satisfactory. Involved in a multiplicity of cares, and distracted with public business, he has not found leisure to set his heart and house in order; so that, on receiving the intimation, "Thou shalt die, and not live," he may, like Hezekiah, "turn his face toward the wall, and weep sore." * Disinterestedly set on the completion of the good work which he has been honoured to advance, he may beseech the Lord to permit him to see the establishment of Israel in peace, and accordingly feel dispirited

* Isa. xxxviii. 1–3.

at the frown with which he is answered, "Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter." * From these and other causes—from constitutional timidity of spirit, increased by the peculiar nature of the disease under which he labours—from humility and tenderness of conscience, combined with weakness of faith and knowledge, disposing him to dwell more on the evil of sin and the awfulness of judgment, than on the mercy of God and the character of him who is the appointed Judge—in fine, from the sovereign withholding, for wise reasons, of those supernatural influences which are requisite to give consolation in the last struggle, the genuine Christian may be in heaviness on a sick-bed, and depart at last in fear, or with trembling hope.

But even when presented in these lights, there is a wide and essential difference between the death of the righteous and the wicked. What considerate and impartial person, who knew the lives and saw the end of both, would not dread the death of the latter with all its fortitude, and covet the death of the former with all its faintings and fears? There is something ominous in the calm—something fearful in the fearlessness of an ungodly man while standing on the verge of eternity. It is "an awful pause, prophetic of his end,"—like the breathless silence which precedes the bursting of a thunder cloud, or the interval of ease enjoyed by a patient, which is mistaken by his friends for a sign of convalescence, but indicates to the skilful physician that a deadly mortification has commenced. On the other hand, there is something hopeful in the fears of the tender-hearted Christian when about to put off this mortal flesh. They betoken the soundness of his conscience and the strength of his humility—that he is alive to his all-important situation, and afraid of deceiving himself—that he is in earnest about salvation, and penetrated with the belief that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." The most intrepid and confirmed unbeliever would exchange his hope of future happiness or of rest in eternal sleep for the enjoyment of a few more

* Deut. iii. 26.

years on earth; the weakest Christian would not yield up his trembling hopes of heaven for a thousand lives and a thousand worlds.

Let me add a few reasons which show that the death of the righteous is desirable.

1. It is safe. This alone is enough to make it desirable. Death is no common or despicable thing. It is a great evil, and in itself an object both of aversion and dread. It is the wages of sin, and on that account not only unnatural but penal. There is a first and a second death, and the one introduces to the other. "Behold a pale horse, and his name that sat on him was Death, and hell followed with him."* He is the King of Terrors, and the apprehension of meeting him at every turn, and in every affliction, keeps men all their lifetime subject to bondage. But so far as the righteous are concerned, death is stripped of its terrors, because it has been deprived of its power to destroy or hurt them. As guilty, they were once obnoxious to its penalty; but their guilt has been taken away, and they have been acquitted at the bar of God through faith in the blood of Christ. They cannot be hurt of the second death; and the first death, under a supernatural ordination, comes to them, not as the executioner of the law, but as the messenger of grace to convey them to heaven. Its appearance may be formidable, and a chilly horror may be felt as it throws its snaky folds round them and seeks the heart; but its bite is harmless like that of a serpent which has been deprived of its sting. "The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ," who by fulfilling the law in our stead, has rendered sin powerless and death innocuous. "Whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die." Death is no death to a Christian. "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy!" is the exclamation of a wicked man, on meeting what it has been his great object through life to avoid. The saint, when he finds himself in its cold grasp, can look up and say with a faint smile, what he will afterwards shout in full

* Rev. vi. 8.

triumph, "O death, where is thy sting?" On the ungodly and wicked, death's dart inflicts an incurable—an immortal wound; for "their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched:" on the Christian it inflicts at the worst a mortal wound, which shall soon be healed, for in his case "this mortal shall put on immortality."

2. The death of the righteous is advantageous. Every saint may adopt the words of the apostle —"To me to die is gain."

Death puts an end for ever to all the evils which he endured here—to all his labours and toils—his sickness and sorrow—his infirmities and burdens—his disappointments and fears—his complaints and crosses and conflicts. In the land to which it conveys him, the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick—he shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more—the sun shall not scorch him by day, and there is no night there—there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away. How welcome is "tir'd nature's sweet restorer" to the labourer after the toils of a long day! How refreshing is sleep to the sick man who has been long tossed on his bed under the influence of the burning fever! But O sweeter and more welcome far is the grave to him who, after many years of suffering and grief, falls asleep in Jesus! "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth," and "he doth well." "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord; for they rest from their labours." "They enter into peace; they rest in their beds." And O how refreshed shall they awake from their repose on the morning of the resurrection!

But this is not all—death puts an end to their sinning, as well as suffering, and introduces them into a state of perfect holiness. Sin dwelling in him is the great burden of the true Christian: its oppression extorts from him his deepest groans. As long as he is here he carries about "the body of this death," crucified indeed, but still living; dying, yet oft reviving, causing him to move heavily and halting, giving advantage to his spiritual enemies, distracting him in duty, marring his peace and comfort, and communion with God. But now he is completely relieved from the burden and bondage of corruption.

The iniquities of the ungodly lie down with them in the grave, and are the cords which bind them till the judgment of the great day. But the dying Christian leaves all his sins, and all of sin, behind him. Death strikes the final blow at the root of his corruptions; it breaks the last tie between sin and his soul. He shall never more feel the rising of an evil affection; he shall not again know "the thought of foolishness;" nor shall temptation ever throw its distracting shade across his mind for a single moment.

3. The dying saint has no reason to regret any thing that he is about to leave behind him. The advantages which accrue from earthly changes are usually counterbalanced by privations. A person obtains a lucrative and honourable post, but it requires him to quit his native country, his parents and dear friends, and to spend his life among foreigners of a strange language, and manners dissimilar to his own. On these accounts he sets out with reluctance, and often looks back with a sigh. The advantages which accrue from a Christian's death have no such counterbalance.

The world fills the hearts of the ungodly. It is their portion and treasure; all their happiness lies in the enjoyment of it. They are of the world; they speak of it, they think of it, they savour it, and nothing else. Death cannot, therefore, but be dreadful to them; for it tears them from all that is dear, desirable, and precious in their eyes, and hurries them into another world, of which they have no knowledge, and for which they have no desire nor preparation, except what lies in their sins, by which they have fitted themselves for destruction, as fuel for the fire. But it is quite otherwise with the believer in Christ. He has been crucified to the world, and the world to him. He sits loose in his affections to it. He passes through it as a pilgrim and stranger. When living under its smiles, and enjoying a large share of its good things, he rejects it as his portion, and is disposed to say, "I would not live always here." He desires a better country. What is most valuable in his eyes, he has sent before him, and therefore feels it easy to follow. His treasure is in heaven, there the better part of his heart—his desires are also; the remainder is kept down chiefly

by its connexion with the body, and this being extricated by the hand of death, he soars to his native element. He dies willingly. He puts off this tabernacle. He is not driven or dragged out of the world, but "departs to be with Christ"—leaves the world to go to his Father and his home.

If it cost him a pang of regret (as it sometimes does) to part with his earthly relations, who depend on him, and to whom he is tenderly attached, faith overcomes this at the last, and he leaves his fatherless children, his widow, and other friends to the care of the angel who redeemed him from all evil, and fed him all his life long. His friends in Christ he knows shall soon follow him. On his death-bed he is sometimes able to speak comfortably to them, by expressing his assurance, not only as to his own personal happiness, but as to the appearance which God will make in behalf of his church on earth: "I die, but God will surely visit you." He does not need to regret his leaving those ordinances which were the most delightful to him here; for the fruit of the vine, which was sweet to his taste at a communion-table, he shall "drink new in his Father's kingdom." The society which he enjoyed below he exchanges for far better society above, including, not only all his friends deceased in the Lord, but patriarchs, prophets and apostles, yea, more and better than they; for he goes to join "an innumerable company of angels, the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and God, the judge of all, and the spirits of just men made perfect, and Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant."

Lastly, I cannot say time would fail me (for it would take but a short time to say all I know on the subject), but speech and ideas would fail me, were I to attempt to describe the blessedness of that state into which death ushers the soul of a righteous man, as a sure prelude and earnest of what awaits him in body and soul at the resurrection of the just. O how little do we know of the meaning of the words and figures which the Spirit has employed to help us to form some faint conceptions of this! Who can tell what is included in the immediate, full, and uninterrupted vision and fruition of God—in being ever with the Lord—in knowing even as we are known,

and loving as we are loved—in God's wiping away all tears from our eyes—in the Lamb, who is in the midst of the throne, feeding and leading to living fountains of waters—in having faith swallowed up in sight, hope in enjoyment, desire in delight, and the remembrance of all the ills which grieved and vexed and oppressed us here, lost in the overwhelming discovery that they have wrought for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!

Who that considers these things is not ready to exclaim, "Let me die the death of the righteous?" Ah! my brethren, there lies the danger. Who will not say so? Balaam did it. Any ungodly man may do it. Many, many, wish to drink of this cup who never shall taste it—no, not a drop of it to cool their parched tongue.

II. This leads me to the caution administered by the text; for from whatever motive it was spoken, it was certainly "written for our admonition." I shall comprise what I have to say on this head in two particulars.

1. It is a real wish. It is not words and no more. The speaker believes—he feels—he feels deeply, that the death of the righteous is desirable. Balaam repeated his wish, "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

Marvel not at this. All men wish to be happy, and to shun and secure themselves against misery. How much soever they are in love with "sin," they do not love "the wages of sin." Man was created for immortality, and there are on his mind traces of his destination which the most wicked and profane cannot entirely erase. The thought of a future world, and a state after death, will intrude unwelcome: Hence anxieties, fears, forebodings. What more natural than to wish to die like those who have spent their life in preparation for eternity! Many who are far from allowing that they are bad men, have a secret consciousness—a latent suspicion, that all things are not right, and as they ought to be. The consciences of worldly men tell them, that however pleasing the life they lead, it is not that which conducts to glory, hon-

our, and immortality. They have their hopes, but the thought of death is sufficient to damp these; their hearts misgive them in their serious moments; and, while rootedly averse to the exercise and enjoyments which characterise the life of the godly man, they would fain exchange lots with him in the end. Perhaps, too, they flatter themselves, that such desires, especially when expressed in prayers, may do something toward the attainment of their object. This is a fond imagination; but what will not a deceitful heart, in love with sin, conceive and bring forth?

2. It is a mere wish, and therefore vain and useless. It has no immediate influence on the life, and can have no remote effect on the death, of the men by whom it is indulged. It leaves the will and affections unchanged, yea, untouched. So far from bringing fruit to perfection, it is barren and fruitless; it does not even put forth the germ of good resolutions. It is dead, being alone.

> "Wishing, of all employments, is the worst—
> Wishing, that constant hectic of a fool." *

What is a wish? An inactive desire. It is the breathing after something desirable, when the means of obtaining it are out of our power, or we feel an invincible repugnance to use them. On both suppositions we make no exertions, and cannot properly be said to have either desires or hopes. We may wish for impossibilities, or what is next to them. A beggar may wish to be a king, but he cannot be said seriously to desire it. The confirmed drunkard, when he sees the advantages of sobriety, or dreads the effects of intemperance on his constitution, may wish for the health and longevity of the sober man, but he cannot properly be said to desire them. There are moral as well as natural impossibilities; and those of the former kind are the greater of the two. The wish in our text may be said to partake of the nature of both. The mendicant who goes from door to door, and sitting on a dunghill, feeds on the garbage which the dogs have left, will ascend a throne

* Young's Night Thoughts, Night IV.

sooner than the unrighteous man shall inherit the kingdom of heaven, or die the death of the righteous.

To what shall I liken those who trust in this lying refuge? or where shall I find any thing which approaches to their infatuation? To go forth to meet the King of Terrors with no other armour of defence beside these fig-leaved wishes, is madness beyond that of the prophet, who, riding on an ass, with a staff in his hand, was blindly rushing on the drawn sword of the angel who guarded the road. During the ages of ignorance and superstition, kings and warriors, who had spent their lives in blood and dissipation, when they found their end approaching, were accustomed to go to a convent, and cause themselves to be dressed in the garb of a monk, imagining that if they died in these holy vestments, their souls would go to Paradise. Even this opinion, of which it is difficult to say whether it be more ridiculous or impious—this attempt to die by benefit of clergy, and to gain admission into heaven by stealth in borrowed garments, is not worse than that which we are opposing. If the death of the righteous were desirable on the ground of any thing connected with the external circumstances of their dissolution, or if their happiness after death were independent of their character and internal dispositions, Balaam's wish would not be so preposterous, though it would still be vain and fruitless. But this is not the case. What is it to die the death of the righteous, but to die a righteous man? Were it possible for a wicked man to gain admittance to heaven, he would feel like Doeg among the priests at Nob, detained before the Lord, and like Satan among the sons of God. Heaven would be no heaven to an unholy person: its employments would be a burden, its pleasures a torment; and the presence of God, which is the life of all its blessed inhabitants, death to him.

O then beware of listening to this delusion, or indulging the hopes which it is apt to engender. Take it along with you—lay it to heart, that to have a desirable death you must be righteous. This brings me to the matter of examination which the text presents; or, to speak,

III. Of the character of those whose death is desirable. There are two questions here: Who are the righteous? Am I of the number? We shall endeavour to answer the first; let your consciences, as we proceed, reply to the second.

"There is none righteous, no, not one." None are less disposed to dispute this humbling truth—this levelling doctrine—than those who are righteous, because by the grace of God they are so. They are all ready to acknowledge that they were by nature the children of disobedience and wrath, and to ascribe to the mercy of God the distinction which has been created between them and others of their race. This, then, is the first mark by which you are to try yourselves. Have you been convinced of sin—brought to see and be affected with your disconformity to the holy law of God, in conduct, conversation, and thought? Have you been led to trace all your actual transgressions to the fountain of a heart deceitful and radically corrupted? And have you been persuaded that you were justly obnoxious to the divine displeasure, and lying under a sentence of condemnation, incapable of doing any thing for your own relief?

Such as are righteous have received the gift of righteousness by faith in Jesus Christ. This God offers to all freely in the gospel, and imputes to the believer. On the ground of it he justifies him from all the charges of the law, acquits or declares him righteous. Here is a second mark by which you are to try yourselves. Persuaded that the obedience and death of Christ furnish a righteousness commensurate to all the claims of the holy and violated law, and which God not only approves, but has provided and reveals for the express purpose of justifying the ungodly, have you, under the teaching and influence of the Holy Spirit, fled to it by faith as your refuge and the foundation of your rest? Is it the sole ground of your peace, and hope, and confidence, in the prospect of death, and of appearing before the judgment-seat? Do you renounce all dependence on your own personal merits or goodness? and is it not only your wish, but also your lively and animating desire to be "found in Christ, not having your own righteousness, but that which is of God by faith?"

But all who are righteous in the primary, evangelical sense of the word, are also holy in their dispositions. The relative change made on their state by justification, is accompanied by a real change on their hearts, effectuated by Divine power through the instrumentality of the word. By means of the light of divine knowledge, which is made to pervade the whole soul, not only are their consciences pacified, but their hearts are purified, rectified, and reduced to a cheerful conformity to the eternal law of righteousness. Examine yourselves by this test. Are your hearts right with God, and sound in his statutes? Do you love him supremely? is it your desire to please him in all things? Do you esteem his commandments concerning all things to be right, and hate every false and wicked way? Have your affections been disengaged from the world, and set on things above, where Christ is?

In fine, the righteous have a holy practice regulated by the moral law. Instead of considering themselves as released by their redemption from any moral duty, they judge that they are laid under new and stronger obligations to holiness in all manner of conversation. "They are righteous before God, walking in all his commandments and ordinances blameless." Try yourselves by this. Is your obedience universal and unexceptioned? Do you exercise yourselves to have consciences void of offence toward God and toward man? "Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil. Whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." In many things you are conscious of offending, but you do not live in the allowed transgression of any divine precept; you feel that sin dwells in you and obtains the mastery for a time over the better part of your nature, but you are engaged in a constant warfare against it, abhor yourselves so far as you are involved in its pollutions, and long for the time when you shall be completely set free from its power.

Does your character, gospel hearers, answer in any good degree to the description which has been given? If not, then you are among the unrighteous; and you must die *their* death.

Yes; if death overtake you (and it may not be far off)—if it overtake you in this condition, you must "die in your sins;" and as death leaves, judgment shall find you. When you survey the enclosed field of death, you read many a monumental inscription and epitaph, closed by a text of holy writ; but there is one text, which would suit them all, and might be written on the gate of every burying-ground: "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: he that is righteous, let him be righteous still, and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be." O beware of that thief of time, and most successful purveyor of hell, procrastination. Reject not, or, which amounts to the same thing, shift not the offers of grace and calls to repentance, which are addressed to you. "Now is the accepted time; now the day of salvation." The approach of death is not the only thing you have to dread. Before that period arrive God may give you up to a reprobate mind, as a just punishment for your voluntary and self-contracted obstinacy and infatuation. Thus shall you be as to all good hope "dead, while you live—twice dead," like a tree blasted by the bolt of heaven, and plucked up by the roots. "He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."* There are favourable seasons, which, if misimproved, shall never return. The man who originally uttered the words of the text, is an awful instance of this. After being restrained, reproved, enlightened, and favoured with such discoveries of the blessedness of the righteous, as to feel and express the most ardent wishes to "stand in their lot at the end of the days," he relapsed into his former state, became more depraved than ever, "taught Balac to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel,"† and perished in his iniquity.

I repeat it—for gospel-hearers do not appear sufficiently aware of the truth — there are to every person under the preaching of the word, and the discipline of providence, sea-

* Prov. xxix. 1. † Rev. ii. 14.

sons of visitation, which, if misimproved, will never return—soft moments—times of awakening, enlightening, relenting, when the ears are open to instruction, when conscience speaks and the heart listens, when the stirrings and striving of the Spirit of God are felt, when the vanity of the present world is seen, and the powers of the world to come lay hold on the soul, when Satan is thrown down, and his prisoner, sighing for an unknown liberty, drags in his chains toward the spot on which a great light shines. Thou art not far from the kingdom of God, O sinner! Lift up a prayer: one effort more, and all will be well. Ministers of the gospel, and all who know the value of an immortal soul, help with your prayers! Now he stands on the limit which divides the kingdoms of darkness and light. One foot is on the line, and the other is lifted up, and stands on tiptoe—he hesitates—his resolution fails—he looks behind—the world rushes into his heart—he falls back—devils shout, and angels retire, covering their faces with their wings!

SERMON XIV.

THE SOUL COMMITTED TO CHRIST.

2 Tim. i. 12.

"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."

There are certain periods in the life of every man, marked by events affecting his happiness, which he can never forget, and on which he cannot reflect without emotions of gratitude and joy. Such, for example, are the periods when he first set out in the world, when he formed a connexion for life, or when he was providentially saved from some dangerous distemper or imminent calamity. There are similar periods in the life of every Christian man; as when he first took a seat at the Lord's table, when he was admitted to sensible communion with God in that or any other ordinance, when he was relieved from spiritual distress, or experienced a revival of religion in his soul after a season of deadness and decay. But of all others the most important era in a Christian's life is that at which he was first led and disposed to commit his soul to its Saviour. With respect to other mercies of a spiritual kind, they all take their character from this, and may be traced back to it as their source. But for it they never would have been, and by it they are what they are. Nothing is asserted of other seasons like to what is said by Christ of this: "There is joy in heaven in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth;"—joy that a soul has been saved from death, that a multitude of sins has been covered, that a brand has been plucked from the fire and converted into a luminary which, after lighting many on the way to heaven, shall

itself shine as a star in the firmament for ever and ever. And with respect to external mercies of which a Christian may have been a partaker, the greatest of them only marks an era in his temporal existence, whereas his conversion to God through Christ marks an era in eternity, inasmuch as it produces a change upon him which draws after it his eternal felicity. Other events which have befallen him, how joyful soever in themselves, may have led to or been followed by distressing results, so that the recollection of them excites pain rather than pleasure. The Lord who gave may have taken away. But here is an event which is a source of unmingled joy, and on which we may continue to reflect with growing satisfaction and delight. We may find reason to repent of the confidence which we have placed in the best of our fellow-creatures. The person to whose care we had intrusted our most valuable property, perhaps our all in the world, may prove unfaithful or unfortunate, and in consequence of this we may be ruined or reduced to beggary. But there is no danger of any thing like this happening to the Christian, who may say boldly, and at all times, with the apostle in the text, "I know whom I have believed," or trusted, "and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day."

There are two things in these words; first, what he had done, and secondly, his persuasion in reference to it. He had believed a certain person, and had committed or intrusted something to him. He does not name either the trustee or the trust, the depositary or the deposit. It was unnecessary for him to mention them in writing to his son Timothy, nor is it necessary to be more specific in addressing Christians. "He whom I have believed," and "that which I have committed to him," are more familiar than household words—they are heart-words, with all who have been taught of God and made wise to salvation. "Whom, having not seen they love, in whom, though now they see him not, yet believing they rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" in the hope of "receiving the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls," which they have committed to him against the

day of his second and glorious appearance. Happy they who have adopted this wise course! All that is precious and dear to them is in safe keeping and sure preservation; and as they have the highest security for it, so they may be at perfect ease amidst all the vicissitudes of life—at losses, privations and troubles—at death, and in prospect of the judgment. As a person whose capital is invested beyond all ordinary possibility of risk and at good interest, hears, during a season of national distress, of fortunes wrecked and families ruined, without any other feeling than pity for the sufferers, and secured against want himself, ungrudgingly "disperses abroad and gives to the poor;" so the believing and assured Christian is "not afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord;" having always all-sufficiency in all things, he may "abound to every good work;" and "being comforted in all his tribulation, he is able to comfort them who are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith he himself is comforted of God."

We shall, first, consider the act of committing the soul to our Lord Jesus Christ, which may be useful not only in helping the believer to review his former deed, but also in exciting the sinner to take the same course. And secondly, we shall consider the persuasion which the believer may have of the safety of his eternal interests in the hands of the Redeemer.

I. In the first place, the believer commits his soul to Christ under a deep impression of its inestimable value. There are some even in places favoured with the light of revelation, who do not appear so much as to know or believe that they have souls. They are like the heir to a great estate or a kingdom, who, having been brought up in profound ignorance of his birth, associates with the lowest company, and addicts himself to the most ignoble occupations, grovelling pursuits and amusements; or like the heaven-struck monarch of Babylon, whose "heart was changed from man's, and a beast's heart was given unto him." O what little value do the greater part of men set on their souls! And at what a vile price are they willing to sell them! All their time and attention are de-

voted to making provision for the flesh—preserving, satisfying, dressing, and displaying the body. Provided it be well with their bodies, they care not how it fare with their souls—though they be naked, famishing, diseased, dying, dead in trespasses and sins.

How irrational and unnatural is such conduct! Is it necessary seriously to expose it? The body, though "fearfully and wonderfully made," was constructed of earthy materials, and will return and be resolved into its original dust. The soul is an immaterial and spiritual substance, simple and uncompounded, and formed for immortality. By the former we are akin to the beasts that perish; by the latter we are allied to angels and the God that made us. It is the soul that thinks, understands, judges, discerns between truth and falsehood, between right and wrong, remembers the past, and penetrates into the future, traces effects to their causes, from the most obvious and near to the great first cause, and is the seat of all the affections, social, moral and religious. It was created at first after the image of its Almighty Maker, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness; and though sin has despoiled it of its moral beauty and impaired its intellectual vigour, yet it still exhibits the remains of its pristine grandeur, like a defaced picture or a palace in ruins. And it is capable of having the divine image reinstamped upon it. The soul, and not the body, is the proper subject of happiness or misery; and can there be a more arresting thought than this, that it must be either happy or miserable through an endless existence? The soul is the man, the body only its temporary habitation. The soul is the jewel, the body only the casket in which it is deposited; and as the casket is frail, and ready every moment to fall in pieces, it concerns us greatly to commit the jewel to one who is able to keep it. "What is a man profited, if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or, what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" This truth flashes conviction into the mind of the sinner at the moment that he believes on Christ. "The redemption of the soul is precious." "O let my soul live!"

2. The believer commits his soul to Christ under a con-

viction of its danger. He is not only intimately persuaded of its value, he is also strongly impressed with a sense of its great and imminent danger of perishing. He perceives that it "stands in jeopardy every hour," so long as it remains in its present state. He is convinced of the evil of sin—of its God-provoking, soul-ruining nature. He hears the sentence which has gone forth from the lips of the judge, "The soul that sinneth shall die;" conscience tells him that his has incurred that sentence; he feels that it has already taken hold of him in spiritual death, or the alienation of his heart from all that is divinely good; and he dreads its full execution in the second death, or an entire and eternal separation from the fountain of goodness. O that such impressions were more common among the hearers of the word! A sense of danger naturally produces a desire to escape from it; though a supernatural communication of light and power is required to show a man the true way, and to determine him to take it. The convinced sinner looks around him for safety, and the anxious enquiry is heard, What must I do? 'What ails thee, distracted man? Thou art in health, thou hast every worldly comfort, all thy friends are about thee. Whom or what seekest thou?' 'One to whom I may commit my guilty, perishing soul. A place where I may be safe from the wrath to come.' Thus is he shut up to the way of faith which the gospel reveals. As in an inundation, when the increasing waters threaten to sweep every thing before them, the affrighted inhabitants betake themselves, with their most valuable goods, to some high place, so does the alarmed and enlightened sinner hasten to commit himself to Christ, as a refuge from the storm, and a covert from the tempest. "O that I had the wings of a dove!" "Who are these that fly as a cloud, and as doves to their windows?" These are they that have been warned to flee from the wrath to come.

3. The believer commits his soul to Christ under the thorough persuasion that he is unable to keep it himself. No man will intrust that which is precious in his eyes to another, so long as he deems it perfectly safe in his own hands. Every man is the natural guardian of his own soul; and had he not lost the ability of preserving it which he originally possessed,

he would never have been required or exhorted to commit it to any other. It was this inability on our part which rendered the interposition of a Mediator and Redeemer necessary. "When we were without strength, Christ died for the ungodly; and what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God" accomplished by "sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." What is it that keeps so many at a distance from the Saviour whom God hath provided, and prevents them from intrusting him with their eternal interests? Want of a thorough and practical belief of the Scripture doctrine of man's fallen state, and its fatal consequences, legally in exposing him to the judicial displeasure of Heaven, and spiritually in indisposing him to all that is morally good and acceptable in the sight of God. "They being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God." Arminianism is the offspring of ignorance and pride; ignorance of the extent of our misery, and a proud aversion to be indebted to another for that which we are utterly unable to do for ourselves. It existed as an operating principle long before it entered into a body of divinity. It is much older than the individual who in the seventeenth century gave it a name among Protestants. It is the doctrine of Popery, rendered more seductive by its refinement from superstition; it is the old error of Judaism somewhat Christianized; it is the natural religion of fallen man. God found it necessary to place cherubim and a flaming sword which turned every way to guard the tree of life, and to prevent Adam from presumptuously seeking life in that garden in which he had forfeited the blessing. And nothing but the sword of the law-curse, suspended from heaven and flaming on their consciences, will deter the posterity of Adam from seeking salvation by that covenant which was originally "ordained unto life," but which now "worketh wrath."* We must have "the sentence of death in ourselves that we should not trust in ourselves," before we will "trust in God who raiseth the dead."† The person who speaks in our text was a memorable example of

* Rom. vii. 10; iv. 15. † 2 Cor. i. 9.

this. He "was alive without the law once," and, a stranger to its spirituality, thought himself blameless touching its righteousness. With these views he not only saw nothing desirable in Jesus of Nazareth, but judged that he ought to do many things contrary to his name, and reviled him as the enemy of the law and the minister of sin. But the light which shone upon him on the road to Damascus dispelled this fond delusion. And what a discovery did he make! The righteous man turned out to be the chief of sinners; the wisdom on which he plumed himself, arrant folly; his zeal for God, mad rage against the Lord and his anointed; and his soul which he fondly imagined to be decked with "fine linen, clean and white, even the righteousness of saints," he now saw to be covered with rags, which, instead of adorning it, only added to its deformity. Then, says he, "What things were gain to me, I counted loss for Christ; yea doubtless I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, that I may win Christ and be found in him."

The person who has been made to know himself would not trust himself with his own salvation for a single moment. Though the Saviour were to take his soul into his hands, and offer to give it back "washed and sanctified, and justified," he would humbly refuse the offer. Though he were to present it as pure and upright as was that soul which the Almighty breathed into the body which had been just moulded by his own fingers, the enhanced value of the gift would heighten the dread of the responsibility, and the Christian would commit himself anew to the Redeemer, saying, "Preserve my soul, for I am holy." He remembers Adam his father, and Eve that bare him, and he shudders when he thinks of the issue of their being 'left to the freedom of their own will,' and the breach of that trust which was rendered awfully sacred by its involving the fate of millions unborn. Knowing this, the believer commits himself to Christ for all and for ever.

4. This is done in the confidence that Christ is willing to undertake and able to keep the trust. Benhaddad, in his extremity, committed himself to Ahab on the report of his servants; "Peradventure he will save thy life, for we have heard that the

kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings."* The lepers who were starving at the gate of Samaria were determined to throw themselves into the camp of the Syrians, by this reasoning, "If they save us alive we shall live, and if they kill us, we shall but die."† But no sinner is required to take the important step in the text upon a peradventure, nor from the mere consideration that it cannot be worse with him than it already is. It is no leap in the dark to which the Gospel calls him, no desperate plunge to escape destruction. His eyes are opened; he knows what he is doing; he is persuaded that Christ is "able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him;" and that he is not more able than he is willing. Yes, sinner, you have the surest grounds and the highest encouragements. The person of the Saviour, his office, his qualifications both personal and official, the revealed relation in which he stands to sinners of mankind, his outstretched hands, his entreating voice, the high assurance of heaven, the concurrent and harmonious testimony of all who have trusted him—these are your grounds and encouragements. And are they not sufficient? would you require more? "Behold, now is the accepted time, now the day of salvation! Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden; and I will give you rest. Him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out. The Spirit and the bride say, come; let him that heareth say, come; and whosoever will, let him come. This man receiveth sinners. His name is Jesus; and it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief." What shall we say to these things? "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

5. The soul is committed to Christ by an act of faith. The expressions "I have believed," and "I have committed," are of the same import, and are interchanged by the apostle in describing his exercise. The deposit is not only made believingly, but it is made by believing. This distinction, as it appears to me, is not verbal or trivial, but of great

* 1 Kings, xx. 31. † 2 Kings, vii. 4.

importance in the evangelical system, as serving at once to illustrate the glories of divine grace and to secure the peace and comfort of the convinced sinner. I shall explain my meaning. The sinner may be said to commit his soul to Christ affectionately, penitently, humbly; because the gracious dispositions intimated by these words natively spring from true faith in Christ, invariably accompany, and cannot for a moment be altogether separated from its exercise. But still the soul is not committed to Christ by an act of love or repentance or humility, but by an act of faith. The commitment is believing; it is the person's reliance on God's testimony concerning his Son; it is his trusting in Christ for his own salvation. Particularly, you are not to confound this commendation of the soul to the Saviour with its dedication to him. All that believe "give their own selves to the Lord."* But this is subsequent, in the order of nature, to the act of which we speak, and proceeds upon it according to the nature of evangelical exercise. They are as distinct as the act of a condemned traitor, when he throws himself on the mercy of his prince and pleads the amnesty which he had published, is from the act of the same individual, when, being pardoned and readmitted to favour, he renews his oath of allegiance. The one is the act of a dying man, the other of a man restored to life; the one is an act of faith or trust, the other an act of homage or obedience. You may trace the difference between them, and also the influence which the one has upon the other, in the exercise of David as it is beautifully delineated in the hundred and sixteenth Psalm.

6. This commitment is a most comprehensive act. It is so in its subject, which includes spirit and soul and body; for, though "the salvation of your souls" is eminently "the end of your faith," Christians, yet are you found "waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of your body." It is also comprehensive in its ends. First and mainly as to the soul; it contemplates pardon and purity, grace and glory, wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

* 2 Cor. viii. 5.

Let no man be afraid that the sacred cause of holiness will suffer from the doctrine which gives the undivided honour of salvation to the Redeemer of God's election. Who art thou, O man of unclean lips, who drinkest in iniquity like water, that thou shouldst think that thou canst secure the interests of holiness better than the High and Holy One who inhabiteth eternity? The believer is convinced that sin has been his ruin, and he can find comfort only by trusting to him who "saves his people from their sins." He commits his soul to Christ, to be delivered from the wrath to come, and to be delivered from the bondage and pollution of sin, to be sanctified as well as justified, to be made meet for as well as put in possession of the inheritance of the saints in light. And then as to the body: knowing that this integral, though inferior, part of his nature was "bought with a price," the believer has committed it also to Christ, that it may be sustained under infirmities and protected amidst dangers; that it may be preserved from "fleshly lusts which war against the soul;" that, though maimed and mangled by disease or violence, its members which remain may be employed "as instruments of righteousness unto God;" that it may be redeemed from the power of the grave, and may at last be presented faultless and "fashioned like unto His glorious body." In short, the believer confides in the Lord for "an everlasting salvation, comprehending conservation in a state of grace, with all that provision, direction and comfort which he needs in travelling through the wilderness of this world to "the better country." His language is, "That which concerneth me the Lord will make perfect."

"The salvation which is in Christ Jesus" is one, though it includes a variety of blessings. The whole is the object of faith. Not that the believer can take it all in at once, or have a distinct apprehension of its several parts; his views gradually enlarge, as he "looks upon the things that are not seen;" new beauties and new blessings arise; but still there is not one of these which he does not recognise as belonging to that salvation which was the object of his faith when he "first trusted in Christ."

Lastly, the believer commits himself to Christ with a view to the day of his second and glorious appearance. This the apostle specifies in the text. Disbelief of a future judgment lurks at the bottom of that indifference which multitudes indulge about their souls; and a habit of putting the day of account far away in their thoughts is one great cause why the hearers of the gospel procrastinate day after day the great concern of their salvation. Ah! my brethren, if you believed with the heart, as you confess with the mouth, that God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world by that man whom he hath constituted the Saviour of the world, and that he shall come with flaming fire to take vengeance on all who know not God, and obey not the gospel, you would not give—you would not be able to give sleep to your eyes, or slumber to your eyelids, until you had obtained a saving acquaintance with him whose friendship and favourable recognition will be all in all on that day. The awakened sinner has a deep and realizing conviction of these two truths in their indissoluble connexion, "It is appointed to men once to die, and after death the judgment." And knowing the terror of the Lord, he is persuaded to "be reconciled to God" by faith in him who was "once offered to bear the sins of many, and who, to them that look for him, will appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

It is one mark of a genuine believer that he loves and looks for the second coming of Christ—he looks forward with hope and desire to that day, the very thought of which is an object of aversion and dismay to others. Why? Just because he hath committed his soul to him against that day, not only to be saved from its terrors, but to be made participant of its joys. That will be the day of accounts, not so properly to the believer, as to Him whom he made his sole trustee and surety, and the result will be equally creditable to the one and profitable to the other. Then will he give a good account of that which was committed to him; and none and nothing shall be lost. With respect to all who were committed to him by his Father, and who were determined by grace to commit themselves to him (and they shall eventually be the same), he

will say, " Here am I, and the children who were given me." That is the day in which he will make up his jewels—the day of the manifestation of the sons of God, when the Redeemer shall bring their souls with him from heaven, and call their bodies to him out of the grave, and shall present both faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. To this the believer has a respect when he commits himself to Christ, and, in the midst of his severest afflictions, and in the view of death and the grave, exults with an ancient saint, " I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day on the earth; and though, after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

Let me add an inference or two from what has been said on this subject.

In the first place you may see that, though there is no prerequisite in the sinner as the ground of faith in Christ, yet there are important preparations to the exercise of it. The word of the gospel concerning the Saviour, together with the call of God to embrace him, is the proper and sole ground of faith, and all are warranted to rely on him, whatever their character is, and whatever their conduct may have been. But there is a knowledge, and there are convictions which are necessarily presupposed in their believing to the saving of the soul. They must know and be convinced that they have souls to be saved — that there is a law which they are under and have transgressed—that they are guilty, and accursed, and depraved, and without strength. They need to be awakened and alarmed and convicted. Their false hopes need to be swept away, and their legal pride brought down by exhibitions of the spirituality and extent of the law of God. These things may be effected suddenly, but they *must* be effected; and generally they are effected in a gradual way. Ministers must travel in birth till Christ be formed in their hearers; and it is not every child of the promise that is brought forth by a single pang. The fiery law was given from Mount Sinai before the gospel was published from Mount Sion. Though the Lord was not in the whirl-

wind, and fire, and earthquake, yet they were necessary to prepare the prophet for listening to the "still small voice." The ministry of the Baptist preceded that of our Saviour; and the preaching of the law is still necessary in subserviency to the gospel. The Spirit convinces men first of sin, and then of righteousness. The wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness, as well as the righteousness which is of God by faith; and he that is not convinced of the former will not believe the latter. Legal doctrine is destructive to souls, because it turns men away from the only Saviour; but there is reason to fear that multitudes have been and are lulled into a false and dangerous security by not having their natural condition laid open, and by not having their attention turned to those things which the Spirit ordinarily blesses as means preparatory to faith.

2. You may perceive that the doctrine which we have been teaching is far from being unfavourable to holiness or good works. They are ignorant of the scriptural doctrine of salvation by faith, and strangers to its influence, who bring this groundless charge against it. Some are afraid that the inculcation of a full confidence in the Saviour will make men careless about the means of salvation. Not so was the apostle: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you." Does a man become careless about his money when he has deposited it in the bank? Does a sick person become careless about his health, when he intrusts his cure to an able physician? And the more unreserved and implicit the confidence which he places in his skill, will he not be the more careful in using his prescriptions, and complying with his advice?

"The grace of God which bringeth salvation teacheth" all who embrace it, "to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ!" I do not say that all who profess this doctrine have been so taught. I know that there are some who pretend a great regard for evangelical truth, who fall far short of others in moral conduct, who are remiss and partial, if not faithless,

in the discharge of relative duties, covetous, selfish, unsocial, uncharitable. Such are the characters of whom Paul could not speak but in tears—"enemies to the cross of Christ," though they profess to be its friends, "who mind earthly things, whose God is their belly, and whose end is destruction." Such also are the professors of whom the Apostle James speaks, or rather whom he repudiates. "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say that he hath faith, and hath not works? Can faith save him? Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead, being alone." Remember that there is a wide and essential difference between being justified *by faith only*, and justified *by that faith which is alone*. True and saving faith is never alone; it worketh by love—by love to God, which is evinced by keeping his commandments, and by love to our fellow-creatures, which is shown by doing them good as we have opportunity.

There are two sayings which the apostle lays down as equally true, and charges ministers to inculcate in their preaching. The one is immediately addressed to all the hearers of the gospel: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."* The second, which is like unto it, is addressed to believers: "This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly; that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works."†

* 1 Tim. i. 15. † Titus, iii. 8.

SERMON XV.

ASSURANCE.

2 Tim. i. 12.

"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."

Having considered, in the former discourse, the exercise of the sinner in committing his soul to Christ, I now proceed to speak of the persuasion which the believer has of the safety of his deposit. "I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day;" *i.e.* I am assured of the safety of my soul in his hands, or that I shall be saved in the day of his glorious appearing. Let us then endeavour to open up the nature, grounds, and effects of a scriptural assurance of complete and final salvation.

I begin with premising that this assurance is no apostolical gift, or extraordinary attainment, confined to the first age of the gospel, or to a favoured class of Christians. Judas, though an apostle, did not possess it: and Paul never speaks of it as a privilege of office, or an effect of inspiration. He does not say on this as he says on another subject, "Am I not an apostle? have not I seen the Lord?" He does not "come to visions and revelations of the Lord," he does not speak as one "caught up to the third heavens;" for he knew that he might have enjoyed all these privileges, and yet "be a cast-away." It was as a sinner—the "chief of sinners," that he committed his soul to Christ: and it is as a believer, and on grounds common to all believers in every age, that he expresses the persuasion in the text. What he here avows as an

individual he elsewhere expresses in the name of all believers —"We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God." And all the saints at Rome he associates with himself in that triumphant passage, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? I am persuaded that neither life nor death, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." God forbid, that we should cut off the streams of Christian consolation, and dry up the most fertile source of Christian holiness, by confining this attainment either to apostolical men, or to the primitive Christians. This were not to "follow their faith, considering the end of their conversation, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Their minds might be more deeply imbued with the Spirit of truth; but we having the same Spirit of faith, according as it is written, "I have believed and therefore have I spoken," we may believe and so speak. Every believer in Christ possesses this persuasion in some degree, and may attain to the full assurance of understanding, and faith, and hope.

The enquiry is of no minor importance in itself, and it claims particular attention at present, when a disposition is evinced to run to opposite extremes as to the doctrine of Christian assurance. What I have to advance will fall in under the illustration of the following propositions,—that it is an intelligent and enlightened persuasion; that it rests on the surest grounds, as laid down in the word of God; that it is strengthened by Christian experience; that it will stand the severest test; and that it exerts a powerful and extensive influence on the Christian life.

I. It is an intelligent and enlightened persuasion. "I know—and am persuaded," says the apostle. How, and whence he knew this, will afterwards be noticed; in the mean time, it is proper to observe at the very outset, that he bases his persuasion on knowledge. What is said of it in all the riches of its full-grown strength, is true of it in its greenest and least advanced state—it is the "assurance of understanding." It differs essentially and totally from all blind impulses,

all enthusiastic imaginations, all sudden impressions made on the mind, but of which the person can give no intelligent or satisfactory account. It is not the result of dreams or visions. It is not produced by immediate suggestions of the Spirit. It is not grafted on texts of Scripture ill-understood, and broken off from their connexion, which have been forcibly injected into the mind, or selected by a kind of spiritual lottery. "This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you," Christian; but is to be suspected of delusion, nourishing pride and self-conceit, and creating a fanciful and presumptuous confidence, accompanied with a feverish tumult in the affections, which bursts out into extravagance of sentiment and irregularity of conduct, and then gradually subsides and sinks to the point of freezing indifference and incredulity.

Genuine Christian assurance proceeds from spiritual illumination by means of the word of God. It is the effect of the Spirit's "opening the understanding to understand the Scriptures," and to know what they testify of Christ. "The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, give unto you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance." "We have known and believed the love of God to us." "The Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding that we may know him that is true." Faith is the act of an enlightened mind. The convinced sinner does not commit himself to the Saviour blindly, or in ignorance of his revealed character and qualifications. The weakest believer is always ready to give "a reason of the hope that is in him." He cannot answer all the cavils of adversaries, but he can maintain his cause with the words of truth and soberness, and sometimes silence the caviller, by the reply of the man whose eyes the Lord opened, "Whether what you allege be true or no, I know not; but one thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." This persuasion is coolly formed, and cautiously expressed, and it is so because it is enlightened. The Christian, especially at his first believing, is apt to suspect his perceptions, however clear and satisfactory, and to check his assurance, until he

has dispassionately examined its grounds, and allowed the transport of his mind to subside. He is apt to go to the opposite extreme from the enthusiast: the latter is presumptuous, the former is jealous and diffident; the latter is satisfied with too little evidence, the former requires too much; the latter mistakes visions for realities, the former, like Thomas of old, suspects the reality to be a vision. The description given of the state of mind into which Peter was thrown, when he was suddenly relieved and led out of prison during the night by the hand of the angel, is illustrative of what the believer sometimes feels: "He wist not that it was true which was done by the angel, but thought he saw a vision. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety that the Lord hath sent his angel and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary, where many were gathered together praying." *

II. This assurance rests on the best and most stable of all grounds. "I know whom I have believed." I know who he is—the great God, who made all things, and upholds them by the word of his power, and therefore is mighty to save. I know what he became for the salvation of sinners—he became a man, a partaker of flesh and blood, like the children whom he came to redeem, that by wearing their nature, he might be qualified for appearing as their substitute, and doing and enduring what was necessary for their liberation. I know him to be Immanuel, the man God's fellow, who would lay his hand upon both parties, and by mediation reconcile them. I know that he hath magnified the law, finished transgression, propitiated justice, and obtained eternal redemption, by the sacrifice of himself, which he offered once for all upon the cross; and I know that, made perfect through suffering, he is now on the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, bearing "the keys of hell and death," and invested by his Father with

* Acts, xii. 9, 11, 12.

power over all flesh to give eternal life to as many as he hath given him. Knowing this, the apostle could say, and every believer may say, "I am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to him against that day." Nor does this merely mean that he can, if he will. It is expressive of moral as well as natural ability,—of all the qualities, personal and official, legal and spiritual, which are requisite to give security to those who confide in him for everlasting salvation. It includes the good-will and mercy and faithfulness and sympathy of the Redeemer, as well as his authority and power, the fulness of the Spirit resident in him, as well as the riches of his merits; the perfection of his atonement, the power of his resurrection, the plenitude of his dominion, the prevalence of his intercession, and the perpetuity of his life and love.

But upon what evidence does the Christian's persuasion of all this rest? Upon the word and promise of Him that cannot lie. Nothing short of a divine testimony and assurance could have induced the awakened sinner to intrust Christ with his eternal welfare; and nothing less will sustain the confidence of a believer, who has obtained a clearer and ever-increasing insight into the preciousness of the redemption of his soul, or preserve him from distracting doubts and fears amidst the temptations and infirmities by which he feels himself daily surrounded and oppressed. Wo to his peace of mind, and to his hopes of maintaining the struggle against the devil, the world, and the flesh, escaping the evils of life, and triumphing over death and the grave, if his confidence were built on any thing below the word of the Eternal, who hath confirmed it by his oath, "that by two immutable things, wherein it is impossible for God to lie, they might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before them." Wo to the continuance of his peace, if it were based on any act, exercise, or attainment of his own, if it ebbed and flowed under a secondary influence, and if, after being relieved, quickened, and cheered by direct communication from the Fountain of Light, he were doomed henceforth to receive all his comfort by reflection from his own experience!

The grounds on which a believer entertains a hope of eternal salvation, are substantially the same with those upon which he was first induced to rest for pardon and acceptance. The persuasion expressed by our apostle in the text was nothing more than the continuation or following out, by repeated acts, of that exercise which he put forth when he first committed himself to Christ. "The life that I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."—"The just shall live by faith," and "are kept by the power of God, through faith unto salvation." Now, upon what grounds does the believer first commit his soul to the Redeemer? On the divine testimony concerning Christ in the gospel. In this testimony there are two things —the attestation, and the thing attested—the one constituting the formal, the other the material ground of his confidence. And both of these are equally important in reference to Christian assurance. Were the thing testified of minor importance, the divinity of the testimony might give assurance of the fact, but would not give confidence of salvation; and, however important and consolatory the doctrine might be, it would fail to create confidence if it rested on testimony not divine. Both of these grounds, however, are to be found in the testimony of God concerning his Son; and both of them concurred in giving to the apostle assurance of his final salvation. He was assured of this, because he knew and was persuaded that Christ was able to keep that which he had committed to him; and he was so persuaded, because the Word of the infallible Jehovah was pledged for its truth. His faith and his hope rested on the same foundation; and the same reasons which induced him at first to venture his eternal all upon Christ, supported, under every adverse circumstance, his confidence of obtaining eternal salvation "against that day." The same grounds which induce a person to commit himself and his property to the sea,—the adaptation of the vessel to the element on which it is launched, the goodness of the mast, the cordage, the rudder and the anchor, with the skill of the mariner, all properly attested to him,—the same

grounds give him confidence during the voyage, and in the midst of the storm; and if he forget or lose confidence in these, he will be at his wit's end, and throw away all hope, when he sees his bark the sport of wind and wave, and in danger of being engulfed in the yawning deep, or dashed in pieces on the rocky shore.

The clearer that the believer's views are of the object of his faith, the firmer, of course, will be his assurance. The apostle does not say in our text, I know *that* I have believed, or *in* whom I have believed, though both were true; but he says, "I know *whom* I have believed," because he meant to intimate that what he knew of his Saviour was the foundation of his confidence. But then, the Christian acquires additional knowledge of him after he has believed; and the more he knows of Christ, the greater reason he sees to be satisfied with the step which he has taken, the firmer does his trust become, and the more he is at ease as to its final results. This is one reason why he prizes so much the knowledge of Christ, and labours to increase it. "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus MY LORD—that I may know him."* This knowledge is not speculative; it is practical, it is appropriating; and the Christian's assurance must rise in proportion to the clearness with which he discovers the stability and security of the foundation on which he rests.

If any one should say to you, 'Are you not afraid of losing the money you have intrusted to such a man?' You would reply, 'No, I am not afraid; for I know him well—I know him to be a good man, not only wealthy and substantial, but faithful, active, skilful, and prudent.' And this confidence admits of being confirmed. You may have a general knowledge of a fellow-citizen, and report may have warranted you to form a favourable opinion of his character; but if he has come to be intrusted with any part of your property, you will not be satisfied with the hearing of the ear, you will be desirous to see him with your eyes, to visit him, to become

* Phil. iii. 8, 10.

personally and familiarly acquainted with him; in short, every thing relating to him and his affairs will be viewed by you in a new light. So is it with the believer respecting Christ. There is an action and a re-action in his exercise. The consideration that I have committed my soul to the Saviour stimulates me to seek farther acquaintance with him; and the more enlarged my knowledge of him becomes, the firmer is my reliance upon him.

III. This assurance is strengthened by Christian experience.

That Christian assurance is of different degrees of strength, and admits of increase, is plain from the language of Scripture respecting it. There is an "assurance," and a "full assurance," yea, "all riches of the full assurance." Those who plead that assurance is a simple idea, incapable of increase or diminution, not only contradict the Scripture, and the experience of the saints, but the common feelings of mankind, as expressed in all languages. The degree of assurance is greater in some than in others, and greater in the same individual at one time than at another. The hopes of the Christian are sometimes very lively and strong at the time of his conversion, and become afterwards fainter and more unsteady. Hence the apostle exhorts the believing Hebrews to "hold fast the beginning of their confidence and the rejoicing of their hope unto the end," and warns them against "casting away their confidence." But, generally speaking, this assurance is progressive, and is enjoyed by the Christian in the highest degree at the end of his course, when it has been confirmed by long experience.

By Christian experience, I refer here immediately to the proofs which the believer has derived from his own experience of the grace, power, and faithfulness of God in Christ. These are manifold, and always increasing. Every instance in which a Christian has been enabled to perform a duty, to surmount a difficulty, to resist a temptation, to mortify a corruption, or support an affliction, tends to increase his assurance. In this sense the apostle says, "We glory in tribulations also; know-

ing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost." He had mentioned before as one of the fruits of justification, that believers "rejoiced in hope of the glory of God." But, it might be asked, did not the heavy affliction which they suffered, damp their hope? No, says he; on the contrary, it is confirmed by the consolations poured into their hearts, by which they are "strengthened unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness." In a similar strain, he desires the Philippians to take encouragement from the firm and undaunted manner in which they had adhered to Christianity. It is to you, he says, "a token of salvation, and that of God; for unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake."

Christian experience is often appealed to as a proof of the genuineness of our faith and hope; and it is so. But there is another light in which it is often presented in Scripture, and that is, as a proof and confirmation of the divine word and promise, and consequently an encouragement to the believer to trust in it with a firmer and more unhesitating assurance. In this way we find David frequently improving his experience:—"The Lord is my strength and my shield: my heart trusted in him, and I am helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth." * This is the burden of the 71st Psalm, which begins with a profession of confident hope in God:—"In thee, O Lord, do I trust;" and he takes encouragement from the protection and kindness which he had experienced from his earliest years, "for thou art my hope, O Lord my God; thou art my trust from my youth; by thee have I been holden up from the womb." Thus encouraged, he adds, "I will hope continually, and will yet praise thee more and more. Thou who hast showed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth." And yet his hope rested properly on the goodness and power of God as pledged by his faithful word: and

* Ps. xxviii. 7.

therefore he says, " I will praise thee, even thy truth, O my God," or, as he expresses himself in another Psalm, " Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope : this is my comfort in my affliction ; for thy word hath quickened me." * We find the apostle of the Gentiles encouraging himself in the same way :—" We trust not in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead ; who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver : in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us."† " The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me ; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom." ‡ And the same high ground of consolation he presents to those in whom he had seen the fruits of the gospel :— " God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." § The experience of God's people, therefore, though not the ground of their assurance, cannot fail to strengthen it.

There is one view in which the inhabitation of the Spirit, including all his operations in the hearts of believers, is represented in Scripture, which contributes greatly to their comfort and assurance. He is called " the earnest of the heavenly inheritance," and his operations are called its " first fruits." As the first fruits offered unto God and sanctified, were to the Israelites an assurance of the full harvest, so the fruits of the Spirit are to the believer an assurance of eternal life. " Ourselves also which have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." If a man of character promise us an inheritance, we trust him ; but if he gives us, not only a token and pledge, but an earnest, by putting us in possession of a valuable part of the gift, our confidence in him, and our expectation of the complete enjoyment of the property, is greatly increased. The application of this to the subject before us cannot be better expressed than in the words of the apostle to the Ephesians :—" In whom ye also trusted, after

* Ps. cxix. 49. † 2 Cor. i. 9. ‡ 2 Tim. iv. 17. § 1 Cor. i. 9.

that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession."

IV. This persuasion will stand the severest test.

It is easy to make use of great swelling words in talking of our Christian assurance. It is not difficult to indulge a confident persuasion of eternal happiness in the time of health and prosperity, when the evil day is far away from us. It is otherwise when the wind of temptation blows, and all the waves and billows of affliction go over us. The confidence of many is as easily shaken as that of the Psalmist was: "In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved. Lord by thy favour thou hast made my mountain to stand strong: thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." * When God's dispensations wear a frowning aspect, when his Providence seems to fight against his promises, then comes the trial of the genuineness and strength of our confidence. If genuine, it will come out of the furnace like gold which has stood the fire, and receive the stamp of heaven. Such was the confidence of Job, when he said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." † And such was that of our apostle: "For the which cause I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed."

To the Christian himself, these trials are useful in ascertaining the strength of his faith. "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small." ‡ There is a difference between the real and the relative strength of assurance. A person may be ready to sink under a burden which has been laid on him, and yet his strength is not less than it was when he was a little before walking erect and at his ease. To recur to the metaphor formerly employed,—if a report is circulated that the person with whom you have deposited your property has become insolvent or unfaithful, and you should be thrown into distress by this intelligence, your confidence in him is not

* Ps. xxx. 6, 7. † Job, xiii. 15. ‡ Prov. xxiv. 10.

really less than it was; but it is subjected to a greater trial, and has to conflict with considerations not formerly placed in your view. Hence the twofold use of such trials:—they show us that our faith is not so vigorous as we may have presumed it to be; and if it stand the test, it comes out purer and stronger than ever. Steady and firm as the basis on which it is built, true Christian confidence will bear the severest test which can be applied to it; not only of afflictions, but death itself, in its most terrible forms. Then instead of sinking, it rises to the full assurance of hope. "Nay, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

V. This persuasion exerts a powerful and extensive influence on the Christian life. Assurance of God's love, peace of conscience, and joy in the Holy Ghost, are closely connected with increase of grace and perseverance therein to the end. Those who enjoy peace with God, and rejoice in hope of his glory, have little or no cause to dread earthly evils, and may glory in tribulations. Nothing tends more to inspire the soul with unshaken fortitude and heroic courage, than a persuasion that our final salvation is sure under the management of Christ. When the men of Ai looked behind them, and saw their city, in which were their wives and children and treasures, enveloped in flames, "they had no power to flee this way or that way," * and became an easy prey to the children of Israel. On the other hand, when soldiers know that all that is valuable and dear to them is secured in a fortified place, they will go forth with undaunted resolution to face the enemy. "What shall we say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" Besides, this assurance has also a powerful influence in stimulating the believer to make progress in holiness. Were it to rise at once to its greatest height, or were the attainment of it independent of the use of means, there would be a specious pre-

* Joshua, viii. 20.

text for saying that it is unfavourable to holiness. But this is far from being the case. Instead of relaxing diligence, or inducing sloth, a lively hope of salvation has, on the contrary, a powerful tendency to animate the Christian to the most vigorous exertions, and the most patient enduring. "We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end, that ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises." It is not an assurance that they shall be happy without being holy, nor is it an assurance that they shall be made holy without the use of means. Paul lived in the full and blessed assurance of faith; and what a life of disinterested, holy, self-denying and persevering activity did he lead, spending and being spent for Christ and the souls of men! "He that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself even as Christ is pure." In fine, this persuasion must exert a pervading influence over the whole life of the Christian, for it engages and fills all the affections. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Those who have committed their souls to Christ, will be frequently looking to the place where he is; "their conversation," their citizenship and their traffic, "is in heaven;" they will live under "the powers of the world to come." "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth: for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth."

From this subject, let us learn, in the first place, that one article of the faith once delivered to the saints for which we are to contend is, that a Christian may attain a satisfying and full assurance of his final salvation. It is impossible to look attentively into the Scriptures without finding it written there in most distinct characters. The contrary doctrine not only contradicts the experience of the saints,—it strikes directly against the scheme of grace revealed by the gospel, is irreconcilable with the perfection of the atonement, and can be maintained only on the supposition of the Arminian tenet, that

eternal life, instead of being the gift of God through Christ, is the pactional wages of an obedience persevered in till death. Christians are bound to seek assurance—it is their infirmity—their sin, and not merely their misfortune, that they do not attain it.

2. We may learn from this subject to avoid extremes on this doctrine. Assurance is of two kinds, which have been designed the assurance of faith and the assurance of sense. The former is direct, the latter indirect. The former is founded on the testimony of God, the latter on experience. The object of the former is entirely without us, the object of the latter is chiefly within us. "God hath spoken in his holiness, I will rejoice," is the language of the former; "We are his workmanship created anew in Christ Jesus," is the language of the latter. When a man gives me his promissory note, I have the assurance of faith; when he gives me a pledge, or pays the interest regularly, or advances the principal sum by instalments, I have the assurance of sense. They are perfectly consistent with one another, may exist in the soul at the same time, and their combination carries assurance to the highest point.

Those who deny the assurance of faith appear to labour under a mistake both as to the gospel and as to believing. The gospel does not consist of general doctrine merely, but also of promises indefinitely proposed to all who hear it, to be enjoyed, not on the condition of believing, but in the way of believing. "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."—"I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean."—"I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts."—"Behold, I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Can a person believe these promises, truly and with understanding, without having some assurance of the blessings promised? There appears also to be a mistake as to the nature of faith and the place which it holds in the application of redemption. It is a trusting in Christ, a relying upon him for salvation upon the ground of the divine testimony respecting him; and does not this always

imply some degree of assurance or confidence? When we refer, in the way of illustration, to a drowning man trusting himself to the rope which is thrown to him, or to a person who confides in him to whom he has intrusted his property, we are told, that the former must first lay hold of the rope before he can trust to be saved by it, and the latter must commit his property to the depository before he can entertain a persuasion of its security. But the mistake lies here, that in the cases referred to there are two acts, a bodily and a mental; whereas in the case under our consideration there is but one, which serves both purposes. Faith at once lays hold of Christ and is persuaded of safety by him; by one and the same act it commits the soul to Christ and is persuaded he will keep it. This is the mystery, that God should have appointed faith or resting upon Christ as the means of interesting in him and his salvation. There is nothing like it in nature or among human transactions; and hence the danger of our losing ourselves and obscuring the truth by having recourse to distant analogies and straining inadequate comparisons. But the place which has been assigned to faith is one of the most striking proofs of the wisdom of God, as it at once secures the glory of divine grace and provides for the consolation of those who flee for refuge to the hope set before them. "It is of faith that it might be by grace that the promise might be sure to all the seed."

Others go to an opposite extreme. They maintain that every true Christian always enjoys an absolute and unwavering certainty as to his final happiness—that he is a true believer and in a state of salvation; and they dwell on the assurance of faith to the neglect of the evidence which arises from Christian experience and growth in holiness. This is apt to cherish a spirit of presumption on the one hand, and to throw persons into a state of despondency on the other. There are various degrees of assurance, and in some genuine believers it may be scarcely perceptible. He who is the author and finisher of our faith was careful not to break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax. While he rebuked the unbelief and unreasonable doubts of his disciples, he never

called in question the reality of their faith. He received the man who said, "Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief." While he said to Peter, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" he took him by the hand and lifted him out of the water. Grant that doubting is sinful, is there a just man on earth that doeth good and sinneth not? Are not the love and patience, and other gracious dispositions of a Christian, also sinfully defective? Urge the admonition "Be not faithless, but believing," but neglect not to urge also, "Be ye holy, for I am holy. Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." Would it not be dangerous to the interests of holiness, and discreditable to religion, if a person were supposed to be in possession of perfect assurance while subject to imperfection in every other respect? Is there not a proportional growth in all the members of the spiritual man? Would he not otherwise be a monstrous creature? Or is the exploded doctrine of sinless perfection in this life to be revived among us? He whose faith is faultless and his assurance perfect and unvarying, sees Christ as he is, and is already completely like him. He would not be a fit inhabitant of earth, and the only prayer he could put up would be, "Now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace."—"Let us go on to perfection." The genuine Christian is conscious of his remaining imperfection. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus."

On the other hand, it is no valid objection to the doctrine of the direct assurance of faith, that final salvation is only to be obtained after a persevering course of holy obedience, and patient suffering according to the word of God. If holiness were the condition of eternal life, then unquestionably there could be no genuine hope of the latter but what was founded on the former; nay there could be no such thing as an assurance of it in this life, for it is only "he who endureth to the end that shall be saved." But if salvation is of grace, if Christ is able to save to the uttermost all that come to God by him, and if there are in the New Covenant promises securing perseverance, and providing all needful assistance for the

discharge of duty and progressive advancement in the Christian life, then all that grace and ability, and all these securities enter into the matter and ground of faith, even from the beginning, and produce a well-founded, though humble, self-denying confidence of final victory and eternal rest. It is the hope, not of being saved absolutely, but of being saved in God's way—not simply of getting to heaven, but of being meet for the inheritance of the saints in light—not of being crowned without a struggle, but of being enabled to fight the good fight, and made "more than conquerors through him that loved us."

Finally, Christian hope is the inseparable companion of faith in Christ. Some would separate these graces, or at least represent them as resting on different grounds, and embracing different objects. According to them the object of faith is the gospel; the object of hope, an actual interest in the salvation which the gospel reveals; the former resting on the testimony of God, the latter on that of our own consciences, and our evidences of a gracious state. This does not appear to be the doctrine of Scripture. They are, no doubt, distinct graces, the one regarding the promise as *true*, and the other regarding it as *good*. But they have the same ground—the infallible word of God;—and what is hope but the outgoing of the soul in the expectation of what it believes? We confound our views on this subject by the use made of the word *hope* in the affairs of this life. Worldly hopes are founded upon probabilities. We expect a benefit—we hope that our friend will bestow it; but having been often disappointed in such cases, we learn to moderate our expectations, and to guard against confidence. But surely it is otherwise with hope in God. "Let God be true, and every man a liar." Instead of indulging, we ought to check our unbelieving suspicions and fears, saying with the Psalmist, "Why art thou cast down, O my soul: still hope in God, for I shall yet praise him." "All flesh is as grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass:—but the word of the Lord endureth for ever; and this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."

SERMON XVI.

THE RECOVERED DISCIPLE.

LUKE, xxii. 32.

"WHEN THOU ART CONVERTED, STRENGTHEN THY BRETHREN."

IF there is any season in which the admonition, "Rejoice with trembling," might be dispensed with, it is surely when the believer is sitting at the table of his Saviour, commemorating that death by which he finished redemption, and receiving the sensible tokens of his love. And yet even there we have reason for mixed exercise, and for tempering our joy in Christ with a godly jealousy over ourselves. How forcibly is this practical truth impressed on our minds by the events recorded in the chapter before us, connected as they were with the first celebration of that divine ordinance! It was when sitting with his disciples at the table, and reaching to them the sacred memorials of his dying love, that Jesus had to say, "Behold the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table." This intimation caused, as it well might, "great searchings of heart." The disciples were "very sorrowful." But, alas, how deceitful is our goodness! how fitful and momentary our frames both of love and grief! What reason has the Saviour to complain of each of us, "What shall I do to *thee?*—and what shall I do to *thee?* for thy goodness is as the morning cloud, as the early dew it passeth away!" Scarcely was the feast over, and the table drawn, when the guests forgot themselves so far, as to enter into a most unseasonable, unseemly contest as to precedence in that kingdom, which they had been just taught sacramentally was to be established by sufferings and blood.

And, in spite of all their vows, next sun had not dawned, before the most resolute of their number had repeatedly and solemnly denied his master; and that, too, after being affectionately and faithfully warned of his danger. Lord, what is man? The best of men? Less than vanity, a lie, when left to himself. O how loudly does this fact sound in the ears of such of us as were lately at the Lord's table! How does it summon us to self-examination after supper as well as before it, to humiliation under a sense of our miscarriages and failures, even though they should only have been partial, to vigilance and circumspection, and humble walking before God! How does it call upon us to flee to the true hiding-place, and diligently to use all appointed means for fortifying our own minds and those of our brethren against temptation!

As preparatory to the holy communion, I directed your attention to the deeply interesting colloquy which the Saviour held with Peter, before his ascension, and in which he led him to profess his attachment to his master as often as he had denied him. On that occasion, Christ, after each reply, laid an injunction upon him: "Feed my sheep—feed my lambs." As if he had said, By this evince the sincerity and fervour of thy love to me,—by tending, feeding, and watching over those, for whom I have laid down my life, and by dealing tenderly and gently with such of them as may be feeble or diseased, seeking that which is lost, bringing again that which has been driven away, binding up that which was broken, and strengthening that which is sick. This task Peter discharged, as an apostle and bishop of souls, in his personal ministry and by his written instructions; and not contented with his own exertions, he was not neglectful to stir up the pure minds of his fellow-labourers: "The elders which are among you, I exhort, who am also an elder,"—"feed the flock of God." But as that charge relates especially to such as are called to fill a public office in the church, I reckon it more suitable to your circumstances and stations to turn your attention to the injunction which the Saviour gave to the same individual on another occasion: "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren."

The words of our text were addressed by our Lord to Peter, when he forewarned him of his mournful fall, and foretold his merciful recovery. "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and *when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*" As if he had said, When the time shall come, that in answer to my prayer, thou shalt be recovered, by the grace of God, from thy fall, brought to a sense of thy sin, and restored to former peace of mind, look upon it as a duty peculiarly incumbent on thee, to use the experience which thou hast acquired, by doing every thing in thy power to fortify thy fellow-disciples against temptation, or to recover them from sin, if, like thyself, they shall fall through temptation. The words, therefore, teach us, That it is peculiarly incumbent on Christians who have been recovered from falls, to strengthen their brethren. And in discoursing from them we propose, in the *first* place, to make some observations on the recovery of fallen believers;—in the *second* place, to explain the duty devolving on such as have been recovered, which is, to "strengthen their brethren;"—and, in the *last* place, to inforce the duty, by specifying the peculiar obligations which they are under to perform this office of brotherly kindness.

I. On the recovery of fallen believers.

1. I begin by remarking that true believers, as well as others, are liable to fall into sin. This is implied in all the warnings which the Scriptures give on this head. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief." "Let us labour—lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief." It is also evident from Scripture example, of which that of Peter is instead of a thousand. As some professors of religion may fall totally and irrecoverably from Christ, after very high and specious attainments, so genuine Christians may fall very foully, and, for a time, may remain in a desperate-like condition. The promises and provisions of the covenant of grace secure all those who are vitally united to Christ from total

and final apostasy, but there is no arrangement made securing that they shall not sin, and by their sin grievously dishonour God, wound their own consciences, lay a stumbling-block before others, and subject themselves to severe chastisement.

There are other ways of failing in our allegiance to Christ, and even of denying him, than that in which Peter offended. Let us not think that we are safe, because our circumstances are very different from those in which he was placed. There is such a thing as denying by works, as well as by words; yea, we may deny him in our heart, by yielding our affections to his rivals. Let us mention some of the ways in which we may fall from the attachment and service which we owe to him.

We may fall into *spiritual decay*. Instead of growing in grace, and abounding in the fruits of righteousness, we may languish, and become in a great degree "barren and unfruitful in the knowledge of Christ." Through carelessness and carnality, a Christian may suffer himself to be shorn of his strength, and become, for a time, like another man. He is "blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." His faith wavers, his love waxes cold, his hope is shaken, he loses his wonted relish for the Word, restrains prayer before God in secret, and turns negligent or formal in waiting on the ordinances of religion. "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

We may fall into *errors*, dangerous and hurtful to the soul. This fall is often the consequence of the former. You will see from the epistles to the churches of Asia, that when they left their first love, and faith, and patience, they became infected with the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, of Balaam, and of "that woman Jezebel, who called herself a prophetess." And of Christians, at a subsequent period, it is said, that "because they received not the love of the truth, God sent them strong delusion that they should believe a lie."* At other times, this defection is to be traced to spiritual pride, puffing up per-

* 2 Thes. ii. 11.

sons with a high conceit of their piety, knowledge, and talents, leading them to despise instruction, and to forsake the good old way in which the children of God in all ages have found food and rest to their souls, and to betake themselves to new and untrodden paths, where they wander in endless and inextricable mazes of error. There was nothing against which the apostles were more particular in warning their converts, than the delusions of false doctrine. And we live in a time when it is peculiarly necessary to attend to these warnings. The time is come when "men will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they turn away their ears from the truth, and are turned unto fables." *

We are in danger of falling into *open vice and immorality*. It has often been found that error and immorality go hand in hand. The gospel is "the doctrine according to godliness;" deviations from it "increase unto more ungodliness." The truth alone can sanctify; error, though it may not always directly encourage vice and irreligion, must be inefficacious in subduing the corruption of the heart, and in promoting true holiness. But even when Christians are not entangled with error, they are in danger of falling into the grossest sin. There is always need for the call, "Awake to righteousness and sin not." "Evil communications corrupt good manners." "But fornication, and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not once be named among you, as becometh saints."

2. The call to those who have so fallen is to convert and turn to the Lord. There is a twofold conversion; one when a sinner is turned from death to life, and from the power of Satan unto God; and another when a saint is recovered from the snare of the devil, into which he had fallen through his own unwatchfulness and corruption; and the last is as necessary as the first. "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works," is Christ's call, not only to every church, but to every individual, who has "left his first love." All who are converted, do convert or turn from their

* 2 Tim. iv. 3.

evil ways. The Psalmist prayed, "Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity;" but he tells us also, "I thought upon my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies." * There is no salvation, or security, or peace, in sin. We must be saved from our iniquities, by being every one of us turned away from them. And this holds as to believers equally with others. True, they cannot perish, but equally true is it that they cannot continue in their sins. Judas "by transgression fell," and remained as he fell, "that he might go to his own place;"—Peter, when "his feet were almost gone," was recovered in the way of his repenting of his transgression. This duty of repentance is incumbent on them from the first moment of their falling into sin. Nothing can be more dangerous than their remaining, even for a short period, indifferent and impenitent. Having provoked the Spirit of God to withdraw his influences, and being left to themselves, they are in danger of going farther and farther from the right path. Thus David, by remaining impenitent under the sin of adultery, was left to fall (fearful to tell!) into that of murder. By transgressing the law of God, Christian, you enter the devil's territories; and he will not neglect the advantage which this gives him over you. How pitiable the case of Samson, when the Philistines were upon him, and his strength had departed! How wretched the plight of Saul, when, deserted by God, and driven to despair, he cried out, "I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more!" †

3. The recovery of believers from their falls requires an exertion of divine power and mercy of the same kind with that which was put forth in their regeneration or first conversion. Accordingly, the change produced is called by the same name. "When thou art converted." We say not that it requires the same degree of power; for the fall of a believer does not extinguish the principle of grace within him; but it weakens it, and gives the opposite principle the advantage and supe-

* Ps. cxix. 37, 59. † 1 Sam. xxviii. 15.

riority for the time. The "law in the members" wars successfully against "the law of the mind," and brings the soul into captivity to the law of sin.* A man who has broken a limb by a fall needs foreign aid, and must be lifted up and carried in the same way as a dead man, that is, by the strength and exertion of another person. Grace received is not enough to enable a Christian to prosecute his course; he must receive a new accession for every new step which he takes. Much more is this necessary to lift him up when he has fallen, and to restore him when he has wandered. The foolish sheep which has left its pasture would never return, if it were not followed and sought out and brought back by the shepherd. Think you that Peter would have been able again to look his offended Lord in the face, if the Lord had not first looked upon him? Ah, no; he would have shunned him, turned from him, fled from him. "The voice of the Lord is powerful;" and so is his glance. If the former is terrible as the thunder, the latter is quick and penetrating like the lightning. The look which Jesus cast on the fallen disciple was equally divine and efficacious with the word which at first made him forsake all and follow him. It pierced his soul, it melted his heart, it laid open his thoughts, it brought him to himself. It produced at once conviction and conversion. "The Lord looked upon Peter—and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly!" It was fit that he who had trembled at a word, should weep at a look.

4. The intercession of Christ secures the recovery of fallen believers. "Confess your faults one to another," says the apostle James, "and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." But the grand security for believers lies in the prayers of their Elder Brother who is on high. "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."

* Rom. vii. 23.

This encouragement was not confined to Peter: "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." He is continually praying for his people: "I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou wouldest help them from the evil." And when at any time they have fallen into sin, he intercedes for their pardon and recovery, and sends his Spirit to convince them of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. "And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire? Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. And he answered, and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment." *

5. The sovereignty of divine grace is displayed in the recovery of fallen saints. It is displayed as to the *time*. "When thou art converted," says Christ, leaving it quite indefinite. It might be soon, or it might be late. Peter was very speedily brought to repentance. Scarcely has the roaring lion seized on his prey, when, hearing the voice of Christ, he is forced to let it go, though not till he has inflicted, on his intended victim, marks of his envenomed malice. "I have prayed for thee," says Christ, "that thy faith fail not;" and the prayer of Christ was an immediate rebuke to the devil. Others again, as we see in the case of David, remain in a hardened, or at least insensible state, for months, or even years. Sovereignty is displayed as to the *process* by which the recovery is effected. Legal terrors, or distressing doubts about forgiveness, may be prolonged. Thus the Psalmist had to complain, "Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." How

* Zech. iii. 1-4.

long it was before the dart was extracted from Peter's liver, we are not told; but it is probable that the wound was not completely healed until the conversation which took place before the ascension of Christ. The same thing happens as to fallen churches. "The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice: —afterwards shall they return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days." *

6. Those who have been recovered from falls derive much spiritual wisdom from their painful experience. Their knowledge is improved. How much more intimate must be their acquaintance with themselves, and especially with their own hearts—so deceitful by nature, and desperately wicked! How much more enlarged their knowledge of the world, and of the depths and devices of their invisible enemy! Their knowledge of sin is increased by what they have felt of its bitter fruits—of the Saviour, by experiencing the renewed tokens of his affection and compassion. They are rendered more humble and charitable, more circumspect, more vigilant, more zealous and active. In fine, being strengthened themselves, they are more qualified for strengthening others.

II. Let us now explain the duty enjoined in the text, on such as have been recovered from falls. "When thou art converted, *strengthen thy brethren.*"

We may be said to "strengthen the brethren," when we contribute, in any degree, to their spiritual advantage and growth in grace, stimulating them to a holy life, and encouraging them to hold fast the profession of their faith, and thus preventing them from falling; or when we recover them from their errors and defections. "Strengthen the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees," and "make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed." Now this kind office may be performed in different ways, and by various means.

* Hos. iii. 4, 5.

1. The recovered disciple may strengthen his brethren by fervent prayer in their behalf—committing them "to Him who is able to keep them from falling," and imploring his mercy and grace to raise them up when they have been "overtaken in a fault." "I have prayed for thee," said Christ to Peter; and in this he showed us an example. This ought to accompany all the other means which we employ, and it may be the only means which we have it in our power to use. However far the objects of our care are removed from us in respect of place or affection, we are always at liberty to use our influence in their behalf at the throne of grace. Whatever alienation may take place between us and our Christian brethren, though they should smite us, and cast out our names as evil, and shut their doors against us, our prayer may still be for them in their calamities. When advice has been spurned, and argument has served only to irritate, this means has sometimes proved successful. "Pray one for another, that ye may be healed," says the apostle James; and he connects this with the conversion of an erring brother: "Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him, let him know that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins." Unspeakable reward! Best of answers to prayer!

2. The recovered disciple may strengthen his brethren by example. One evidence of a sanctified fall is the greater care which a person takes in ordering his conversation. By a holy, circumspect, tender walk, by an open, decided, and unwavering confession of the name of Christ, by a regular attendance upon ordinances, and by a cheerful submission to afflictions, we may be the means of alluring strangers to join themselves to the Lord, and cannot fail to confirm the souls of the disciples. "They that fear thee will be glad when they see me," * says David, when avouching his love to the law of God, and imploring divine leading. Without the accompaniment of a holy life, our prayers will not be accept-

* Ps cxix. 74.

able to God, and our advices will be unsuccessful with men. "Thy servant Job shall pray for you; for *him* will I accept, lest I deal with you after your folly."* "Let *the righteous* smite me, it shall be a kindness; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities."† This is one way in which those who have offended will be particularly concerned to edify others: like Hezekiah, they "will go softly all their years in the bitterness of their soul."‡ And thus "if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won, while they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear." To this we may add, that nothing tends more to confirm the faith of our brethren than the patient endurance of reproach and suffering for the sake of the gospel. Such was the effect of the sufferings of Paul at Rome: "Many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."§ And our Lord intimated that Peter, by submitting to a violent death for his sake, would glorify God, and, at the same time, strengthen his brethren, by giving this proof of his firm attachment to him whom he had formerly, through the fear of death, denied.

3. The recovered believer may strengthen his brethren by instruction. Though he may not, like Peter, be called to "feed Christ's lambs" in the public capacity of an undershepherd, yet according to his station, talents, and opportunities, it is his duty to instruct his brethren. More particularly, he is to strengthen his brethren,

(1.) By warning them faithfully and affectionately of the danger of falling into sin. "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily while it is called to-day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." 'Be not secure' (the converted saint will say); 'you are exposed to danger from within and from without. You have evil hearts, and you live in an evil world;

* Job, xlii. 8. † Ps. cxli. 5. ‡ Is. xxxviii. 15. § Phil. i. 14.

and there is an invisible foe hovering around you and waiting for your halting. Brother, brother, Satan is desiring you to sift you as wheat. I have prayed for you, but trust not to my prayers. Be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. O be not high-minded, but fear. Be warned by my example to avoid pride and self-confidence. Tamper not with temptation. Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men; avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright; for at the last, it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.'

(2.) By acquainting them with the bitter fruits of sin. None knoweth the power of God's wrath but his own Son, into whose soul, when standing as the surety of sinners, it was poured immeasurably. But next to him, his saints feel it most sensibly, when yielding to temptation they fall into sin and under a sense of wrath. "It pleased the Lord (says one) to shoot an arrow of wrath suddenly into my soul, which pierced my soul and body both. It lasted not long—if it had—I had been a most miserable spectacle. I have sometimes wished for some drops of wrath to awaken me out of a secure frame; but I found one drop—intolerable! Who knoweth the power of his wrath? Tongue cannot express it. O precious Christ! O precious blood! Horror and despair had swallowed me up, had it not been that blood, the blood of God." David in the thirty-eighth, and Heman in the eighty-eight psalm, express the same feelings in still more striking terms: "Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger, neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. My soul is full of troubles, and my life draweth nigh unto the grave. Thou hast laid me in the lowest pit, in darkness, in the deeps. Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves." None so qualified for proclaiming the terrors of the Lord, or dissuading from sin, as those who have felt in this manner.

(3.) By leading them to that grace whereby alone they can be established and made to stand in the hour of temptation, or can be recovered when they have fallen. Peter knew that he had fallen by trusting to himself, and that he was recovered by the grace of Christ, who prayed for him, and who had converted and continued to uphold him. And therefore he directed his brethren to the true grace of God wherein they stood. Hence, in his first epistle, he blesses "God even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who had begotten them to a lively hope"—and describes them as "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation"—built upon Christ, "the living and chief corner-stone." And in the close of the epistle, he rolls them over upon this all-sufficient support. "The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." Ministers and private Christians are but feeble props. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." But he is the Rock; and his work is perfect. He will not leave the work unfinished. He is "the God of *all* grace"—pardoning grace, sanctifying grace, renewing grace, recovering grace, glorifying grace. The more a Christian is emptied of himself, the more he is made sensible of his own weakness and worthlessness, and the more singly that he depends on the grace that is in Christ Jesus—the safer he is. We go forth to the combat in our own strength, and we are foiled; we repeat the attempt, and are again foiled. We are always forgetting the lesson, and need to be reminded of it, that our strength is weakness, and our wisdom folly, and that all our sufficiency is of God.

(4.) We may strengthen our brethren by directing them to the means of establishment. Though the work is God's, yet he accomplishes it by means, and in the use of these we are to co-operate with him. Among those means which Peter specifies (and I shall confine myself to these at present) are the following:—He recommends a lively recollection of the price by which we were redeemed. "Pass the time of your

sojourning here in fear, forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ."* He brings to their remembrance the high character which belonged to them as Christians: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people."† He inculcates an abiding sense of the essential holiness of that God to whom they are redeemed: "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance; but as he which has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation."‡ He presses on them the cherishing of a holy awe of the Divine Majesty and greatness, as an antidote against the fear of man. "Be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."§ He strongly insists on humility. "Be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble."‖ He points out the necessity of sobriety and vigilance, as becoming those who are pilgrims, and who know that they are in an enemy's country and that the Lord is at hand.¶ And as they were ready to be shaken with trials, he places their privileges over against these,—shows the salutary tendency of affliction—proposes to them the example of Christ's sufferings—and sets before them the glorious issue of them all.**

(5.) We are to strengthen our brethren by using all proper exertions to recover those that are fallen, and especially by administering to them the comforts of the gospel. This is the evangelical, the divine way of recovering from falls. The terrors of the law can only convince; sometimes they harden. "There is no hope," the sinner will say; "no; for I have loved strangers, and after them will I go." The promises and consolations of the gospel recover and heal. "For the iniquity of his covetousness, was I wroth, and smote him, and

* 1 Pet. i. 17. † Ib. ii. 9. ‡ Ib. i. 14. § Ib. iii. 14.
‖ Ib. v. 5. ¶ Ib. v. 8. ** Ib. i. 2, 4, 7; iii. 21; iv. 12–14.

he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways, and will heal him; I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners." * "I will heal their backslidings, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him." †

The Christian who has himself been restored, will exert himself to recover those who have fallen, with long-suffering and compassion. Their case will draw forth his strongest sympathies. He will not stand at a distance from them, or despise them, nor will he soon or easily despair of their recovery, but will "reprove and rebuke and exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine." And when he has brought them to a sense of their sin, he will pour in the balm of consolation into their wounded spirits. He is bound to "comfort others with the same comfort wherewith he himself is comforted of God;" and will be disposed to use towards them the same tenderness with which Christ has treated him. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye, which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." ‡

III. Let us now briefly mention some of the obligations which lie on the recovered Christian to perform this office of brotherly kindness.

1. Gratitude to his deliverer requires it. Has he, converted Christian, had mercy on your souls, cast all your sins behind his back, restored you again, and made you to walk in the paths of righteousness? And will you not, at his call, exert yourself for advancing his glory, by promoting the spiritual welfare of those who are dear to him? "I endure all things," says Paul, "for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." "Restore unto me," says David, "the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free Spirit: then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

* Isa. lvii. 17, 18. † Hos. xiv. 4. ‡ Gal. vi. 1.

"Lovest thou me?" said Christ to Peter. "Feed *my lambs* —feed *my sheep*."

2. Love to the brethren, raised to sympathy by a recollection of their own circumstances, binds recovered Christians to strengthen their brethren. This is the best way in which we can testify our regard to them. What would we think of a person who had nearly lost his life by falling over a precipice, and yet should neglect to warn others of the danger? or of one who had been cured of a dangerous disease, and refused to communicate the remedy to those who were afflicted in the same manner in which he had been?

3. A recollection of the dishonour which they did to Christ, and the injury which they inflicted on their brethren, will excite them to make reparation, so far as it may be in their power. The fall of Peter must have had a great effect in staggering his brethren, considering the boldness which he had all along discovered in confessing Christ: they must have felt as soldiers "when a standard-bearer fainteth." He considered it, therefore, to be his duty, by every means in his power, to re-establish and comfort their minds. "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things ye shall never fall." "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth." *

4. The experience which they have acquired is a gift which they are bound to lay out for the public good. "As every man," says Peter, "hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Here all the qualifications already noticed, by which the recovered believer is peculiarly fitted for the service of strengthening his brethren, might have been adduced to enforce the duty. He has not been humbled, merely to teach himself circumspection, or graciously lifted up, merely to increase his gratitude to his deliverer; his experience has

* 2 Peter, i. 10–15.

qualified him for the task of strengthening others, and lays him under strong obligations to the discharge of it, that they also may be "partakers of the benefit."

From this subject we may learn, in the first place, that the Scripture doctrine of the perseverance of the saints is not inimical or unfriendly to holiness. You see, from the example of Peter, that the perseverance of the saints is consistent with their falling into sin, and consequently with exhortations and warnings on the part of God, and with caution and watchfulness on their part. Some represent this doctrine as calculated to make persons careless, and others scruple to preach it lest it should have this effect. Our Lord had no fears or scruples on this head; for he tells Peter, before he entered into temptation, that he had prayed for him, that his faith might not give up the ghost. Let us not attempt to be wiser and more prudent than our Lord. A state of grace does not secure against falling into sin, but it secures recovery from it, and this recovery is brought about in such a way as not only to strengthen the good principles implanted in the heart of the individual, but also to fit and dispose him to strengthen others. To imagine that the Christian who has fallen and been mercifully recovered, will be induced to fall again from the prospect of a similar interposition, is as preposterous as to suppose that a man who had, through carelessness, broken a limb, will expose himself to the same calamity, merely because he had experienced the skill and attention of the surgeon in healing it.

2. See again, my brethren, the wisdom of God in overruling the falls of believers for the best and holiest ends. "Out of the eater came forth meat, and sweetness out of the strong." Not only does grace superabound when sin abounds, but sin is shown, and seen, and felt, to be "exceeding sinful;" and one sin is made the means of preventing the commission of many sins. Among the many lessons which Peter's fall inculcates, this is not the least, that it is an evil thing and a bitter for a saint to depart from the Lord. Yet from its bitter, and in themselves noxious and poisonous ingredients,

divine grace can extract a balm, which shall impart health and vigour to multitudes. Who so successful and honoured in winning men to Christ, and in confirming the souls of the disciples, as the miraculously converted persecutor, and the twice-converted fisherman? We are apt to perplex our minds by curious enquiries as to the origin of moral evil, and the entrance of sin into the world; but while we may rest assured that nothing could enter into God's world without his knowledge and permission, would we not be more profitably employed in contemplating the wisdom which educes good not only from "seeming," but from real and great "evil?"

3. Learn the evil of selfishness in religion. Say not with the first murderer, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Christ does not merely say to Peter, "When thou art converted—sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee," but "strengthen thy brethren." And let none of you think that because you occupy a private station in the church, you may be excused from this service, and devolve it on her public overseers. "None of us liveth to himself. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification."

4. If, however, it be sinful for us to neglect this duty, how much greater must be the sin of throwing a stumbling-block before others! If it be our duty to "strengthen our brethren," what a grievous offence to weaken, shake, and overthrow them—and then, perhaps to rejoice over their fall! "Through thy knowledge shall thy brother perish for whom Christ died?" Wouldst thou destroy him whom Christ died to save? "It is impossible but that offences must come; but wo to that man by whom the offence cometh! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

Finally, let us learn a lesson of caution and circumspection. The eyes of the church and the world, Christian, are upon you. The eyes of Satan are upon you. And the eyes of God are upon you. See then that ye walk circumspectly. Be humble. Live near the Lord. Live by faith. O beware of what will dishonour God, bring discredit on your profession, wound your consciences, grieve your friends, and gratify your

enemies! "Ye beloved, building up yourselves in your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life." "Now 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."

SERMON XVII. *

THE SPIRIT OF JUDGMENT.

Isa. xxviii. 5, 6.

"IN THAT DAY SHALL THE LORD OF HOSTS BE FOR A SPIRIT OF JUDGMENT TO HIM THAT SITTETH IN JUDGMENT."

Next to the enactment of just and wholesome laws, the due administration of them is of the highest importance to a community. This has accordingly engaged the particular attention of every people who have attained to any considerable degree of civilisation. The most enlightened nations have separated the judicial from the legislative authority, rendered judges, in the discharge of their functions, independent of the supreme executive magistrate in the state, and adopted other precautions, with the view of keeping the channels by which justice is dispensed through all the departments of society pure and uncorrupted. Nor is the jealousy which they manifested on this head to be censured as excessive. By the wise and impartial administration of justice a people have been reconciled to the rule of a usurper, and tyranny itself has become tolerable; whereas the neglect or perversion of justice has made them unhappy and discontented under the best form of political government. The salutary effects of righteous judgment are not confined to the securing of individual rights, the repressing of the bad, and the protecting of the good and peaceable. Under its fostering shade every useful art and every liberal science flourish; the honour of the laws being preserved unsullied, a cheerful obedience is yielded to their authority; morality is promoted by an exhibition of the connexion which subsists be-

* Delivered at the opening of the Synod of Original Seceders, Edinburgh, September, 1829.

tween its essential principles and the temporal welfare of men; and piety is indirectly, but powerfully, strengthened by the thoughts being irresistibly raised to the fountain of all justice, and by the representation, faint indeed, but not scenic, which is given of the great assize before which all must at last appear.

If the distribution of justice in secular kingdoms, and in relation to the affairs of this life, is of so great moment, it must be of still greater importance in that society which is styled "the kingdom of heaven," and in relation to things connected with the eternal interests of men. "The habitation of justice" is one of the appellations given to the church in scripture; her exalted Head hath made ample provision for her enjoyment of this blessing under his wise and beneficent government; and it holds a distinguished place among the promises which secure her spiritual restoration and prosperity. "Thus saith the Lord, I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy sin; and I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning; afterwards thou shalt be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed with righteousness, and her converts with judgment." This is secured by the residence of God in his church, and constitutes one of the most brilliant jewels in that crown which is formed by his glory shining upon her, according to the words before us: "In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people, and for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment."

I propose, in the first place, to make some remarks on the warrants and nature of ecclesiastical judicature; and, secondly, to consider the spirit in which it ought to be exercised, and which God has promised to confer.

I. In entering on the first head, I remark generally, that religious society has its foundation in the very nature of man considered as a social being. Men are bound to unite for the worship of their Creator, as well as for their mutual defence and external comfort; and this view of religious society is antecedent in idea, or in the order of nature, to any

particular form which it may receive from supernatural constitution or positive ordinances. The church is a society called out of the world by grace, and organized for promoting the glory of God in the salvation and sanctification of fallen men. Viewed strictly in this specific character, its polity and order are entirely of supernatural institution; but there are many things which belong to it under the general notion of a society, and are common to it with other societies, or which belong to it as a society having religion for its object. For these things the light of nature furnishes important directions, and is a sufficient warrant. Divine revelation takes the dictates of sound reason for granted, and refers to them in such terms of approbation as impose it upon us as a duty to be guided by them in those cases as to which the scriptures are silent, or have merely laid down general rules.* The rites of Christian worship are of divine institution, but there are various external circumstances connected with their observance which are left to the regulation of human prudence exercised with a proper regard to decency and edification; such as the times of assembling, the order in which the several parts of worship shall be celebrated, and the length of the services. The range of this class of objects is still more extensive in relation to the government and discipline of the church, as to which Divine wisdom saw it fit to be less minute and precise in its prescriptions. Every society, and consequently the church of Christ, the most perfect of societies, must have external bonds of union, rules of management, and, in short, all those means which are necessary to her preservation, or conducive to the ends of her erection. The essential principles of jurisprudence, which are founded on natural laws, are common to civil and ecclesiastical society; and they dictate the observance of certain forms of process as safeguards to justice, and means of eliciting truth in dubious or controverted cases.

With these explanations, I proceed to observe, that Christ, as king of his church, hath appointed a government in her, and

* Luke, xiv. 5.; x. 7. 1 Tim. v. 18. Acts, xiv. 17. Rom. i. 19, 20. 1 Cor. v. 1.; xi. 13–15.

committed to office-bearers, under him, a power to execute his laws, and pronounce judgment according to them, for the preservation of order and peace, and the promoting of the interests of truth and holiness to his glory. "As my Father hath sent me, so have I sent you.—I appoint unto you a kingdom, that you may sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.—Lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world.—God hath set in the church, governments.—Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth.—Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.—Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls.—God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.—At the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established. And an oath for confirmation is the end of all strife."

The overlooking of the important ends to be served by the church as a visible society, is a capital error, or at least has been the source of many hurtful mistakes in our own, as well as in former times. Many seem to confine their views entirely to what is necessary for training up a number of individuals for eternal life; the only wise God hath combined this with the maintenance of a public cause, to the advancement of his glory on earth; and for this purpose has erected and maintains an organized and permanent association, which he has constituted the depositary of his truths, laws, and ordinances. Those institutions which tend directly to promote personal salvation and holiness, such as the word, sacraments, and prayer, could not be preserved in purity, or practised to edification, without the external administration of laws. Church members are not all true saints; and such of them as are so, being renewed but in part, stand in need of counsel, restraint, and correction. But there is a higher reason than even this for ecclesiastical judicature; it belongs to the administration of that kingdom which was given to Christ as Mediator, and constitutes an essential part of his glory as the lawgiver, judge, and king of the church. The divine government of the universe is conducted by laws adapted to the various orders of created beings. Though sin

had not entered into our world, mankind would have lived under the external regimen of law, if there had been no other reason for it than this, that an exhibition of the moral government of God might be preserved among them. In our law the sovereign is called the *Grand Justiciar*, and earthly kings, in general, rule and dispense justice in the remotest parts of their dominions, by means of the subordinate governors and judges whom they appoint. And in like manner, the authority of the church's king is exercised, and his glory illustrated, by the instrumentality of those who, in his name, dispense his ordinances, and execute his laws. "He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me."

Ecclesiastical judgment may be viewed either materially or formally. It belongs to secular judges to expound or interpret the law of the country, and to apply it, or to pronounce sentence according to its precepts, in the particular causes which are brought under their cognizance. To ecclesiastical judges belong the interpretation of the laws of Christ, by a judicial declaration of truth in opposition to prevailing error, and of duty in opposition to prevailing sins; and the application of these laws to such cases as occur. This last branch includes the admission of individuals to the privileges of the church, or to public office in it, and the trying of such offences or scandals as may arise from time to time, together with the inflicting of censure on the offenders, from admonition to excommunication, or complete exclusion from ecclesiastical communion, in the case of church members, and to deposition, in the case of office-bearers.

Of the matters which come within the jurisdiction of church-rule, I shall not speak farther at present; but it may be proper to be more specific as to its formal nature.

1. Ecclesiastical judgment is spiritual, in distinction from that which is civil or secular. The government of the church and the government of the state, with the judgment which is competent to those who respectively administer them, differ widely from one another.

They differ in their *origin*. Both indeed are derived from

God, who is the original fountain of all authority and justice. But civil government is from God as Creator; ecclesiastical government from Christ as Mediator. The former holds of him as King of nations, the latter as King of saints. The law of nature, written on the hearts of all men, is sufficient to direct in all that is essential to the former; the latter is founded on the law supernaturally revealed in the scriptures. Civil magistrates and judges are "the ministers of God;" ecclesiastical rulers are "the ministers of Christ," and pronounce judgment in his name, or by his authority. "Jesus said, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

They differ in their *objects*. Civil judgment is pronounced on things that pertain to this life and the external man—his property, his life, his liberty, or his good name; ecclesiastical judgment, on things that pertain to the welfare of the soul and to the life to come. If the former has to do with religious matters, it is either upon the ground that religion in general is conducive to the welfare of secular society, or because particular religious acts interfere with civil rights; if the latter have to do with civil matters, it is only in so far as they relate to the conscience. If at any time the same actions, materially considered, fall under the cognizance of both jurisdictions, as in the case of theft or murder, the formal light in which they are judged by each is different; the secular judicatory proceeds against them as *crimes*, which injure civil society; the ecclesiastical as *scandals*, which mar the purity of the church.

They differ in their *ends*. The end of secular judgment, in subordination to the glory of God, is the external peace and temporal prosperity of men, or, as the apostle expresses it, "that we may live quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty." The end of ecclesiastical judgment, in subordination to the glory of God by Christ, is the promoting of the spiritual and eternal interests of man, or, in the words of the same apostle, "that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."

They differ, so far as their subjects are concerned, in their *extent*. Civil judgment extends to all who belong to the commonwealth; spiritual judgment is confined to those who have been embodied into a church state.

They differ in their *sanctions*, and in the *means* which they employ to accomplish their ends. Civil authority is supported by the power of the sword, ecclesiastical authority by the power of the word, or, as it is sometimes designed, of "the keys." By the former, judgment is executed on the delinquent, according to the nature of his crime, to imprisonment, banishment, confiscation of goods, or death; by the latter, judgment is executed on the offender to admonition, rebuke, suspension from sealing ordinances, or excommunication.

In fine, even when the same offences fall under the cognizance of both judicatures, the *issue* may be different. The ecclesiastical judges may pronounce the highest spiritual sentence against one whom the secular authorities, in the exercise of prudent policy, may spare; and the latter may inflict capital punishment on an individual whom the former may receive and absolve at the last hour, as in the case of a penitent murderer or traitor.

From these premises it follows, that, as there is an exercise of judgment in the church essentially distinct from that which is civil and criminal in the state; so, on the one hand, the two jurisdictions, so far from being inconsistent with one another, are fitted for being mutually helpful in the advancement of objects common to both; and, on the other hand, the ecclesiastical judicature, not being derived from the secular, is not subordinate to it, and is equally competent and necessary under Christian and Heathen rulers. Even during the Jewish dispensation, under which civil and religious matters were more intimately conjoined than under the Christian, the two jurisdictions were kept distinct. A line of demarcation between the office of the civil judge, and that of the priest, was laid down in the Mosaic code; and in the arrangements "for the judgment of the Lord, and for controversies," made in the days of the reforming Jehoshaphat, we find Amariah the high priest appointed as president "in all matters of the Lord," and Zebadiah, the ruler of the house of Judah, "for all the king's matters."*

2. Ecclesiastical judgment is ministerial and executive, not

* Deut. xvii. 8-12. 2 Chron. xix. 8-11.

lordly or legislative. This property is implied in the titles and designations which the Scriptures give to those by whom it is exercised—ministers, or servants of Christ, bishops or overseers, pastors or shepherds, and stewards, who, in the economy of a great family, act under the directions of their master and lord. It is apparent from the injunction of Christ to his disciples: "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them,—but ye shall not be so." And this language he used at the very time that he told them, "ye shall sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."* Every thing which approaches to supreme authority, and which implies lordship over the conscience or dominion over the faith of Christians, is to be refused as an encroachment on the sovreignty of the "one Lord" of the church, and an infringement of that "liberty wherewith he hath made her free."

Christ is the sole lawgiver in his spiritual kingdom; and the proper business of the office-bearers whom he hath appointed is to interpret and carry into execution those laws which he has given forth and enrolled in his statute-book. Nor is this inconsistent with their making acts which serve to regulate certain external circumstances connected with the worship of God and ecclesiastical discipline. This is a power intrusted to courts of pure law and justice among men, although they have no legislative authority. Provided such regulations do not encroach upon true Christian liberty, and are enacted, not from the thirst of domination and mere arbitrary will, but with the design of preserving order and promoting edification or uniformity, they are to be cheerfully obeyed; and even when they may appear inconvenient or less calculated to accomplish these ends, it is the duty of individuals to yield a practical submission to them, in order to avoid schism, scandal, or the contempt of lawful authority.

3. It is public and authoritative. There is a right of private judgment, called by divines the judgment of discretion, which belongs to all the members of the church, and extends to every thing connected with religion, and among others to the decisions of ecclesiastical judicatories. But there must

* Luke, xxii. 25, 26, comp. v. 30.

also be lodged, in every well-ordered society, a power of pronouncing by its proper organs, a public judgment for deciding disputes and controversies which may arise, and for determining the manner in which its affairs shall be conducted. This public judgment is not merely consultative and hortatory, but authoritative; and when rightly formed, it is to be submitted to, not only because it is materially agreeable to the standard of scripture, but also because it has been pronounced by an ordinance of Christ. "If he neglect to hear the church, let him be to thee as a heathen man and a publican." Hence we read of "the decrees ordained by the apostles and elders," copies of which were given forth, and "delivered to be kept;" and the obedience yielded to them was attended with the happiest effects, for "so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily."*

A public judgment as to matters of common concern does not destroy or set aside the right of private judgment. On the contrary, it is one means of protecting church-members in the enjoyment of that privilege, by preventing one or a few persons from lording over others, and securing to all those advantages which are to be enjoyed in a social state. It no doubt regulates and restrains the exercise of private judgment, so as to prevent it from interfering with the public good; and were not this allowed, there would be an end of all society, both civil and religious, and men would return to a state of nature, or rather would be reduced to an unnatural state. Society has its rights, as well as individuals have theirs, and when the claims of the two interfere or clash, reason and revelation agree in teaching that the latter should yield to, and be controlled by, the former. At the same time, every equitable and wise government will respect the private judgment of individuals, and will make a wide distinction between those who, from motives apparently conscientious, oppose public decisions in a modest and peaceable manner, and those who manage a factious and disorderly resistance; and, above all others, an authority which has to do with matters which more immediately relate to the conscience, would need to be tender on this head, and to refrain from enacting an approval

* Acts, xvi. 4, 5.

of all its determinations. The church is not infallible in her decisions; her authority is limited and ministerial; "all synods or councils since the apostles' times, whether general or particular, may err, and many have erred;" and upon these grounds alone, though there were no other, the right of dissent, protest, or remonstrance, both judicially and extrajudicially, ought to be conceded and kept sacred, although this is apt to be forgotten by those very societies which have derived their separate existence, and taken their discriminating designation, from the exercise of this right.

4. It is to be exercised by select persons set apart for this purpose, and not by the community of the faithful. He who "appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth," who made the sun to rule by day, and the moon and stars by night, who constituted man the superior of this lower world, giving him dominion over the beast of the earth, the fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, who hath laid in human nature the principles and foundations of all reasonable authority—marital, parental, herile, and political—by whom kings reign and princes decree justice, even all the judges of the earth,—he is the author of "the ordinances of justice" in the church. We know, and are assured, from the analogy of all his works, that he could not be the author of what has the remotest tendency to produce confusion in that society which was purchased with the blood of his Son, and of which he hath made him head and lord.

"In the multitude of counsellors is safety," in opposition to the danger incurred by him who relies on his own judgment, or the advice of one or two favourites; but counsellors consist of a select number taken from many. It is not from a promiscuous multitude that we are to expect the wisest and most equitable decision. History shows that the rights of individuals have been more flagrantly violated, and that more unjust and cruel sentences have been pronounced, under democracies than under any other form of government. This is so evident, that almost every people have chosen, voluntarily, to commit the management of their affairs, and especially the administration of their laws, to a few. The due exercise of justice

requires, in an eminent degree, deliberation, calmness, patience, impartiality, superiority to prejudice, and the knowledge of human nature as well as of law,—qualities which do not characterise the proceedings of a large assembly, composed of persons of every class, temper, and attainment. Surely those persons do not act advisedly, how good soever their intentions may be, who labour to introduce a democratic government into the church of Christ; and it would require the clearest proof of a divine prescription to warrant the adoption of a mode of management, which, judging according to common principles, is equally hazardous to justice, truth, and tranquillity. Unity and peace may be preserved for a time in such societies, provided they be small; but in that case, the increase which has been promised to the church, instead of being prayed for as a blessing, would need to be deprecated as a curse. If harmony has been maintained for a considerable period in churches where every question is submitted to the voice of the people, it will be found on examination, we apprehend, that this has been owing to the superior influence which one or a few individuals have acquired over the body, and that the government, though nominally popular and congregational, was really select and presbyterian, if not single and monarchical.

All rights in society imply corresponding duties, and require corresponding gifts. If a person has a right to rule, it is his duty to rule, and he must possess the requisite qualifications for discharging the task. But it seems difficult to say which is greatest, the absurdity or the hardship of the assumption, that every one who is admitted to the benefits of a society, shall be bound and capacitated to take an active share in its public managements. May not a person be both an honest and useful servant in a family, and yet not be fit for occupying the situation of a steward, or for being consulted, and having his vote taken, as to the economy of the household? The capacity of conducting one's self in a private station, and the capacity of conducting public affairs, surely are distinct things. Every Christian is capable of understanding the things that pertain to his salvation; but it does not follow from this that he is qualified for feeding the flock of God. It is not necessarily

required of every church member that he be able to rule a family well; but if he be incapable of this, "how shall he take care of the church of God?" The ascended Head of the church "gave gifts to men;" but does it appear, either from scripture or experience, that he bestowed the gift to rule upon all who believe on him? The New Testament uniformly speaks of persons who rule in the church, in distinction from those who obey; but with what propriety of speech can those be called rulers who are permitted to do nothing without the express consent of the whole, or the majority, of those who are bound to obey them? It is no valid objection to this reasoning, that the Scriptures speak of acts of jurisdiction as proceeding from the church. Rulers are the instituted organs of the church, by whom its will is declared. In common language that is said to be the deed of a community which has been done by its officebearers or representatives. Great Britain declared war against France, made peace with Spain, entered into an alliance with Austria and Russia, abolished the slave trade. In like manner that is often ascribed in Scripture to the congregation, and the whole congregation, which was really transacted, and judicially determined, by their elders, heads, or princes.*

Lastly, it is to be exercised by them jointly, and in parity. The only monarchical power in the church is exercised by Jesus Christ. She acknowledges but "one Lord." No individual on earth is entitled to pronounce judgment by his single authority, either universally as pope, or over a national church as primate, or over a diocese as bishop. From the very nature of the work, the gospel must be preached, and the sacraments administered, by pastors singly; but to warrant them to proceed to acts of jurisdiction, even in particular congregations, they must be associated with other elders, whose office it is to "rule," though they do not "labour in word and doctrine."† The promise of the divine presence and blessing is made to such assemblies. "Where two or three are

* Exod. xii. 3, comp. verse 21; Num. xxxv. 12, 24, 25, comp. Deut. xix. 12, and Josh. xx. 4, 6; 1 Chron. xiii. i., comp. verses 2, 4; 1 Chron. xxix. i., comp. xxviii. i.; 2 Chron. i. 3, comp. verse 2. † 1 Tim. v. 17.

met in my name, there am I in the midst of them to bless them." In primitive times "elders" were accordingly ordained in every city. Though an apostle, Paul associated the presbytery, or eldership, with himself in the act of ordination.* And the incestuous person at Corinth was not excommunicated by his sole authority; "sufficient to such a man is this punishment inflicted by many." † As in all judicial proceedings, the officebearers of the church are bound to act conjunctly, so they possess equal power. There was no primacy or even superiority of office-power among the apostles. The least appearance among them of a disposition to acquire pre-eminence, was strictly prohibited and severely reproved by Christ. "He that is greatest among you shall be your servant. One is your master, and all ye are brethren."

Such being the nature and the objects of the judgment which belongs to the officebearers of the church, it is apparent that they require qualifications of no common kind. Let us, therefore, proceed to consider,

II. The spirit which is requisite for the exercise of ecclesiastical judgment, and which is promised in the text. Jesus Christ is not only the exemplar, but also the fountain of all qualifications for ruling in the church. It was prophesied "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked." ‡ As the Head of the church he bestows these gifts; and to the Holy Spirit belongs the communication of them in point of efficiency.

1. I begin with the fear of the Lord, or a deep sense of religion. This is the ground into which all the other quali-

* 2 Tim. i. 6, comp. 2 Tim. iv. 14. † 2 Cor. ii. 6, 7. ‡ Is. xi. 2–4.

ties must be wrought, in order to form the character of one who "behaves" himself as he ought in the house of God, which is the church of "the living God." It is the beginning of all wisdom, and the germ from which every public virtue springs. No gifts, how eminent soever, will compensate for the want of this. A godless person may be expected to prove an unfaithful steward and unjust judge. If in secular society, "he that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of the Lord," the maxim applies with unspeakably greater force to that which is sacred. The manifestation of this quality is assigned as at once the reason of the powers conferred on Levi, and the security for his exerting them with success: "I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before me: the law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips; he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity." *

2. The spirit of wisdom and understanding. A good heart and upright intentions are not enough here. Indeed, these will scarcely suffice in a private station; for in this world all Christians need to be "wise as serpents," and to "walk circumspectly." But knowledge, prudence, and discernment, are peculiarly requisite for the management of public affairs. Those who are invested with office in the church must be men "full of wisdom," as well as "of the Holy Ghost." They must be "well instructed in the kingdom of heaven." They require also a competent knowledge of the world, that they may "walk in wisdom toward them that are without;" and of human nature, for Christians are men of like passions with others; and the Spirit of God, by his supernatural influence, raises and purifies, without forcing or superseding the operation of the natural faculties. Ministerial gifts are distributed with a wise variety. "Unto one is given the word of knowledge;" an accurate and sound acquaintance with the doctrines and ordinances of religion. "Unto another is given the word of wisdom;" a judicious and comprehensive perception of what ought to be done for the advancement of truth and the edifica-

* Mal. ii. 5, 6.

tion of the body in existing circumstances. One can lay down the law with clearness; another can state the question with precision, sift the evidence, and apply the law to the fact. Let both abound in their respective gifts, and let each honour and improve that of the other; for "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal," and "the eye cannot say to the hand I have no need of thee, neither the hand to the feet, I have no need of you."

3. The spirit of disinterestedness and impartiality. This is "the spirit of judgment"—when the individual is sunk in the public functionary—when on crossing the threshold of the sanctuary, and ascending the seat of judgment, he forgets self and all worldly considerations. Those who judge for the Lord, must be denied to their own interest and honour and aggrandisement, and seek only the welfare of souls, the honour of Christ, and the enlargement of his kingdom. They must be exempt from covetousness, and superior to the sordid love of gain; "taking the oversight of the flock, not for filthy lucre's sake, but of a ready mind." Of such a spirit was Moses, who magnanimously refused Heaven's offer to make of him a great nation, and was ready to die for Israel. Such was Nehemiah, who, for twelve years refused his salary as governor, "because the bondage was heavy upon the people." And such was the apostle of the Gentiles, who, treading in the high steps of these godly and patriotic rulers, could say, "Behold the third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be burdensome to you; for I seek not yours, but you."

And to a disinterested spirit must be added impartiality. The balance of justice must be held with such an even hand, as that the sentence shall resemble that which "comes from his presence whose eyes behold the things which are equal;" and with this view a vigilant and unremitting guard must be kept over the working of those passions and affections which have a tendency to bias and mislead the judgment, though they should not corrupt the heart. Church officers need always to bear in mind that their courts are fenced by "calling on the Father, who, without respect of persons, judgeth every man according to his work." There must be no accepting of

persons in the distribution of justice—no favour shown on the ground of relationship, private friendship, or acquaintance, worldly rank or wealth, splendid gifts, eminent services, or even general character, how spotless and exalted soever it may be. While the man with the gold ring and gay clothing is not to be preferred to him who appears in vile raiment, the divine law, with stern impartiality, forbids the wresting of justice even in favour of the poor. "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment; thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour." * Of this spirit must every one be "that sitteth in judgment." A modest man will be induced to suspect and review his opinion, when he finds himself in a minority; and all due weight ought to be given to the sentiments of those who are superior in age, in talents, and in character; but on the seat of judgment, and in questions which involve sin and duty, justice and injustice, every one must act and answer for himself. "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment." †

O how difficult and rare is this union of disinterestedness and impartiality! "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's." Barnabas, though a "good man," and disinterested above many, appears to have yielded to partiality in favour of a near relation; and those who "seemed to be pillars" have been found, when judgment was laid to the line and equity to the plummet, shaken and moved from the base of strict rectitude and integrity. But this spirit is promised in our text, and it has been exemplified, to the honour of religion, especially in times of reformation. It was the manifestation of this spirit which drew the inspired eulogy and benediction on the tribe of Levi, from the dying lips of the lawgiver of Israel. "Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him, neither did

* Lev. xix. 15, comp. Exod. xxiii. 3. † Exod. xxiii. 2.

he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children. They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law. Bless, Lord, his substance, and accept the work of his hands; smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again." *

4. A spirit of patience and meekness. It is only by a cool, patient, and dispassionate examination, that a judge can come to a sound decision on any cause. Those who judge in the Lord's matters must not spare themselves, nor be niggardly of their time, attention, and labour. Nothing is more unbecoming than sallies of passion, or fits of impatience, on the bench; for he who cannot rule his own spirit, is unfit to govern others. "The man Moses was meek above all the men on the face of the earth," and, therefore, qualified for taking the charge of a froward and rebellious people. The officebearers of the church may lay their account with having both their temper and their patience tried by unreasonable and unruly men who despise dominion, and are not afraid to speak evil of dignities; for all men have not faith, and even those who have it are often peevish, prejudiced, and pragmatical, and sometimes self-willed, heady, and high-minded. When differences have arisen in churches, about matters perhaps in which conscience had no concern, when personal interest or family honour has become involved, when parties have been arranged, when faction has raised its many-coloured banner, and discord, with its hoarse trumpet, has proclaimed, "To your tents, O Israel," O what sad discoveries have been made! How inconsistently have even good men acted! and with what recklessness have they given their principles, their professions, and their vows to the winds! In the midst of this storm, "the servant of the Lord," possessing his soul in peace, "must not strive, but be gentle to all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."

5. The spirit of holy resolution and courage. The servant

* Deut. xxxiii. 8–11.

of the Lord will never forget that the power given to him is "for edification, not destruction;" those who have been overtaken in a fault, he will be disposed to "restore in the spirit of meekness;" nor will he exert the authority with which he is armed for "revenging all disobedience," until he has exerted every habile means for separating the deluded from the reprobate, and given them an opportunity to demonstrate their obedience.* But though not reckless of consequences, he deems the sacrifice of truth and equity too great for the peace even of the church. A judge must be rigidly, sternly tenacious of the right, which he must not yield either to the threats of the tyrant, or the clamours of a misguided populace. Better that the tribunal should be dyed with his blood, than that it should be profaned by one unjust sentence. *Fiat justitia, ruat cœlum.* Those who are most gentle, and patient, and forbearing, while forbearance is a duty, will be most firm and undaunted when called upon to resist the evil spirit, who has broken through the sacred enclosures of the church, and is laying waste all its pleasant things. Who more self-denied, and patient, and condescending than the apostle who "became all things to all men?" But who more fearless, and resolute, and uncomplying than he, when the purity of the gospel, the liberty of Christians, and the authority which he exercised in the name of his Divine Master, were at stake, and in danger of being lost, tarnished, or brought into discredit?† "Deal courageously," said Jehoshaphat to the judges, "and the Lord shall be with the good."‡

Lastly, the spirit of humility and dependence on God. Secular judges, when they take their seat on the bench, appear in their robes of office. The garb in which those who sit on "the judgment of the Lord" should appear, is humility, in the sight of God of great price, and richer than scarlet or ermine. "Ye younger, submit yourselves to the elder; yea, all of you be subject one to another; and be clothed with humility." The cultivation of this grace is of the greatest

* 2 Cor. x. 6. † 2 Cor. x. 1–11; xiii. 1–3, 10. ‡ 2 Chron. xix. 11.

utility for regulating the conduct of the ministers of Christ toward one another, by preventing those ungodly jealousies, worldly rivalries, and unseemly animosities which sometimes rise among them, to the scandal of religion, the vilifying of their office, and the quenching of the Spirit. How disgraceful to see the servants of the meek and lowly Jesus striving, not for the faith of the gospel, but for the mastery, provoking one another, not to love and good works, but to envy and every evil work, girding themselves, not with the armour of God, but with the instruments of unrighteousness, and converting the courts of the Lord's house into an arena for fierce debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults. But what saith the Scripture? "Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves." This appears a paradox to many; but it is so only to those who have not learned to "receive the kingdom of God as a little child." Humility is no less useful in regulating the conduct of ministers towards the Christian people, by keeping them from affecting dominion, and assuming those airs of authority which, instead of exalting their office and securing respect for their persons, uniformly tend to provoke resistance to the former, and to breed contempt for the latter. When at any time we may be in danger of being puffed up with pride, we have only to recollect the humility with which our Divine Master conducted himself on earth, going in and out among his disciples as one that serveth. If we weigh the momentous nature of our office against the honours which may be attached to it, and consider our gifts in connexion with the awful responsibilities which they impose, O how little reason shall we find for boasting or self-gratulation! Instead of being lifted up with pride, we will be humbled to the dust, and brought to the attitude and disposition of dependents, who have nothing but what they have received, and who need to be daily "receiving out of His fulness, and grace for grace." "Who is sufficient for these things?—Not I, but the grace of God which is with me."

Among the practical lessons which our subject furnishes, allow me to specify the following:—

In the *first* place, we may learn the great importance of ecclesiastical discipline, and of preserving it in its scriptural purity and primitive vigour. Evangelical and vital religion cannot flourish generally or permanently in any church where this is neglected. Discipline is to the church of Christ what a wall is to a city, when an enemy has taken the field. It serves the same purpose that a fence does to a garden: if it be broken down, or suffered to fall into disrepair, the boar from the forest, and the wild beast of the field, will enter, and devour all that is beautiful or productive within. This is a subject which ought to come home with peculiar force to the consciences and feelings of all Christians dwelling in this favoured land. As marks of the true church, the reformers on the continent specified the pure preaching of the word, and administration of the sacraments; but, in addition to these, our reformers of Scotland, in their first Confession of Faith, described "discipline executed according to the word of God, as a certain and infallible sign of the true church." The establishment of a scriptural and efficient discipline in the church of Scotland, at the very beginning of the Reformation, was her distinguishing glory, on account of which she was lauded and felicitated by foreigners, who desired to possess that blessing, but could not obtain it. As the want of this ordinance of the church's Head has produced the most mournful consequences abroad, so to the neglect or perversion of it at home may be ascribed, in a high degree, those corruptions as to faith, worship, and morals which have spread among ourselves, and which, more than once, have threatened to lay waste all our pleasant things. "Purity of doctrine and discipline," says one of our religious patriots, who 'stood in the gap' at a critical period of our ecclesiastical history, "are like the twins of Hippocrates, who always sickened and recovered at the same time, and at last dwined and died together."

In the *second* place, we may see one duty incumbent on those who have devoted themselves to the public service of the church, or who are engaged in studies preparatory to the

work of the ministry. To preach the gospel is a principal part of their employment, but it is not the whole of it. It is possible that a person may be able to make a sermon which shall be both acceptable and edifying, and, after all, be but poorly qualified for "taking care of the church of God." It is true, as formerly hinted, that there is a diversity of gifts among ministers, and few excel in all; yet they should "covet earnestly the best gifts," and labour to qualify themselves for every department of their function. Younger ministers should study ecclesiastical jurisprudence. They ought to make themselves familiar with those portions of the sacred oracles which relate to this subject; and they will find, in the Pentateuch, the book of Proverbs, and the writings of the prophets, as well as in the New Testament, maxims and practical instructions, which will be of the highest use in directing them how to act among the people committed to their charge, and how to form a judgment on those questions on which they may be called to decide in deliberative assemblies. Next to the scriptures, they should acquaint themselves with the authorized books of discipline, and the acts and proceedings of the best reformed churches, especially of the church of Scotland; and, adding observation to reading, they should give the closest attention to the proceedings of the judicatories to which they are admitted, availing themselves of the enlarged experience of their elder brethren, that so they may "purchase to themselves a good degree," and, their spiritual senses being improved by exercise, they may be able rightly to divide the word of truth, and to discern between good and evil. It was a proposal made to the synod of Dort, and which received the recommendation of that famous assembly, that students of divinity, after finishing their academical education, should, for some time before their ordination, attend the meetings of inferior church courts, to observe their modes of procedure, that, when admitted to the ministry, they might be better qualified for taking a share of ecclesiastical government. Permit me here to mention an observation made many years ago, that it had become a too common custom among young ministers, even in the Secession, to come up to the meetings

of the supreme court rather to visit their friends, and enjoy themselves, than to attend on public business—a practice which could not fail to produce very hurtful effects; and perhaps it was partly owing to this that congregations, in many instances, fell from their ancient laudable custom of furnishing ministers and ruling elders at a distance with the external means necessary to enable them to wait regularly on the judicatories. We trust that it will be long before this neglect of attendance shall prevail in our body. But we should take warning from past experience; the evil creeps in imperceptibly, and when it has become general and inveterate, will resist and baffle every remedy.

In the *third* place, we may learn from this subject what care ought to be exercised in choosing and setting apart those who are to bear office in the church. The privilege granted to the Christian people, to choose their own pastors and elders, imposes an obligation on them to exercise it with serious deliberation and fervent prayer. There is not a stronger prejudice against the right of popular election than that which has been excited by the haste, the levity, and the capriciousness with which it has often been used. As congregations in many instances can only be partially acquainted with those to whom their choice is limited, and as they are but too apt to prefer the showy to the solid qualities, a higher responsibility rests on the judicatories of the church, to whom it belongs to pronounce a judgment on probationers for the holy ministry, both anterior and subsequent to their election. To them the charge is given, "Lay hands suddenly on no man; be not partakers of other men's sins." The counsel anciently given by a heathen king, is not undeserving of the attention of a Christian synod; "Thou, Ezra, after the wisdom of thy God that is in thine hand, set magistrates and judges, which may judge all the people that are beyond the river, all such as know the laws of thy God; and teach ye them that know them not."*

In the *fourth* place, we may see the scriptural grounds of

* Ezra, vii. 25.

subjection to the authority, and obedience to the determinations of church rulers. These are, the divine institution of ecclesiastical government, the connexion between it and the regal glory of Christ, and the salutary influence which it is calculated to exert upon all other divine institutions, as well as upon the peace, unity, order, purity, and general prosperity of the church as a visible and diffusive society. A base subjection of the conscience to human authority, and a blind and implicit obedience to the decrees of men, without bringing them to the test of the supreme and unerring standard, are equally unscriptural and irrational; but, on the other hand, those who cast off all subordinate and regulated authority in the church, and plead for a boundless liberty to act in all matters of religion according to the dictates of their own mind; those who, though they profess to own authority in general, uniformly contemn its exercise when they themselves are the objects of it, or teach others to do so; and those who cherish a morbid and sickly jealousy of all who are in public office, although they give the most unequivocal proofs of disinterestedness and moderation—are not actuated by the spirit of Christ and of God.

In the *fifth* place, our subject suggests suitable exercise on occasion of the meeting of ecclesiastical judicatories. It was a custom in the better times of our church, to set apart a day for fasting and prayer before the meeting of a general assembly, to entreat the divine countenance to its deliberations. We are afraid that, in the times in which we live, the same deep interest is not felt in the meetings of the courts of Christ by Christians of any denomination. Are the same fervent supplications now presented which used formerly to ascend from every pulpit, praying society, and family, for weeks before such an occasion as that which has brought us together? Do we need them less? Assuredly no. Have we less encouragement to offer them? Not, so long as the text remains in our Bibles. Let all, then, and especially those who are called to take part in the management of the public affairs of the church, humbly, fervently, and believingly plead that the Lord of Hosts may be to us for a spirit of judgment

when we sit in judgment. "I have set watchmen on thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace day or night: ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence; and give him no rest till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

In fine, reverend fathers and brethren, having received this ministry, let us take heed to it to fulfil it. Let us not faint, but stir up the gift of God that is in us. Let us set the Lord before us, and he will be at our right hand, to instruct and uphold us. Let us take heed to ourselves, and to the whole flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made us overseers, to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood. Let us cherish, and in our deliberations display, that catholic and truly liberal spirit which will induce us to merge the particular interests of those congregations with which we are more immediately connected, in the general and common interest of the whole body for whom we are this day met to act. Let us remember that we judge not for man, but the Lord, who is with us in the judgment—that his glory is deeply concerned in what we do—that the preservation of truth and righteousness, and the eternal well-being of precious souls, are concerned in it—that, for aught we know, the interests of generations yet unborn may be involved in our deliberations—that His eyes, which are as a flame of fire, are upon us—and that we must, in a little, individually, and all of us at last, face to face, appear before a greater than any earthly tribunal, and give an account of the use we have made of every talent, and of the manner in which we have managed the sacred trust, committed to us by the Lord of the church, who is now saying to each of us, "Behold, I come quickly; hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

SERMON XVIII.

THE ASPECT OF THE TIMES.*

Daniel, xii. 8.

"O MY LORD, WHAT SHALL BE THE END OF THESE THINGS."

It is impossible for any person to look on the present aspect of Providence, with an observing, and especially a religious eye, without being persuaded that our lot has fallen on critical times, times which teem with important events affecting the interests of society in general, and of the church of God in particular. At no distant period, good men were inclined to hope that the existing agitation was on the surface of society, and that it would soon subside, and leave things in their former state of tranquillity. That day is gone by; and there are few, I believe, how opposite soever their opinions may be of the moral character of the times, who are not now come to the contrary conclusion, and who are not convinced that this ferment is increasing, that its exciting causes are deep and widely extended, that they are as yet but partially developed, and that many days must elapse before the storm shall have spent its rage, and the agitated waves wrought themselves into repose. The Christian, instructed in the course of Providence by a light shed on it from the volume of Revelation, has reasons peculiar to himself for coming to this conclusion. He looks beyond the feeble arm and narrow counsels of men, to the arm and counsel of Him who has all events and all hearts under his absolute control, and who over-

* Delivered in May, 1834.

rules them for the accomplishment of his holy and irrevocable purposes. He knows that the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land; he is persuaded that he will thoroughly plead the cause which is his own, and is prepared to expect that great changes on the frame of society, both civil and ecclesiastical, will usher in a flourishing state of that kingdom, for the sake of which all kingdoms rise or fall. His eye is therefore directed to the operations of Providence; and though he knows that these are not the proper rule of what he ought to do in his station, yet he views them with the deepest interest; and, with the overpowering feelings of the wise and holy man in the text, he enquires, "O my lord, what shall be the end of these things?"

These words belong to a vision with which Daniel was favoured on the banks of the Hiddekel, and which is described in the last three chapters of this book. There appeared to him a man clothed in linen, who, after the prophet had recovered from the swoon into which he was thrown by the heavenly apparition, disclosed to him the future fates of the children of his people. Though some late interpreters have explained the greater part of the prediction in the eleventh chapter as referring to events happening under the Christian era, it seems most natural to apply it to the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, the great enemy of God and of his ancient people. That was a time of great trouble to the Jews, and seemed to threaten their extermination as a people, and along with them the extermination of true religion.* This could not fail to oppress the devout and patriotic mind of Daniel, who was relieved, first, by a promise of deliverance to his people, and secondly, by the appearance of two new personages who enquired of the man clothed in linen, "How long shall it be to the end of these wonders?" Daniel "heard, but did not understand" the reply; and taught by this that the theme was too high for him, he turns his question from the time to the manner of the time. "Then said I, O my lord, what shall be the end of these things—these wonders?" It is the

* Chap. xi. 13–35.

language of humble, earnest, adoring enquiry and prayer, and expressive of the workings of a pious mind contemplating the afflictions of the church, and looking forward to their issue. Let us, looking up to the Spirit who leads into all truth, endeavour to improve it, proceeding upon the broad principle that "whatsoever was written aforetime, was written for our learning," and keeping in view the analogy which pervades all the works of God.

"The works of the Lord are great; sought out of all that take pleasure therein." But there is a depth of wisdom and sovereignty about some of them, on account of which they may be characterised as "wonders," calling forth astonishment and awe and amazement in the minds of those who are most practised in the study of Providence. Among these are the calamities with which the church is sometimes assailed, and her interests brought into great and imminent peril. Let us, in the first place, contemplate some of these wonders; and in the next place, consider the temper and exercise which become us in contemplating them.

I. 1. It is a wonder that the church of God should be exposed to calamity. Of all the wonders in the procedure of Him whose way is in the sea, whose paths are in the mighty waters, and his footsteps untraceable, this is one of the greatest; and it has often excited the wonder of the world, and the astonishment of those who are best acquainted with his works. "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel." We might have expected that the people whom He had chosen for his heritage, separated from the world lying in wickedness, formed into a kingdom of priests, made the depositary of his lively oracles, and blessed with his special residence and government, would be guarded by a special Providence from every rude assault, and made to dwell in peace under the shade of her Almighty protector. But it is otherwise. "My ways are not your ways, saith the Lord." "The Lord knoweth the thoughts of men, that they are vanity." The sufferings of the Son of God, when he was manifested in the flesh, were matter of infinite surprise to his friends, and of

mortal offence to his enemies; and as he was, so must his church be in the world. "Behold I, and the children whom the Lord hath given me, are for signs and wonders in Israel from the Lord of hosts." *

2. It is a wonder—a mystery, that the calamities to which she is exposed should sometimes be so great and overwhelming. She is broken with breach upon breach. Deep calleth unto deep against her; all God's waves and billows pass over her. She is made to pass through fire and through water. Bereaved of her children, deserted by her friends, desolate, a widow and a captive, Zion, standing on the smoking ruins of her sacred habitation, has been heard to utter the bitter plaint, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow." † "For under the whole heaven hath not been done, as hath been done upon Jerusalem." ‡

How often has the purity of the church, which is at once her glory and her strength, been defaced by error and corruption! Her greatest enemies have been those of her own house,—her appointed or chosen guardians, who have been ringleaders in apostasy; such were the priests and the false prophets in Israel and Judah, and the false teachers who privily brought in damnable doctrines to the Christian churches. The hedge of discipline being broken down, the wild beasts have rushed in, treading down the pasture and polluting the streams, destined for the food and refreshment of the flock of God which he had purchased with his own blood. The furies of persecution have been let loose upon her. They have fired her sanctuary, burnt up all the synagogues of God in the land, slain her priests, given the bodies of her saints to the wild beasts, and scattered the remainder to the four winds of heaven.

3. It is a wonder that these calamities have come visibly from the hand of God, and are accompanied with evident tokens of his displeasure. This makes the stroke so heavy—that the enemy and the oppressor wields the rod of God's

* Isa. viii. 18. † Lam. i. 12. ‡ Dan. ix. 12.

anger, and has received a commission against a hypocritical nation. This is the very gall of the bitter draught, converting it into a cup of trembling and astonishment. "O God, THOU hast cast us off, thou hast scattered us, thou hast been displeased—thou hast showed thy people hard things; thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment."* The indignation of man they could bear, the fury of the oppressor they could brave; but a sense of divine displeasure they feel to be intolerable. And the provocation cannot be small, which induces the Lord to forsake his house, to leave his heritage, to give the dearly beloved of his soul into the hands of her enemies.

4. The duration of the calamity is another wonder. It sometimes continues until the strength of the friends of religion is gone, and their hope is ready to give up the ghost. "How long!" has often been the utterance of the groan which has come from the bottom of the heart of the suffering church. "How long, O Lord! is it for ever?" "How long wilt thou not have mercy on Jerusalem, against which thou hast had indignation these threescore and ten years?"† But this was a short period, compared with that during which the witnesses for the truth suffered from Antichrist—twelve hundred and sixty years. Hence the loud cry of the souls of the martyrs under the altar, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth."‡

Lastly, it is a wonder that her calamities produce so little effect. The judgments with which God visits his church are intended for her benefit and reformation, for correction and purification. If they were seen to work the peaceable fruits of righteousness, awakening consideration, producing humiliation, and leading to repentance, and to the putting away of whatever has procured the divine displeasure, they might be borne with patience and even joyfulness. But, alas! it is often otherwise, and judgments, instead of softening, harden the heart. This was what God had to complain of in his

* Ps. lx. i. 3. † Zech. i. 12. ‡ Rev. vi. 10.

ancient people: "Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more." * This was what led the prophet to despair of the recovery of the people committed to his charge: "O Lord, thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou hast consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction." † And still more strongly: "The bellows are burnt, the lead is consumed in the fire; the founder melteth in vain; for the wicked are not plucked away: reprobate silver shall men call them, because the Lord hath rejected them." ‡

Having mentioned these things in general, I now proceed to specify some particulars in our present situation which furnish ground of anxious wonder. The church of God, in our day, is not subjected to persecution, as in former times; the judgments inflicted on her are of a spiritual character, but they are not on that account the less alarming. In fact, they are the severest of all, as they immediately affect the internal interests of the church. And here many things appear which are portentous, and calculated to excite anxiety as to the issue.

1. It is a dark and portentous spot in our sky that the progress of knowledge should be accompanied with so much infidelity and irreligion. At the era of the Reformation, learning was the handmaid of religion, attended her wherever she went, and did her willing homage. The most learned men were then the most pious, and those who examined the Bible with the most critical accuracy were most deeply imbued with its spirit. Infidelity was unknown within the pale of Protestantism. How different now! Though the Bible has been more extensively circulated than in any former age, and the means of instruction are ample, yet impiety and profaneness are on the increase. The Scriptures are treated, in a great measure, as a profane or common book, even by those who make them the object of their special study. Science has long ago declared herself independent of religion, and courts an alliance with infidelity rather than revelation. The time seems to be fast approaching when Christianity will be di-

* Isa. i. 5. † Jer. v. 3. ‡ Ib. vi. 29, 30.

vorced from education, and there is reason to fear that knowledge, instead of being, as hitherto, the stability of our times, will prove the source of our weakness, and the means of our ruin.

2. Another ominous cloud in our horizon is the engrossing attention to politics, and the indifference or aversion shown to religious privileges amidst the struggle for those of a civil nature. In former times, especially in our own land, the cause of civil and religious liberty, of political and ecclesiastical privileges, was identified. They had common friends and common foes. Those who opposed regal despotism and arbitrary power in the state, withstood the ecclesiastical supremacy and Erastian encroachments on the church; and the same parliament which had successfully vindicated its own freedom and privileges, removed the yoke of patronage from the Church's neck, and left it free for her ministers to be admitted "upon the suit and calling of the congregation." Need I say how different it is at this day? Those who are loudest in their cry for political privileges, in Parliament and out of it, are not only indifferent about ecclesiastical privileges, but are the most determined foes to them. And those churchmen, who derive their distinctive name from the people, and who, under God, owe all to the voice of the people, are too generally hostile to popular rights. Not satisfied with having the yoke imposed by state authority, it must be riveted by a church authority, and by means of the golden screw of a *veto;* and as the name of the instrument is Roman, it must, I suppose, have a Roman inscription too, *Esto perpetua.* Really our friends of the Establishment ought not to be surprised that Dissenters are moving a disjunction of Church and State, when they themselves are pleading for the separation of civil and ecclesiastical privileges, and insisting that there is no analogy between them.

This feature of our times augurs ill for the continuance or successful operation of our civil privileges. Rarely, if ever, have a people retained for any long time their enjoyment of civil liberty, when strangers to that which is of a religious character; nor can we expect the blessing of heaven upon it,

unless it is employed for the advancement of the interests of Christ's kingdom.

3. Here is another wonder, that those who had so long pleaded for a national reformation of religion, should have abandoned that plea, at the very time when Providence seemed to present the opportunity of prosecuting it with some prospect of success. This is the great Voluntary spot in our ecclesiastical horizon. Though the rigorous enforcement of the law of patronage was the immediate cause which drove the first Seceders from the Established church, yet they did not propose, by their association, merely to obtain the redress of that evil;—they associated together for the more liberal object of seeking a reformation of religion in Britain and Ireland, agreeably to the word of God, the subordinate standards of the church, and the national covenants. This reformation they distinguished in their Testimony and other public deeds, into civil and ecclesiastical; meaning by the former, the removal of all laws in the state which are injurious to the true religion, and the substitution of others which are calculated to advance the interests of truth and righteousness. For a long time there was no prospect of their obtaining this object, in consequence of an obstinate refusal on the part of rulers to make any alteration on the existing constitution and laws. Of late, however, a change of a very extensive kind has taken place, which, though limited to political matters, involves a principle equally applicable to matters which are materially and objectively religious and ecclesiastical; a change too, which has given an opportunity for the expression of public opinion, to a degree perhaps unexampled in this country, certainly not enjoyed since the Revolution. Now here is the wonder, that at this very time, so favourable to the object of their association, the great body of Seceders should have avowedly abandoned the object which they had in view, and advanced a principle which declares that the advancement of religious reformation is an unfit object of national concern, and that all connexion between church and state, religion and politics, is unscriptural and antichristian;—in short, that they should have adopted that very principle which defeated the

Reformation happily begun in Britain and Ireland, at that period which they, in their public declarations, fixed upon as a pattern of imitation!

4. It is a wonder that a spirit of determined hostility against the religious establishments of the country should have displayed itself, at the very time when a revival of evangelical religion began to make its appearance in them, and internal exertions were making to reform their abuses. You will not understand me as insinuating that there are not corruptions in our northern establishment which justify secession. But it cannot be denied, and we should be glad to acknowledge, that favourable symptoms have of late appeared of a revival in that church. Though we have no reason to think that error has been banished from the national church, yet, compared with former times within the memory of some still alive, it may be said, that as ashamed it hides its head. The Socinian heresy is no longer avowed; and the cold, deadening strain of legal preaching, once so general, has been banished from many pulpits. That selfish system of religion, which would confine all concern to the salvation of the soul and personal godliness, and which once was so prevalent among serious persons, has suffered a sensible abatement, and together with it, the latitudinarian tenet, which represents all contendings for discipline, and even modes of faith, as unnecessary, if not hurtful. A spirit of concern for the public interests of religion and the reformation of abuses in the church, has been excited in quarters where it did not formerly exist. The attention of Christians has been turned to those periods in the history of the church in our land, in which the work of reformation was advanced to a high pitch, and which furnish, in particular, the brightest examples of ministerial diligence, faithfulness and zeal. To speak with respect of our national covenants is no longer an exclusive mark of a Seceder, and even their obligation on our land is acknowledged by not a few, who lately would have scouted, or at least stared, at the assertion.

Now it certainly appears strange that, in such circumstances, which were calculated to propitiate the favour of all the friends of religion, and especially of Seceders, such hostility should

have been manifested towards all establishments, and that the efforts of its enemies to overturn them should seem to keep pace with those of their friends to render them more worthy of being supported.—But we will take a very partial view of the subject, if we confine our attention to the motives of the assailants. The great thing which should engage our thoughts, is the language of Providence, and the displeasure which it is expressing at the long continuance of a course of measures in the national church, which has alienated the great body of the people, and induced them to despair of ever seeing a thorough reformation of abuses which they have been taught to consider as the necessary consequences of an establishment.

5. It is a wonder that the late revival of evangelical doctrine should have been followed and checked by enthusiastical extremes. On these it is unnecessary that I should dwell; but one of them is so closely connected with the subject of our present discourse as to merit particular notice.

A serious enquiry into the predictions of the Bible is inseparable from the duty of searching the Scriptures, and forms part of that homage which we owe to Him who, as a proof of his sole divinity, describes himself as "declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done." To trace the marks of Divine wisdom and prescience in the exact correspondence between the prediction and the event, in prophecies which have already received their fulfilment, is a task at once pleasing and profitable. Nor are our enquiries bound down precisely to fulfilled predictions. The Old Testament prophets enquired and searched diligently into the time and manner of time of which the Spirit which was in them did testify; and we learn from the example of Daniel, who understood by books the period of Jerusalem's desolation, that they were not restricted, in the conclusions to which they came, to supernatural communications. But enquiries into the future, even when conducted with the help of the torch of prophecy, ought to be characterised by modesty and devout sobriety. Here, it would seem, the common maxim applied to knowledge, "Drink deep, or taste not," needs to be reversed. We should always recollect, that pro-

phecy lifts off the veil which covers futurity but partially, or, to speak more correctly, it throws over those objects which it reveals a veil which, while it prevents us from seeing them clearly, admonishes us to check our curiosity by a believing and humble patience.

The neglect of this rule has introduced into this department of study a rashness and presumption, productive of great injury to the minds of individuals, and to the cause of religion in general. By attempting to fix the exact period at which certain predictions shall receive their accomplishment, and by putting arbitrary and fanciful interpretations on the language of prophecy, the Scriptures have been exposed to the derision of infidels, the confidence of professing Christians in the certainty of the Word of God has been shaken, and the minds of many have been withdrawn from the great truths of the gospel, and the active discharge of the duties of their station. Almost all the extravagant opinions and practices of the present day may be traced to this origin. Hence it is that some, from being interpreters of prophecy, have set up for prophets themselves, or have encouraged others in the delusive notion that they possessed the prophetic spirit, or other gifts connected with it; and hence it is that, notwithstanding the express premonition of our Lord, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation;" and "If any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ! or lo, there! believe it not"—the minds of not a few are directed to an imaginary appearance and visible reign of the Son of man on earth, to the exclusion of all due regard to his first coming, when he put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, and his second coming at the end of the world, without sin, unto the salvation of them that look for him.

6. We may only advert farther on this head, to the wonder that the friends of truth and reformation should be so divided in sentiment and communion. Considering that these are so feeble in point of numbers, and that the force of their public testimony depends so much on their united exertions, it is truly surprising that so little of a spirit of enlightened and scriptural union should exist among them; and that so generally they should be on the watch to increase their own little parties, by

fishing in disturbed waters, and picking up treasures from the wreck of ruined establishments.

II. I proceed now to consider the exercise and conduct which become us in contemplating and enquiring into these wonders. Cold speculations about the mystery of Providence, how clear and correct soever they may be, are as unprofitable, I should say pernicious, as when they have for their object the mystery of redemption. In both cases, the speculatist perishes like the philosopher who was frozen to death, while making observations on the weather and the heavenly bodies within the frigid zone. The men of Issachar are praised for their "understanding of the times;" but it is added, "they knew what Israel ought to do;" and what their hands found to do, they did it with all their might.

1. Our enquiries into the wonders of Providence in our time should be conducted with holy adoration of the doings of God. This is a feeling which the student of Providence needs always to preserve and cherish in his breast. He may expect to meet at every turn with something which is strange and startling, and to him unaccountable. "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!" It is peculiarly necessary to keep this feeling alive in the time of affliction, personal or public. To justify God when he is measuring out hard things to us—to entertain favourable thoughts of him—to celebrate his holiness, righteousness, and sovereignty, when we are smarting under his rod—is no easy task. O 'tis difficult in such circumstances (and that the best of his saints have found it) to avoid misconstructing his conduct, by drawing rash and hasty conclusions from it—to keep from murmuring and repining, and charging God foolishly; and still more difficult is it to glorify him in the fires, and to say, "He hath done all things well!"

Yet this is our duty—our high duty, and if we fail here, no part of our exercise can be right—all is marred. Holy Jeremiah was deeply sensible of this; and, therefore, before pouring out his complaint to God, and enquiring into the causes

of the great anger which had gone forth against the cities of Judah, he reminds himself of the divine rectitude, and protests that nothing which he might utter in the agony of grief, or in the ardour of expostulation, should be understood as insinuating the slightest reflection on that immaculate and bright attribute. "Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee; yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments." * Of the same import are the words of another prophet:—"Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity:—wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" And hence the enlightened conclusion to which he came (for it is when we are in the attitude of adoration that we see farthest into the mystery of Providence): "Art thou not from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? We shall not die. O Lord, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction."†

To maintain this becoming frame of spirit, let us meditate on the infinite distance between God and us—his majesty and our meanness, his sovereign propriety and our absolute dependence, his uncontrollable authority and our unconditional subjection, his wisdom and our ignorance, his purity and our vileness, the eternity of his plans and the yesterday conception of ours. And let us call in to our aid the recollection of his dealings with his church in former times, and the wonderful manner in which he has made the darkest dispensations to produce the happiest and most glorious results.

2. The contemplation of these wonders calls for deep humiliation. No man will ever give glory to God by owning the righteousness of his judgments, until he is brought to a due sense of his own sinfulness, and humbled on account of it; nor will the Holy One remove the tokens of his displeasure from an individual or a people, so long as they remain proud and impenitent. This is the ordinary rule of his procedure, as solemnly announced from ancient times:—"If they shall con-

* Jer. xii. 1. † Hab. i. 12, 13.

fess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; and that I also have walked contrary unto them; if their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity: then will I remember my covenant—and I will remember the land."* This was the exercise to which they were brought, when God turned again the captivity of Zion. In this way was Daniel employed, when the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem came forth. "I set my face," says he, "unto the Lord my God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes, and I prayed unto the Lord my God, and made my confession."† Such was the exercise to which the captives were brought collectively, as we see in the fast which they proclaimed at the river Ahava, "to afflict themselves before their God and to seek of Him a right way."‡ Such was their exercise repeatedly after their return, when involved in transgression; they solemnly confessed their sin, and renewed the covenant of their fathers. In this manner was fulfilled the prediction:—"In those days and at that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping; they shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten."‖

And thus it was eminently in our own land in times of reformation, and particularly after seasons of defection. Those who are acquainted with the history of our church, know that on these occasions her breaches were repaired, and her lost privileges recovered, amidst deep acknowledgments of sin, and the renewal of early-plighted but violated vows. Our land exhibited the picture of a Bochim, before she put on the appearance of a Hephzibah. The absence of this exercise on the deliverance wrought by God at the Revolution, was deplored by some of the best friends of the Church of Scotland. To this neglect of duty, among other things, we must

* Lev. xxvi. 40–42. † Dan. ix. 3–8, 13, 14. ‡ Ezra, viii. 21. ‖ Jer. l. 4.

trace those evils which have wasted that church for a long century; and it were little less than belying God's word to expect that we shall escape from these, so long as we remain unhumbled. The Lord of hosts is calling to weeping and mourning and fasting; but behold, joy and gladness, eating flesh and drinking wine.

There is nothing more offensive to the Holy One than pride and self-confidence; and yet how generally do these prevail! The Secession Church has waxed vain of its numbers, and engaged in an attempt which is calculated to rob the King of kings of the homage due to him from the nations of the world, and to injure the best interests of society both civil and religious. On the other hand the Established Church seems little less disposed to boast of her numbers, her endowments, her legal securities, and her exclusive possession of royal countenance. The latter charges the former with entering into an unholy alliance with infidels, heretics, and profane persons, for overthrowing establishments; the former retorts that the latter retains persons of such characters within her pale. I enter not into an examination of the justice of these mutual criminations; but I say, that between them there is an almost total want of that spirit which our conduct and our circumstances equally demand; and that a proud and haughty tone to our fellow-creature covers a spirit of rebellion against the Almighty.

All parties and denominations have great reason for humbling themselves under the mighty hand of God, and deprecating his just and heavy displeasure. Those who may retain a profession and communion in some due degree of conformity to Scripture, have ground to mourn over their departure from first love, in the want of that spirit which animates, and that deportment which adorns, a confession of the name of Christ. "Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen; and repent, and do the first works."

3. These wonders ought to be contemplated and enquired into in the exercise of fervent prayer. This is the language of the text, for every question put to God is a prayer. "O

my lord, what shall be the end of these things?" Daniel meant to pray that God would preserve his people under the oppression which they were suffering, that he would keep them from fainting and apostatizing, that he would refine them in the furnace, hasten the day of deliverance, and shorten the day of calamity for the elect's sake. And these things ought to form the matter of our prayers. It has been observed that when God intends any deliverance to his church, or revival of the interests of religion, he excites his saints to pray for this mercy; and the remark is justified by sacred history. The experience of the holy man in our text may stand for that of a thousand. How fervently was he employed in prayer about the time when the restoration of the captivity took place! "And whiles I was speaking," he says, "and praying and confessing my sin, and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my God; yea, while I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications, the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee." * Let us all imitate the example of this greatly-beloved saint. "For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest. Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth."

4. Let us contemplate these wonders with firm faith in the preservation of the interests of religion, and the deliverance of the church. Prayer, unless it be believing, will not be prevalent. We must honour the power and faithfulness of God; and what is prayer but the pleading of his promises? "Do as thou hast said." Hence the language of David, "For thou, O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant,

* Dan. ix. 20-23.

saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer to thee. And now, O Lord God, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness to thy servant. Therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant." * But we will plead the promises coldly and formally if we do not believe them. We should view them as made, not only to the church, but to her divine Head; and though we have no ground to assure ourselves absolutely that God will preserve any particular church, yet his promises secure the preservation, purification, enlargement, and perpetuity of the kingdom of his Son. And with faith, let us join the twin grace of patience by which it is supported; "for the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie: though it tarry wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry."

In conclusion, let me exhort all present to seek preparation for coming calamities and trials, whether of a private or public kind. Let none trust in an empty profession of religion, or in the mere possession of religious privileges. This was the great error of the ancient people of God, and we often find the prophets warning them against "trusting in lying words, and saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, are these." † Seek a saving acquaintance with God, and a saving interest in his covenant. "Acquaint thyself now with God, and be at peace with him; thereby good shall come unto thee." "Because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel."

Let believers give all diligence to be found of Christ in peace at his coming. "Ye beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life."

The members of this congregation I would exhort to seek establishment in the present truth. After long examination, I am fully convinced, that, by the good hand of God, you

* 2 Sam. vii. 27–29. † Jer. vii. 4.

have been led, in respect of profession and communion, to take up your ground in the safe medium between the conflicting parties in the great controversy of the day, while you continue to testify against the corruptions of the churches established by law in our native land, and at the same time keep aloof from those who condemn all recognition of Christianity by public authority, and seek to withdraw the provision which has been made by the nation for religious purposes. I cannot flatter you with the prospect of the speedy removal of those defects in the national settlement of religion, or those practical abuses in ecclesiastical administration, which the body we are connected with have so long condemned, and which have excluded us from fellowship with the National Church in Scotland. I am sorry I cannot join with those who would give the name of *reforming* to the General Assembly, whose meeting is now drawing to a close. One party which has long had the management in the judicatories, and has ruled with sufficient rigour (I mean not against error or vice), has been defeated: how their successors will act remains still to be determined. In the mean time, their proceedings hitherto have not laid a foundation for sanguine hopes. One thing they have done which must meet our approbation, in removing that glaring anomaly on the Presbyterian constitution, chapels of ease. But an overture, involving a charge of error on a capital article of our religion, Justification by faith, has been dismissed simply on the declaration of the accused individual, that he was perfectly sound on that head. The decision on Calls, so much applauded by many, together with its strange but not unsuitable accompaniments, I can look upon in no other light but as an attempt to gull the people with a show of privilege, while it subjects them to be fettered, at every step, in the exercise of it, and involves them in the inextricable meshes of legal chicanery. And this boon is presented to them by the hands of those who have scornfully thrown out and rejected their petitions for relief from a grievance of which the Church of Scotland has always complained; and this at a time when the legislature, by which the yoke was imposed, had so far listened to similar petitions from the people, as to

appoint a committee to enquire into the grounds of complaint, and to put the country to no small expense in conducting the investigation. I say it is more than suspicious that the alleged boon should be presented by the hands of those who have summarily and haughtily thrown out the petitions of the Christian people against patronage. They say, they have muzzled the monster: it is a mistake; they have only muffled him, and they have muzzled the people.

It gives me great pain to say these things, and I say them, not in anger, but in grief and in love. Nothing on earth would give more joy to my heart, than to see sure and decided symptoms of reformation in the National Church of Scotland—to see the Zion of God in our land rising from the dust and shaking herself, putting on her beautiful garments, and looking forth, as in the morning of her day, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners, to the confusion of those who would have quenched her light, and plucked her from that firmament in which she once shone with surpassing brightness. I would go seven times to the top of her highest mountain, to look out for the harbinger of her relief, though each time I should have to return with the message, "There is nothing," provided at last I could hail the appearance of "the little cloud out of the sea, like a man's hand," the sure prelude of the plentiful rain, which shall refresh the weary inheritance, make her wilderness as Eden, and her desert as the garden of the Lord.

Do not despair, neither be discouraged, my brethren. There is abundance in the promise. Wait in faith and patience and prayer for its accomplishment. God hath done great things for Scotland; and he hath not suffered them to be forgotten. He hath reserved for himself a remnant, both in the Established Church and out of it, who think with gratitude and praise of his wonderful works. This is a token for good. And when he hath tried and humbled them, and led them to the exercise of prayer and confession,—"Then will the Lord be jealous for his land, and pity his people."

SERMON XIX.*

GRIEF FOR SINS OF MEN.

PSALM cxix. 136.

"RIVERS OF WATERS RUN DOWN MINE EYES, BECAUSE THEY KEEP NOT THY LAW."

IT is no rare spectacle to see a person in tears. Man is the heir of trouble, the child of sorrow, which assails him in a thousand forms. If exempt for any time from suffering in his own person, his sympathies are continually called forth by the afflictions of others to whom he is linked by the bond of a common nature, and by the more tender ties of kindred and friendship. How often do we see the "face foul with weeping" for the loss of a parent, a brother, a child, or a husband; and scarcely has the mourner washed himself and dried up his tears, when some new calamity causes them to flow afresh! The enquiry which we are ready to make on such occasions, What ails thee? Why weepest thou? does not express our surprise at the sight, but our desire, whether dictated by curiosity or benevolence, to ascertain the cause of the distress.

But, my brethren, the text presents us with a spectacle which is rare indeed, and which, though far from unreasonable, is calculated to excite very general surprise—a man whose heart was pierced, and from whose eyes the tears streamed, not on account of any bodily pain, or domestic trial, or worldly loss, but on account of the violations of God's law which he witnessed around him. David had met with heavy calamities of a temporal kind, and on these occasions we behold the keen sensibilities of the man blended with the confidence and sub-

* Preached on the occasion of a Synodical Fast, Feb. 1828.

mission of the saint. When persecuted by Saul as a traitor, when forced to flee from his capital by the unnatural rebellion of Absalom, or when informed of the unhappy death of that undutiful but beloved son, we can account for his grief on common principles. But when he composed this lengthened and beautiful piece of devotion, which expresses throughout the calm but intense breathings of delight in the law or revealed will of God, felt and cherished in the hours dedicated to uninterrupted and fixed meditation,—he appears to have been free from all the ordinary causes of distress and sorrow. The afflictions which he had suffered were recollected by him only as affording grounds of thanksgiving on account of the spiritual benefit he had derived from them. The attempts of his enemies, and the bitter scorn with which they had assailed him, were thought of only to enhance his esteem for those statutes, the study of which had made their envenomed darts to fall harmless at his side. Yet while enjoying that "peace which passeth all understanding," and which is the blessed portion of those who love God's law, there was one thing which pained him, which was an alloy to his happiness, which we find him repeatedly lamenting in the course of the Psalm, and which occasioned him more poignant grief than all the personal and domestic trials under which his heart had formerly bled. His righteous soul was vexed from day to day by the frequent, open, bold, and persevering transgressions which he saw and heard of. "I beheld transgressors, and was grieved." "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law."

Grief for sin is one of those charities of the heart, whose operation begins at home. He who has never seen his own sin, who has not been grieved for it, and wept over it, cannot feel grief for that of others. There is sympathy implied in sorrowing for the sins of others; and we cannot feel deeply for those distresses to which we are utter strangers in our own persons. Without this personal experience, we may weep, but will not grieve; and our tears will, at the very best, be theatrical and professional. Nay, they will pass for gross hypocrisy with Him who sees the heart. There is great danger of

self-deception here. We are apt to flatter ourselves that we hate sin, when we condemn or bewail it in the conduct of others, while, in reality, we are only indulging a splenetic, censorious, or fretful disposition. Self-love, too, conceals from us the guilt or turpitude cleaving to our actions, which we clearly see in the same or similar actions done by others. When David heard the story of the poor man and his ewe-lamb, he could not repress the sentiments of indignation which rose in his breast against the hard-hearted oppressor; but what an appalling discovery was made to him when the prophet said, "THOU art the man!" The spoiler of the poor man was forgotten, and his deed, base as it was, swallowed up and lost in that of the ravisher of Bathsheba and the murderer of Uriah. "*I* have sinned." He felt as if there had not been another sinner in the world. The sacrifice of a broken spirit is pleasing to God; but it must be offered, like those of the priests under the law, "first for our own sins, and then for the people's."*

But this gracious principle, while it begins at home, must not end there. It must be liberal and diffusive; and its diffusiveness is one mark, and no small or accidental one, of its genuineness. The exercise described in our text was not peculiar to David. We find it displayed in the recorded experience of the most distinguished saints in Scripture. Of Lot we are told that he was "vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked; for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds."† Isaiah exclaims, "Wo is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."‡ Jeremiah has been called the weeping prophet, because his writings were bedewed with tears, produced, not merely by "the destruction of the daughter of his people," but by the wickedness and rebellion which brought it upon her. "Mine eye," saith he, "runneth down with rivers of water—mine eye trickleth down, and ceaseth not, without any intermission."§ We see the same spirit manifested by Paul,

* Heb. vii. 27. † 2 Pet. ii. 7. ‡ Is. vi. 5. § Lam. iii. 48, 49.

and by one greater than them all—the "Man of Sorrows," who showed his acquaintance with this as well as other causes of grief, by weeping over the unbelief, the obduracy, and the wickedness of men.

If we mourn for sin truly, it will excite our grief whereso-ever and by whomsoever it is committed. But, like all our sympathies, it will be excited more powerfully by the sins of those with whom we are more intimately connected, and by such of them as come more immediately within the sphere of our own observation. We are to mourn more especially, though not exclusively, for the sins of our own land, of the city in which we dwell, of the church with which we are in immediate fellowship, of the congregation of which we are members, and of our own families.

Having made these general reflections, let us now, in the first place, trace these rivers of grief to their springs; and in the second place, specify some of the leading qualities of this grief.

I. Let us trace these rivers of grief to their springs.

1. Grief for the sins of men springs from love to God. Every saint feels a lively interest in the honour of God, arising from the knowledge which he has of his infinite ex-cellence, the experience which he has had of his boundless goodness, and the supreme delight which he takes in him as his all-sufficient and everlasting portion. Sin is a violation of the authority of God, and an offence to the essential purity of his nature. It insults his majesty, and reflects dishonour (so far as a created act can do) upon all his attributes. How strong and impressive is the language which God in condescension employs when speaking of the conduct of sinners in reference to himself. They make him a liar, deny him, reproach him, lift up the heel against him; he is limited by them, made to serve, robbed, wearied, tempted, provoked, vexed, grieved, broken, pressed under them as a cart is pressed under sheaves. Now all the saints feel as he feels. They feel as a dutiful subject, servant, child or wife feels, when a gracious prince, kind master, liberal benefactor, indulgent parent, or affec-tionate husband, is dishonoured or ungratefully used. Every

letter of his name, every work of his hand, every word of his mouth, every precept or institution on which he has stamped his authority, every lineament of his image which can be traced on any the meanest of his creatures, they respect; and cannot bear to see any injury done to it, or even dishonour breathed upon it. How then can they be but grieved—is it any wonder that rivers of waters run down their eyes, when his name is profaned, his works contemned, his word denied, his precepts trampled on, his image disfigured and derided?

2. It springs from love to the law of God. Consider, my brethren, where the text lies—in the heart, in the very bosom of the most fervent breathings of delight for that law which sinners "keep not." It is bedded in a channel of pearls. What variety, what fulness of appropriate language, does the Psalmist employ in this sacred ode, to express his esteem for the revealed will of God, without any mixture of that vain repetition or straining, which is to be seen in formal and studied encomium! The law of thy mouth—the word of thy lips—thy commandments—thy precepts—thy testimonies—thy statutes—thy judgments. They are true, faithful, righteous, wonderful, everlasting. God's law had quickened him—made him wiser than all his teachers—comforted him in all his affliction—was his counsellor in critical cases. He cannot utter his love for it—he loved it exceedingly—he asks God to consider how he loved it—it was his delight—sweeter than honey to his mouth—better than thousands of gold and silver—it was his meditation all the day—he kept it, and made haste to keep it—he had sworn and he would perform it—he hid it in his heart—he rejoiced in it as those that find great spoil—he inclined his heart to it—he stuck to it—he opened his mouth and panted, his eyes failed, and he fainted in looking for it. And as if he had exhausted speech in its praise, he exclaims, hopeless of doing it or his own feelings justice, "I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad!"

What is the reason, brethren, that we do not feel that deep grief for sin which the Psalmist evinced? It is because we have not the intense love which he felt for that law, of which

every sin is a transgression. And why should we not? Its limits surely have not been contracted—it has lost none of its excellences or recommendations. There is one consideration (not to mention others) which ought to increase our respect for the law, and consequently our grief for sin. Christians must reckon every sin as a violation of that law which the Son of God hath magnified, and made honourable, and vindicated by his obedience in our nature and in our stead. And God, by the agony and death of his Son, has stamped sin with the broad and burning brand of his hatred. O harder than the adamant must that heart be, which weeps not for that which brought the sweat as great drops of blood from the body of our Redeemer, and made his soul sorrowful even unto death!

3. It springs from love to the sinner. Love to God produces love to our brethren,—and this affection is expressly enjoined by the law which is so much esteemed by every genuine saint. None knows better than he the sad and awful consequences of sin. Having escaped them himself, he is anxious to save others; and when all advices and remonstrances fail, and sinners will not hear nor consider to give glory to God, what can he do but, like the prophet, "weep in secret places for their pride" and impenitency? "One sinner destroyeth much good;" and when we see the law broken in any instance, we cannot calculate to how many sins this will lead in the same individual, or in others over whom he has influence, or to whom his example may extend. While the Christian hates the sin, he loves the person of the sinner; and the more he loves the latter, the more must he loathe and mourn over the former. This affords an illustration of the Psalmist's language: "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?"

4. There are personal feelings which stir this grief, and enter into its composition. When we see a person in distress, it frequently reminds us that we were once afflicted in the same or a similar way—a recollection which strengthens our sympathy, if it is not the spring from which it directly flows. In like manner the saint is made to recollect his former sins, and

his grief for them mingles with that which he feels for the present sins of others. In how many ways, too, unperceived by us, may we not have contributed by our untenderness, or the careless performance of our duties, to lead astray or to harden others! Judah was forced to say, on fuller information, respecting his daughter-in-law whom he had condemned to be burned, "She hath been more righteous than I."* And how painful must have been the recollections of David on the misconduct of his sons! National guilt, which brings down temporal calamities on a people, is the aggregate to which each has contributed his share. Though the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, but every one shall be dealt with ultimately for his own transgressions; yet the sins which we see committed around us are the sins of our common nature, which, by the very laws of humanity, we are called to deplore. The words of the heathen poet may be adopted fitly on such occasions, and in this application, by the Christian: 'I am a man; and I reckon nothing that belongs to mankind foreign to me.' They are the fruits of the sin of our first father and representative, which is imputed justly to us all. They proceed from that depravity of nature which is common to all, and which might have discovered itself in us, by the same gross scandals and crimes which we observe in others, if this had not been prevented by converting grace, or providential restraints. It is told of a good man, who had a deep insight into the depravity of his heart, which had been cured by the regenerating grace of God, that he never saw a criminal going to the scaffold without saying, There goes such a one—pronouncing his own name.

II. I now proceed to mention the leading qualities of this grief.

1. It is genuine. There may be, and often is an affected and hypocritical expression of sorrow for prevailing sins, and there may be false and lying tears, as well as words, before God. Such were those which we may suppose the

* Gen. xxxviii. 26.

Jews to have shed, when, on visiting the tombs of the righteous which they had built from a pretended zeal, they exclaimed, "If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets."* And such are the wailings over public sins by those who indulge in practices, less gross it may be, but equally repugnant to the law of God. But the feeling described in our text was preceded, as we saw, by profound grief for personal sin, and is uniformly associated with a recollection of the sins which the mourner has himself committed.

Its genuineness is evinced by its impartiality. The sincere mourner is grieved for the sins of friends as well as of enemies,—of those of his own religious connexion, as well as those of other denominations,—for the sins of his own family, as well as those of his neighbours; nay, he is more sensibly affected with the dishonours done to God by those who are most intimately connected with him—"the provoking of sons and daughters." He is grieved for all sin. The ears of every sober person are shocked at hearing the hellish imprecations uttered by some profane men; but he is affected by hearing the name of God taken, or minced, in vain. Few that have any respect to religion but would have their feelings hurt if they saw the theatres thrown open, and men flocking to places of public entertainment or business, on the Lord's day (although this is done in some countries called Christian); but he is distressed to know that this holy day is so generally spent in idleness, in private dissipation and parties of pleasure, in unnecessary visiting, or in vain, worldly and irreligious company and conversation.

The genuineness of these tears is evinced by the ease with which they flow. Take a person of tender feelings to a scene of distress, and the tear will instantly start to his eye on beholding it. Tell a benevolent man of a worthy family involved at once in sickness and destitution, and you need not to give him a minute description of the distressing scene which harrowed up your feelings on visiting it, to dispose him to contribute for its relief. The mere sight of sin draws forth the

* Mat. xxiii. 30.

sorrow of a godly man. "I BEHELD transgressors, and was grieved." It was an ancient custom to employ minstrels and hired mourners on occasions of domestic calamity, with the view of increasing the sorrow of those who assembled, and thus doing more honour to the dead. The saint has no need of such theatrical stimulants. "His eye affecteth his heart."*

In fine, his tears flow more freely in secret; he goes to his closet, and on his knees he weeps and makes supplication before his heavenly Father. It was to God that the Psalmist was speaking in the text; and every true mourner can join with him in his appeal, "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?"†

2. This grief is generous and seemly. There is a godly sorrow for the evils of this life; but sorrow for worldly distresses is no proper mark of godliness. The observation applies so far to sorrow for sin. If we grieve and weep merely for our own sins, there may be ground to suspect that we are actuated by a selfish principle,—that we are merely afraid of the punishment to which they expose us: but when we are grieved for the sins of others, after our own have been pardoned and blotted out, this shows that we feel the dishonour done to God, and are touched with compassion for the souls of others.

It is accordingly a feeling of which no person needs to be ashamed. To be overwhelmed with affliction—to burst into tears at every untoward or distressing occurrence—to indulge in immoderate grief even on occasion of great trials, is weak and childish. But it is not unseemly to weep for sin—for any sin, and it is not easy to be excessive in this expression of sorrow. Such tears become Christian men—men of stature and valour; for, as one has expressed it, "it is the truest magnanimity to be sensible on the point of God's honour, which is injured by sin." David was reproved by his commander-in-chief for mourning immoderately and indecently for Absalom; but he had no reason to be ashamed when "rivers of waters ran down his eyes, because they kept not God's law." And

* Lam. iii. 51. † Ps. cxxxix. 21.

had this degraded him in their eyes, he might have replied, as on another occasion, "I will be yet more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight."*

3. This grief varies, especially in its expression, in different persons, and in the same person at different times. This is common to it with other gracious dispositions in the hearts of men who are but partially sanctified, and whose exercise, in this their sublunary state, resembles the tide which ebbs and flows according to the varying influence of the moon.

Sometimes their eyes are dry, at other times the tears may be seen standing in them; now they trickle down the cheek, and again they run like a stream. Sometimes their hearts are altogether unaffected, and they have no tears to shed for sin, and what is worse, no desire to shed them; at other times, they could wish that "their head were waters, and their eyes a fountain of tears," and that they had a lodge in the wilderness where they might weep day and night for the guilt of their people, and the judgments it has provoked. Sometimes the transition from insensibility to melting of heart may be very sudden, and effected by a very slight instrumentality. He who has the key of the well that is in the heart can open it by a touch—a word—a look. An instance of the species of sorrow exemplified in the text occurs in the Epistle to the Philippians. The apostle had been exhorting his brethren to "rejoice in the Lord," and he had been giving them an example of it in his own exercise, in that most charming passage, beginning, "Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ my Lord." But while pursuing this pleasing strain, the Spirit brought to his remembrance some instances of professors, who had joined with him in speaking the same language, but had been left foully to contradict it; and he all at once changes his voice: "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."† And it was some time before he recovered himself, so far as to intimate to them that he did not mean to

* 2 Sam. vi. 22. † Phil. iii. 18.

retract what he had given them as his final exhortation: "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice."*

A difference may be expected in the exercise of the saints, at least as to degree, in the manifestation of sorrow for sin. Some are more eminent for one grace, and others for another; as Moses for meekness, and Job for patience; Elijah for zeal against sin, and Jeremiah for grief on account of it. The same affection, therefore, may often be discovered, according to the character of the individual, in the different forms of indignant reprehension, mild expostulation, or tearful complaint. The natural temperament is also to be considered. The constitution of some men denies them tears; and grace does not in this world change the bodily temperament. Deep waters make little noise, and are scarcely seen to roll or to move. Sometimes the sorrow is too big for utterance; and tears, when they come, bring relief. Even the situation of the person is to be taken into account. Abraham was called to walk with God in faith and obedience; while Lot, having chosen his residence in a city notorious for its wicked practices, had his righteous soul vexed from day to day.

4. This grief is habitual. Though it may vary, as the object of it is presented or withdrawn, or as the attention is called off to other and necessary duties, and "there is a time to weep, and a time to refrain from weeping"—yet it is not a transient emotion, but an abiding exercise. David in the text does not say, Rivers *ran*, but *run*. Paul could call God to witness that he "had great sorrow and continual heaviness in his heart,"† for his unbelieving and impenitent countrymen. As long as Christians are in this world they will have reason for this feeling; although it may be more strongly excited on some occasions than on others. The idolatrous connexions which were formed by Esau "were a grief of mind unto Isaac and Rebekah;"‡ and at a later period of their lives, the latter gave expression to what must often have been the experience of the saints, when she said, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth."§ "Wo is me,"

* Phil. iv. 4. † Rom. ix. 2. ‡ Gen. xxvi. 35. § Gen. xxvii. 46.

cries the Psalmist, "that I sojourn in Mesech, that I dwell in the tents of Kedar! My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace."* But offences must come, scandals will be occurring from time to time in the church; and unless the Christian go out of the world, he cannot avoid coming in contact with persons whose conduct will stir up his grief, and keep these "rivers of waters" from remaining stagnant.

In fine, this grief is influential and profitable. It may be useful to others; it will be useful to ourselves. "By the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better." It will increase our love to the law of God, on the principle which leads us to take an interest in the person whom we have sympathized with under distress or injurious treatment. It will enhance our compassion towards the sinner, by leading us to contemplate the misery to which he is exposed, to pray for him with greater fervency, and use every means for his relief. Sin is hateful, and the person who has rolled himself in it is odious in the sight of God and of all good men. But our indignation against sin is apt to become a passion (which it never is in God)—it is apt to be influenced, if not kindled, by the strange fire of our own corruptions, and to be directed against the person of the offender instead of his sin, to alienate us from him instead of exciting us to seek his salvation, and to dispose us to blaze abroad instead of "covering the multitude of his sins." Now our grief for sin will check our indignation against it, and its waters will reduce and cool down our feelings (if I may so express it) to the proper Christian temperature. In such cases, it is always dangerous when our anger is more intense than our grief. Jacob's sons, when they heard of the folly wrought in Israel by the dishonour of their sister, were grieved and very wroth: and this excess of indignation finally precipitated them into an act which not only brought on the name of Israel a deeper stain than that which they sought to wipe off, but extorted from him these bitter words on his death-bed: "Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel."† We never more

* Ps. cxx. 5, 6. † Gen. xlix. 7.

need to "put away all wrath and bitterness and clamour and evil speaking," and to be "tender-hearted," than when we are reproving sinners, or using means to recover those who are led captive of the devil. Had Jonah been more grieved for the wickedness which led to his denunciation against the inhabitants of Nineveh, he would not have been angry at their repentance and reprieve.

True grief for sin may also be expected to have a good effect on the sinners themselves. Surely if any thing will awaken a person to a consideration of his ways, it would be the clear conviction that he was giving the most acute distress of mind to a godly minister, parent, brother, friend or neighbour. If any advice or remonstrance can have effect, it would be that conveyed in the accents of tender sympathy and unaffected sorrow. This would oil, not feather, the arrow of reproof. If it was a Christian brother who was thus dealt with, surely he would be gained, and made to say, "Always smite me thus, for it is a kindness; reprove me thus, for it is an excellent oil, which shall not break mine head." If, provided we had a call and opportunity in Providence, we were to rise from our knees, and with hearts melted with grief for his sin, to go to him and say, 'I am distressed for thee, my brother; my bowels are moved within me, my repentings are kindled. You see before you a fellow-offender, one who has sinned in the same manner as thou hast done, and whose sin has this day been brought to remembrance by thinking upon thine:'—If we were to act in this manner, have we not some ground to expect that, by the blessing of God, it might be the means of calling forth a kindred feeling in his breast, and might we not hope to see realized, in a much higher sense, the pathetic scene described by the poet, when an aged king went to beg the body of his son, and succeeded in touching and melting into pity the stout heart of the murderer, by reminding him that he also had a father? *

But, above all, genuine grief for sin has an influence with

* "Now each by turns indulged the gush of woe,
And now the mingled tides together flow."

God himself, and has often been the means of averting his displeasure, not only from the individual himself, but from those over whom he mourns. When God was about to inflict a signal punishment on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, he issued a special order to spare those who were engaged in this exercise. "Go through the midst of the city, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof."* Whole nations may have been indebted for their preservation from ruin, to the seasonable flowing of these "rivers of waters" from the eyes of a few genuine mourners in Zion, who, obscure and despised as they may have been, must be ranked, on this account, as the truest patriots, and the best benefactors of their country. "Ungodly men," says a pious writer,† "though they meddle not with public affairs, or should they be faithful and honourable in meddling—yet by their impious lives they are traitors to the nation—the incendiaries of states and kingdoms. Godly men, though they can do no more than mourn for the sins of the nation, are the most loyal and serviceable subjects, bringing tears to quench the fire of wrath kindled by sin."

"Let these sayings sink down into your ears." Let us all be deeply humbled in the sight of God. Let "the land mourn, every family apart."‡ "Let every man be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger that we perish not?"§

Let me close this subject with a few reflections.

1. How rare is this exercise, even among professing Christians! To the greater part of the world it is wholly unknown. As the men of the world are strangers to the joy peculiar to a godly man, so they cannot enter into the grounds of his sadness. How can it be expected, when they never saw the criminality or turpitude of sin, which, to their vitiated taste, in-

* Ezek. ix. 4. † Archbishop Leighton. ‡ Zech. xii. 12. § Jonah, iii. 8.

stead of being "an evil and bitter thing," is "a sweet morsel," which they "roll under their tongue?" With them, the mourner for sin is either a hypocrite or an enthusiast—he either acts a part by affecting a sorrow which he does not feel, or he foolishly mars his own happiness by brooding over the representations of a gloomy imagination, and indulging the qualms of a sickly and distempered conscience. Thus it has been in every age. Thus it was with David, or rather a greater than David, who had to say, "When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach. I made sackloth also my garment; and I became a proverb unto them. They that sit in the gate speak against me; and I was the song of the drunkards." * This, though it stirs instead of abating their inward grief, induces them to restrain the expression of it in public, and to seek for secret places in which they may give it vent without provoking the reproaches and insolent contempt of them that are at ease in Zion. As in the context of the words I was quoting: "But as for me, my prayer is unto thee."

That those who never felt any love to God or his law should look strangely on the person who mourns and is in bitterness for it, is not to be wondered at. But there is a fact which comes nearer to us, and which may justly excite both surprise and alarm. How rare is the exercise of the Psalmist among those who profess godliness! Among those who have separated from the world lying in wickedness, and who testify against and condemn the abominations done in the midst of the land! How far short in this respect do those come whom we are bound in charity to look upon as Christians indeed! O 'tis a rare thing to see a person weep for sin—but it is a rarer—much rarer thing to see one weeping and grieved for the sins of others! Where, oh where are those adown whose cheeks the tears of sorrow for sin flow? whose sore runs in the night, and whom neither bodily health, nor domestic enjoyments, no, nor the assurance of personal salvation, will comfort, while they see God's law broken, and his name every day blasphemed?

* Ps. lxix. 10–12.

God knows where they are:—they are his hidden ones, like the seven thousand in Israel, who were unknown to Elijah, and like the mourners in Jerusalem, who could be discovered, not by Ezekiel, but by "the man clothed in linen, with the writer's ink-horn by his side." * We have often read the words of the text, they are familiar to our ears, we acquiesce in them as a just description of the exercise of a saint. But what experience have we of the exercise which they describe, or, allowing them to be figurative, of the inward sentiment of which they are the natural sign? It is said that God puts the tears of his children into "his bottle." † Ah! my brethren, if the tears which we have shed for worldly trials were separated and set aside, and if those which we have shed under awakenings and compunctious visitings for our own transgressions were also separated and set aside, what would the residue be? The smallest phial in the apothecary's shop would more than suffice to hold it. It will be so far a favourable symptom, if we are convinced of our mournful failure in this matter, and grieved for the hardness of our hearts.

2. How much need is there for the renewing and softening influences of the divine Spirit! The exercise described in the text supposes, in relation to sin, a discerning eye, a tender conscience, and a full heart. But the heart of man by nature is, in regard to spiritual things, blind, insensible, and unfeeling. Even those who possess great natural sensibility, and who have tears in readiness for every earthly object of distress, have none to bestow on that which is the fruitful and malignant source of all the evils which have drowned the world in sorrow. They may feel at the commission of those gross vices which attach infamy to themselves or their connexions, or which entail visible misery on the culprit. But they feel not for sin—for the dishonour it does to God, and the degradation and ruin which it brings on the rational and immortal soul. The hard and flinty heart must be struck by the rod of God's word, wielded by the hand of a greater prophet than Moses, before the waters of godly sorrow will flow from it;

* Ezek. ix. 2. † Ps. lvi. 8.

and there is this difference between it and the rock in the neighbourhood of Horeb: the one needed to be struck only once; whereas the other requires repeated strokes of divine influence, in order to extract the treasure which is infused into, not inherent in it. Even the renewed heart is apt to return to its original obduracy, or to contract a callousness as to sin by its daily contact with it, unless this is subdued by the grace of God. It is true, our Saviour hath said, "He that believeth on me—out of his belly" (that is, out of his heart) "shall flow rivers of living water." But what says the Evangelist in explanation? "But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive."* Would we have the services of this day, would you have the word now spoken, to profit us, by leading us to mourn and be in bitterness for our sins, like David in the text, then let us look up, with faith and fervent desire, to him who promised to "pour on the house of David, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications."

* John, vii. 39.

SERMON XX.*

THE BETTER COUNTRY.

HEB. xi. 16.

"BUT NOW THEY DESIRE A BETTER COUNTRY, THAT IS, AN HEAVENLY."

IT is not at all uncommon to meet with persons who desire a better country than that in which they were born and have long resided. Thousands have, within these few years, left our own shores, and traversed wide oceans to the west and the south, in quest of new abodes. In some cases, this has proceeded from the urgency of external circumstances, inducing them to seek support for their families in places less peopled, and where the means of subsistence are more easily procured. The stern law of necessity has obliged them to tear asunder the ties of country and kindred. More frequently, the emigrants have been actuated by a restless disposition, the love of novelty, a spirit of discontent with the institutions of their native land, or extravagant and visionary hopes of bettering their condition. But all, how different soever their motives, merely seek to exchange one spot of earth for another, and in this respect differ widely, or as we usually say, *toto cœlo*, from the persons described in our text, who "desire a better country, that is, an heavenly."

The inspired apostle is speaking immediately of the patriarchs. As an example of the power of faith, he adduces the conduct of Abraham, who left his native country, and went out, at the command of God, "not knowing whither he went," and his

* Delivered January, 1835.

subsequent manner of life in continuing to "dwell in tabernacles, as did Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise." By adhering, during the whole of their lives, to this mode of residence, the apostle tells us that these patriarchs "confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Such was the express confession of Abraham to the inhabitants of Canaan, "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you;" and of Jacob to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been." From these premises the general conclusion is obvious: "They that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country." But the question might be put, What country did they seek? and this the apostle proceeds to answer. If there was any country upon earth which these sojourners longed for, it must have been their native land, in which they had kinsmen and connexions; and its distance and the difficulties of the journey were not so great as to prevent their reaching it, provided they had cherished such a desire. "Truly if they had been mindful of that country from which they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned." But as they never testified any wish of this kind, the inference in the text natively follows: "But now" (from what has been said of their conduct, it appears plainly that) "they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly."

What is said of these holy men is true of all believers both under the Old and New Testament. "I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner as all my fathers were," said David, long after the children of Israel had entered on the quiet possession of Canaan. The apostle Peter addresses the saints to whom he wrote, "as strangers and pilgrims;" and lest any should suppose that this description was applicable only to the strangers scattered abroad through the lesser Asia, we need only refer to another apostle who declares, in the name of Christians in general, "Our conversation is in heaven," and exhorts them to "set their affection on things above and not on things on the earth." If we are "fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God," we are pilgrims on earth, and our heart, as

well as our home, is in heaven. This is the doctrine of the text; and in handling it we shall consider,

I. The desire which believers cherish with respect to the better country.

II. The manner in which this desire is evinced and manifested by them.

I. The desire of the better country.

We possess little direct knowledge of heaven, or a future state of blessedness. Scripture holds it forth chiefly by images, borrowed from earthly things, and describes its glory and felicity by representing them as far surpassing every thing of the kind seen or enjoyed in this world. Is it represented as an inheritance?—it is "incorruptible and undefiled." A crown?—it "fadeth not away." A kingdom?—it "cannot be removed." Is it held forth as a city?—it is "the New Jerusalem, whose walls are garnished with all manner of precious stones." Is it spoken of as a country?—then it is "a better country,"—better than Canaan, which, while the blessing of God rested on it, was a goodly land, the joy of all the earth—better than any country that ever existed, or could exist, in this world. There are various qualities which render one country preferable to another, such as healthfulness, abundance, tranquillity, knowledge and righteousness, liberty and order, and security for the permanent enjoyment of our property. And in respect of all these qualities, it might be easily shown that heaven is a better country than any upon earth. But, without dwelling upon this, let us endeavour to describe the desire which the Christian cherishes with respect to heaven.

1. The desire is of supernatural implantation. All the desires of the natural heart are confined to this world, and to what may be enjoyed on earth. "What shall we eat? what shall we drink? wherewithal shall we be clothed?" are the expressions of natural desire. Or if, in some, the aspirations may be of a more refined and elevated description, still they are sublunary. They may be aerial, and even etherial, but they are not celestial. The pride of life, as well as the lust of the eye and of the flesh, is of this world. We have heard of an ambi-

tious man who wept because there was not another world for him to conquer; but they were all earthly laurels he wished to win:—he had no desire to "take the kingdom of heaven by force." There is in man a natural longing for immortality, but his wish is to enjoy it on earth; or if he has feigned to himself a heaven as a future residence, it is constructed after the likeness of this world.

The saints themselves did not always breathe this desire. We might apply the words of the text in this view. "*Now* they desire a better country." Formerly their desires were like other men's. Abraham, at one time, looked not beyond the inheritance of his father Nahor, and what he might be able to add to it by his own skill and industry; but when, at the divine call, he left Ur of the Chaldees, "God gave him another heart," * and thenceforth he became unmindful of the country from which he had come out, and was content to be a sojourner in that to which he had gone, for he desired a heavenly country. So is it with all those who are effectually called. Formerly they "walked according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind." But now they are born again, and have new dispositions;—born from above, and seek those things that are above. Their desire for heaven is an essential element of their new nature. It is a supernatural instinct, pointing to heaven as their mother-country—a sublime aspiration, indicative of their noble birth, and distinguishing them as men of "a more excellent spirit" than those who are content to grovel in the dust of this world.

2. This desire proceeds from a discovery of the glory and excellence of heaven. It is not a blind instinct, like that which teaches the swallow to migrate at a certain season of the year, or the new born child to seek the milk which nature intended for its sustenance; but an enlightened and reasonable feeling. The saints desire heaven because they perceive and judge it to be a better country than any on earth. Some perhaps may ask, How can they know heaven to be such a desirable land, when they never saw it? We might reply by asking,

* 1 Sam. x. 9.

Does all our knowledge come by sight? Have we not ears as well as eyes? Does not our acquaintance with the greater part of the earth which we inhabit, rest on the report of travellers or the letters of friends? But the saints have seen heaven through the glass of the divine promise, which brings it within their view. This is the account which the apostle gives of the exercise of the patriarchs in the context. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises" (that is, the blessings promised) "but having seen them afar off." That wonderful instrument the telescope, the invention of which Providence would appear to have delayed, as it were, to put to shame the infidelity of modern times, not only brings near to us the heavenly bodies, discernible by the naked eye, in a way which could not have previously been conceived, but reveals a multitude of stars, which, without its aid, would have been to us as if they had not existed, and have remained invisible as the glories of the third heavens. And who will venture to deny, that God can communicate similar discoveries in the spiritual world, as far above the reach of the eye of reason, as those of the telescope are above the range of the natural eye, but accompanied with impressions of equal distinctness and certainty? Deny it who may, Christians are assured of its truth. "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." * Their "eyes have seen the king in his beauty; they have beheld the land that is very far off." † "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." ‡

The desire of the Christian for the heavenly country is enlarged with his increasing discoveries of its riches and glory, and these discoveries are not only theoretic, but also experimental. "We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and ex-

* 2 Cor. iv. 6. † Isa. xxiii. 17. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 9, 10.

perience, hope." * "The kingdom of God is within you." You have heard of "coming events casting their shadows before;" but "the world to come" casts its lights before—it makes its "powers" to be felt. The saint sometimes obtains, as Moses before his death, a Pisgah-sight of the better country, and he tastes in the wilderness the grapes of the heavenly Eshcol. And when admitted to communion with God in ordinances, he is led to exclaim with Jacob, "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

3. This desire proceeds from, and is supported by, a firm and appropriating faith of the divine promises. The patriarchs not only "saw them afar off," but they "were persuaded of them, and embraced them." They relied on the truth of the promiser, and they embraced the promised good, as all their salvation, and all their desire.

Those who stigmatize this as the dream of fancy, should consider to what their rejection of it leads. Will we exclude God from his own world? Will we prevent him from holding intercourse with the spirits which he has made? And what less do we, when we say that he cannot speak to them, so as to satisfy them that it is his voice, and to demand their reliance on his word?—a demand which one creature daily makes upon another, and does not make in vain. "If we receive the witness of men," surely "the witness of God is greater." "Now, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Shall we brand all the great and holy men of antiquity, the lights of their age, when darkness was all around, the salt of the earth in a time of almost universal corruption—as enthusiasts? The history of their faith is the record of the evidence for a future state of blessedness. Abraham was assured of the call of God, when he left his native country, and went out, not knowing whither he went; and he not only attested the sincerity of his belief, but confessed the truth of the promise made to him, by continuing to dwell as a sojourner in Canaan to the end of his days. And so did Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. The promise of God

* Rom. v. 2, 3, 4.

continued to receive fresh accessions of evidence in the subsequent revelations made to the fathers, and in the partial accomplishment of it, till at last it was completed in the appearance, ministry, and work of Him in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed; and it has been "confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with diverse miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost." *

The faith of the Christian does not rest solely on the external evidence of miracles, as a divine attestation. The gospel has a self-evidencing power;—like the sun, it carries its own light along with it, whithersoever it goes. It is a luminous body, and every ray which proceeds from it throws light on the path to heaven. God does not require his people to rest their hopes of eternal felicity on a simple promise, that he will bestow it upon them. He knows the infirmity of our flesh, as creatures of sense, and the infirmity of our spirit, as sinners oppressed with a feeling of guilt and unworthiness. He speaks to us by facts, and facts which, addressing themselves to our wants and the appetencies of our nature, are calculated to lift our desires and expectations to the inconceivable good which he hath prepared in heaven. How wonderful the apparatus for this purpose! How simple, yet every way adapted to the end! When Jacob had left his father's house, he saw in a dream "a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven, and behold, the angels of God ascending and descending upon it." This was intended to confirm his faith in the invisible protection of God; but it had also a typical meaning, to which our Lord referred when he said: "Ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." † Heaven was twice opened, first at the descent of the Son of God to our world, and, secondly, at his ascension. When the Son of God descended, the portals of heaven closed behind him, and were as firmly barred as they had ever been; but they were not closed after he ascended, when he had

* Heb. ii. 4. † John, i. 51.

obtained eternal redemption for us. Heaven is now kept open by his residence and ministration in the upper sanctuary. The incarnation of the Son of God, his ministry on earth, his death, his resurrection, ascension, session and intercession, are the steps of the mystic ladder by which the faith and desires of the saints rise to heaven. "Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." "God who is rich in mercy hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

4. This desire is animated by a hope, which produces patience. "We are saved by hope." Such is the importance of this Christian grace, and the connexion in which it stands with the future possession of glory, that it gives a name to heavenly enjoyments in the Scripture. Hence we read of "the hope laid up for us in heaven," and of looking for "that blessed hope," and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Desire would fail were it not invigorated by hope, and sustained by patience. It is in itself an impatient feeling, and sickens at delay. Its language is "Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariot?" Gracious desire, is the soul looking out at the window of hope, and leaning on the arm of patience, "counting him faithful that has promised, and against hope believing in hope." "The vision is yet for an appointed time; but at the end it shall speak and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come." *

5. The desire is habitual. "They *desire* a better country." This was their exercise not at any one time only, but through the whole of their lives. Christian desire is the breathing of the new creature after its native clime, its inheritance, its rest. It is not so much an emotion, a transient feeling, called up during a period of excitement, as a principle fixed and rooted in the heart, and which is entwined with all the feelings of the new man. It may be weakened and borne down by cor-

* Hab. ii. 2.

ruption, the cares, riches, and pleasures of this life, but cannot be extinguished. It may be shaken by the storm of temptation in the soul, but faithful as the magnetic needle to the north, it will resume its position, and point with trembling reverence towards heaven. Sometimes when faith is steadfast, and hope lively, the Christian's steps are enlarged under him, and the pulse beats high with the desire of celestial glory. "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come, and appear before God?" "For we that are in this tabernacle do groan being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." But even when this is not their attainment, believers can say, "Yea, in the way of thy judgments, O Lord, have we waited for thee; the desire of our soul is to thy name, and to the remembrance of thee. With my soul have I desired thee in the night. Yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early."

Lastly, it is a desire which shall be gratified. "The desire of the righteous shall be granted; the expectation of the poor shall not perish." There are many things which men desire most ardently, health, long life, riches, friends, but they never obtain them, or they do not find that satisfaction in them which they promised themselves. All the desires of good men are not always granted, even though they are not in themselves unlawful. Moses desired permission to enter Canaan, David to build the temple, and Peter to know what should become of the beloved disciple; yet their desires were denied. But the gracious desire of heaven shall in no case be frustrated. God will not disappoint those desires which are of his own implantation, and rest upon his own faithful word and promise. They are sacred to him as the first fruits laid upon his altar, and perfumed with prayers and praise. What is more, the object of their desire shall not only be granted, but their expectations shall be exceeded, when their hope has been turned into fruition, and their desire into delight. Each shall be constrained to say, as the queen of Sheba of the glory of Solomon, "Behold, the half was not told me."

II. It remains to show how the saints evince and manifest this desire. Desire is an affection of the mind of which the individual is conscious, but which others can know only by its outward manifestations. It is evidently implied in the text that the patriarchs had evinced by decided proofs that their desires were supremely fixed on heaven. They gave credible evidence of this. We are bound to act in such a manner as may convince others, both within and without the church, that we are journeying to the heavenly country, and induce them to cast in their lot with us, and bear us company by the way; as Moses said to his brother-in-law, "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."* But it is incumbent on us also to satisfy our own consciences on this head—to ascertain, on solid and scriptural grounds, that our desire is of a gracious and saving kind. Let us keep both of these in view, while we enquire how the saints show that they desire heaven as a better country.

1. The saints evince this desire by their conversation. If a person has the intention or prospect of going to a foreign country, he will often speak of it, seek information about it, and make himself master of its language. The saints "speak the language of Canaan." "Our conversation is in heaven," says the apostle. He includes under that expression the whole of a Christian's conduct and deportment. But his saying is true also in the proper and more restricted sense of that word. It is natural for us to talk of those things, which are the object of our esteem, desire, and pursuit. "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh. They that are of the world, speak of the world; they that are of God, speak of the things of God." If persons conceal their desires, it is either because the discovery of these may balk their expectation, because they are ashamed of them, or because they think that others will not sympathize with them. But none of these reasons need or ought to prevent us from communicating our heavenly desires. The expression of them

* Numb. x. 29.

cannot interfere with their accomplishment; and to be ashamed of expressing them is a feeling altogether unworthy of an expectant of immortality. He who in a foreign land is ashamed of his native country, is unworthy of it, and he who is ashamed of the kingdom of God cannot expect admission into it. With respect to the want of congenial feelings in those with whom he converses, the Christian will study prudence in the introduction of religious topics, and avoid to make his good evil spoken of; but even while he keeps in his mouth with the bridle of discretion in the presence of the ungodly, he will carefully shun every thing which can be construed into a disavowal of his hopes; and if, at any time, he should be tempted to this sin, his speech will bewray him. The Christian pilgrim is under no such restraint, when he is in the company of his fellow travellers, and with them his talk will be of the better country. You must not, however, confine a heavenly conversation to discourse which turns directly on heaven. He that speaks of God, speaks of heaven, "for it is God's throne;" he that speaks of the church, speaks of heaven, "for it is the city of the great King." To talk of holiness, is to talk of the atmosphere of heaven; to converse about Christ, is to converse about the way to heaven, and that which constitutes all its felicity.

Religious converse has been practised by the saints in all ages, and especially in times of abounding irreligion and profaneness. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." * They not only spake of divine things when they happened to meet, but they met that they might speak of them. They had stated as well as occasional meetings for this purpose. Two things go far to prove that professors of religion have become, in a great degree, strangers to heavenly desires: first, the rareness of religious conversation in their occasional discourse; and, secondly, the falling off of meetings for prayer and religious

* Mal. iii. 16.

converse. Our fathers grudged not to abridge their hours of labour and their hours of rest—they scrupled not to travel with the light of the moon and the stars, and to spend hours in a smoky hovel, that they might enjoy this foretaste of heaven upon earth; while we, with every accommodation and facility, will not go out of our houses, or cross a street, to enjoy the privilege. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. To what can we ascribe them but to earthliness of affection, distrust of God, and want of brotherly love?

2. The saints evince this temper of mind, by their conduct in reference to this present world. They testify by their whole deportment that they do not regard it as their portion and rest. In proportion as their desires are set on heaven, they are withdrawn from this earth. So far as they act in character, they display a holy indifference about terrestrial objects. When their faith in the better country is clear, and their longings after it lively and ardent, they make their "moderation known to all men," being assured that "the Lord is at hand." Do they seek great things for themselves in respect of wealth or honours? They seek them not. Their treasure is in heaven, where their hearts are; and they run the race set before them, and fight the good fight, in hope of that unfading crown which Christ shall bestow on them at his second appearing.

Are they placed in affluent circumstances? They are not high-minded; they trust not in uncertain riches, they are jealous over themselves, lest their hearts should be corrupted by them; and are "ready to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life." Are they in depressed and indigent circumstances? They are content with such things as they have, and submit cheerfully to privations. Are they subjected to worldly losses and bereavements? They do not bewail their lot, like him who cried, "Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and what have I more?"* but with holy Job, they say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord

* Judges, xviii. 24.

taketh away;" and, provided such dispensations have, through the blessing of God, the effect of weaning their minds from the world, and fixing them more steadily on heaven, they count their losses gains. They are ready to part with all at the call of God, or for the sake of Christ; like Moses, who "esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt, for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward;" and like the believing Hebrews, who "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods, knowing in themselves, that they had in heaven a better and an enduring substance." With their hopes and desires of heaven within them, they can say, with better reason than the philosopher in the midst of the bustle and anxiety of a conflagration,—'I carry my all with me.'

3. They evince this desire by their patience under the afflictions of this life. "No chastening is for the present joyous, but grievous;" and if the saint had hope in this life only, he would be of all men the most miserable, as he is often chastened and plagued more sharply than others. Worldly men cannot fail to fret and murmur and be miserable under affliction. It crushes their hopes, withers their desires, and dries up the springs of their comforts. But it cannot reach those of the man whose "affections are set on things which are above." On the contrary, by mortifying the remains of carnality, and disengaging his heart from the world, it contributes to strengthen his gracious desires, and makes him long more ardently for that place, where alone he can enjoy complete exemption from all that is painful and distressing. At the same time his desire being full of hope, sustains the soul, and enables him to wait patiently for the salvation of God. This influence of desire and hope in sustaining the Christian is largely expressed in the prayer which the apostle poured out in behalf of the believing Colossians:—"That ye might walk worthy of the Lord, strengthened with all might according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, who hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." Add to this that sanctified affliction is the means of preparing

for heaven, and when Christians perceive this, they are made to "glory in tribulations," these appearing to them light and momentary, compared with the exceeding great and eternal weight of glory, which they work for them. Fretfulness and impatience under trouble argue that the desire of heaven in the Christian is languid, or obstructed by much unbelief and ignorance of the way in which God conducts his people to the city of habitation. "Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord." "Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry."

4. Believers evince their desire of heaven by the regular intercourse which they keep up with it, and the delight they take in those exercises which most resemble the employment of its blessed inhabitants.

There is nothing which the stranger and sojourner is more attentive to, or more gratified by, than maintaining correspondence with his native country. If he should show himself indifferent about receiving intelligence from home, or neglect opportunities of communication, it would be considered as a proof that he had become an alien, and ceased to wish for a return. The word and ordinances of God are the appointed means of intercourse between the saints and the better country. To the former they owe all their knowledge of it, and they cannot fail to take delight in that which was the first means of producing their hope and desire of heaven. They "call the Sabbath a delight," for it is the day which, in its peaceful and sacred employments, harmonizes most with "the rest which remaineth to the people of God." By prayer and meditation they send their desires heavenward; and by faith they receive a return in assurances of acceptance, and communications of grace. Nor is this an intercourse by mere symbols; it is real and sensible; and there is a personal agency established for carrying it on, by the residence of Christ in heaven, and the residence of the Spirit in their hearts.

Praise is the characteristic employment of the upper sanc-

tuary, and all true Christians delight in this part of worship. In their prayers they praise God, ascribing to him the kingdom, power, and glory; nor do they neglect, or carelessly perform, in private or public, the ordinance of psalmody, "speaking to one another, in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, making melody in their heart unto the Lord."

5. They manifest this desire by regulating their conduct according to the laws, maxims, and manners of heaven. A stranger may accommodate himself to the manners and habits of the people among whom he dwells, provided there is nothing in them that is immoral; and a Christian will not court singularity in things common or indifferent—such as in his gait, dress, or dialect. But in all things which are regulated by the law of God he will be precise and uncompromising. Whenever the maxims or manners of the world contradict the law of the God of heaven, he will make conscience of practising nonconformity; and he will find many opportunities for this. "Be not conformed to this world." "Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." Regulating himself by the maxims, and conforming himself to the manners of heaven, the conduct of the heir of heaven will be holy; for "every man that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself, even as Christ is pure." "Seeing that ye look for such things, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness." He will manifest in his deportment towards his brethren a pacific and forgiving disposition. And the whole of his character will bear the impress of that love which is the predominating feature of the inhabitants of the better country.

6. The saints evince their desires after heaven by their diligent preparation for it. Desire is a spur to diligence, both in natural and spiritual things. They say plainly that they "seek a country"—not as if it were unknown to them, or hard to find, but in respect of diligence in the use of means of coming to it. Their exertions are as great, and their vigilance as unremitting, as if they expected to obtain heaven as the proper reward of their services. "Work out your salva-

tion with fear and trembling." "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Desires will never bring a man to heaven any more than they will bring a traveller to the end of his journey.

Finally, the saints evince their desire for heaven by their willingness to die. You have heard of the Swiss sickness—a longing for their native hills which comes upon that people, when they are abroad, which makes them sick at heart, and grows into an incurable disease. Something similar is occasionally felt by the saints, whether it be excited by the evils of this life, or by extatic discoveries of heavenly bliss. "I loathe it," said Job; "I would not live alway." "Now," said Simeon, "lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." We must all die; but it is the saint only that, on cool reflection, is ready, and willing, and sometimes desirous to die. And though the Christian may not always attain to this, yet he is willing to leave this world when God calls him out of it—"willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." We find Paul at one time "in a strait between two, having a desire to depart;" and yet adding, "nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you."* But when he saw that his work was over, he yielded to his ruling passion, which was, "to be with Christ." "I am NOW READY to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand."†

From this subject we may learn, in the first place, the reasonableness of the preference which the saints give to heaven. It is a better country than any that they know, or expect to see on earth. Their preference is not the effect of gloomy discontentment, or of a mind soured with disappointments, and dissatisfied with their connexions, natural, civil, or religious. It is the result of a fair and deliberate calculation, founded on the discoveries they have made of the superior advantages of the heavenly country, and confirmed by experience. "By

* Phil. i. 23. † 2 Tim. iv. 6.

faith, Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect to the recompense of reward."

2. See one improvement which we should make of the evils of this life—to excite and strengthen our desire for the better country. It is not enough to feel these evils, to grieve for them, to complain of them, to become weary of life and to wish to die. They have failed in producing their proper effects, if they have not enhanced heaven in our estimation, and induced us to long for our departure from this world chiefly that we may "be with Christ, which is far better."

3. Let us learn what ought to be our wishes and prayers for our country on earth:—that it may be as like as possible to the heavenly country. Their love to and their desire after heaven does not quench patriotism in the breasts of enlightened Christians. For their brethren and companions' sakes, they will pray that peace may be within its walls and prosperity within its palaces. They know that God has a cause on earth, and they are anxious that it should flourish in their father-land. Their native country is always in their eye when they pray, "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done in earth, even as it is in heaven." They are not afraid that it shall become too like heaven; the more it flourishes in knowledge, virtue, and religion, the brighter will be the reflection from it of the image of that happy place, where all is light and love, and in which they desire to meet their children, and their children's children.

4. The subject teaches us the necessity of faith—to discover the existence and the excellence of the heavenly country, and to enable us to live under the influence of unseen but eternal realities. Would you form an acquaintance with this better country? Seek that faith which is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Without this, you want the eye to discern, the ear to hear, and the heart to conceive, the things which God hath prepared for them that

love him. "We," says the apostle, "look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Finally, my brethren, do we desire a better country? Then, we will regret the less that every year which is spent, shortens the time of our remaining here, and brings us nearer to eternity. We will see the wisdom of those trials which, by loosing the ties that bind us to this world, prepare our minds for the next; and in every instance of mortality we will hear the admonition, "Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest, because it is polluted."*

* Micah, ii. 10.

SERMON XXI.*

THE FAN IN CHRIST'S HAND.

MATTHEW iii. 12.

"WHOSE FAN IS IN HIS HAND, AND HE WILL THOROUGHLY PURGE HIS FLOOR, AND GATHER HIS WHEAT INTO THE GARNER; BUT HE WILL BURN UP THE CHAFF WITH UNQUENCHABLE FIRE."

WE are accustomed to hear children speak of the Bible and the Testament; and we sometimes find this mode of speaking retained by persons who ought to have put away childish things. The Old and New Testaments form one Bible. They proceed from the same author, testify the same things, possess the same properties, and lead to the same end. In the writings of the Old Testament we have eternal life, and they testify of Christ. And the writings of the New Testament abound with quotations from those of Moses and the prophets. Upwards of four hundred years elapsed between the composing of the last book of the Old Testament, and the first of the New; and yet the current of revelation flows on in an unbroken stream. You would suppose that Matthew had taken the pen from the hand of Malachi, and proceeded immediately to relate the accomplishment of what his predecessor had predicted. "Behold," says Malachi, "I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me." This Matthew relates as accomplished in John the Baptist. "This is he that was spoken of by the prophet saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." "The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple," says Malachi. This Matthew shows to have been fulfilled in the coming of Christ. And even in their accounts of the manner of his appearance, they

* This was the last discourse delivered by the author, having been preached August 2d, 1835, the Sabbath immediately preceding his decease.

harmonize. "But who may abide the day of his coming?" exclaims the prophet; "and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap."* "He shall baptize," responds the evangelist, "with the Holy Ghost and with fire." "Behold the day cometh," continues the former, "that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."† This corresponds exactly with the words before us: "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

A secure people need a severe minister; and it is a good sign that a people have been aroused from their security when they are reconciled to the severity of the preacher. Such a preacher was John the Baptist, who warned a hypocritical nation to flee from the wrath to come, preaching the baptism of repentance. His ministry occupied a middle place, as it were, between the law and the gospel. He stood between the prophets and Christ. He was honoured above the former, because he was permitted to point out the Messiah with the finger, and to say, "Behold the Lamb of God." It was his work to testify of Christ as just about to appear, and to conduct and deliver over his disciples to his and their common master. In speaking of him, though he cheerfully admits his own inferiority, he at the same time asserts the harmony of their design, and warns his hearers against expecting to find under the administration of Him that was to come any covert for their hypocrisy and other vices. "Now also," says he in a preceding verse, "the axe is laid unto the root of the tree: therefore every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire." What more calculated to awaken unprofitable members of the church than this description? The unfruitful tree is marked out by the gardener, who has long dressed and pruned it in vain; the ground is cleared around it, the axe is laid at its root, and nothing remains but for the lord of the garden, when he comes in to survey it, to give the

* Mal. iii. 2. † Ib. iv. 1.

command, " Cut it down : why cumbereth it the ground ?" Similar is the description in the succeeding verse. Water will remove the external filth which cleaves to any object, but the operation of fire is severer and more effectual—it melts the hardest metals and burns up the dross. John baptized with water ; but Christ shall " baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire."

The description is varied in our text, while the subject is still the same. The work of purifying the church, and clearing it of all that is foreign, incongruous or offensive, is likened to the operation of winnowing grain. This process, in ancient times, consisted of different operations. The corn, after being thrashed, was laid out on a floor and exposed to a gentle wind which scattered the straw and chaff. It was then beaten by the hoofs of oxen, next passed through a sieve, and lastly subjected to the hand-fan, a species of shovel, by which it was thoroughly cleansed. Similar to this is the purification of the church ; and Christ, who superintends the whole process, and reserves for himself the last and crowning part of it, is here compared to the husbandman, who stood with the fan in his hand, with which he, for the last time, turned up the grain, that the wind might separate and bear away every remaining particle of chaff and refuse, and that nothing might rest behind but what was pure and substantial. It is one part of the work of Christ to purify his church ; and he will not do this work superficially, or leave it unfinished : he will " thoroughly purge his floor ;" he will make a complete separation, at last, between the chaff and the wheat; the latter he will deposit in his heavenly garner, and the former he will burn up with unquenchable fire. The devil has a fan of his own, which he uses for the purposes of temptation. " Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat." But Christ will not give up his fan to Satan : he still holds it in his hand, and brings individual believers, as well as his church, under its operation, that he may thoroughly cleanse his floor.

My intention, at present, is to name some of those means which the Lord Jesus Christ employs to fan or purify his church.

It may be premised that the work is twofold. First, it includes a separation of persons. The church in this world is like a barn-floor, which contains a mixture of good grain and refuse. There are hypocrites and nominal or godless professors, as well as genuine saints; and sometimes the number of the former may become so great, that it is difficult to perceive any other. Hence the need of times of reformation, in which Christ comes into his church as a purifier, with his fan in his hand.—Secondly, it implies a separation of persons from their corruptions. The husks of sin, the clay of corruption, the chaff of vanity, cleave to the best so long as they are in the body, and hence they need to be sifted and beaten and fanned, in order to cleanse them. In accomplishing these separate objects, our Lord proceeds in a manner somewhat different; but still, in general, the same means serve, in his adorable wisdom, to effect both purposes.

1. Christ accomplishes this work by means of his Word. It is compared to fire, on account of its searching and purifying tendency:—to a candle or light, which discovers the hidden things of darkness;—to a sharp two-edged sword, which cuts both ways, discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart, and divides between the soul and spirit—making a discrimination between states and characters, not only by laying down infallible marks of these, but also by applying them convincingly to individuals.

The Scriptures evince their discriminating power, by touching both the consciences and the corruptions of men; and by either softening and subduing them, or by irritating and hardening them. To some the gospel proves the savour of life; to others, the savour of death; to them that are saved, it is the power of God; to them that perish, a stumbling-block and foolishness. "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against,—that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."* So it was foretold by Simeon to the mother of our Lord; and

* Luke, ii. 34.

the history of his personal ministry is a commentary on that text.

When he preached first in his native city of Nazareth, we are told that, after he had read out his text, "the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him." This was a favourable commencement. After he had proceeded so far in his sermon, it is said, "All bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth." This was still more flattering. When it is added, "They said, Is not this Joseph's son?"—the question is suspicious; but still it might only mean that they were the more struck with astonishment at his wisdom when they recollected that he was the son of one of their poor townsmen. But Jesus proceeded to address them in a style that was more plain than pleasant, telling them that a prophet was seldom accepted in his own country, and reminding them that though there were many widows in Israel during the famine in the days of Elias, that prophet was sent to relieve only a single widow who lived in Sarepta, a city of Sidon; and though there were many lepers in Israel, the only one whom Elisha cured was Naaman, a Syrian,—this doctrine of the divine sovereignty instantly changed their admiration into resentment. "All they in the synagogue when they heard these things were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong." *

His subsequent history presents numerous examples of the same nature. After having miraculously fed the multitude on one occasion, they exclaimed, "This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world;" and they would have taken him by force to make him a king. When he withdrew from them, they eagerly followed, and sought him out. But by means of the fan of his word, he soon freed himself of these light-minded, carnal followers. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat? This is an hard saying: who can hear it? From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked

* Luke, iv. 20–29.

no more with him."* On one occasion we are informed, "the common people heard him gladly;"† but why? Because his discourse had on that occasion been directed against the scribes and Pharisees, and they were pleased to see their superiors mortified; but when their own turn came, and he began to reprove their vices, by and by they were offended also. On another occasion, he dispersed a whole congregation, except one, by that single saying, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." "And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even to the last; and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst."‡

Similar instances might be mentioned of the power of Christ's word in distinguishing the characters of particular individuals. What a contrast between the effects which it produced on the Syrophenican woman, and the rich young man! The former persevered in her suit, even after being repelled, and classed with the dogs: "Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." The latter is blown away with a single word: "He went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions."§ "What thou doest, do quickly," said our Lord to Judas. And stirred by this fan, Satan carried away the unsound disciple to the conclave of the enemies of Jesus. When the word of God crosses our inclinations, discovers our idols, demands the sacrifice of our corruptions—it raises a storm within, and arms the whole soul against it. "I hate him," said Ahab of Micaiah, "because he always prophesies evil of me." And what else could a faithful prophet say of a wicked man, even though that man was a king?

2. Christ cleanses his house by means of the fan of church-discipline. There are persons on whom the word has no effect either one way or another: it neither converts nor convinces them—neither reclaims them from their sins, nor drives them from the society of the faithful. They are like the ancient Jews, who did steal, murder, commit adultery, and yet came and stood before the Lord in his house, saying, "We are de-

* John, vi. 14–66. † Mark, xii. 37. ‡ John, viii. 7, 9. § Mat. xv. 27. xix. 22.

livered to do all these abominations." * Are these persons to be admitted to the privileges of the kingdom of heaven, or having been admitted to them before their conduct became openly immoral and profane, must they be permitted to enjoy them without any control? No: Christ has not left his spiritual kingdom so defenceless, nor obliged his servants to give that which is holy unto the dogs. He has committed to them "the keys of the kingdom of heaven," and among these is the key of discipline, and the power of binding and loosing by censures; and when these are exercised agreeably to the rule of his word, he approves of and ratifies them in heaven. The purity of the church's communion is to be maintained by excluding the unworthy from its pale, by admonishing and rebuking the scandalous, by suspending from sealing ordinances the irregular and disorderly, and by excommunicating the obstinate and impenitent. Our Lord's parables of the wheat and tares, and of the net in which were enclosed good and bad fishes, teach us that we are not to expect that the church on earth will ever consist of godly persons exclusively, and that the office-bearers of the church are not to presume to judge of the states of men. But the words of Christ are not to be interpreted so as to contradict themselves; and does he not say of the person who neglects to hear the church, "Let him be unto you as an heathen man and a publican?" and has not his Spirit said by the apostle, "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person?" † Such censures have a twofold good effect: they remove contagion from the church; and they often have the effect of removing corruption from the offending individual. They are "delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." ‡

3. Christ purifies his church and people by the fan of affliction. I scruple not, my brethren, to call afflictions an ordinance of God; they are sent to try his people—they are trials of their faith, love, humility, patience, and submission. The heavy trial at Ziklag brought forth at once David's graces, and the people's corruptions. "David was greatly distressed; for the

* Jer. vii. 9. † 1 Cor. v. 13. ‡ Ib. v. 5.

people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." * Satan, well aware of the tendency of affliction, when it bereaves men of their chief enjoyments, to excite their corruptions, anticipated this effect in the case of Job: "Put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." And Job's wife seconded the temptation: "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die." But what was his exercise under all this? "What! shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil? In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." Elisha asks the Shunamite, in her deep distress, "Is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child: And she said, It is well." How very different is it with others, who, when they are under the rod, spurn at it, "like a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke;" who, like Pharaoh, proudly ask, "Who is the Lord that I should obey him?" or as the impatient king of Israel, "Behold this evil is of the Lord: why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" †—What, my brethren, let me ask, has been the effect of affliction upon you?

4. The Lord Jesus sometimes employs in this work the fan of persecution and public calamity. It is said of the stony-ground hearers of the word, that they "dure only for a while; for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by they are offended." The fear of these deter some from joining the church of Christ; but others will join without counting the cost. In the prophecies of Daniel, Antiochus, that great persecutor, is said to "have intelligence with them that forsake the holy covenant. And some of them that have understanding shall fall, to try them, and to purge, and to make them white, even to the time of the end." ‡ Of all the crowds that flocked to our Lord during his earthly ministry, how few continued with him during his last sufferings.—Yea, even those who had continued with him in his temptations, were blown away for a time, so that he trode the wine-press alone.

* 1 Sam. xxx. 6. † 2 Kings, vi. 33. ‡ Dan. xi. 30, 35.

Peter, the boldest and most strenuous of his adherents, denied him; and the rest, in violation of their solemn engagement, forsook him and fled. And who were left to own him? The thief, who was nailed with him to the cross, and the centurion of the band which guarded the scene of his crucifixion!

When the church becomes very corrupt, public judgments become necessary to vindicate the character of God, and maintain the credit of religion. It is sometimes necessary to let in a whirlwind, "a full wind," as it is called, on the floor, which sweeps it completely, and carries all away to a great distance. There is a fanning in wrath. "I will fan them with a fan in the gates of the land: I will bereave them of children, I will destroy my people, since they return not from their ways." * At first view, this may appear to be ruinous, instead of purifying, to the church. Hence that expression, "A dry wind of the high places in the wilderness toward the daughter of my people, not to fan, nor to cleanse." † The Chaldeans are there compared to that destructive wind which blows from the deserts of Arabia, burning up and destroying all before it, called the Simoom. For a time it appeared that the church of God was ruined—good as well as bad were swept away. Accordingly it follows, "Behold he shall come up as a whirlwind. Wo unto us! for we are spoiled." But the good were preserved—they were "sown among the people;" and restored to their own land. "I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them again to place them; and they shall be as though I had not cast them off." ‡

5. Christ employs for this purpose the fan of temptations. Afflictions and persecutions because of the word operate as temptations, and are so denominated in Scripture, because they try the character of professed Christians, discover the unsoundness of some, and the integrity of others. But temptations are more extensive. Prosperity, as well as affliction, is a sore trial to the constancy of professors. By it, to use the language of Job, they are "lifted up to the wind." § How hard is it for

* Jer. xv. 7. † Jer. iv. 11. ‡ Zech. x. 6, 9. § Job, xxx. 22.

a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven! And how hard for any man to withstand the influence even of a little breath of worldly prosperity! I refer, at present, however, to temptations strictly so called.

We know that God "tempteth no man;" he does not seduce us by persuasion, or by any operation on our hearts, into sin. But, for wise and holy ends, he permits men to be tempted, to be exposed to the enticements of sinners, and to those circumstances which have a tendency to draw out their corrupt inclinations. Hence we are directed to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." And there is a deep and awful dispensation of Providence in this respect towards unprofitable and ungodly professors of religion, which, while it demands from us humble adoration, ought to fill us with holy dread. "Because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved, God also sent them strong delusions that they should believe a lie." *

Satan is at the head of the sinful agents of temptation. Though he acts chiefly by means of external objects addressed to the senses, yet that he has direct access to the soul there can be little reason to doubt, from his own nature as an unembodied spirit, or the account given of his operations in Scripture. He is called "the Spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience." And again, "Whom the god of this world hath blinded." Christ as the purifier of his church, permits him to come into it, though he stands by him to restrain and curb him. Though he will not commit his fan into the hands of this destroyer, yet he permits him to use his own fan. Satan has his subaltern agents whom he employs as instruments in seduction. And as he spake at first by the mouth of the serpent, which "was more subtle than any of the beasts of the field," so he speaks still by the mouths of those who are most plausible, or who exert the greatest influence over us. He knows well how to "entice thee secretly by thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend which is as

* 2 Thess. ii. 10.

thine own soul." * If Peter had recollected the reproof of his master, "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of man," he would not have been so ignorant of the devices of the Tempter, as to suppose that he could not speak to him by the mouth of a maid-servant.

The wind of error and false doctrine carries away multitudes of giddy and unsound professors, who are "tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." There arose of old false prophets and false Christs, and under such specious appearances did they come, and such plausible language did they employ, that they drew away many disciples, and "if it had been possible would have deceived the very elect."

6. Lastly, Christ will accomplish this work by the fan of the final judgment. This is the last part of the process; and then will Christ "thoroughly purge his floor." All the preceding steps are preparative to this, and contribute to the end which it will accomplish. The purgation wrought by them is only partial. None of them, nor all of them together, make a complete separation between the chaff and the wheat. Hypocrites may read the word of God, and sit under the most faithful and searching ministry, and yet hold fast their hypocrisy, and think they are something, when they are nothing. The discipline of the house of God, even when most conscientiously and scripturally administered, can only remove those whose conduct is openly offensive. There was a Ham in the ark, a Judas in the sacred college of the apostles. We have no ground to think that affliction, or persecution, or temptation, or public calamities, carry away all that are insincere from a profession of religion. Professing Christians may go down to the pit under the influence of a deceived heart, and not know that they carry a lie in their right hand. "Many will say in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? Have we not

* Deut. xiii. 6.

eaten and drunk in thy presence? And when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?" They may go to the judgment-seat under such delusions, indulging presumptuous hopes, but they shall not abide there, far less come from it in that state. "The ungodly shall not stand in the judgment." In this life, Christ has his fire in Zion and his furnace in Jerusalem, and there he sits as a refiner. But at the last day, "a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him." Alas! "who shall be able to abide the day of his coming?"

The trial shall be most strict. "We must all appear"—be made manifest—"before the judgment-seat of Christ." The Judge is the Omniscient One, and on that day will make all men to know that it is He that trieth the reins and searcheth the heart. When the Lord cometh, "he shall bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts." Hence it is compared to the severest ordeal—that by fire. Every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be tried by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

Then a complete separation shall be made between the righteous and the wicked. Not one of the righteous shall be found on the left hand of the Judge; and not one of the wicked on his right hand.

And this separation shall be final. No confusion or mixing of the two parties shall then appear. "These shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal." "He shall gather his wheat into his garner, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

THE END.