

THE
WORKS
OF THE
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LATE OF
KETTERING, IN NORTHAMPTONSHIRE;
IN EIGHT VOLUMES:
TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,
A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR,
BY JOHN RYLAND, D. D.

VOL. VIII.

LONDON:
PUBLISHED BY B. J. HOLDSWORTH,
18, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD.

1824.

MISCELLANIES:

CONSISTING OF

**MAGAZINE PAPERS,
SKETCHES OF SERMONS,
ASSOCIATION LETTERS,
TRACTS,**

&c.

4622

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MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS,

&c.

FROM

DE COETLOGON'S THEOLOGICAL MISCELLANY,

1785—1788.

REMARKS ON THE EQUITY OF

1 Cor. xvi. 22.

If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be
anathema, Maran-atha.

A SENSE of the excellence of Christ, or of his worthiness of being loved, is of great importance in religion. Without this, we can never truly love him, nor prize any thing which pertains to him. Destitute of this, we shall see his name degraded without indignation, and hear it exalted without delight. Without this, we shall esteem his salvation itself no otherwise than a happy expedient to escape eternal misery. In short, without this, we shall be mere statues in Christianity, bring no glory to its Author, and enjoy none of its refined pleasures.

A spirit very different from this, possessed the great Apostle, when he uttered the above passage. Twenty years ago, if a soldier, who had fought under the late *Marquis of Granby*, had heard the

language of detraction against his noble commander, deeply impressed with a sense of the hero's worth, he would have been ready to exclaim, 'If any man love not the Marquis of Granby, let him be banished the British dominions!' Probably, some such feelings might possess the heart of Paul, who had long served under the Lord Jesus Christ, and was deeply impressed with an idea of his innate worth.

Indeed the sentence is *awful*. *Let him be accursed when the Lord cometh!* It probably alludes to the Jewish excommunications, which they tell us were of three sorts, or degrees. In the *first*, the offender was *put out of the synagogue*, or merely *excommunicated*; in the *second*, he was not only excommunicated, but *anathematized*, or *cursed*; in the *third* (which was only for the worst, and most incorrigible,) he was not only *anathematized*, but *consigned over to the judgment of the great day!* The meaning of the word here seems to be, 'Let him be excommunicated from the presence of God, and all holy beings; and as he did not love the Lord Jesus Christ as a Saviour, let him fall before him as a Judge!' This sentence, however awful, is strictly *equitable*. The truth of this will appear by the joint consideration of three things.

I. *He that loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, must be an enemy to GOD, to VIRTUE, and to all MORAL EXCELLENCE.*—Such an oneness is there between God as a Lawgiver, and Christ as a Saviour, that what is done to the one is done to the other. The Jews, in our Saviour's time, wished to be thought

friends to God, while they were enemies to Christ; but, *If God were your Father*, saith he, *ye would love me*. And again, *I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.—I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not*. The same thing is observable now, among the Deists, who would be thought friends to the one Supreme Being, but enemies to Christianity. And indeed this deistical spirit seems greatly to prevail in multitudes that are not professed Deists, especially among some in the higher ranks, who, though they can now and then assume so much fortitude, as to speak respectfully of the Supreme Being, yet would be ashamed that a word should be heard from their lips in defence of Christ or Christianity. It were to be wished too, that none of those who sustain the character of *Christian ministers* had ever discovered the same spirit. This is very awful! But, whatever we may think here, and whatever character we may sustain, it will be found at last, that, *whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father!*

If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, he can have no regard to the *authority of God as a Law-giver*, seeing it was this that he came into the world to maintain. When devils had cast off God's yoke as grievous, and practically declared him a tyrant; and men had followed their example, judging it too mean a thing, it seems, for ever to be so kept under rule; then the Son of God came down, and in the presence of these revolvers, was subject to the very law which they had discarded. Though he was under no natural obligation to come under the law,

yet, that he might show how worthy he thought it of being obeyed, and thus wipe off the foul reproach, *he learned obedience*. Yea, that it might be seen how *easy* a yoke it was, and thence the unreasonableness and wickedness of their revolt, he declared, whatever others might think, it was his *meat to do the will of his Father!* If any man, therefore, love not the Lord Jesus Christ, he cannot love the law of God, but must be of Satan's mind, accounting it a severe law, and that obedience to it is slavery; and thus he must be an enemy to God.

Again: If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, he can have no regard to the honour of God's *justice* being secured. If we had a proper regard to the justice of God, we could not bear the thought of salvation itself being erected upon its ruins. To desire such a thing would be nothing less than desiring to depose the King of the universe; *for justice and judgment are the basis of his throne*. If a fallen creature loved God, and could see no way for his own salvation but what must be at the expense of truth and equity, his soul must be filled with inexpressible distress. If the way of salvation by Jesus Christ were then to be preached to him, a way wherein, through his glorious sacrifice, God could be just and the justifier of him that believed in Jesus, how would his spirit revive within him! With what joy of heart would he acquiesce in a plan wherein mercy and truth could meet together. The more he loved God, the more he would love Him who out of love to equity invited the sword of vengeance to plunge itself in his heart, saying,

FATHER, GLORIFY THY NAME! But if Christ and his way of salvation have no charms in our eyes; if we would barely like to be justified, (that is, freed from condemnation,) but care not how; and think, as to God being just therein, he must see to that; is it not evident that we have no love to God, truth, or righteousness?

Further: If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, he gives proof that God's grand *enemy being defeated*, and all his *counsels turned into foolishness*, affords him no pleasure; and consequently he can be no friend of God, but an enemy. If we love our prince, we shall rejoice at his enemies being overthrown, and admire that noble commander who, by hazarding his life in the high places of the field, should put them to confusion. If any monster had been so unfeeling, in the day when David slew Goliath and saved Israel, as to have had no love to the young hero, would he not have been deemed an enemy to his king and country, and suspected of being on the side of the Philistines? Now, as the Lord Jesus Christ entered the field, and with his own arm spoiled principalities and powers, brake the serpent's head, routed his forces, and ruined his scheme; if we love not him, whatever we may pretend, we must be enemies to God, and on the side of Satan.

In short: If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, he must be an enemy to all *moral excellence*; for of this he was a perfect model, both living and dying. God himself hath borne witness of him, that *he loved righteousness, and hated iniquity*.

He lived to set forth the amiableness of the one, and died that God in him might show his abhorrence of the other. He lived and died that God's character in saving sinners might be untainted with moral turpitude. It may well therefore be said of him. *The UPRIGHT love thee! Christ is the sum and centre of all excellence.* Perhaps we cannot form a better idea of him, than as an assemblage of all goodness, a being in whom all excellencies meet. To have no love to him then, is to have no love to moral excellence, and so to be an enemy to all good. Such a character surely deserves to be anathematized from God and all holy beings!

II. *He that loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, must be an enemy to MANKIND.* Perhaps it might be asked, Cannot people be possessed of *humanity* without being the subjects of Christianity? It is answered, No, not in the full extent of that term. It is not denied but that people may wish well to one another's temporal interests, may wish to promote their health and wealth and reputation, may live in friendship with mankind and be of a compassionate spirit to the poor, and may have no design in what they do to destroy their souls. But all this is no more than an over indulgent parent may feel, who yet *interpretively*, by sparing the rod, is said to *hate* his son; and it is common to say in such cases, the parent was the child's *enemy*. Yea, it is very little, if any thing, more than thieves and robbers may exercise towards their comrades. Here is one of that character, for instance, draws a young man into his practices: he has no *intention* to bring him to

the gallows, nor himself either; and he may wish his health and prosperity, and pity and relieve him in distress. All this is good; but could it appear from hence that he was not his *enemy*, in setting him against his own interests, and seducing him away from his best friends? Is he not his *enemy*? But to come nearer to the point—

The Lord Jesus Christ is the best friend to mankind that ever existed: if therefore any man bears *true* love to the souls of men, and seeks their real welfare, it is impossible but that he should love the Lord Jesus Christ. We should deem him an enemy to mankind, who, if a skilful and generous physician came into our parts, and healed all gratis who applied to him, should endeavour to prejudice the minds of people against him. An enemy to *Joseph*, who was the saviour of Egypt and the adjacent countries, would have been deemed an enemy to mankind. But what were these? Christ has healed the tremendous breach between God and man, has rescued millions and millions from eternal ruin, and is still *able and willing to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by him*. If any man therefore love not the Lord Jesus Christ, surely he deserves, as an enemy to the public good, to be excommunicated from the society of the blessed.

‘But may there not be a *neutrality* exercised in this affair? If some do not love Christ, does it follow that such are his *enemies*?’ Yes, it does. This is a cause wherein the idea of neutrality is inadmissible and impossible. They that are not *with* him, are declared to be *against* him.

III. *He that loves not the Lord Jesus Christ, must be an enemy to HIMSELF.*—To be an enemy to Christ, is to be guilty of the most awful kind of suicide. *All they that hate him, are said to love death.* Christ is the only door of hope for any lost sinner: to hate him therefore, is to hate ourselves. Had *Naaman* continued to despise the waters of Jordan, people would have thought that he had had no love for himself. If a company of wretches who had escaped a ship-wreck were in an open boat at sea; and if on the appearance of a friendly vessel bearing down upon them, they were so infatuated, that, instead of imploring assistance, they should treat it with every mark of indignity and contempt, we should say, *they love death*—they deserve to perish. If the power of Christ's *anger* be considered, it will amount to the same thing. For a man to rouse a lion would seem as if he was weary of his life: much more to provoke the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Of him it may well be said, *Who shall rouse him up?*

If a person then be an enemy to God, to mankind, and to himself; surely it is but right and fit he should be excommunicated from the society of God, and all holy beings, as an enemy to being in general. Surely he that loves not God, ought to be accursed from God; he that loves not mankind, ought to be banished, to take his lot among devils, as we should banish a murderer from the society of men; and he that loves not himself, but seeks his own ruin, ought to find it.

Upon the whole, if the foregoing thoughts be just, then that distinction has been made without ground,

that sinners will not be punished for their not loving the Lord Jesus Christ, but only for *the breach of God's law*; as if the want of love to Christ was not a breach of the law. So far from this, it is such a breach of it as perhaps cannot be equalled by any other case whatever. It is at once a breach of the *whole law*, and that in the highest degree. What doth the law require, but *love to God, love to our neighbour, and love to ourselves*? These are the whole of what is included in that summary given of it by our Lord; and these we have seen are all broken, and that in the highest degree, in the want of love to Christ.

O how is it that we are not all excommunicated, and accursed of God? Are we better than others? No, in nowise. God might justly have banished us from the abodes of the blessed. It is all of grace, free, sovereign, and great grace, if we are brought to love him, and so escape the awful curse; and for this we can never be sufficiently thankful.

ON SPIRITUAL DECLENSION, AND THE
MEANS OF REVIVAL.

IT is a matter of complaint too common, as well as too well founded, that the bulk of Christians in the present age are very deficient in spirituality, and come far short of the primitive Christians in a close walk with God. We lament over our unfruitfulness, our want of growth in grace and increasing conformity to Christ. Complaints of this kind, if they arise from the integrity of our hearts, are

necessary and proper; but complaining alone will not effect a cure. *We may sigh and go backward to the last period of our lives.* One necessary mean of effecting a cure, is to inquire into the *cause* or *causes* of the complaint. An investigation of this nature may, through a divine blessing, answer some good end upon the minds of those whose desire it is to be searched and tried, that every evil way may be detected.

It is not here intended to inquire into all the different causes of unfruitfulness, but only to point out a few of those which are the most obvious. That which I shall insist upon in this paper is, **THE WANT OF A PROPER REGARD TO THE WORD OF GOD.** It has been the pleasure of God to *magnify his word more than all his name*; and if we are under the influence of a right spirit, we shall magnify it too. It is by the knowledge of its sacred truths that we are *freed* from the slavery of sin, and our spirits *sanctified*. In it, as in a glass, *we behold the glory of the Lord, and are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of God.*

In almost all the remarkable declensions in the church of God, a neglect of the scriptures has been at the root. On the contrary, in all the seasons of revival and reformation, the scriptures have been the grand means of their being brought about. During the long and wicked reign of Manasseh, the book of the law of the Lord was lost, was lost even in the temple; and then it was that idolatry prevailed: when Josiah came to the throne, and a reformation was brought about, the lost book

was found, and read, and regarded. During the captivity, the word of God seems to have been neglected. In the times of Ezra and Nehemiah, a glorious reformation was brought about; but by what means? The sum of the account is this: *Ezra and his companions stood upon a pulpit of wood, read the law, and gave the meaning; and the people understood the law, and wept bitterly, and entered into a covenant with their God.* Religion was reduced to a low state at the time of our Lord's coming; and one cause assigned for it was, that the Pharisees, by their traditions, had *made void the law of God.* On the contrary, the glorious revival which then succeeded, by the ministry of John the Baptist, Christ, and his apostles, was by means of their disseminating the true knowledge of God as revealed in the scriptures. It is true, they themselves were inspired, but yet even the Lord Jesus Christ appealed to the word, calling upon his hearers to *search the scriptures.* To what can we attribute the great anti-christian apostasy, but to a disregard of the word of God? The original cause, as prophetically given us by the Apostle himself, was this, *BECAUSE THEY RECEIVED NOT THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH, that they might be saved, God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.* The foundation of popery was laid in a disregard to the Bible, and an overweening attachment to traditions and unscriptural ceremonies. As the apostasy ripened, the scriptures were neglected; and at length, when it arrived to its height, they were utterly discarded, being absolutely forbidden to be

read by the common people in their own language. On the contrary, by what means was the glorious Reformation effected? Was it not by translating, exposing, and preaching the scriptures? From the foregoing facts, we ought at least to suspect, that a want of regard to the holy scripture lies at the foundation of our departures from God.

There are several ways in which a want of proper regard to God's word is discovered. I shall mention three in particular.

First: By a neglect of *reading, meditating, and praying* over it. We have great advantages for knowing the mind of God. He hath told us all his heart. Our advantages are superior, not only to heathens, who walk in the dark, without a revelation, but to those of the church of God itself in any former period. Old-testament saints valued the scriptures *more than thousands of gold and silver*, more than their necessary food; and yet they had but a small part of the sacred canon to what we have. That which has crowned all, and brought life and immortality to light, was then wanting. The most glorious of all the displays of God has been added since their death. Christians themselves, in former ages, had not our advantages. Till the art of printing was discovered, it must have been very difficult for many families to obtain a Bible; and no doubt a great number of Christians, who were generally a poor people, were denied the pleasure of having those sacred books in their families. Since then, circumstances are altered; we have now, through a kind providence, the most

easy access to the scriptures. But whether we have more of a spiritual understanding into the mind of God than our predecessors had, may be questioned; yea, whether the word of God upon the whole, is read more now by Christians than it was then, may be a matter of doubt. Does not its being common and easy of access, seem to diminish its value in our eyes? Are we not apt to think light of it, as Israel did of the manna when rained in plenty around their tents?

The sacred scripture is a rich mine abounding with substantial treasures; but it is a mine that must be *worked*. If we would read it to advantage, it must be with *prayer and meditation*. *My son*, said the wise man, *if thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God*. A blessing is pronounced upon the man *who meditates in God's law by day and by night*. *He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of waters, which bringeth forth fruit in its season*. If any think to excuse themselves by alleging that they were never taught to read; I answer, if they were interested in a common will, or testament, they would never think of remaining ignorant of its contents. If they could not read, they would procure some person to read it to them; or if that could not be done, rather than not know its real meaning, they would be at some considerable

pains to learn to read it themselves. Now shall all this regard be shown to a common will, and that spontaneously, of our own accord; and no more respect be paid to the invaluable testament of our dying Redeemer? Where then is the sincerity of our religious profession? *Where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also.*

Secondly: By not reading it for the *ends* and *purposes* for which it was written. What those ends are, we are expressly informed in the book itself. *All scripture is given by inspiration of God; and is profitable for DOCTRINE, for REPROOF, for CORRECTION, for INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS.* To read the scripture for *doctrine*, is to learn our religious sentiments from it, and form them by it. So far as we are under the influence of prejudice, or receive systems on human authority; and go to the scripture, not so much with a desire to be instructed in what we know not, as to strengthen ourselves in what we have already imbibed, be it right or wrong; so far we exercise a sinful disregard to the scriptures, and may justly be given up of God to our own deceptions. If we read the word of God to any good purpose, we must suppose beforehand that we do not know every thing, that we are liable to error in judgment and evil in practice; how else shall we read it for *reproof* or for *correction*?

If we set up our *own reason*, so as to resolve to admit of nothing as divine truth but what shall be within its comprehension, we despise God's word, and cannot be said to read it either for *doctrine* or *correction*. It is not enough that we *call no man*

master; we must have *one master, even Christ*. Our own *reason* is also another word for our own *creed*; and we are as much in danger of being ruined by our own creed, as by that of another man. It matters not by what name we call it, our reason or our creed; if the infallible dictates of the Holy Spirit are to give way to this, adieu to all religion. Where such presumption begins, it may truly be said, religion ends.

In reading the *preceptive* part of scripture, it will be of but little use to us unless we read it with an intention and determination, through divine assistance, to form our conduct by it. To read for *instruction in righteousness*, is the same thing as searching to know what is the good, perfect, and acceptable will of God, with a design to do it, let it grate ever so much with our carnal inclinations. It answers but a poor end to read a chapter once or twice a day in the family, merely for the sake of decency, without so much as an intention of complying with what shall be found to be the mind of God.

If our judgment or conduct is formed by *dreams, visions*, or supposed *immediate revelations from heaven*; and not by the plain meaning of the word of God as it stands in our Bibles, then do we slight the word of God, and God may justly give us up to our own delusions. It is no just plea in behalf of these supposed revelations, that they often come *in the words of scripture*. If we infer any thing from certain words of scripture being impressed upon our mind, either in favour of ourselves, or for

the guiding of our conduct, which cannot be proved to have been the meaning of scripture independent of that impression, it is no other than real enthusiasm; and will in the great day be found to be a disregard and perversion of the scripture itself.

Thirdly: By forming a low opinion of the *importance of the truths contained in it*. It seems to be very much the spirit and opinion of the present age, that it matters not how polluted the fountain is, if the streams are but pure: but the question is, whether the streams *can* be pure, if the fountain is polluted. Actions materially good, and beneficial to society, may flow from a heart at essential variance with the doctrines of revelation; but it wants proof that any action can be truly good, and acceptable in the sight of God, unless it originate in evangelical principle. On the contrary, the scripture is express, that *without faith it is impossible to please God*.

Some good people have contracted a strange prejudice against the doctrines of the gospel, accounting them *dry* and *uninteresting* matters. They like *experimental* religion the best, they tell us. But I do not understand the distinction of religion into doctrinal and experimental after this sort. I would ask such a person, What is experimental religion? Is it any other than *the influence of truth upon the mind*, by the agency of the Holy Spirit? You love to *feel* godly sorrow for sin; so do I; but what is godly sorrow for sin but the influence of truth upon your heart? Is it not the

consideration of *the great evil* of sin, its *contrariety to what ought to be*, its being committed against *light, love, &c.* that dissolves your heart in grief? Were you not to realize these *truths*, it would be impossible for you to weep over your sin. But you love to feel joy and peace in believing; so do I: but must you not have an object to believe in? Take away the great doctrine of the atonement, and all your faith, joy, and peace are annihilated. Much the same might be said of other gospel doctrines: instead of being opposed to experimental religion, they are essential to its existence. That some doctrinal sermons have been *dry* and *uninteresting* is granted; but that must have been the fault of either the preacher or the hearer. If scripture-doctrines were delivered in their native simplicity, and heard with a heart suitable to their importance, they could not be *dry*: they must be like the doctrine of Moses, which *dropped as the rain upon the grass, and as the dew upon the tender herb.*

There is another prejudice against the doctrines of the gospel, in the minds of many people. They imagine them to be unfriendly to practical religion. That practical religion may be neglected through an excessive attachment to favourite opinions, is allowed: but if we imbibe and inculcate the truths of the gospel according to the lovely *proportion* in which they stand in the Bible, and adhere to them, not because we have once imbibed them, but because God hath revealed them; such a reception of the truth, and adherence to it, instead of enervating

practical godliness, will be found to be the life of it. Doctrinal, experimental, and practical religion, are all necessarily connected together: they can have no existence separate from each other. The influence of truth upon the mind is the source of all our spiritual feelings, and those feelings are the springs of every good word and action.

The above are some of the different ways in which we are liable to be wanting in our regard to the word of God; and in proportion as these prevail, it is natural to suppose we shall be wanting in *spirituality* and *communion with God*: instead of growing in grace, we shall dwindle like the unwatered plant in the drought of summer. This may be expected on *two* accounts. *First*: As an awful chastisement for our sin, in such disregard. God's word is indited by his Holy Spirit: a want of proper regard to that word must therefore be one of those evil things by which the Spirit of God is *grieved*; and where that is the case, it is natural to suppose he will withdraw his reviving, fructifying influences, the consequence of which will ever be, a discernible want of spirituality. I call this an *awful* chastisement; and such it is, because of a spiritual kind. As the Holy Spirit is the sum of spiritual good, so his withdrawment is the completion of every spiritual evil. When David was threatened with the loss of all that was dear to him, he deprecated this more than any thing beside: *Take not thy Holy Spirit from me! Wo unto them, saith the Lord, if I depart from them.* *Secondly*: As a natural consequence of it. God's word is that

to those who *meditate in it by day and by night*, which *the rivers of waters* are to *a tree planted by their side*. It is that by means of which they *bring forth fruit in their season*. From the want of a spiritual and experimental acquaintance with God's word, proceeds *a want of religious principle*; and this seems to be the case of multitudes of professors in the present age. From want of religious principle, proceeds a more than ordinary liability to *errors in judgment*: the house that was *empty*, though swept and garnished, was ready for the reception of unclean spirits. From errors in judgment, proceed *errors in spirit and conduct*: if once the truths of God sink into disesteem, his precepts, in the spirituality of them, will not continue to be regarded. Little sins, as they are accounted, will be indulged, and the most difficult and self-denying duties neglected. And then, if things come to this, that we give way a little, we shall soon go farther: want of universal obedience will soon lead to a universal want of obedience; and thus if infinite mercy prevent not, we shall *wax worse and worse*. This is no other than the high road to apostacy, towards which it is to be feared great numbers of professors are verging, and in which great numbers are already walking! Happy should I be, if any one by these hints might be led to reflection, and recover himself out of the snare of the devil, by whom he is led captive at his will!

I have only one thought more to add. If a regard to the word of God is of such great importance to Christians, what must it be to *Ministers*?

A defection in a private character nearly terminates in himself; but a defection in a minister may affect many thousands. If as ministers we sink into a disregard for divine truth, to say the least, we shall not preach it with that ardour which is necessary, if at all. It becomes us to tremble, and to inquire whether the defections among our people be not owing in part to the wholesome truths of God being withheld from them, or delivered in a languid and careless manner; and if so, it becomes us farther to consider, how we shall endure that cutting rebuke, *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children!*

IN the last paper, it was supposed that one cause to which declensions in religion might be imputed, was, *a disregard to the word of God*: in this, I shall attempt to prove that another cause is, *the manner in which we attend to the duty of PRAYER*. Prayer is the ascending of the heart to God. It is one of the ordinary means of our communion with God. A great part of the religious life consists in the exercise of it, either in public or in private, either vocal or mental. It may be supposed, that our spiritual prosperity will bear some proportion to the degree of fervor and constancy with which this duty is attended to. All our spiritual life is derived from Christ, as that of

the branch is from the vine; and prayer is that by which we receive of his fulness, grace for grace. If this duty is either restrained before God, or performed in a careless, carnal manner, our souls must of course dwindle away, and lose their fruitfulness.

But as the persons, to whose consideration these papers are humbly recommended, are such as profess godliness, I shall take it for granted that they make a point of prayer, and shall say nothing of its being omitted, but confine my remarks to *the manner in which it is performed.*

It is a fact, to which I suppose many can subscribe, that it is very common for us to pray to the Lord, and yet for our prayers to remain unanswered. We pray, for instance, that the kingdom of Christ may increase in the world, and yet we see but little of that kind taking place: that our sins may be forgiven, and yet sin remains upon our consciences from time to time; and we lose it, not so much by its being blotted out by God's pardoning mercy, as worn out by our own forgetfulness: that our graces may be lively and active, yet we remain wretchedly insensible and formal: in a word, that we may enjoy communion with God, and conformity to him; and yet the degree that we possess of either is so small, that we have reason to be greatly ashamed, and to tremble lest it should be said of us at last, *Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?*

But how is it that our prayers should be thus unanswered? Is the Lord's arm shortened, that it cannot save; or his ear heavy, that it cannot hear?

Or is he slack concerning his promise of hearing and answering the prayers of his people? None of all these; he himself hath told us the reason: *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss. If I regard iniquity in my heart, said the Psalmist, the Lord will not hear me.* Let the following questions be seriously considered.

First: *When we pray, do we really and earnestly desire what we pray for?* It is awful to think of approaching the Searcher of hearts without meaning as we speak; and yet it is to be feared that a spice of this solemn mockery runs through many of our petitions. It were well for such persons as always pray in a *set form* of words, to examine whether they mean what they say. It is granted, that a person *may* as really pray in the words of others, provided they do but express his case, as in those of his own; but cases are so numerous in different persons, and so various in the same person at different times, that it is not to be expected that any set of words of human composition should fully answer the end proposed by it. Nor is formality in prayer confined to those who use a form. Persons who pray extempore may fall into a habit of repeating words without meaning, or words which, however good and proper in themselves, are not the expressions of the heart. Prayers offered up in public are very liable to this abuse, and that both in the speaker and hearer. The speaker is under a temptation to forget the God he approaches, and to consider himself barely as in the hearing of men; and so to ask, not for such things as he really

desires, but such as next occur to his mind, as things, if I may so speak, *that will do to be prayed for* : and the hearer is apt to consider himself as not immediately concerned in the petitions of another, and so to indulge his mind in wandering after other things ; whereas, by joining in public prayer, we solemnly profess to unite with it : he that prays is to be considered as the mouth of the assembly to God.

There is one considerable evidence that we do not mean what we say, in many of our approaches to God ; and that is the want of what the Apostle calls *watching unto prayer*. If a poor man in real necessity ask relief at a rich man's door, he will not think it sufficient to repeat over a few words, and return without an answer : no, he *watches*, and looks with longing expectation after that for which he has been petitioning. And if the party to whom he applies should have previously invited him, and even laid his commands upon him, whenever he is in want to repair to him, the poor man in that case will not be so apt to consider his applications so much in the light of duties as privileges. It is easy to apply this to our approaches to God. Are we of such a spirit in those approaches as to reckon them a privilege ; or do we satisfy ourselves with having gone through the exercise, and performed, as we think, our duty, without waiting, or scarcely thinking of our petitions being granted ? When we say *Amen, So be it*, at the close of our prayers, do we really desire that so it *should* be ? It is a dangerous state of mind to be praying daily for keeping

and quickening grace, and yet to be easy without it; to rest contented with asking communion with God, instead of enjoying it. The least that can be supposed in such cases is, that God will punish our indifference, not to say our hypocrisy, by withholding the blessings for which we make request.

Secondly : *Are we not apt to be less earnest in matters wherein we should take no denial, than in others wherein it would become us to be submissive?* There are two sorts of mercies for which we have to pray; mercies which God hath *not* bound himself to bestow, even though we pray for them in ever such a right spirit,—and mercies which he *hath*. Of the first class, are all our earthly comforts, and some things in the religious life : of the last, are all those spiritual blessings essential to salvation. David prayed for the life of his child : God did not reprove him for praying, yet neither did he grant him his request. David desired also to build God a house : God took it well that it was in his heart, yet he denied him the thing he desired. In neither of these cases had God promised to grant the desire of his servant, and he saw fit to counteract it; but in respect to spiritual and eternal blessings, God has bound himself to *grant the desire of the righteous*, and to *perfect that which concerns* his praying people. Now, if things are so, it is easy to see, that when we are praying for the first sort of blessings, a peculiar submission to the will of God becomes us, which is not required in the other. If we pray, with Jabez, to have our *coast enlarged* in temporal things, we

ought to feel a contented mind, and submit to God, though our prayers should be unanswered; but if we are praying for an interest in Christ as our spiritual and everlasting portion, contentment of mind is not there required. God does not require us to be willing to be lost for ever; for that would be the same thing as to be willing to be for ever employed in cursing and blaspheming, instead of blessing, his holy name. Again, if we adopt the latter part of the prayer of Jabez, *O that thou wouldst keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me!* if by *evil* we understand the evil of affliction, a resignation to the will of God becomes us; but if by *evil* we understand the evil of sin, resignation would then become criminal. But if we inspect the generality of our prayers, I am afraid there is more resignation, as it is accounted, in respect to the enjoyment of spiritual blessings, where it is not required, than there is in temporal blessings, where it is required. In those things wherein we should take no denial, we are too easy; but in those wherein resignation would become us, we are too urgent. The phrase *If it be thy will*, which so often occurs in prayer, is perhaps more frequently applied to things in which God requires us to be all importunity, than to things wherein such language would be suitable.

Thirdly: *When we pray for good things, is it always to a good end?* It is possible we may go to God, and really desire the things we ask, and yet, not desiring them to a good end, we fail of obtaining our desires. We may pray for blessings

upon our worldly engagements, and it is very right we should do so; but such prayer may be merely for the purposes of sensual gratification. Thus the apostle James speaks, *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.* And thus the Lord charged Israel, before they entered into the promised land, saying, *I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swear.* If these be our ends, our prayers can be no other than abomination in the sight of God. We may even pray for the success of the gospel, and it is doubtless right that we should do so; but it is possible such desires may be uttered, not out of regard to the prosperity of Christ's cause, but of *our own*; and if so, it is a low and carnal end, and we cannot expect that God should hear us.

Fourthly: *When we confess our sins, and pray to be restored, do we really lament them, and mean to forsake them?* I fear too many of our petitions are unanswered, because they do not arise from godly sorrow. We confess from custom or conscience, but do not feel our hearts go out against the sin, so as to return to the Lord with all our soul. Confession is of the nature of a solemn oath, an oath of abjuration; and it is awful to think that we should ever use it without a desire and determination to forsake! Where this takes place, it is no wonder that prayer for the forgiveness of sins and communion with God should be unanswered. This is regarding iniquity in our hearts; and then we are assured the Lord will not hear us.

Fifthly: *When we pray for divine direction in matters of faith or practice, are we sincerely determined to follow the dictates of God's word?* We may pray to be led into all *truth*, and yet feel a prejudice in favour of sentiments already imbibed, and against others which may be proposed: in this case, while we pray and search the scriptures we shall feel a secret wish to have them speak according to our pre-conceived ideas of things, not knowing how to endure the shame of having been mistaken. Much the same may be said of things which relate to *practice*. There is such a thing as to go to God for direction in doubtful matters, not with a resolution to be determined by the word of God, but with a hope to find God's word in favour of our inclinations. This was the motive of *Ahab* in sending for *Micaiah*, to know whether he should go up to Ramoth-Gilead to battle; and of the Jews left in Judea, to know whether they should tarry there, or go down to Egypt. In both these cases they had determined what to do: their asking counsel of God therefore was mere hypocrisy. *Son of man*, said the Lord to Ezekiel, concerning such characters, *these men have set up their idols in their heart, and put the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them? Therefore speak unto them, and say, Thus saith the Lord God, Every man—that setteth up his idols in his heart, and putteth the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him that cometh, according to the multitude of his idols.*

Sixthly: *Are we not greatly wanting in what may be called religious public spirit, in our prayers?* It is a fact, that a great number of Christians in the present day are perpetually harassed in determining the reality of their own Christianity: they are all their life-time poring upon that subject, and perhaps die at last full of fear and anxiety. The primitive Christians do not seem to have been so much troubled with these thoughts, as with their want of conformity to Christ. Christ taught his disciples to approach *daily to God as their Father*; and by the accounts we have, it would seem they generally did so: but such sweet freedom is now rarely to be found, even among the godly. How is this to be accounted for? There is no doubt that such darkness of mind is in a degree pitiable, and that such persons require to be dealt with in a way of wisdom and tenderness. It is a thought however, that deserves consideration, whether one great cause of this darkness of mind may not arise from *an excessive attention to our own safety*, to the neglect of *the glory of God* and the prosperity of Christ's kingdom. Christ enjoins us to pray, *Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come*, before we ask for the forgiveness of our sins, or even for our daily bread. A person that is employed in scarcely any thing else but recollecting former evidences, for the purpose of being able to answer the question, 'Am I a Christian?' is not likely to gain his object. The means he pursues tend to defeat their own end. Self-examination, however necessary in a degree, yet if attended to

to the neglect of other things, is like the conduct of a man in trade, who should spend three-fourths of his time in casting up his accounts, that he may determine whether he has gained or lost. It is doubtless very desirable to enjoy a full satisfaction respecting our interest in Christ, and such a satisfaction is to be enjoyed in the present life; but the question is, what are the means by which it is to be obtained? Like reputation, and some other things, to pursue it as an end is the way to lose it. If we care so little about God's glory, as to pray scarcely at all for the advancement of his kingdom in the world; but are continually taken up about our own safety, it is right that God should so order things as that we should be disappointed. If we wish for satisfaction on that head, it must be sought only as a *secondary object*. If we were to seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness, these would be among the things that would be added unto us. *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.*

Lastly: *Do we ask blessings wholly in the name of Christ?* I do not mean to ask whether we conclude our prayers in so many *words*, but whether we come to God under a full persuasion of our utter unworthiness, knowing and feeling that while we implore the best of blessings we deserve the heaviest of curses; and desiring all to be given, not for our sakes, but wholly for the sake of Christ. We have reason to believe that if our prayers were more presented in the name of Christ, they would be more successful; seeing that it stands on sacred

record, that *whatsoever we ask* IN HIS NAME, *it shall be given us.*

IN the last paper, I considered the manner in which the duty of prayer is attended to, as one considerable reason of spiritual declension: in this, I shall propose to consideration another cause, as contributing to the same end: it is that of *sin lying on the conscience unlamented*. When the apostle Paul wrote his First Epistle to the church at Corinth, they were sunk into a most wretched condition indeed. With admirable faithfulness, wisdom, patience, and tenderness, he wrote that Epistle with a view to reclaim them. Many of them were reclaimed: but some, it seems, continued insensible; which induced him, when he wrote his Second Epistle to that church, to express himself thus: *I fear, lest when I come again, my God will humble me among you; and that I shall bewail many who have sinned already, and have not repented of their deeds.*

Sin, if not habitually lamented, and removed by repeated applications to the cross of Christ, is like poison in the bones: it rankles within us, and is destructive of our soul's prosperity. So long as sin remains unlamented, so long we have an habitual liking to it; and so long, to say the least, God has a controversy with us. To assist any one who wishes to make strict inquiry into this matter, I would state a few *evidences* by which it may be known whether we have sinned and not repented, and point out *the danger* of such a condition.

If there is any particular evil to which we have been especially addicted, and that evil is still *persisted in*, we may be certain that we have not lamented it sufficiently, or to any good purpose. Saul confessed his sin unto David; but his persisting in it but too plainly proved that he never truly repented of it. How often soever we may have confessed our sins before God, if these confessions are not attended with a forsaking of them, we are none the nearer, but perhaps the farther off: it is an awful state of mind indeed, to be able to persevere, at the same time, in sinful indulgences and religious exercises.

Farther: Though we should refrain from the evil as to practical compliance; yet if such refraining arises from mere *prudential considerations*, we may certainly conclude that we have never truly repented of it. If the bias of the heart is towards an evil, and we are withheld, merely or principally, by regard to our reputation, or worldly interest, or fear of hell, and not by the fear and love of God; our condition is very dangerous. If when we are plied with temptations, the arguments we use to repel it, are taken, not so much from its evil nature, or its God-dishonouring tendency, as from the consequences it will produce, let us tremble: surely we stand upon the brink of a tremendous precipice. "That man," says Dr. Owen, "who opposes nothing to the seduction of evil in his own heart, but fear of shame among men, or hell from God, is sufficiently resolved to do that evil if there were no punishment attending

it; which, what it differs from living in the practice of sin, I know not!"

Again: Suppose we have been guilty of no one particular sin, either of commission or omission; yet we may have accumulated a load of guilt by small degrees. This is the more likely to go unlamented, because, being contracted by little at a time, it has obtained a place in the heart almost unnoticed. But as little and repeated colds, when they settle upon the constitution, will in the end bring on a fit of sickness; so will these little neglects and indulgences bring on a sore disorder upon our souls. There is not a day passes but we are contracting fresh guilt: unless therefore we maintain an habitual communion with Christ, daily bewailing our sins at the foot of his cross, we may certainly conclude that we have sinned and not repented.

Farther: If past evils are *remembered* with pleasure and approbation; if the thoughts and imaginations are fed by dwelling upon them; or if we can take a pleasure in *speaking* of our former sinful exploits, though, it may be, at the same time we would be thought to disapprove of them; these are but too forcible a kind of evidence that we have not yet repented of our deeds. To say the least, if we have repented, we have again made the evils our own, by a re-commission of them in the mind; which requires renewed repentance and application to Christ, as otherwise we are as much under the guilt of them as ever. True repentance is attended with a holy *shame*,

a shame that will teach us to wish our evil ways annihilated, and the very name of them buried in oblivion. There are some sins which expose us to shame among men; and these it is natural for us to wish to have buried in forgetfulness, whether we repent of them or not: but there are others very offensive to God, which yet will gain the applause of men; and here it is the temptation in question lies. True repentance will make us ashamed to repeat these, as well as others. *Thou shalt remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more, because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord God.*

In fine: If we have not with holy abhorrence confessed and rejected our sin, we have not yet repented of it. There is such a thing as the conscience being habitually burdened with guilt, and the spirit depressed with long-continued dejection, and yet the soul not be brought to a thorough contrition. The heart seems now ready to dissolve, but yet not altogether come to a point. Such a state of mind is tenderly described by David, in the 32d and 38th Psalms. Both these psalms were probably written after his repentance for his remarkable fall; and in them he describes, not only the breakings forth of godly sorrow, but the previous operations of his mind during the time of his lying under the guilt of that great sin. *When I kept silence, saith he, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned*

into the drought of summer! Thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore.—My wounds stink and are corrupt, because of my foolishness. Now he comes to the crisis: I am ready to halt; my sorrow is continually before me! I will declare my iniquity, I will be sorry for my sin!

The state of mind last described is far less dangerous than any of the above, because it promises to come to a speedy and happy issue; but yet things are never safe, till the soul, dissolved in grief, lies prostrate at the feet of Jesus. We have reason to think that a great deal of remorse of conscience and depression of mind may come on and go off again; and there is nothing that we have greater reason to dread, than a being so given up of God as that the guilt of our consciences shall *wear* away by degrees, instead of being *washed* away by an application to the blood of Christ.

A few additional observations on the *danger* of having sinned and not repented, shall close this paper. In the first place, *it weakens and enervates our graces*, and by consequence *spoils our usefulness*. Godliness, in all its lovely forms, is a tender plant: sin indulged in the soul, like weeds in the garden, will impoverish it, and cause the tender plant to dwindle away. Righteousness and unrighteousness cannot flourish together. Experience but too plainly proves, that carnality indulged damps the flames of love, kills holy resolution, joy and peace fly before its malignant influence, hope sickens into fear, and faith loses sight of invisible realities. When this is the case, of what use are

we? what in the family? what in the church? what in the world? where is now the savour with which our spirit and conversation should be attended? Alas, we are but too much like salt that has lost its savour, fit for neither the land nor the dunghill!

Farther: *It cuts off all communion with God.* The joys of salvation were withdrawn from David when he withdrew from God. It is well if prayer and all close dealing with God is not neglected; or if we approach to God in form, still while iniquity is regarded in our hearts the Lord will not hear us. We may go morning and evening, and oftener; but the Lord is not there! The pleasures of religion are fled. Our soul is removed far off from peace, and we shall soon have forgotten spiritual prosperity. There are only two states of mind which we now alternately experience: we are either locked up in *insensibility*, or pierced with *self-reflection*.

Again: *It gives Satan a great advantage over us.* It tempts the tempter to apply to us with renewed force. While sin lies unlamented upon the conscience, we are like a besieged city, enfeebled by famine, sickly, and without a heart to resist; and this must needs invite the besieger to renew his onsets. It is by resisting the devil that he flies from us: and so, *vice versa*, by dropping resistance he is encouraged to approach towards us. This in fact is the case with us: while sin remains unlamented there are generally more temptations ply the mind than at other times.

When Sampson slept and lost his strength, the Philistines were soon upon him. And now put these all together; our strength gone, the Holy Spirit departed, and temptation coming upon us with redoubled force: alas! where are we? Well did the Psalmist exclaim, *Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and in whose spirit there is no guile.*

Again: Secret sins indulged will in all probability soon become *manifest and open*. It is not in human nature to be able for a long continuance to conceal the ruling bias of the heart. It will come out in some way or other, and it is fit it should. A wise providence has so ordered it, that the heart and conduct shall not be at perpetual variance. It is worthy the character of a holy and a jealous God to shew his abhorrence to secret sin, by suffering the party to be rolled in the dirt of public reproach. If we regard not the honour of God's name, can we wonder if he regards not the honour of ours? *Him that honoureth me I will honour; but he that despiseth me shall be lightly esteemed.*

Once more: Does it not hereby become a matter of doubt how it is with us as to *our state before God*? Though no true Christian will ever sink into total apostasy, yet while sin is unlamented we are in the direct road to it, the same road that those have trod who have apostatized. They once thought themselves right as well as we, and began to sin by little and little: yes, they went on, and presumed it may be that they should be some time or other *restored*; but instead of that, have gone on and on,

till death has cut them off, and beyond the grave they have found their dreadful disappointment.

These things should make us tremble, and consider the danger of trifling with sin, and presuming upon being reclaimed, and so making ourselves easy in impenitence. If we go on in sin, have we not reason to think things were never right with us from the first? If the waters are naught, does it not seem to indicate that the spring has never been healed?

HAVING, in the three foregoing papers, pointed out some of the *causes* of spiritual declension, I come now to inquire into *the means of revival*. But before any thing can be said by way of direction, two or three things must be premised.

1. That in the use of all means we consider them but *as means*, place no dependence upon them, but entirely upon the Spirit of God as the first cause. We can of our own accord find the way out of God's path, but if left to ourselves we shall never find the way in again.

2. If we have so backslidden from the Lord as to live in the indulgence of any known sin, whether of omission or commission, that we *immediately put away* these idols, and that without reserve. God will not hear us while iniquity is regarded in our hearts. If any or all of those things pointed out in the foregoing papers as causes of declension, are so indeed, those causes must be lamented and forsaken, or depend upon it the effects will not be removed.

3. In whatever mode we have departed from God, that there be a *real desire of returning* to him again. Without this, all directions will be in vain, and all means without effect. *Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.* It may be we are accustomed to live without close communion with God, and are almost *contented* with such a kind of life. Perhaps we *lay our accounts* with going through life without habitual close walking with God. If so, I only say this, Let us not at the same time lay our accounts with dwelling for ever with him at last.

But if the above three things may be supposed, there are then other scriptural directions which may be given. That which I shall insist upon in this paper is as follows: *That we closely consider the evil nature of that sin which is committed after our conversion to God.*—As our first return to God begins with conviction of sin, so must every other return. The ordinary means of obtaining conviction of sin, together with a mournful sense of it, is by seriously and closely reflecting upon its evil nature, and aggravating circumstances. *I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto thy testimonies.*—*Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loath yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities, and for your abominations.*

Perhaps we cannot obtain a more affecting representation of the evil of our backslidings from God, than that which is given us by the prophet Jeremiah, in his address to Israel, contained in the

second chapter; and as advice from such a quarter comes with divine authority, I do not think I can do better than to refer the reader to the first thirteen verses of that chapter, on which I shall now make a few remarks.

From this affecting passage we may observe *four* things in particular, which are represented as aggravating those sins which are committed after we have known the Lord; they are committed in violation of the most solemn *vows*, without any the least *provocation*, are expressive of the blackest *ingratitude*, and the most extreme and singular *folly*.

First: They are committed in violation of all those *solemn vows and covenant engagements* which we made and into which we entered, at our first conversion. Not only was there a covenant between the Father and the Son before time, but as well there is a covenant between Christ and his people in time.

Conversion is a marriage wherein, (with reverence be it spoken,) Christ resigns up himself with all he is and has to us, and we resign ourselves with all we are and have to him. Such an union is here alluded to. The love we bore to Christ at that time might fitly be called, *the love of our espousals*. Was there not a time when we scarcely wished for any other pleasure than what was to be enjoyed in communion with himself and his saints; when his name was as ointment poured forth; when we loved the very image of it? And when we have seen those who we thought bore most of that in their spirit and conduct, has it not been as though we

had seen an angel of God? Was there not a time when closet exercises were reckoned our highest privileges; when the return of public ordinances was waited for with eager expectation; in short, when we took Christ's cause for our cause, his people for our people, his will for our law, his glory for our end, and himself for our portion? Now these were times from whence we may each say, *Thy vows, O God, are upon me!* But have we not since then strangely forsaken him? How is this? Did we love him too well then? Is he not as worthy now as then? If a prince espouse a poor miserable outcast, and give himself with all he is and has to her, and only require her heart in return, shall she refuse him that? shall she be the first that shall be dissatisfied? must she go after other lovers, and that in spite of all her solemn vows? And yet may each backslider say, 'Thus it has been with me! *O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, thou art MY Lord:* thou hast taken him for thy lawgiver and thy portion; how is it that thou shouldest bow down to other lords, and seek satisfaction in that which is not God?'

Secondly: Whatever departures from God have taken place, they have been *without any provocation whatever*, on his part. *What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me?* This is a question that ought to cut us to the very soul, and open every spring of sensibility and self-abhorrence! While we were in open rebellion against him, was he wanting in *forbearance*? When he saw us in our impoverished and ruined condition,

and gave his own Son to die for us, did he act an *unfeeling* part towards us? Was it hard on our side that Christ should be *made sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him?* Since we have been engaged in his service, has he been a *hard master?* Has his yoke been galling to us? Did he ever prove to us a barren wilderness, or a land of drought? Was ever the path of obedience a barren path? Is it better with us now than formerly? Has he been a *churlish father* to us? Did he ever refuse us free access to him in a time of need? When we have asked for bread, did he ever give us a stone? When he has smitten us, was it not always with a mixture of mercy, and all to do us good in the latter end? Whenever we have returned to him with our whole heart, has he not been always ready to receive us, and to bury all in forgetfulness?—Methinks I hear him appeal to the very *rocks and mountains*, (as being less insensible than we,) for the equity and goodness of his cause: *Hear, O ye mountains, the Lords controversy, and ye strong foundations of the earth: for the Lord hath a controversy with his people, and he will plead with Israel: O my people, what have I done unto thee, and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me! Alas, what shall we say unto the Lord? what shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto thee, but unto us belongeth confusion of face as it is this day!*

Thirdly: Sins after conversion are attended with circumstances of peculiar and horrible *ingratitude*.

—This was a part of God's charge against Israel. He had brought them up out of the land of Egypt, had led them through the wilderness, through a *dangerous, barren, and lonesome* wilderness; a land of deserts and of pits; a land of drought, and of the shadow of death; a land where no man passed through, and where no man dwelt. He had brought them also into a plentiful country; but they had polluted it, and even made his heritage an abomination. It is true, God has not done the self-same things for us, as he did for them: he has not given Egypt for us, nor Ethiopia for our ransom; but he has given what is of infinitely greater account—his own blood! Neither has he redeemed us from Egyptian thralldom; but he has *delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son*. We never were supported by miracle, in the dangerous, barren, and lonesome deserts of Arabia; but we have been led and supplied by a kind hand, both in a way of providence and grace, through a wilderness equally lonesome and barren, and much more dangerous. We never were possessed of the land of Canaan, that plentiful country, that rest for the weary Israelites; but we were born in a country but little inferior to it, even as to the enjoyments of this life; and the *rest* of gospel-privileges into which we are entered, with a glorious inheritance into which we hope to enter, abundantly transcend every thing of that sort, and lay us under far greater obligations. If we have any thing ingenuous left in us, surely a spirit and conduct that has slighted

and dishonoured a God of such love as this, must, on reflection, deeply wound us.

Fourthly: Such departures from God are expressive of the most extreme and singular *folly*. The Lord charged Israel with folly; and such it doubtless was. We should think so of any people who, in want of water, should remove their tents from an over-flowing fountain, and promise themselves a greater fulness by settling in a desert, and hewing out cisterns which, after all, could hold no water. And yet this is no more than we have done, as well as Israel. We have sought happiness in the creature, to the neglect of God; and all created comforts, when possessed in that way, are but broken cisterns. We have found them so: let us be ashamed of our folly, and return to the fountain of living waters.

Departing from God, and indulging ourselves in sinning against him, is a kind of exchange, but it is a foolish one; it is an exchange of liberty, for drudgery and slavery; of peace of conscience, for bitter remorse; of joyfulness and gladness of heart, for sorrow and anguish: and of abundance of all things, for hunger, thirst, nakedness, and want of all things. It is a being weary of the government of the Prince of peace, whose yoke is easy, and whose burden is light, and a putting our necks under the iron yoke of a tyrant, which tends to our destruction.

Israel was not only charged with folly, but with *singular* folly. *Pass over the Isles of Chittim, saith the Lord, and see, and send unto Kedar, and*

consider diligently, and see if there be such a thing. Hath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit! There are some foolish people in the world, who never know when they are well, but will always be changing and exchanging, though they always continue to lose by it. To be compared to these were enough to shame us; but this is not the worst. Notwithstanding the fickleness of the human mind in lesser matters, they seem in general each nation to be firm to their gods, even though they were no gods; so firm, I suppose, that if they could have exchanged wood for silver, or stone for gold, they would not have complied. But Israel, the only people upon the earth who had a God worth cleaving to, Israel must be the only people who desire to change! Well may it be added, *Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be ye horribly afraid!* Shall the people of the only true God, and only they, prove untrue!

But, alas! we wonder at the sottish stupidity of Israel, and forget that in them we see our own picture. Extreme and singular as their folly might be, in their idolatries, it was not more so than is ours, when we feel reluctant to draw near to God in close communion, and fly for happiness to sensual and carnal gratification.

AS one great cause of our departures from God has been supposed to be a neglect of the word of God, it will ill become me, in writing on the

means of returning to him, to forget to make use of that unerring guide. Hence it is, that I have endeavoured, as much as possible, to introduce some particular part or parts of the word of God, as the ground of what has been advanced on every subject.

There is much advice given in scripture respecting the return of backsliders, both as individuals, and as collective bodies. But that which I shall here notice is the counsel of Christ to the church at Ephesus, who had fallen under rebuke for having left their first love. *Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent; and do the first works.*

The first thing observable in this piece of sacred counsel, is, that we *remember from whence we are fallen*. This might have a tendency to convince us of our sad defects, if we were to compare our spirit with that of the *primitive Christians*, and consider the difference. They are frequently described as *little children*, denoting, no doubt, their littleness in their own eyes, their love one to another, their readiness to forgive injuries, their modesty, and above all their godly simplicity. Like little children, they were unacquainted with the arts of dissimulation and intrigue. *Laying aside all malice, and guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and evil speakings, as new born babes they desired and fed upon the sincere milk of the word, and grew thereby.* Is there nothing in this picture of a primitive Christian that makes us blush? Sure I am it ought, whether it does or not. In them surely we must see and *remember from whence we are fallen*.

Another picture of primitive Christianity is given us in Acts ii. 42. *And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine, in fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers.* From this account, we may learn, 1. That primitive Christians looked upon *soundness in the faith* as of great importance. They were strangers to that spirit of indifference to truth which loves to represent its doctrines as mere matters of speculation, and insinuates that '*it matters not what a man believes, if his practice be but good.*' They would have trembled at the thought of deviating from that gospel which had been made the power of God to their salvation. 2. That the fellowship which they maintained with one another arose out of *a union of sentiments in apostolical doctrines.* They were full of charity; but their charity was not of that kind which led them to have fellowship with men of all principles. They loved the souls of men too well to deceive them by countenancing what they believed to be pernicious and destructive errors. 3. They exercised a religious regard to the *positive institutions* of Christ, as well as to the doctrine of salvation through his name. They not only listened to his instructions as their Prophet, and relied upon his atonement as their Priest, but cheerfully complied with his institutions as their King. 4. They were men that dwelt much with God in *prayer.* Having obtained mercy themselves, they joined in supplicating the divine throne for the salvation of others. Nor did they confine their devotions to the church, but carried them into their families and

their closets. Let this lovely picture of primitive Christianity be closely reviewed; and let us, by this means, *remember from whence we are fallen, and repent.*

Farther: It might be of use to compare our spirit and conduct with that which prevailed at *the Reformation*. It may be difficult to ascertain with precision the difference between that age and the present. But there are two things which I think may be pointed out, which are self-evident. 1. The *principles* they imbibed and preached were very different from what at this time generally prevail. The doctrines which the generality of the Reformers held were such as follow: a trinity of persons in the Godhead; the deity and atonement of Christ; justification by faith; predestination; efficacious grace; the certain perseverance of the saints, &c. These doctrines they preached, and looked upon them as consistent with a free and unreserved address to unconverted sinners. How far the body of the reformed churches are gone off from them, I need not say. It is true, the Reformers imbibing these or any other sentiments, is no proof of their being divine: but there is one thing that deserves notice, viz. their *moral tendency*. Have not the reformed churches, in proportion as they have forsaken the doctrines of the Reformers, forsaken also that purity, zeal, and ardour, that uprightness before men, and close walking with God, for which they were distinguished? 2. Their *attachment* to what they accounted divine truth was very different from ours. To maintain the

doctrines and ordinances of Christ, in their primitive simplicity, they hazarded the loss of all things; and great numbers of them actually resigned their lives, rather than give them up. It was to enjoy these that they threw off the yoke of Popery, and claimed the right of private judgment. We also claim this right, and so far we do well; yea, herein we exceed them, particularly in allowing to others that right which we claim for ourselves. But though we understand religious liberty better than they did, yet it is too evident we make a much *worse use* of it. Instead of using it as a *mean* for obtaining truth, great numbers among us rest in it as an *end*. Religious liberty, however equitable and valuable it is in itself, is certainly of no further use *to us*, than as it is applied to the discovery of truth, and the practice of righteousness. But the spirit of the present age is to boast of the liberty of thinking for ourselves, till we lose all attachment to religious principles, except an overweening one towards our own conceits, be they right or wrong: and this is the same thing as to boast of a mean till we have lost the only good end to be answered by it. The temper of the present age, so far as I have had opportunity to observe it, is, loudly to cry up the right of judging for themselves, which undoubtedly all men ought to have: but then, they very unjustly infer from this, that it matters not what they believe, if they are but sincere in it; that is, if a man's thoughts are but his own, it matters not whether they be right or wrong. Another false inference which they draw is, that because they

have a right to think for themselves without being called to account for it by their fellow creatures, therefore they have the same right in regard to the Governor of the world. The indifference of truth and error being thus admitted, the mind becomes susceptible of any thing that offers; and thus the great truths of revelation are slighted, perhaps, if for no other reason, because they occupied a place in the creeds of their forefathers. A comparison of times, on these subjects, may assist us in *remembering from whence we are fallen*.

Once more: It would be profitable to recollect *the best parts of our lives, and compare them with what we now are*. Think, backsliding Christian, what an effect those sacred truths have had upon your heart, which since, it may be, you have held with a loose hand, and have been almost inclined to abandon: think what delight you have taken in those ways, which you have since neglected; what abhorrence you have felt against those sins in which you have since thought there was no great harm, and so have yielded to them; how you have been grieved when you have seen other Christians degenerate into carnality, sloth, pride, or worldly-mindedness: think—ah! where shall I stop? Do not forget to ask your soul at the close of every thought, *Is it better with me now than then?* We are not only counselled to *remember from whence we are fallen*, but also called on to *repent*.

Repentance is a godly sorrow for sin; and if ever there be any true revival of religion, it must

originate in this. When Judah returned to the Lord after their captivity, it was with bitter weeping. *Going and weeping, they sought the Lord their God.* There can be no well-grounded peace or joy restored to our mind, while the idols of our hearts remain unlamented. God insists upon these being given up; and that, not in a way of secret reluctance, but with holy abhorrence. Nor are we called upon to lament merely on account of positive acts of sin, but even for our sins of *omission*—because we have *forsaken our first love.*

Some professing Christians seem to have no notion of any obligation that they are under to love Christ and divine things. ‘It is the work of God,’ say they, ‘to affect our hearts, and enable us to love Christ: we cannot command the influence of the Spirit, nor keep our own souls alive.’ This is very true, but not in the sense in which they plead it. The hearts of men, even of the best of men, are so very bad, that unless a kind of perpetual miracle be wrought in them, their love will be sure to expire. To preserve alive a spark in the midst of an ocean would not be so great a wonder as the preserving the love of Christ in our hearts. But if nothing be obligatory on us, but what we *can do of ourselves*, or in other words, what we, in this our corrupted state, *can find in our own hearts to do*, it must follow, that we are not obliged to do any good thing whatever; for *without Christ, we can do nothing*; and so it must follow that we have no cause for self-reflection for the contrary, but have a good right to make ourselves easy, and to be

contented with that degree of love and holiness which we have, seeing it is such a measure as God pleases to bestow upon us. But, in this case, there could be no propriety in the church at Ephesus being rebuked for having left their first love, or called upon to repent for it. Repentance, if genuine, will lead us to the other part of Christ's advice; namely, *Do the first works*. The first works are the works of the best ages of the church, and the best times in our life. If there be any considerable revival in the church, or in the souls of individuals, it will be when the diligence, disinterestedness, tenderness of conscience, generosity, and faithfulness of those times are imitated.

IN the last paper, I attempted to point out some of the means of returning to God, founded on the advice given to the church at Ephesus: in this, I shall make a few observations upon the address to the church at Laodicea; whose character, I am afraid, bears but too near a resemblance to that of the present age. The address of Christ to that *lukewarm* and *self-sufficient* people, is as follows: *Thou sayest, I am rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing: and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear: and anoint thine eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love,*

I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Laodicea seems to have been a place of trade. Trade usually produces riches; and riches, pride, indifference in divine things, and spiritual wretchedness. There were *three* things of which these people had very wrong notions; namely, *riches, beauty, and discernment*. They thought an increase of goods made them *rich*; that the splendid figure which on that account they cut among the churches made them *beautiful*; and that their philosophical knowledge, it is probable, made them *wise*. But they had been for each of these commodities, if I may so speak, to a wrong market; namely, to the world. If they would possess either, they are told to deal with Christ for it. The counsel of Christ is as if he had said, 'Trade with me. Part with all your own frippery for spiritual things, and learn to derive these from me. They are articles with which none else can supply you. Count my grace your *riches*, and part with your dross for it; my righteousness your *ornament*, and part with your own for it; and my word and Spirit that which is able to make you *wise* unto salvation; and come to me as fools in your own eyes.'

Britain, like Laodicea, is a place of trade: trade has produced riches; and riches, pride, indifference, and spiritual wretchedness. If there is any people therefore in the world, to whom the counsel to Laodicea is applicable, rather than to others, it seems to be the churches of Britain. What is

addressed to them therefore, I shall understand as if it were immediately addressed to us.

The principal thing contained in this counsel, is, that we **DEAL WITH CHRIST**; and this is the subject with which I shall close this paper. As Christ is the only way to which we are to point lost sinners to repair for salvation, so he is the only way in which we can make any progress in real religion. *As ye have received Christ Jesus, says the Apostle, so walk ye in him.* Neither is there any other way of returning to God, when we have backslidden from him. To return home to God, is to return to a close walk with him, to a serving him *acceptably, and with godly fear*; and to this end, we must *have grace*: but there is no way of obtaining grace, but by dealing with Christ. *It hath pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell*; and it is *out of his fulness that we all must receive, and grace for grace.*

Christ is a believer's *life*; the bread of life, the water of life, the tree of life, the vine that communicates life to the branches. Each of these metaphors implies that we cannot live at all spiritually, without union to him; so neither can we be lively and fruitful, without close communion with him. If we be strengthened with *might in the inner man*, it must be by Christ's *dwelling in our hearts by faith*, or in other words, by his having place in our thoughts, desires, and best affections.

Those three things concerning which the church at Laodicea was counselled; namely, spiritual

riches, spiritual *beauty*, and spiritual *discernment*, can neither of them be obtained but by dealing with Christ. It is not enough for us to be once interested in pardoning and justifying grace: if we would be *rich* in the sight of God, we must be dealing with Christ as guilty, self-condemned sinners, for forgiveness and acceptance. It is not enough that we reckon upon going to heaven when we die: our conversation must be there even now; there must be a correspondence kept up between Christ and our souls, or we shall be *poor* and *miserable* indeed! Nor is it enough that we confess our sanctification, or spiritual *beauty*, to come from him: there must be a daily dealing with Christ for the mortification of sin, and for the increase of grace and peace. Our garments are not to be *made white*, or beautiful, but by being *washed in the blood of the Lamb*. There are very few, if any of us, who are sufficiently sensible of our entire dependence upon Christ for sanctification. But whatever methods we may take to promote it, short of dealing with him, they will not do. We may become beautiful in our own eyes, like Laodicea; but shall be miserable and naked in the sight of God.

What is the reason of the multitude of contradictory sentiments at this day, even upon the great doctrines of the gospel, which are written in the scriptures so plain that *he that runs may read them*? Is it not for want of dealing with Christ for wisdom? We may think, and reason, and dispute all our life-time; but unless we

become fools in our own eyes, and rely upon the *word* and *Spirit* of God for instruction, we shall be wretchedly blind to the real glory of the gospel. *Spiritual things must be spiritually discerned.* Without this eye-salve, whatever be our conceit of ourselves, we shall not be wise. It is by an unction from the Holy One that we know all things, and without that unction we *know nothing as we ought to know it.* We are not to abandon either thinking, reasoning, or on all occasions even disputing; but to take heed that they be so exercised as not to interrupt, but promote, our correspondence with Christ.

There are certain *sentiments* and *feelings* which are necessary and encouraging in our returning to God; such as a deep sense of the evil nature of sin, godly sorrow for it, and a hope of forgiveness on our return; each of which is produced and promoted by a dealing with Christ.

Where can we learn the evil of sin, so as it is to be seen in the death of Christ? True, it is to be seen in the glass of the law, and in the moral character of God; but it never was seen, nor can be seen, in so odious a light as that in which it appears on Calvary. And here indeed it is that we not only see the evil of sin, but view the law and moral character of God in all their glory. What an idea must it afford us of God's displeasure against sin to see him pouring out his wrath upon his dear and only-begotten Son; exposing him whom he loved more than all the creation together, to ignominy and death, rather

than suffer it to go unpunished! Christian, the more thou art acquainted with Christ, the more bitter, unnatural, disengenuous, and shameful, will thy sin appear to thee.

What will open the springs of godly sorrow for sin, like an intimate, and close dealing with Christ? If any thing will dissolve the hardness of our hearts, it is the consideration of his dying love. If we are brought to *mourn as one that mourneth for an only son, and to be in bitterness as one that is in bitterness for his first-born*, it is by *looking upon him whom we have pierced*. Come, backsliding Christian, come but to the Saviour's feet, and thou shalt soon be able to wash them with thy tears.

Finally: What can afford us any *hope* and *encouragement* to return to God, but the name of Christ? It is in him alone that we can obtain forgiveness. He is the advocate with the Father, to whom they that have sinned are encouraged to look for relief. It was his blood in which David prayed to be washed from his uncleanness, and blood-guiltiness. Under all our guilt, darkness, and confusion, let us not despair. We have an *intercessor for transgressors before the throne; a faithful and merciful High Priest, who was tempted in all points like unto us, yet without sin; and in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted*. Let us consider how he interceded for those that were *in the world*. *I am no more in the world, but these are in the world: holy Father, keep them!* Think of the Lord's having laid upon him the iniquity of

us all; even of such as like sheep have gone astray, and turned every one to his own way—of his being able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by him, seeing he *ever liveth* to make intercession for us. Think how he expostulates with us, invites us to return in the most melting language, and stands with open arms to receive us: *O that there were such an heart in them; that they would love me and fear me, and keep all my commandments always! O that my people had hearkened to my voice; then had their peace been as a river, and their righteousness as the waves of the sea!—Set thee up way-marks, make thee high heaps; set thine heart toward the high way, even the way that thou wentest! Return, O thou backsliding children, for I am married unto you, saith the Lord.—Take with you words, and turn to the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips; for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.—I will heal your backslidings; I will love you freely. I will be as the dew unto Israel; and he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I am like a green fir tree; from me is thy fruit found.*

If this, or any of the foregoing papers, may be the means of reclaiming any from the error of their ways, either mental or practical; if they might tend to excite either myself or others to a closer walk with God, I shall enjoy the satisfaction of not having written in vain.

ON FINAL RESTITUTION.

OF all the sentiments advanced in the religious world, there are few perhaps that are likely to have a greater spread than that of *final and universal salvation, or the release of wicked men and devils, at some unknown period after the day of judgment*. It is not supposed that this sentiment is attended with such convincing evidence as must bear all before it: far from it; but it is a sentiment suited to the corrupt passions and prejudices of men; and we know the propensity of our own minds to believe a thing to be as we would wish to have it.

It is one presumptive argument, however, against the sentiment referred to, that it is destitute of real *utility*. Admitting it to be true, of what use is it? Who are encouraged by it? Not the upright, they are safe without it. It is the ungodly sinner, if any. He is encouraged, it is true; not however to forsake his sins, or to flee to the remedy; but to conclude that he shall have peace at last, *though he walk after the imagination of his heart, to add drunkenness to thirst*. If it be a truth, it seems to be of such a nature that the world would be much better without the knowledge of it than with it. On the other hand, admitting it to be an error, it must be allowed to be tremendous in its consequences. Nothing ought more to be dreaded than that which tends to deceive the souls of men, and that in matters of everlasting consequence!

The following thoughts are not offered as a discussion of the subject, but merely as what may

throw some light upon one particular passage of scripture, upon which it is frequently grounded. This passage is in Acts iii. 21. *Jesus Christ—whom the heavens must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.* On this passage I would offer the three following observations.

First: *The times of restitution cannot mean any time or times beyond those of the resurrection, and the last judgment.* This is evident from the passage itself compared with various other scriptures. The heavens have received Christ, and will retain him till the times of restitution of all things—but the whole tenor of scripture declares that the heavens will not retain Christ beyond the times of the resurrection and the last judgment—therefore the times of restitution cannot be beyond that period.

Christ's being retained in the heavens till the times of the restitution of all things, is said to have been *spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began.* This, if applied to the kingdom of the Messiah terminating in the resurrection and the last judgment, is true: for from Enoch to Malachi this was a subject to which all the prophets bare witness. But if applied to some future period after the final judgment, when wicked men and devils shall be released, it is not true, the abettors of this notion themselves being judges. What evidence can they pretend to, supposing the thing itself were a truth, that God by the mouth of all his holy prophets said any

thing about it? Much less that Christ should be retained in the heavens till the arrival of this supposed period. On the contrary, by the mouth of all his holy prophets he hath said just the reverse. He hath all along represented Christ's second coming as being immediately *before*, and *in order to* the last judgment, and not *after* it.*

Secondly: *The times of the resurrection and the last judgment are with peculiar propriety called the times of restitution of all things, because that is the period when the moral disorder of the creation shall come to an end.* By the introduction and prevalence of moral evil, every thing in creation has been disjointed and thrown into a state of anarchy and confusion. God's authority has been set aside, his just revenue of glory withheld, and even the *creatures*, which were all designed to promote righteousness, order, and happiness, are abused, and made to subserve the gratifications of brutal appetite. The sun emits his rays, and the clouds let fall their showers, the mountains abound with cattle, and the valleys with corn; and all to furnish man with what he subverts to the vilest purposes. All this is *unnatural* to the creation. The grand end of every being, intelligent or unintelligent, was to subserve the Creator's glory. If the creatures of God are made to promote the cause of iniquity, it is unnatural. It is a *vanity to which they are unwillingly*, as it were, *made subject*; and under which, as under a burden, *they groan and travail*

* Jude 14, 15. Job xix. 25, 26. Psa. l. 3, 4, xcvi. 13. xcvi. 9. Joel iii. 13.

in pain; longing for the glorious liberty of the sons of God, which shall arrive at the resurrection. The empire of sin shall then be utterly destroyed, order fully restored, and peace and righteousness flow in their ancient channels.

But nothing of all this implies the restoration of wicked men and devils to their original state. If a rebellion break out in the dominions of an earthly king, which is carried to such a height that the laws are set aside, the royal authority disregarded, and all the productions of that part of his dominions appropriated to purposes of hostility; if after this the king should crush the conspiracy, reinstate himself upon his throne, and call the offenders to justice; if he should pardon some, punish others, and restore law, peace, and order, to his whole dominions; this might be termed a restitution of all things: but who would imagine that this implied the restitution of all the rebels to their ancient dignities and honours?

Thirdly: *The times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, and the times of restitution of all things, appear to be the same; and a share in both is held up as a motive to repentance and conversion. The Apostle, in the text, says, Repent therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. And he shall send Jesus Christ, who before was preached unto you; whom the heavens must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. This,*

if applied to the times of the resurrection and the last judgment, is all rational and beautiful; but if applied to some period after those times, when devils and wicked men shall be released, it is absurd and contradictory. Is it possible to suppose Peter's meaning should be to the following purpose? 'Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when these times of refreshing and restitution shall come; though after all, your sins shall *then* be blotted out, whether you repent and be converted or not!'

APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS RECONCILED.

ADMITTING the divine authority of the holy scriptures, their harmony ought not to be called in question; yet it must be allowed by every considerate reader, that there are *apparent* difficulties. Nor is it unlawful, but laudable, to wish to see those difficulties removed, and to aim at a perception of the particular beauty of God's word, as well as a general persuasion of its harmony. On this principle I greatly approve of the request of *Candidus*, and so far as it respects myself shall endeavour to comply with it.

The passages which he wishes to see reconciled, are John v. 40. and vi. 44, 45. 65. *And ye are not willing to come to me that ye might have life.—No man can come to me except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him.—It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh*

unto me.—*Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not,—and he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me except it were given unto him of my Father.*

My thoughts on these passages will be comprised in the seven following observations.

First: *There is no way of obtaining eternal life, but by Jesus Christ.* This observation is fully implied in the first passage, and I suppose may stand without any further confirmation.

Secondly: *They that enjoy eternal life, must come to Christ for it.* Coming is not an act of the body, but of the mind and heart. It is a term which in the New Testament is commonly used as synonymous with *believing* in Christ. In common speech we frequently apply it to the yielding of a person's mind who has heretofore been in a state of enmity, or variance. When we see a change in his views of things, his proud spirit begin to subside, his prejudice give way, the high tone of his expressions lowered, and his heart inclining towards a reconciliation, we say, '*He is coming.*'

Thirdly: *It is the revealed will of Christ that every one who hears the gospel, should come to him for life.* This position, I should think, is equally evident from the text in question, as either of the above. Our Lord would not have complained of the Jews for not coming to him, nor have imputed it to the obstinacy of their *will*, if the contrary had not been their duty, as well as their highest interest. Every one who hears the gospel must either feel willing to be saved in God's way, or unwilling,

or neither the one nor the other. If we are willing, we are true believers: if unwilling, we are what the scriptures style *disobedient*, like these Jews, and like them fall under the displeasure of Christ. 'But may we not be neutral? That a being positively unwilling to be saved in God's way is sinful, seems to be almost self-evident: but is there no such thing as a *medium*?' To which I answer, If there be a medium between a being willing and unwilling, it must consist in such a state of mind wherein a person feels *indifferent*; that is, neither *for* Christ nor *against* him. But this is declared to be impossible, *He that is not against us*, said Christ, *is on our side*. If a person could feel indifferent in this case, that indifference would be deemed disloyalty. As the curse fell upon Meroz, for his *not* coming forth to the help of the Lord against the mighty, so an Anathema Maranatha is denounced against any man that loveth *not* our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. It is inconsistent with the perfections of God to allow any sinner who hears the gospel of Christ to feel either aversion, or indifference towards him.

Fourthly: *The depravity of human nature is such, that no man of his own accord, will come to Christ for life*. This position, it may be objected, is not sufficiently evident from Christ's words in the first of these passages; seeing it does not follow, that because the Jews would not come to him therefore none else would. To this it is replied, Be it so; it is sufficiently evident from this passage, taken in connexion with other scriptures, and even with

those two with which it is here attempted to be reconciled. To come to Christ for life, is to feel the danger of our situation, and be in real earnest after escape; in such earnest as one that was fleeing to the city of refuge, with the avenger of blood in pursuit of him. But men are naturally at ease, or if awakened by the alarms of providence or conscience, are disposed to fly to any refuge rather than Christ. To come to Christ for eternal life, is to feel and acknowledge ourselves destitute of every claim on his favour, and worthy of eternal death; but this is too humiliating to human pride. To come to Christ for life, in short, is to give up our own righteousness, and be justified by his; our own wisdom, and be guided by his: and our own will, and be ruled by his: it is to receive him as our all in all: but man by nature is unwilling to part from his idols; he had rather hazard his soul's eternal welfare than give them up.

Fifthly: *The degree of this depravity is such, as that, figuratively speaking, men cannot come to Christ for life.* It is not here supposed that they would come to Christ, but cannot; nor that they could not come if they would. It is true, when the word *cannot* is used in its literal and proper sense; that is, when it is applied to a natural inability, this idea is always implied: *Ahijah COULD NOT see, by reason of his age.—The king of Moab would have broken through the hosts of his enemies, but he COULD NOT.—The mariners rowed hard to bring the ship to land, but they COULD NOT.* In each of these cases there was properly a want of power,

which denominated the parties unable, though they were, or might be supposed to be, ever so willing. But it is usual, both in scripture and in common speech, to express the state of a person under the dominion of an exceeding strong propensity, by the terms *cannot*, *unable*, &c. *They that are in the flesh CANNOT please God.—Why do ye not understand my speech? Because ye CANNOT hear my word.—Having eyes full of adultery, and CANNOT cease from sin.—Joseph's brethren COULD NOT speak peaceably to him.—How CAN ye, being evil, speak good things?—How CAN ye believe, who receive honour one of another?* Now, when the word is used in this sense, it would be a contradiction to suppose a willingness, or an incapacity in case of willingness, seeing it is the want of willingness wherein the incapacity consists.

That the term *cannot*, in John vi. 44, denotes the strength of evil propensities, and not any natural and excusable hindrance, is evident from the *cure* here mentioned; namely, *the Father's drawing*. When we are drawn by divine influence to come to Christ, it is a drawing of the *heart* towards that to which it was before averse; consequently it was *the aversion of the heart* wherein the inability consisted.

It has been usual with writers, to express the difference between these two different kinds of inability, by the terms *natural* and *moral*. To this, it has been objected, that "the scripture knows of no such distinction." If by this is meant that the scripture does not expressly make such a distinction,

it is true; but if this be a proof that the scripture knows nothing of the thing, it will at the same time prove that the scripture knows nothing of the doctrines of the trinity, divine providence, the satisfaction of Christ, with many other acknowledged truths of the last importance. After all, terms are not worth disputing about, provided the ideas included under them are admitted. That the ideas in this case are scriptural, is sufficiently evident from the forecited passages. Every person of common understanding, whether he will or not, must of necessity perceive a difference between the inability of the mariners recorded in Jonah, and that of the adulterers mentioned by Peter; and that the one rendered the parties excusable, and the other constituted them the more highly culpable. Let this difference be but admitted, it matters not what terms are used, provided they do but sufficiently express it.

Sixthly: *A conviction of the righteousness of God's government, of the spirituality and goodness of his law, the evil of sin, our lost condition by nature, and the justice of our condemnation, is necessary in order to our coming to Christ.* I think each of these ideas are included in the phrase *learned of the Father*. Without this, there can be no solid conviction of the need of a Saviour. The sinner will be whole in his own account; and *they that are whole need not a physician*. A knowledge of the Father as the lawgiver of the world, must precede a hearty reception of Christ as a Saviour. It is *through the law we become*

dead to the law, that we may live unto God. The law is our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ. It is therefore very unreasonable, as well as unscriptural, for any, under the pretence of knowing Christ, to decry the law of God, seeing it is by learning at that school we are prepared to come to Christ.

Lastly: *There is absolute necessity of a special divine agency in order to our coming to Christ. No man CAN come unto me, except the Father who sent me draw him.* Those who deny the grace of God to be invincible in its operations, understand this and other passages, of what is sometimes called, I think, moral influence; that is, such influence as men may have upon the minds of each other in a way of persuasion. And so they suppose the sense of the text is, that no man can come to Christ, unless he have the gospel preached unto him. But it ought to be considered, that *drawing*, in verse 44, is tantamount to having *learned of the Father*, in verse 45, where it is declared that *every man that hath heard and learned of the Father, cometh unto Christ*. But it is not every one that hath been objectively instructed by the preaching of the gospel, who comes to Christ: it must therefore be such an instruction and drawing as is peculiar to true believers; such a drawing as that whereon our coming certainly follows: and thus we believe, *according to the working of his mighty power*.

Upon the whole, we see from these passages taken together, first, if any man is lost, whom

he has to blame for it—HIMSELF; Secondly, if any man is saved, whom he has to praise for it—GOD.

A PARAPHRASE ON ECCLES. VII. 15—19.

THERE have been various opinions on the advice of the wise man, *Be not righteous overmuch*, &c. Great numbers have produced it with a view to censure religious zeal, and in favour of a spirit of indifference. Others, who would abhor such an abuse of it, have yet thought it directed against *intemperate* zeal. Others have thought *righteousness* and *wisdom* here, to mean a spirit of *self-righteousness*, and a being *wise in our own eyes*. Others have thought the verses to be a caution against *presumption* on the one hand, and *despair* on the other. And some have considered the whole book as a dialogue between a libertine and a moral philosopher; and that the above passage is the language of the former. It is not my design to find fault with any except the *first*; though I acknowledge they have neither of them afforded me satisfaction. The following paraphrase is submitted to the judgment of the intelligent reader.

Suppose Solomon to be addressing himself to a young man, which he frequently does under the character of a *son*, not only in the Proverbs, but in this book also, Chap. xi. 9. xii. 1, 12. And suppose verses 16 and 17, to be an *irony*, or a cutting

sarcasm, upon the unrighteous and foolish taste of the world.

Ver. 15. *All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that prolongeth his life in his wickedness.*

‘I have lived to see many strange things in my life time; things that have made me lose all liking to the present state. I have seen uprightness, instead of promoting a man in the esteem of those about him, only serve to bring him to ruin. I have also seen wickedness, instead of exposing a man to the loss of life or estate, often go unpunished, yea, and even be the means of his promotion.’

Ver. 16. *Be not righteous overmuch, neither make thyself over-wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself?*

‘My son, if you wish to go through the world with applause, hearken to me. You must not be very *righteous*, I assure you! nor yet very *wise*. A man whose conscience will stick at nothing, will get promoted before you; and a vain, confident fool will gain the popular applause, while you, with your sterling but modest wisdom, will be utterly neglected. Be not overmuch wise nor righteous my son: why should you ruin yourself?’

Ver. 17. *Be not overmuch wicked; neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time?*

‘Only take care you be not *too much* wicked; for however mankind are averse to tenderness of con-

science, they do not like an *arrant* villain. If you play too much at that game, you may lose your life by it. Neither must you be *too much* of a *fool*; for however mankind are not fond of sterling wisdom, yet barefaced folly will not always go down with them: if you would please the world, and get honour among the generality of men, you must be neither a sterling wise man, nor a stark fool.'

As it is the distinguishing mark of an irony to close seriously, and as such a close gives it its edge and force;* so now it is supposed the irony ends, and the serious style is resumed.

Ver. 18. *It is good that thou shouldest take hold of this; yea, also from this withdraw not thine hand: for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all.*

As if he should say, 'But hearken, my son; another word before we part. Notice what I say to you, and abide by it. Let the world say what they will, and let things go as they may in the world, righteousness and wisdom shall be found best at last; and he that feareth God will not dare to sacrifice these excellencies to obtain a few temporary honours: he will sooner live and die in obscurity.'

Ver. 19. *Wisdom strengtheneth the wise, more than ten mighty men which are in the city.*

'A consciousness of his being in the right too, will wonderfully sustain his mind; far more than

* See 1 Kings xxii. 15, 17. Eccles. xi. 9.

any popular applause could do, or even the rewards and honours of the great.'

If the above be the sense of the passage, then it may be observed, how foreign, as well as foolish, is that sense which some have put upon it, as if it were intended to recommend a kind of *mediocrity* of virtue and vice; whereas this is the very thing intended to be satirized. A sensualist might as well plead for his practices, from Chap. xi. 9. *Rejoice, O young man in thy youth, &c.* as a lukewarm professor use this passage to plead for his indifference.

MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS,

&c.

FROM

THE EVANGELICAL MAGAZINE,

1794—1812.

THE NATURE OF REGENERATION, IN ANSWER TO THE
FOLLOWING QUERY,

Does the Spirit of God, in regeneration, produce a new
principle in the heart, or only impart a new light in
the understanding?

THE question, as stated by your correspondent, I consider as important, and as admitting of a satisfactory answer. Whether I shall be able to afford him satisfaction, I cannot tell; but will do the best I can towards it. If we were called to determine *how*, or in *what manner* the Holy Spirit operates upon the human mind, great difficulties might attend our inquiries; but the purport of this question seems to relate, not to the *modus* of his operations, but to the *nature* of what is produced. To this I should answer: The Spirit of God in regeneration *does* produce a new principle in the heart, and not merely impart a new light in the understanding. The reasons for this position are as follow:

First: That which the Holy Spirit imparts in regeneration corresponds with his OWN NATURE: it is *holiness*, or *spirituality*. *That which is born of the Spirit, is spirit*. But mere light in the understanding, as distinguished from the bias or temper of the heart, has nothing in it spiritual or holy; it is a mere exercise of intellect, in which there is neither good nor evil.—The scriptures, it is true, make frequent mention of spiritual light, and of such light being imparted by the Spirit of God; but the terms *light* and *knowledge*, as frequently used in scripture, are not to be understood in a literal, but in a figurative sense. As spiritual darkness, or blindness, is not a mere defect of the understanding, so spiritual light is not the mere supplying of such a defect. Each of these terms conveys a *compound* idea; the one of ignorance and aversion, the other of knowledge and love. Hence the former is described as *blindness of the heart*, and the latter as *understanding with the heart*. If I understand any thing of the theory of the human mind, there is a kind of action and re-action of the understanding and the affections upon each other. We are not only affected with things by our judgment concerning them, but we judge of many things as we are affected towards them. Every one feels how easy it is to believe that to be true which corresponds with our inclinations. Now, *so far* as the decisions of the judgment are the consequence of the temper of the heart, so far they are either virtuous or vicious. Of this kind is *spiritual blindness*. Men do not *like* to retain God in their

knowledge. They *desire* not the knowledge of his ways. Hence ignorance, in this figurative or compound sense of the term, is threatened with the most awful judgments: *Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that KNOW thee not.*—Christ will come *in flaming fire to take vengeance on them that KNOW NOT GOD.* Of this kind also is *spiritual light.* Hence the following language: *I will give them a HEART TO KNOW ME.*—*God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined IN OUR HEARTS, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.* This is that holy or spiritual knowledge, which it is *life eternal* to possess; of which the *natural* man is destitute; which would lead us to *ask for living water*; and which, had the Jewish rulers possessed, *they would not have crucified the Lord of life and glory.* *Ye neither know me nor my Father,* said our Lord to the Jews: *if ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also.* The want of this knowledge was the sin of the Jews; and, as we have seen already, stands threatened with divine judgments: but the mere want of knowledge, according to the strict and literal meaning of the term, and where it arises not from any evil bias of heart, which has induced us to slight or neglect the means, is not criminal: on the contrary, it excuses that which would otherwise be criminal. Ahimelech pleaded his ignorance of David's supposed rebellion, before Saul; and it ought, no doubt, to have acquitted him. If the Jews had not enjoyed such means of knowledge as they did,

comparatively speaking, they *had not had sin*.—Further: Spiritual knowledge, or knowledge according to the figurative or compound sense of the term, has the promise of *eternal life*: but knowledge, literally taken, as distinguished from the temper of the heart, may exist in the most wicked characters, such as Balaam and Judas; and though in itself it be neither good nor evil, yet it may be, and generally is, an occasion of greater aversion to God and religion. Thus our Lord told the Jews: *Ye have both seen and hated both me and my Father*. Thus also many among us who have long sat under the preaching of the gospel, and long been the subjects of keen conviction, feel their enmity keep pace with their knowledge; and thus at the last judgment, sinners will see and know the equity of their punishment; so that *every mouth will be stopped, and all become guilty before God*; yet the enmity of their hearts, there is reason to think, will be thereby heightened, rather than diminished. In short, mere knowledge is in itself neither good nor evil, though it is essential to both good and evil; that is, it is essential to moral agency. If knowledge were obliterated from the mind, man would cease to be an accountable being. In every condition of existence, therefore, whether pure or depraved, he retains this, in different degrees; and will retain it for ever, whatever be his final state.

From hence I conclude, That what is produced by the Holy Spirit in regeneration is something very different from mere knowledge.

Secondly: That which the Holy Spirit produces in regeneration corresponds with the nature of DIVINE TRUTH: but the nature of divine truth is such, that mere light in the understanding is not sufficient to receive it. In proof of the former of these positions, I refer to the words of the Apostle, in Rom. vi. 17. *Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you, or rather, according to the marginal reading, into which ye were delivered.** The gospel, or the *form of doctrine* which it contains, is a *mould*, into which the heart, softened like melted wax, is, as it were, *delivered*, or cast, and from whence it receives its impression. Every mark or line of the gospel mould leaves a correspondent line in the renewed heart. Hence Christians are represented as having the *truth dwelling in them*; their hearts being a kind of counterpart to the gospel.—That mere light in the understanding is not sufficient to receive the gospel, will appear by considering the *nature* of those truths which it contains. If they were merely objects of *speculation*, mere light in the understanding would be sufficient to receive them; but they are of a *holy* nature, and therefore require a correspondent temper of heart to enter into them. The sweetness of honey might as well be known by the sight of the eye, as the real glory of the gospel by the mere exercise of the intellectual faculty. Why is it that the *natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he*

* Εἰς οὗν παρεδόθητε.

know them; but because they are spiritually discerned? A spiritual or holy temper of heart is that in the reception of gospel truth, which a relish for poetry is in entering into the spirit of a Milton, or a Young. Mere intellect is not sufficient to understand those writers; and why should it be thought unreasonable, or even mysterious, that we must possess a portion of the same spirit which governed the sacred writers, in order properly to enter into their sentiments?

Thirdly: That which the Holy Spirit communicates in regeneration, corresponds with the nature of DIVINE REQUIREMENTS. In other words, the same thing which is required by God as the governor of the world, is bestowed by the Holy Spirit in the application of redemption; both the one and the other is not mere light in the understanding, but a heart to love him. The language of divine requirements is as follows: *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and mind, and strength.—Circumcise the foreskin of your hearts, and be no more stiffnecked.—Make you a new heart, and a new spirit; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?—Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth, and with all your hearts.* The language of the promises is perfectly correspondent with all this, with respect to the nature of what is bestowed: *And the Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.—A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away*

the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.—And I will put my fear in their hearts, and they shall not depart from me.

Fourthly: That which the Holy Spirit communicates in regeneration, being the great remedy of human nature, must correspond with the nature of the MALADY: but the malady of human nature does not consist in simple ignorance, but in the bias of the heart; therefore such must be the remedy. That regeneration is the *remedy* of human nature, and not the implantation of principles which were never possessed by man in his purest state, will appear from its being expressed by the terms *washing* and *renewing*; the *washing* of regeneration, the *renewing* of the Holy Spirit; which convey the ideas of *restoring* us to purity, and *recovering* us to a right mind. Regeneration implies degeneracy. The nature of that which is produced therefore by the one, must correspond with that which we had lost, and be the opposite of that which we possessed in the other. Now that which we had lost was *the love of God and our neighbour. Love is the fulfilling of the law*: love, therefore, comprehends the whole of duty; consequently the want, or the opposite of love, comprehends the whole of depravity. If it be said, No, the *understanding is darkened*—True, but this is owing to the evil temper of the heart. (Eph. iv. 18.)* There is no *sin* in being ignorant, as observed before, any further than that ignorance is voluntary, or owing

* Διὰ τὴν πώρωσιν τῆς καρδίας αὐτῶν. Through the callousness of their heart,

to some evil bias. This we are sure is the case with wicked men, with respect to their not understanding the gospel. *Why do ye not understand my speech?* said our Lord to the Jews. The answer is, *Because ye cannot hear my word.* His word did not suit the temper of their hearts; therefore they could not understand it. Prejudice blinded their eyes. Here then lies the malady; and if the remedy correspond with it, it must consist in being *renewed in the spirit*, or temper, of *our minds*; and not merely in having the intellectual faculty enlightened.

It may be said, we cannot love that of which we have no idea; and therefore light in the understanding is necessary to the exercise of love in the heart. Be it so; it is no otherwise necessary than as it is necessary that I should be a *man* in order to be a *good* man. There is no virtue or holiness in knowledge, farther than as it arises from some virtuous propensity of the heart, any more than there is in our being possessed of human nature. This, therefore, cannot be the grand object communicated by the Holy Spirit in regeneration.

Should it be farther objected, That those who plead for a new light in the understanding, mean by it more than mere speculative knowledge; that they mean *spiritual* or *holy* light, such as transforms the heart and life; to this I should answer: If so, the light or knowledge of which they speak is something more than knowledge, literally and properly understood; it must include the temper

of the heart, and therefore is very improperly distinguished from it.

To represent men as only wanting light, is indeed acknowledging their weakness, but not their depravity. To say of a man who hates his fellow-man, 'He does not *know* him—if he *knew* him, he would love him;' is to acknowledge that the enmity towards the injured person is owing to mere mistake, and not to any contrariety of temper or conduct. The best of characters might thus be at variance, though it is a great pity they should, especially for any long continuance. If this be the case between God and man, the latter is not so depraved a creature as we have hitherto conceived him to be. The carnal mind is not *enmity* against God, but merely against an evil being, which in his ignorance he takes God to be. To this may be added, if sin originate in simple ignorance, (which is supposed, in that the removal of this ignorance is sufficient to render us holy,) then it is no more sin; nor is there any such thing as moral evil in the universe. So far as we can trace our actions to simple ignorance, or ignorance in which we are altogether involuntary; so far, as we have already seen, we may reckon ourselves innocent, even in those cases wherein, had we not been ignorant, we should have been guilty. These are serious consequences; but such as at present appear to me to be just.

The above is submitted to the consideration of *Tardus*, and the reader, as the result of the maturest reflections of the writer.

ON THE PARABLE OF THE UNJUST STEWARD.

IT will not be expected that we should affix a distinct idea to every term in a parable. There are some parts of almost every composition of this kind which belong to what may be called the *drapery* of it; and were we to aim at a minute explication of them, we should presently feel ourselves lost in mazes of folly and impertinence. The first and chief object in the exposition of parables, is to find out the *leading design* of the speaker. The leading design in this parable is manifestly to expose the sin of *covetousness*. So it was understood by the Pharisees, who, as the sacred writer observes (v. 14.) *were covetous*, and who, *when they heard these things derided him*. They perceived the parable was aimed at a sin in which they lived; but instead of being re-proved and humbled, they affected, like the same kind of people in the present day, to carry it off with a high hand, and treated the reprover with derision.

To show the evil of the sin of covetousness, our Lord represents every man in the possession of worldly property as a *steward* under God, and intimates that a time will come when we must give account of our stewardship, and be no longer stewards. From the supposed case of one of the *children of this world*, who on being summoned to give account of his stewardship, took measures to ingratiate himself with his lord's tenants, our

Saviour takes occasion to reprove the folly of avarice, and to enforce the practice of charity and liberality; by which that worldly property which had hitherto been unjustly detained from the necessitous, and which therefore was in danger of proving injurious to the souls of its possessors, might be turned to their everlasting advantage. *The children of this world*, he observed, *are wiser in their generation than the children of light.* The expedient supposed to be used by one of the former, is introduced in order to shame the latter, and to provoke them to be as wise for their souls as the others are for their bodies.

The want of integrity in the unjust steward does not appear to consist in his giving back a part of the rents to his lord's tenants, but in his having embezzled and misapplied his property. The abatements which he is supposed to have made, seem to have been, whatever might be his motive, but an exercise of justice towards those whom for his own private interest he had oppressed. In oppressing the tenants and defrauding his lord, the unjust steward fitly represents the conduct of those, who at the same time withhold what is meet from the poor and from the Lord, appropriating what Providence puts into their hands to mere selfish purposes.

Worldly riches are called *the mammon of unrighteousness*, not because it is unrighteous to be rich, nor, as I am inclined to think, on account of their having been *obtained* by unrighteous methods; but rather because of their being unrighteously

detained from the poor and needy. Our riches may have been righteously obtained with respect to men, and yet unrighteously detained with respect to God, and with respect to the poor, who are his tenants, his representatives in this world. Such an unrighteous detention of our worldly wealth is tantamount to the conduct of the unjust steward, who *wasted his lord's goods*. That which is not applied to the purposes for which it was entrusted in our hands, is embezzled and misapplied in God's account. In this view the most covetous persons are the greatest wasters; and every one who possesses more than he ought, by having detained it from the poor and needy, is in possession of unrighteous mammon, is an unjust steward, and must shortly have to give account of his stewardship!

But if the mere detention of our property beyond what is fit and right, constitute it the mammon of unrighteousness, who then is innocent? Who that is in possession of wealth can wash his hands, and say, 'I am clear in this matter; I owe nothing to religion, nothing to the poor!' Alas, every one must feel self-condemned! The prevalence of this sin may account for our Lord's speaking of riches in general, in ver. 11, as the unrighteous mammon. There is perhaps a part at least of every man's property that, if *all* had their dues, would not be his.

And what is to be done with this overplus, this unrighteous mammon? The answer is, Apply it to the uses to which it ought to have been applied

before: not only communicate liberally of your substance to all those purposes for which you are entrusted with it, which ought to be your general course; but, like Zaccheus, pay up your arrears. This will be *making friends of*, or *BY, the mammon of unrighteousness; laying up treasure in heaven; laying up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life.*

It is true, the mere communication of relief to the needy, if unaccompanied by love, will avail us nothing; and even if it spring from love, there is nothing in it that can, strictly speaking, merit the kingdom of God; yet God having graciously promised eternal life as the reward of those who give but a cup of cold water to a disciple of Christ, because he belongs to him, a compliance with the one affords a foundation to expect the other. As God graciously rewards even his own work in this world, so it will be in that to come: those who have sown sparingly here, will reap sparingly hereafter; while those who have sown plentifully shall reap plentifully. We may as truly be said, by laying out ourselves for God, to lay up treasure in heaven, as if eternal life was literally the reward of human merit; and though when we have done all we are unprofitable servants, having done no more than was our duty to do, yet through the superabounding goodness of God, we may be said by these means to make to ourselves friends, who will bear such witness in our favour, as that we shall be received into everlasting habitations.

To enforce the exercise of liberality, our Lord holds up the disparity between earthly and heavenly riches; the one as *little*, the other as *much*; the one as *unrighteous, deceitful, or false* mammon, the other as the *true* riches; this as pertaining to *another* man, of which we are only stewards, that as being properly *our own*, an inalienable and eternal inheritance; seriously warning us, at the same time, that if we continue unfaithful in the one, we can never expect to be put in possession of the other.

DEGREES IN GLORY PROPORTIONED TO WORKS OF
PIETY, CONSISTENT WITH SALVATION BY GRACE
ALONE.

A CONSTANT reader of the Evangelical Magazine for September last, p. 376, approves of several observations which were made on the parable of the Unjust Steward, but wishes me to show more particularly the consistency of spiritual and eternal blessings being bestowed as a reward of works of piety and charity, and consequently of different degrees of glory being hereafter conferred on different persons, according to their conduct in the present life with the doctrine of salvation by grace alone. I consider the above as an interesting inquiry, and submit the following as an answer.

In the first place, it seems proper a little more fully to establish the sentiments themselves. Whether we can perceive their consistency, or not, they manifestly appear to be taught in the holy scriptures. The same divine writers who teach

the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, teach also that eternal life will be conferred as a *reward* on those who have served the Lord with fidelity, and suffered for his sake in the present world. *Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* In the addresses to the seven Asiatic churches, eternal life, under various forms of expression, is promised as the *reward* of those who shall overcome the temptations and persecutions of the present state. Nor is it a mere promise of eternal life in *general* to those who shall overcome; but of a reward according to the deeds done in the body. This subject will appear with the fullest evidence, if we consider the nature of that enjoyment of which the heavenly state will consist.

First: Heavenly bliss will greatly consist in our being *approved of God*. There is a day approaching, when *God will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart; and then shall every man have praise of God*. That which Enoch had on earth, all God's faithful servants shall have in heaven, a *testimony that they have pleased God*; and a heaven it will be of itself! But it is impossible that all good men should partake of this satisfaction in an equal degree, unless they had all acted in this world exactly alike.

Secondly: Heavenly bliss will consist in *the exercise of love, supreme love to God*: And if so, the more we have done for him, the more our hearts will be filled with joy on the remembrance

of it. The same principle that makes us rejoice in his service here, will hereafter make us rejoice that we have served him; and as love here makes us glory even in tribulation, if God may but be honoured, so there it will make us rejoice that we were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name's sake. It is thus that our present *light afflictions work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*; and thus that by labouring and suffering in his cause, we *lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven*. All this supposes that, unless we have equally laboured and suffered for God in this world, we cannot equally enjoy him in the next.

Thirdly: Heavenly bliss will consist in *ascribing glory to God and the Lamb*: But this can be performed only in proportion as we have glory to ascribe. He that has done much for God has obtained more crowns, if I may so speak, than others; and the more he has obtained, the more will he have to cast at the Redeemer's feet. When we hear a THORNTON, a HOWARD, or a PAUL, acknowledge, *By the grace of God I am what I am*, there is a thousand times more meaning in the expression, and a thousand times more glory redounds to God, than in the uttering of the same words by some men, even though they be men of real piety. The Apostle of the Gentiles speaks of those to whom he had been made useful, as such as would be his *joy and crown* another day. But if there were not different degrees of glory in a future state, every one that enters the kingdom of heaven, yea, every infant caught thither from the

womb or the breast, must possess the same joyful recollection of its labours, and the same crown, as the apostle Paul. The stating of such a supposition is sufficient to refute it.

Fourthly: Heavenly bliss will consist in *exploring the wonders of the love of God*. Spiritual knowledge expands the soul, so as to render it capable of containing more than it would otherwise do. Every vessel will be filled, as some have expressed it; but every vessel will not be of equal dimensions. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are represented as conspicuous characters in the kingdom of heaven, with whom it will be a blessedness to sit down in communion. Peter and Paul, and other such eminent characters, are prepared for a greater degree of enjoyment than Christians in common.

Some have objected against this doctrine, 'that we are all loved with the same love, purchased by the same blood, called by the same calling, and heirs of the same inheritance; and therefore it may be supposed that we shall all possess it in the same degree.' But if this reasoning would prove any thing, it would prove too much; namely, that we should all be upon an equality in the present world, as well as in that which is to come: for we are *now* as much the objects of the same love, purchased by the same blood, called by the same calling, and heirs of the same inheritance, as we shall be hereafter; and if these things be consistent with the greatest diversity in this life, there is no conclusion to be drawn from thence,

but that it may be equally so in that which is to come.

What remains is, that we prove *the consistency of this doctrine with that of salvation by grace alone*. If the doctrine of rewards implied the notion of *merit*, or *desert*, the inconsistency of the one with the other would be manifest. Man, even in his purest state, could merit nothing at the hand of his Creator; since the utmost of what he did, or could do, was his duty: much less is it possible for fallen, guilty creatures, to merit any thing at the hand of an offended God, except it be shame and confusion of face. But no such idea is included in the doctrine of rewards; which is only designed to encourage us in every good word and work, and to express Jehovah's regard to righteousness, as well as his love to the righteous.

In the first place: Rewards contain nothing inconsistent with the doctrine of grace; because those very works which it pleased God to honour, are *the effects of his own operation*. He rewards the works of which he is the author, and proper cause. He who *ordains peace for us, hath wrought all our works in us*.

Secondly: All rewards to a guilty creature have respect to *the mediation of Christ*. Through the intimate union that subsists between Christ and believers, they are not only accepted in him, but what they do is accepted and rewarded *for his sake*. The Lord had respect to Abel, *and to his offering*; and we are said to *offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*. As

there is no sin so heinous, but God, for Christ's sake, will forgive it; no blessing so rich, but he will bestow it; so there is no service so small, but he will reward it. A cup of cold water given to a disciple for Christ's sake, will insure a disciple's reward.

Thirdly: God's graciously connecting blessings with the obedience of his people, serves to show, not only his love to Christ, and to them, but his *regard to righteousness*. His love to us induces him to bless us; and his love to righteousness induces him to bless us in this particular mode. An affectionate parent designs to confer a number of favours on his child, and in the end to bequeath him a rich inheritance. He designs also to have his mind suitably prepared for the proper enjoyment of these benefits; and therefore, in the course of his education, he studiously confers his favours by way of encouragement, as rewards to acts of filial duty. He gives him a new garment for this, and a watch for that: for his attention to the flocks and herds, he shall have a sheep, or a cow, which he shall call his own; and for his assiduity in tilling the soil, he shall have the product of a particular field. It is easy to perceive in this case, that the father does not consider these things as properly the child's due, upon a footing of equity; but to manifest his approbation of filial obedience. Thus our heavenly Father gives grace and glory. Thus it is, that *finding* is connected with *seeking*, and *crowns of glory* with *overcoming*. It is thus, as well as by the atonement of Christ, that *grace*

reigns through righteousness unto eternal life. Those who at the last day shall be saved, will be sufficiently convinced that it is all of grace, and that they have no room for glorying but in the Lord; while on the other hand, the moral government of God will be honoured, the equity of his proceedings manifested, and the mouths of ungodly sinners stopped; even when the Judge declares in the face of the universe, concerning the righteous, *These shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.*

ANSWER TO STEPHANUS, RESPECTING THE DIFFERENCE
IN THE FRAME OF HIS MIND WHEN ENGAGED IN
SOCIAL AND SECRET PRAYER.

I TAKE it for granted that Stephanus means to say, that *at the same time* when it was common for him to find great liberty and zeal in public prayer, it was usual for him to be lifeless, barren, and uncomfortable in private; otherwise there would be no difficulty in the case. That such a state of mind should excite a jealousy of himself is not surprising. Stephanus inquires after its *cause and cure.*

As to the first, permit me to ask, Are you not more influenced by the presence of creatures than by His presence who fills heaven and earth? Is there not a spice of vanity that prompts you to wish to appear to advantage when in company with your fellow-men; an emulation that stimulates invention, and which by a kind of intellectual

friction, like that of the wheels of a machine, warms your faculties, and works up your powers to an earnestness that is in danger of being mistaken for religious zeal? Such has not unfrequently been the case among professors of religion.

Let me further ask, Have you not indulged in some besetting sin, to which God and your conscience only have been witness? Private prayer is the season for such things to come to remembrance, rather than in the exercise of more public duties. Hence it may be that your face shall be covered with shame, and your soul be struck as by the darts of death, when in private; while in your more public exercises, not considering yourself as called upon to confess private sins, you may think but little about them. Let me suppose Stephanus to be a young man, and to have offended his father. Should he be admitted into public company with his father, he will not feel so great a difficulty in addressing him there, as if he was introduced into a private apartment, and was obliged to converse with him alone. In the former case, his private feelings, as being unknown to the company, will not be noticed, in the latter, the conversation can turn upon nothing else. I do not presume to determine that this is the case with Stephanus; but this I say, such causes are adequate to such effects, and it becomes Stephanus to inquire if they have no influence in his case.

As to the *cure*, that is certainly a very improper step which he proposes—declining to engage in public prayer. Let him rather betake himself to

private prayer, attended with close examination and humiliation before God: this will render public prayer more easy. If Stephanus had offended his father, as supposed above, and if, after a little free conversation with him in public company, he should feel dejected and sullen, and should be ready to resolve that he would never enter a company again with his father, because, though he could speak freely to him there, yet he was always reserved when alone, would this be lovely? Let him rather reflect, and ask, Is there not a cause? Let him resolve on this wise, I will arise and go to my Father in secret, and will say, *Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.* Let him give no rest to his eyes, nor slumber to his eyelids, till all is reconciled: otherwise, whether he pray in public or desist, his soul will be exposed to the most imminent danger.

AN ANSWER TO THE FOLLOWING QUERY:

Was the fall of Adam *fore-determined*, or only *foreseen* by God?

THE concern which the decrees of God have with the fall of man, has often been the subject of inquiry. I do not see the reason, however, why this particular fact should be singled out from others. There is nothing revealed, that I know of, concerning the fall of man being the object either of the divine foreknowledge or decree. The scriptures declare, in general, that God knoweth

the end from the beginning, from which we may conclude with certainty, that he knew all the events of time, all the causes and effects of things, through all their multiplied and diversified channels. The scriptures also ask, *Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?* which intimates that the providence and purpose of God are concerned in whatever cometh to pass. The volitions of free agents, the evil as well as the good, are constantly represented as falling under the counsels and conduct of heaven. Never did men act more freely, nor more wickedly, than the Jews, in the crucifixion of Christ; yet in that whole business they did no other than what *God's hand and counsel determined before to be done.* The delivery of Christ into their hands to be crucified, as performed by Judas, was a wicked act; yet was he *delivered according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.* The proof that the fall of man was an object of divine foreknowledge is merely *inferential*; and from the same kind of proof we may conclude, that it was, all things considered, an object of predetermination.

That this subject is deep and difficult, in the present state, is admitted; and wicked men may abuse it to their own destruction: but the thing itself is no less true and useful, if considered in the fear of God. There is a link, as some have expressed it, that unites the purposes of God, and the free actions of men, which is above our comprehension; but to deny the fact, is to disown

an all-pervading providence; which is little less than to disown a God. It is observable, in one of the foregoing passages, that Peter unites *the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God* together, and seems to have had no idea of admitting the one without the other. It is also worthy of notice, that in his manner of introducing the subject, it appears to have no tendency whatever to excuse them from guilt, by throwing the blame on the Almighty: on the contrary, it is brought in for the purpose of conviction, and actually answered the end; those to whom it was addressed, being *pricked in their hearts, and crying out, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*

The decrees of God seem to be distinguishable into *efficient* and *permissive*. With respect to moral good, God is the proper and efficient cause of it. This James teaches, *Every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights*; particularly the blessing of regeneration, which contains all moral goodness in embryo; as it follows, *Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth.*

With respect to moral evil, God permits it, and it was his eternal purpose so to do. If it be right for God to permit sin, it could not be wrong for him to determine to do so; unless it be wrong to determine to do what is right. The decree of God to permit sin, does not in the least excuse the sinner, or warrant him to ascribe it to God, instead of himself.

The same inspired writer who teaches, with respect to good, that *it cometh from above*, teaches also in the same passage, with respect to evil, that it proceedeth from ourselves; *Let no one say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil; neither tempteth he any one. But every one is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.* And as if he considered the danger of mistaking on this profound subject, he adds by way of caution, *Do not err, my beloved brethren.*

ANSWER TO THE FOLLOWING QUERY:

How may a man ascertain his election of God to the ministry of the gospel? And what are sufficient qualifications for that important office?

I CONCEIVE an answer to the latter part of the question will enable a person to decide upon the former; it being a principle which may be taken for granted, that whoever possesses the essential qualifications for the Christian ministry, is called of God to exercise them. *Every man that hath received the gift is commanded of God to minister the same, as a good steward of the manifold grace of God.* Only let him take heed, that *if he speak, it be according to the oracles of God.*

Now the scriptures are not silent on the qualifications of a bishop. See 1 Tim. iii. 1—7. By a bishop, I must be allowed to understand, not a

lord in lawn, but a Christian pastor. And besides those requisites which belong to his moral and religious character, there are two things which appear to be absolutely necessary to the discharge of this sacred office; one is, that he have a true *desire after it*, and the other, *an ability for it*. The *first* of these qualifications is included in the terms, *if a man DESIRE the office of a bishop*. It is supposed that this desire shall spring from a pure motive, and not from the love of ease, affluence, or applause; but from a concern to glorify God, and promote the salvation of men. It is necessary, in my judgment, that there should be a *special desire* of this sort; a kind of fire kindled in the bosom, that it would be painful to extinguish. The *second* qualification is contained in those expressive terms, *APT TO TEACH*. He must possess not only an inventive mind, but a kind of natural readiness in communicating his ideas.

Neither of these qualifications is sufficient in itself. A man may have a desire after the Christian ministry, and that desire may arise from the purest motives; and yet, having no competent ability for the work, he is certainly not called of God to be employed in it. I doubt not but the Lord will take it well that it was in the heart of such persons to build him a house, though their desire may never be accomplished. On the other hand, a person may not only be a good man and judicious, but possess a readiness in communicating his ideas: and yet, having no special *thirst* after the work of the ministry, or of thus

promoting the salvation of souls, he is unfit to engage in it.

Of the *first* qualification, every man must be his own judge; for who else can be acquainted with his desires and motives? Of the *last*, those with whom we stand connected. Whether we be *apt to teach*, is a question on which we ought not to decide ourselves: those are the best judges who have heard us, and been taught by us. When a congregation of Christians invite a person to serve them in the gospel, it is a sufficient proof that they consider him as equal to the undertaking. If a person so invited be but clear as to the former qualification, I conceive he may leave the latter to the judgment of others; and conclude, that so long as a door is opened for him to preach the gospel, he is called of God to do so.

AN ANSWER TO THE FOLLOWING QUERIES :

1. Did not the law of God require of Christ, considered as a man, a perfect obedience on his own account? If it did, how can that obedience be imputed to sinners for their justification?

2. How does it appear to be necessary that Christ should both obey the law in his people's stead, and yet suffer punishment on the account of their transgressions; seeing obedience is all the law requires?

TO the *first*, I should answer, The objection proceeds upon the supposition, that a public head, or representative, whose obedience should be imputable to others, must possess it in a degree

over and above what is required of him. But was it thus with the first public head of mankind? Had Adam kept the covenant of his God, his righteousness, it is supposed, would have been imputed to his posterity, in the same sense as the righteousness of Christ is imputed to believers; that is, God, to express his approbation of his conduct, would have rewarded it, by confirming him and his posterity in the enjoyment of everlasting life: yet he would have wrought no work of supererogation, nor have done any more than he was required to do on his own account.

But though, for argument's sake, I have allowed that the human nature of Christ was under obligation to keep the law on his own account; yet I question the propriety of that mode of stating things. In the person of Christ, the divinity and humanity were so intimately united, that perhaps we ought not to conceive of the latter as having any such distinct subsistence as to be an agent by itself, or as being obliged to obey, or do any thing of itself, or on its own account: Christ, as man, possessed no being *on his own account*. He was always in union with the Son of God; a public person, whose very existence was for the sake of others. Hence his coming under the law is represented, not only as a part of his humiliation, to which he was naturally unobliged, but as a thing *distinct from his assuming human nature*; which one should think it could not be, if it were necessarily included in it. He was *made of a woman, made under the law—made in the likeness*

of men, he took upon him the form of a servant— being found in fashion as a man, he became obedient unto death.*

As to the *second* question, Obedience is not all that the law requires of a *guilty* creature: (and in the place of such creatures our Saviour stood) a guilty creature is not only obliged to be obedient for the future, but to make satisfaction for the past. The covenant made with Adam had two branches: *Obey, and live; sin, and die.* Now the obedience of Christ did honour to the preceptive part of the covenant, but not to the penal part of it. Mere obedience to the law would have made no atonement, would have afforded no expression of the divine displeasure against sin; therefore, after a life spent in doing the will of God, he must lay down his life: nor was it *possible that this cup should pass from him.*

As obedience would have been insufficient without suffering, so it appears that suffering would have been insufficient without obedience: the latter was *preparatory* to the former.† *Such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.* And such a meetness could not have appeared, but by a life of

* See Doddridge's Translation of Phil. ii. 7.

† I use the terms *obedience* and *suffering*, the one to express Christ's conformity to the precept of the law, the other his sustaining the penalty of it; though, in strict propriety of speech, the obedience of Christ included suffering, and his suffering included obedience. He laid down his life in obedience to the Father.

obedience to God. As a Mediator between God and man, it was necessary that he should be, and appear to be, an enemy to sin, ere he could be admitted to plead for sinners. Such was our Redeemer to the last, and this it was that endeared him to the Father. *Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.* Finally: the sufferings of Christ could go only to the removal of the curse; they could afford no title to eternal life, which being promised on condition of obedience, that condition must be fulfilled in order to insure the blessing. Hence it is by *the righteousness of one* that we partake of *justification of life.*

The great ends originally designed by the promise and the threatening, were to express God's love of righteousness, and his abhorrence of unrighteousness; and these ends are answered by the obedience and sufferings of Christ, and that in a higher degree, owing to the dignity of his character, than if man had either kept the law, or suffered the penalty for the breach of it. But if Christ had only obeyed the law, and had not suffered; or had only suffered, and not obeyed; one or other of these ends must, for aught we can perceive, have failed of being accomplished. But his *obedience unto death*, which includes both, gloriously answered every end of moral government, and opened a way by which God could honourably, not only pardon the sinner who should believe in Jesus, but bestow upon him eternal life.

Pardon being granted with a view to Christ's atonement, would evince the resolution of Jehovah to punish sin; and eternal life, being bestowed as a reward to his obedience, would equally evince him the friend of righteousness.

ON THE UNPARDONABLE SIN.

THE forgiveness of sin, is doubtless one of the most interesting subjects to a sinful creature; and if there be one sin upon which the Divine Being has thought fit to set a mark of peculiar displeasure, by declaring it unpardonable, it is worthy of the most serious inquiry to determine what it is. Perhaps the most likely method of coming at the truth, will be by first taking a view of those passages of scripture, where it is either fully expressed, or implied, and then making a few remarks upon them.

There is no express mention of the sin against the Holy Spirit, under the former dispensation. It seems, however, that there was a period in the lives of Cain and Saul, and perhaps of some others, when they were given up of God to inevitable destruction. The first, or rather the only express mention that we have of it, is in the Evangelists, where it is applied to the Pharisees, on occasion of their blasphemously asserting, *This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils.* Dr. Whitby thinks these passages were only designed to warn them of the sin, and that it was not possible to be actually committed

till the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost; and assigns this as a reason, that Christ afterwards prayed for those very persons. But those for whom Christ prayed, *knew not what they did*: they were in the same situation with Saul, while a persecutor; they *did it ignorantly, and in unbelief*. This, however, was not true of all his murderers. Those who made answer to Judas, who confessed that he had betrayed innocent blood, *See thou to that*, could not, I am afraid, have this plea alleged on their behalf. It is true, the multitude did it ignorantly, and many of their rulers, as Peter candidly acknowledged; but this, I should think, is more than could be said of them all. It is pretty evident that some of them acted upon the principles suggested by our Lord: *This is the heir, come let us kill him*. It is no objection to this, that it is said, *If they had known him, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory*; for *knowledge* is not here put for a mere conviction that he was the Messiah, but for that spiritual discernment, which is possessed only by believers, being *revealed to them by the Spirit, who searcheth the deep things of God*. From certain passages of scripture it appears to me, that some of the Pharisees were guilty of the unpardonable sin. See John ix. 41. and xii. 42, 43.

Perhaps the next intimation that is given of this sin, is in Peter's address to Simon Magus: *Repent of this thy wickedness, and pray God, IF PERHAPS the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee*. It does not appear that the Apostle considered

the sorcerer as having *certainly* committed the unpardonable sin: but it seems he considered it as a matter of doubt, and therefore, with a view to impress upon his mind the greatness of his wickedness, and the danger he was in, expressed himself in that doubtful manner, which he was not used to do in ordinary cases.

The apostle Paul seems to have had an eye to this sin, when speaking of himself; he says, *I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly and in unbelief*. None will suppose that Saul's ignorance, much less his unbelief, had any thing in it meritorious, which could induce the Divine Being to show him mercy: on the contrary, it was sinful, and that for which he reckoned himself the chief of sinners. But it was not accompanied with such circumstances of aggravation as to exclude him from an interest in divine mercy: it was not the unpardonable sin.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews there are several intimations of this sin; particularly in the following passages: *It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.—For if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation,*

which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses's law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses: 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 to the Spirit of grace?

Peter also describes the same characters: *For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.*

Lastly: It must be with reference to this sin that John writes in his First Epistle; *If any man see his brother sin a sin not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life.—There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it.—We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.*

The above are the principal, if not the only passages, in which reference is made to the unpardonable sin. From these, taken altogether, I shall offer the following remarks:—

First: When the scripture speaks of any sin as *unpardonable*, or of the *impossibility* of those who have committed it being renewed again unto repentance, we are not to understand them as expressing any natural limitation of either the power or the mercy of God, nor yet of the efficacy of the Saviour's blood; but merely of a limitation dictated by sovereign wisdom and righteousness.

Secondly: It is not any one particular *act* of sin that denominates it unpardonable, but the *circumstances* under which it is committed. The act, in the case of the Pharisees, was uttering blasphemous language against the miracles of Christ; in the supposed case of Saul, it was blasphemously persecuting, and otherwise injuriously treating, the church of Christ; in the case of the Hebrews, it was apostasy from the truth; in the false teachers described by Peter, it was not only perverting the truth, but returning to sensual abominations. These acts being various, the unpardonable sin could not consist in any one of them in itself considered, but in their being committed under certain circumstances.

Thirdly: The peculiar circumstance under which either of these acts becomes unpardonable, seems to be, the party being possessed of a certain degree of *light*; and that not merely objective, as exhibited in the gospel, but subjective, as possessed by the understanding. This light, which is attributed to the Holy Spirit, seems to afford the specific reason of the unpardonable sin being represented as committed against him. The

distinction which our Lord makes between blasphemy *against the Son of Man*, and that *against the Holy Spirit*, declaring the one pardonable, and the other unpardonable, seems to consist in this: the former, during his humiliation, might be the effect of ignorance and unbelief; but the latter (imputing to satanic influence those benevolent miracles, which were not only wrought before their eyes by the Spirit of God, but approved themselves to their consciences to be of God) could be no other than wilful malignity. And this would be the case, especially after the pouring out of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, when such a blaze of light shone forth in confirmation of the gospel: a blasphemous opposition to it at that period would, where the light was not only exhibited, but possessed in the understanding, be a black mark of reprobation. The blasphemy of Saul was accompanied with a great degree of objective light; but it did not so possess his understanding and conscience, but that he did it ignorantly, and in unbelief. Had he committed the same blasphemy knowingly, or in spite of a full persuasion in his conscience that the cause he opposed was the cause of God; it is supposed, by his own manner of speaking, that it would have been unpardonable, and that he would not have obtained mercy. The case of the Hebrews turns entirely upon the same circumstance: they not only had the gospel objectively exhibited before them, but became the subjects of deep convictions, and powerful impressions. They were

enlightened, and had tasted the heavenly gift; were made partakers of the Holy Spirit; tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come. None of these expressions, it is true, denote that divine change which *accompanies salvation*, being expressly distinguished from it; (and John also, in his First Epistle intimates, that those *who are born of God*, cannot be guilty of this sin,) yet they undoubtedly express powerful impressions, and deep convictions, together with some extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit, which were common in those times. All this rendered a departure from the truth, what the Apostle, in the tenth chapter of the same Epistle, calls *sinning wilfully, after we have received the knowledge of the truth; treading under foot the Son of God, and doing despite to the Spirit of grace.* It is also upon this circumstance of *light*, that the case of those apostates mentioned by Peter, turns. *After they have KNOWN the way of righteousness, to turn from the holy commandment* is that which seals their doom.

Fourthly: The *impossibility* of such characters being recovered and saved, arises from two causes:

1. The only way, or medium, of a sinner's salvation is by the sacrifice of Christ; but the nature of their sin is such, that they *wilfully tread him under foot, and treat the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, as an unholy thing.* Now, if the sacrifice of Christ be thus treated, there is no other way of escape: *There remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a fearful looking for of judgment.* Hence it becomes a hopeless

undertaking for the servants of God to attempt any thing for their recovery. What can they do? Nothing but what they have done already in vain. The grounds which they have ordinarily to go over in saving sinners from the wrath to come, are, *Repentance from dead works; faith towards God; baptism of water, and in the primitive times, of the Holy Spirit, accompanied with the laying on of hands; exhibiting to them the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment:* but these things have been *known and rejected*, have lost their force: why should they be repeated? No, saith the Apostle, *leaving these first principles*, and those who have rejected them, in the hand of God, we will go on, with our work, *unto perfection.*—*The plowman doth not plow ALL DAY to sow.—and bread-corn is bruised, because he will not EVER be threshing it.*

2. The only efficient cause of a sinner's being brought to repentance, and so to forgiveness, is the almighty and sovereign influence of the Holy Spirit; and the only hope that is left for such characters, must arise from the exertion of His power, with whom all things are naturally possible: *But of him they are given up! they have done despite to the Spirit of grace*, and he hath utterly abandoned them to their own delusions! See Heb. vi. 7, 8.

Fifthly: The cases which in our times appear to approach the nearest to this sin, are, those of persons who apostatize from the truth after having enjoyed great religious advantages, obtained much light, felt

strong convictions, and made considerable progress in reforming their conduct. The apostasy of such characters, as of some among the Hebrews, is sometimes *sentimental*. Having long felt the gospel way of salvation to grate upon their feelings, they fall in with some flesh-pleasing scheme; either that of open infidelity, or some one of those which approach the nearest to it; and now their conduct becoming equally loose with their principles, when reproved by their friends they keep themselves in countenance by professing to have changed their sentiments in religious matters. In them is fulfilled what was predicted of some by the apostle Paul: *They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause, God shall send them strong delusions, that they should believe a lie:—and be damned.*

The apostasy of others, like those described in the Second Epistle of Peter, is of a more *practical* nature. Having long felt the yoke of religion galling to their inclinations, they burst the bonds, and let loose the reins of lust; and to ward off reproof and keep themselves in countenance, affect to treat all religion with contempt; raking together the faults of professing Christians, as an excuse for their own iniquities. Such characters are commonly the worst of all, and the most dangerous to society; nor do I recollect any instance of their having been *renewed again unto repentance: twice dead*, they seem doomed to be *plucked up by the roots*. In them is verified what our Lord speaks, of a man out of whom should be cast an unclean spirit,

which goeth forth in search of a new habitation, seeking rest, but finding none, and at length resolves on a return to his old abode. And when he cometh, he findeth it empty, swept and garnished. Then he goeth, and taketh with him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and they enter in, and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

I am afraid, that to the above might be added a great number of characters, who in early life were of a decent and grave deportment; and who, possessing promising abilities, were encouraged by their friends to engage in *the work of the ministry*. Their main study being to cultivate their powers, they have at length attained the art of conveying truth and commending virtue in a style of pleasing energy. But as they have never loved nor lived upon the truth which they have communicated, so neither have they practised the virtues which they have recommended. Slaves to popularity, avarice, or lust, they pass through life under a mask of disguise; and being conversant with divine things, as surgeons and soldiers are with the shedding of human blood, they cease to have any effect upon them, with respect to their own souls. I would not presume to pass sentence on all such characters; but neither would I be in their situation for the whole world!

The chief difficulties which attend the account of the unpardonable sin, affect ministers, in their praying for, and preaching to sinners and dejected souls, who are apt to draw dark conclusions against

themselves. With respect to *prayer*, we have directions given us on this head. (1 John v. 16.) We are not to pray that God would forgive men *this sin*, because this would be contradicting the revealed will of God; but as we cannot tell with certainty who are the subjects of it, we may pray for sinners, without distinction, that God would give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; always submitting our petitions to the sovereign direction of unerring wisdom. But it may be asked, with respect to *preaching*, How can a minister proclaim the mercy of God to his auditory in an indefinite way? How can he invite them to a participation of the blessings of the gospel? How can he declare, that if any one of them, even the greatest sinner among them, return to God by Jesus Christ, he will be accepted; when for aught he knows, there may be persons in his presence who may be in the situation above described, and for whom no mercy is designed? To this I answer, the same objection may be made against the doctrine of *election*; and is made by the adversaries of that doctrine. Let a minister pursue his work, and leave the effect to God. What he declares of the willingness of Christ to pardon and receive all who return to him, is true; and it might be said of any man in truth, that if he returned to God by Jesus Christ, he would be forgiven. The impossibility, with respect to those who have committed the unpardonable sin, respects their repentance, as well as their forgiveness; and even that is not a natural, but a moral impossibility.

With respect to *dejected minds*, let it be observed, that no person, let his crimes have been what they may, if he be grieved at heart for having committed them, and sincerely ask forgiveness in the name of Christ, needs to fear that he shall be rejected. Such grief is itself a proof that he has *not* committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, because it is a mark of that sin to be accompanied with a hard and impenitent heart. Such characters may feel the remorse of a Cain, a Saul, or a Judas; but a tear of godly sorrow never dropped from their eyes.

THE DUTY OF CHRISTIAN FORGIVENESS:

In answer to R. W. who requests an explanation of Matt. xviii. 23, and following verses, according to the Calvinistic plan.

The manifest design of the parable is to impress upon us the duty of forgiveness one to another, from the consideration of God's freely forgiving us. That in the parable, I imagine, which struck the querist as inconsistent with Calvinistic principles, was the supposition of a man being given up to the tormenters, whose sins had been forgiven. Some expositors, in order to solve this difficulty, suppose the punishment to mean his being given up to *church* censures; others to temporal calamities, and the accusations of a guilty conscience: But it appears to me that this is altogether foreign from the design of Christ. Our Lord certainly meant to suggest to *all the professors of Christianity, all the subjects of his visible kingdom*, that unless they forgave men their trespasses, they themselves

should not be forgiven, but should be cast into endless torment. The true solution of the difficulty I take to be this: it is common with our Lord in his parables to address men *upon their own principles*; not according to what they were in fact, but what they were in profession and expectation. For example: *There is joy over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons WHICH NEED NO REPENTANCE.*—*The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call THE RIGHTEOUS, but sinners to repentance.* Not that there were any among mankind who were *righteous, whole, and needed no repentance*, in fact, but merely in their own account. The *elder son* in the parable, in Luke xv. is doubtless intended to represent the scribes and pharisees, who at that time drew near and murmured at Christ's receiving sinners. Ver. 1, 2. And yet this elder son is allowed to be very obedient, (at least he is not contradicted in this matter,) and to have a large interest in his father's inheritance; not because it was so in fact, but as reasoning with them upon their own principles.

But what is nearer still to the case in hand, is the parable addressed to Simon the pharisee. Our Lord here supposes that Simon was a *little* sinner, and a *forgiven* sinner; and yet in fact he was neither. No set of men were greater sinners in reality than the pharisees; and this man gave proof of his being in an impenitent and unforgiven state. But Christ reasoned with him upon his own principles; q. d. 'You reckon yourself a *little*

sinner, and that what few failings you have will doubtless be forgiven you: well, be it so; this woman is a great sinner, and so accounts herself: I forgave her all her transgressions, and therefore you need not wonder at her conduct; her love to me is greater than yours, even allowing, for argument's sake, that your love is sincere.'

Thus in the parable under consideration, our Lord solemnly warns all the members of his visible kingdom, who professed to be the people of God, and who had their expectations of being forgiven of him, without determining whether their professions were sincere, or their expectations well founded; that if they forgave not men their trespasses, neither would his heavenly Father forgive them their trespasses. Whether they were sincere or not, made no difference as to the argument: If a person lays his account with being forgiven of God, and is unforgiving to his brother, his conduct is inconsistent and wicked; for, being under the power of self-deception, his motive is the same as if it had been otherwise.

There are some subjects on which I feel myself incapable of throwing any fresh light. Where this is the case I think it my duty to decline them. Under this description I must reckon the questions of a correspondent who signs himself A BEREAN: and another, who has addressed me under the signature of CANDIDUS, concerning *the decrees of God*. I feel difficulties upon those great subjects, on which, at present, I had rather pray than write,

ON THE IMMACULATE LIFE OF CHRIST.

THE character and work of Christ form a very considerable part of the gospel embassy. The attention of Christians in all ages, has been deservedly drawn towards this important subject. His Godhead, his manhood, his miraculous conception, his life, death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession at the right hand of God, are topics, each of them full of the richest consolation to believers. There is nothing pertaining to Christ which is uninteresting. It has lately struck my mind, that the immaculate life of Christ is a subject that has not been insisted on in our sermons and bodies of divinity in proportion to its importance in the evangelical scheme. The thoughts which I have to offer upon this subject will be contained in *two parts*. In the first, I shall take a view of the evidences with which it is supported; and in the second, consider its connexion with the truth of Christianity, and of some of its leading principles.

The EVIDENCES by which the immaculate life of our Lord Jesus Christ is supported are as follows:—

First: *His friends, who knew the most of him, and who wrote his life, describe him as without fault.* The characters of men are often best esteemed by those who know the least of them. Like works of art, they will not bear a close inspection; but those who were most conversant with Jesus, *beheld his glory*, and loved him best.

Peter tells us, *He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.* He describes him as *a lamb without spot.* Paul speaks of him as being *made sin for us, who knew no sin.* John teaches, that *he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him was no sin:* and the whole company of the disciples, in their address to God, speak of him as his *holy child Jesus.* Acts iv. 27. It is true, some of the evangelists do not make express mention of his perfect innocence; but they all write his life as faultless. There is not a shade of imperfection that attaches to his character, from the beginning to the end of their accounts of him. This evidence derives peculiar weight from the evident impartiality of those writers in other cases: they do not hide each other's faults, nor even their own. The imperfections of the apostles, during Christ's life upon earth, were numerous, and, in some cases, affecting; yet they narrate them with the greatest sincerity. Even those faults which are most degrading to dignity of character, and the most mortifying to reflect upon, they never affect to conceal. They tell of their little foolish contests for superiority, of their carnality in desiring an earthly kingdom, and of their cowardice in forsaking their Lord and Master in the hour of extremity; but never do they suggest any thing to *his* disadvantage.

Secondly: *His worst enemies have never been able to substantiate a single charge against him.* Though our friends have the greatest advantages of knowing us, yet it may be alleged they are

partial, and that the scrutiny of an adversary is most likely to discover our imperfections. Be it so : it is to the glory of Christ's character that it will bear the test of both. A public challenge was given to the Jews, his most inveterate enemies, to accuse him of sin ; (John viii. 46.) and not one of them dared to accept it. That which adds peculiar weight to this evidence is, the circumstance that Christ had just before inveighed against them with the keenest severity : *Ye are of your father the devil*, said he, *and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a liar from the beginning ; and because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.* Under such charges from him, if there had been any shadow of a ground for accusation, they would most certainly have seized it. The apostles gave nearly a similar challenge on behalf of their Lord as he had given for himself. They taxed their countrymen with *having denied the Holy One and the Just, and preferred a murderer before him.* How are we to account for the silence of these adversaries ? It was not for want of will ; it must, therefore, be for want of power.

But there were some who, in the lifetime of Jesus, did accuse him. They said, *He is a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.* They insinuated that he was *ambitious*. Jesus having declared, saying, *I am the light of the world*, they answered, *Thou barest record of thyself, thy record is not true ;* and the same objection is repeated by a modern Jewish writer.* They also

* Mr. Levi.

charged him with blasphemy, in that he, being a man, made himself God; and for this supposed blasphemy, they put him to death. To the former part of these charges it may be answered, that they who preferred them, do not appear to have believed them: if they had, they would have made use of them, especially when challenged to *accuse our Lord of sin*. As to the latter part of them, I acknowledge, were I to embrace any system of Christianity, which leaves out the proper deity of Christ, I should be unable to vindicate him. Either his words did mean what the Jews understood him to mean, or they did not. If they did, upon every hypothesis which excludes his proper deity, he was a blasphemer; if they did not, he ought explicitly, and with abhorrence, to have rejected the idea of making himself God;—but, if I admit that he really was *God manifest in the flesh*, all these objections fall to the ground.

It is worthy of notice, that modern unbelievers are not very eager to attack the moral character of Christ. Through all their writings, full of railing accusations on every other subject, one cannot but remark a cautious reserve upon this. Mr. Paine, who, in a talent of the highest importance to the cause of infidelity, I mean impudence, has had but few equals; even Mr. Paine declines this part of the business. Amidst all his rancour against revelation, he seems disposed to follow the advice of Pilate's wife, to *have nothing to do with that just man*. "Nothing," he observes in his *Age of Reason*, "which is here said, can apply

even with the most distant disrespect to the *real* character of Jesus Christ. He was a virtuous and an amiable man. The morality that he preached and practised, was of the most benevolent kind." Whether Mr. Paine can consistently with these concessions reject the evangelical history, we shall by and by inquire; suffice it at present to observe, that though he disowns Jesus to be the Son of God, yet he ranks among the witnesses in favour of his moral character.* But, can it be true, we may be tempted to ask, that Mr. Paine, that determined adversary to Christianity, should have made such a concession in favour of Christ? *Is Saul also among the prophets?* It is even so; nor let it appear a matter of surprise: the father of lies himself was constrained to unite in this truth: *I know thee who thou art,—the Holy One of God.*

Thirdly: *Christ himself, who best knew his own heart, and who never was known to boast, bore witness of himself, that he was free from sin.* Not only did he challenge his most inveterate enemies, saying, *Which of you accuseth me of sin?* but declared, what no other man did or could, that he *always did those things which pleased God*; that there was *no unrighteousness in him*; that when the prince of this world should come, he should *find nothing in him*; and that he was *meek and lowly in heart*, a perfect model for his followers

* The present leader of the English Socinians has dared to insinuate, that, if we knew the whole of his private history, it is probable he might not be altogether free from sin, nor is it of much consequence to him whether he were so or not. R.

to imitate, and into whose *image* they were predestinated to be conformed. If it be objected, in the words of the ancient Jews, *He beareth record of himself, his record is not true*,—it might be answered in the words of Jesus, ‘Though he bare record of himself, yet his record is true; for he knew whence and what he was;’ and as he was never known to deal in empty boasting, his testimony has great weight.

Fourthly: *The temptations that our Lord underwent, instead of drawing him aside, displayed his character to greater advantage.* Seasons of temptation in the lives of men, even of good men, are commonly dark seasons, and leave behind them sad evidences of their imperfection. It was not without reason that our Lord cautioned us to pray, saying, *Lead us not into temptation.* There are but few, if any instances, in which we enter the field of contest, and come off without a wound; but, to our Redeemer, temptation was the pathway to glory. There was nothing in him on which it could fasten: its arrows, therefore, rebounded upon the head of the tempter. In all points he was tempted like as we are, *yet without sin.* He underwent the trials of poverty and want. He was often hungry and thirsty, and had not where to lay his head; yet he bore it without repining; he wrought miracles to satisfy the wants, and alleviate the miseries of others; but, for himself, strictly speaking, he wrought no miracle. It was upon this ground that Satan first accosted him; *If thou be the Son of God,*

command that these stones be made bread: q. d. 'Would I, having all creation at command, know the want of a piece of bread?' But this temptation was repelled in a manner that discovered his heart to be wholly devoted to the will of God. Our Lord had also temptations of another kind; he had worldly honours offered him. Not only did Satan present to him *all the kingdoms of the world*, but the Jewish populace would have *made him a king*, even *by force*, if he had not withdrawn himself. If Jesus had possessed the least degree of worldly ambition, there were arguments enough to have induced him to comply with the popular desire. They had no king but Cæsar, and he was a tyrannic invader; who had just as much right in Judea as the Empress of Russia and the King of Prussia in Poland. If the virtue of Jesus had resembled that of the great sages of Grecian and Roman antiquity, he would have embraced this opportunity, and his name might have been enrolled in the annals of fame. Their pride was to be patriots; but that which they called patriotism was abhorrent to the spirit of Christ. He possessed too much philanthropy to enter into national prejudices and antipathies: though the deliverance of his country from the Roman yoke might have been doing a great national justice, and, in this view, very lawful for some persons to have undertaken, yet he declined it; for it made no part of that all-important design for which he came into the world. He was *doing a great work, and therefore could not come down.*

As his last sufferings drew on, his devotedness to God, and his disinterested love to men, appeared more and more conspicuous. He incurred the displeasure of the Samaritans by *stedfastly setting his face to go up to Jerusalem*, even though he knew what would follow upon it. Under the prospect of his sufferings he prayed, saying, *Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour; but for this cause came I to this hour. Father, glorify thy name.* Never, surely, was such a flood of tenderness poured forth as that which follows in his last discourse to his disciples, and in his concluding prayer for them. Follow him to the Jewish and Roman tribunals, and witness his meekness and patience. *When he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously. He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and, as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.* There are two kinds of characters which are common among men,—oppressive tyrants, and cringing sycophants. The first are lords, the last are slaves; but the character given of Christ shows that he was neither the one nor the other. *He did no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.* Though the Lord and Master of his disciples, he was among them as their servant; and when brought before Herod and Pilate, he betrayed no signs of fear; but, amidst their blustering, imperious, and scornful treatment, maintained a dignified silence,

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows. Throughout his sufferings he manifested the tenderest concern for sinners, and even for his murderers. *The same night in which he was betrayed,* he was employed in providing for us, by instituting the sacred supper; and as he hung upon the cross, and beheld his enemies, he prayed, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!*

Let not fastidious infidelity object his want of *fortitude* in the garden; or rather, let it object, and make the most it can of the objection. It is true *his soul was troubled*; it is true he prayed, saying, *Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!* That is, he discovered what, among men of the most refined sense, are always accounted 'the amiable weaknesses of human nature.' Is it an honour under affliction to carry it off, or affect to carry it off with a high hand? Rather, is it not an honour to feel the hand of God in it, and to acknowledge that we feel it? And if, amidst these feelings, we be in *subjection to the Father of spirits*; if, while we mourn, we do not murmur; this is the highest degree of perfection of which human nature is capable. Such was the spirit of our Redeemer, and such the conclusion of his prayer in the garden: *Not my will, but thine be done.*

That our blessed Lord was not deficient in *real* fortitude, is manifest from his conduct during his trial and crucifixion. He feared God, and put up strong cries, and was heard in that he feared; but he feared not men. There his spirit shrank

under the weight: but here he is firm as a rock. The principal engines with which he was attacked from men were *pain* and *disgrace*. By the first they deprived him of life, and by the last they hoped to wound his reputation, and cover his name with eternal infamy: but neither the one nor the other could divert him from his course: *He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

By the misgivings of Christ's human nature in the garden, together with his firmness before men, we are furnished with very important instructions. From thence we learn, that the most dreadful part of his sufferings were not those which proceeded from men, but those which came immediately from the hand of God. This agrees with what is implied in that pathetic exclamation, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* He could have borne the rest, but this was worse than death! How can this agree with any other idea of the death of Christ, than that of his being a substitute for sinners? Upon no other principle can his agony in the garden, or his exclamation upon the cross, be fairly accounted for. From whence also we learn the absolute necessity of Christ's death for our salvation. If it had been possible for the great designs of mercy to have been accomplished without his being made a propitiation for our sins, there is every reason to suppose that his request for an exemption would have been granted.

IN a former paper, I considered the *evidences* of the immaculate life of Christ; in this I shall inquire into its *importance*, as it stands connected with the truth of Christianity itself, and of some of its most interesting branches.

First: *If the life of our Lord Jesus Christ was immaculate, it must go a great way towards proving the truth of the gospel which he taught, and of that religion which he inculcated.* If Jesus Christ was “a virtuous and an amiable man,” as Mr. Paine himself acknowledges, he must have been what he professed to be, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world. To allege, as this writer does, that “Christ wrote no account of himself—that the history of him is altogether the work of other people,” is mere trifling. If the history that is written of him is undeserving of credit, how came Mr. Paine to know any thing about either the amiableness of his character, or the excellence of that morality which he preached and practised? He knows nothing of either the one or the other but through the medium of the evangelical history; and if he admit this history in one case, with what consistency can he reject it in another.

Mr. Paine affects to rank Christianity with other religions—with heathenism and Mahomedism, calling the New Testament writers “The Christian mythologists;” But what founder or teacher of any religion will he resort to, whose character will bear any comparison with that of Christ. Among the sages of antiquity, or the teachers of

what is called *the religion of nature*, there is not one to be found whose life will bear a thorough scrutiny. Natural religion itself must be ashamed of its advocates: and as to Mahomet, there is scarcely any thing in his character but a combination of ambition, brutality, and lust, at the sight of which nature itself revolts. "Go," says an eloquent writer, "to your natural religion: lay before her Mahomet and his disciples, arrayed in armour of blood, riding in triumph over the spoils of thousands and ten thousands, who fell by his victoriôus sword. Shew her the cities which he set in flames, the countries which he ravished and destroyed, and the miserable distress of all the inhabitants of the earth. When she has viewed him in this scene, carry her into his retirements. Shew her the prophet's chambers, his concubines, and his wives; let her see his adultery, and hear him allege revelation and his divine commission to justify his lust and his oppression. When she is tired of this prospect, then shew her the blessed Jesus, humble and meek, doing good to all the sons of men, patiently instructing both the ignorant and the perverse. Let her see him in his most retired privacies. Let her follow him to the Mount, and hear his devotions and supplications to God. Carry her to his table, to view his poor fare, and hear his heavenly discourse. Let her see him injured, not provoked. Let her attend him to the tribunal, and consider the patience with which he endured the scoff and the reproach of his enemies. Lead her to the

cross, and let her view him in the agonies of death, and hear his last prayer for his persecutors, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do!*

“When natural religion has viewed both, ask which is the prophet of God? But her answer we have already had, when she saw part of this scene through the eyes of the centurion who attended at his cross: by him she spake, and said, *Truly this man was the Son of God.*”*

To admit the amiableness of Christ's moral character, and yet reject the evangelical history of him, is choosing a very untenable ground. The history which the evangelists have given of Christ, evinces its own authenticity. A character so drawn is a proof of its having really existed, and of those who drew it possessing a mind congenial with it. If Christ had not been that immaculate character which they represent, they could not have so described him. It is not in the power of man to invent any thing like it; the imagination of impostors, especially, would have been utterly unequal to the task; such a picture could not have been drawn without an original corresponding with it. Writers of fiction have often produced wonderful characters; they have emblazoned their heroes with extraordinary charms, but they are charms of a different kind from what Jesus possessed. The beauties of holiness are not to be collected in the manner in which the sacred writers have

* Bishop Sherlock's Sermons, Vol. I. pp. 270, 271.

collected them, by the power of imagination ; and as the existence of the picture implies the reality of the original, so also it proves the congeniality of mind possessed by those who drew it. Let the moral character of Christ have been ever so fair, a set of impostors could not possibly have drawn it in the manner in which it is drawn ; for this it was necessary that it should be not only observed, but felt and loved and imitated. If Judas had written a history of Christ, it would have been a very different one from those which are transmitted to us, even though it had been of a piece with his confession, *I have betrayed innocent blood.*

I am not inclined to call Mr. Paine, what he calls the sacred writers, either *fool* or *liar* ; but methinks it were no great labour to prove him to be both. It certainly was no mark of *wisdom* in him to acknowledge Christ to be “an amiable character, and that he taught and practised morality of the most benevolent kind,” in an attempt to overturn Christianity ; and the flagrant manner in which he has *belied* the sacred writers must be manifest to every one that is in the least acquainted with them, and will take the trouble to compare them with what he has asserted concerning them.

Secondly: From the purity of Christ’s character arises an important part of his fitness for his undertaking ; without this he could not have been a *priest*, a *sacrifice*, or a *mediator*. It was necessary that the priests of Aaron’s order should be *without blemish*, and their sacrifices *without spot*.* This

* Lev. xxi, 21. Numb. xxvii, 3, 9, 11.

purity, it is true, was of a ceremonial kind, but it was typical of that which was moral; for in reference to this it is said of Christ, that *such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners.*—*We are redeemed, not with silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*—*He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.* The priests under the law were but ceremonially clean; they needed *daily to offer up sacrifices, first for their own sins, and then for the people's*: but Christ *offered himself once without spot to God, and thereby perfected for ever them that are sanctified.* A polluted being might endure the demerit of sin, as the ungodly actually will; but he cannot make atonement for it, so as to *make an end* of it. The world might have borne its own iniquity, but it is the *Lamb of God* only that can *bear it away.* And as it was an important part of the priestly office to mediate, and make intercession for the people, so Christ is our mediator and intercessor before the throne: *With his blood he entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.* This mediation is founded upon his sacrifice; and the acceptableness of the former depends upon his spotless purity equally with the latter. A mediator could in no case be admitted to plead in behalf of a criminal, unless he himself were innocent. Had Moses been guilty of idolatry at Horeb, he could not have mediated on behalf of Israel. Our *advocate with the Father is Jesus*

Christ the righteous. Though he mingled with sinners, yet he must be holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from them; and though he pleaded for sinners, yet he must not extenuate their sin, but condemn it without reserve, and justify the righteous government of God, by which it was threatened with destruction. It was on this account that the mediation of Christ was so highly acceptable to God, and so gloriously successful, that he gave him the desire of his heart. *Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness, above thy fellows.*

Thirdly: From the spotless purity of Christ's character arises his fitness to be the great *exemplar*, after which we should be formed, and which it should be our daily practice to imitate. God hath *predestinated us to be conformed to the image of his Son.* Jesus saith to the weary and heavy laden, *Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls.* One great object of the Holy Spirit is to *glorify Christ*; and this he doth, not only by *receiving of the things of Christ, and shewing them unto us*; but by working, as I may say, by his spotless life as a model, and forming our souls into a resemblance of it. And as the Holy Spirit *glorifieth Christ* in his operations upon us, so also must we glorify him by voluntarily copying after his example.

The nature of man is such that he requires an example before his eyes. We all feel a strong propensity to imitation: Hence the danger of evil,

and the benefit of good company: and hence the superior effect of example, in ministers and heads of families, to mere precept. But where shall a suitable example be found? God is too much above us: our weak souls cannot look stedfastly at his glory. With angels we have but little or no acquaintance; and men, even the best of them, are stained with imperfections, which it would be dangerous to imitate. If we had been predestinated to be conformed to the image of the best merely human character, we should never *appear faultless before the presence of the divine glory*. Whatever imperfections attend us in the present state, we require a perfect model, otherwise we shall never attain perfection in any state. The example of Christ is the only one that is adapted to our circumstances. In his face the glory of God is seen, without the eye of the mind being dazzled with its overwhelming lustre. In his character there is every thing to love, and in conforming to it nothing to fear. Happy are the men who are found *followers of the Lamb whithersoever he goeth!*

ON THE EXTRAORDINARY APPEARANCE TO ELIJAH
AT MOUNT HOREB.

1 Kings, xix.

ELIJAH lived in a time of great apostacy. His history is more particularly related than that of most of the other prophets, and is very interesting. The most distinguishing event of his time was a sore famine. For three years and six months the

heavens were shut up. Of this Ahab was previously warned; and to prove that it was a visitation from God for sin, he was assured by Elijah, that as the Lord God of Israel lived, there should be neither dew nor rain, but according to his word. Hitherto he preserves his character, not only as a man, but as a man of God. We admire his magnanimity also, when, towards the close of this afflictive period, he looked Ahab in the face and reproved him. Still more do we admire him when, singly by himself, he braved the host of Baal's adherents, and confounded them before the people. But alas, what is man! After all this he is intimidated by the threatenings of Jezebel, and flees for his life. After going a day's journey into the wilderness, he sits down under a juniper tree, and requests for himself that he may die. From hence he arose and went to Horeb, the mount of God. Entering into a cave, he was there interrogated by him whose cause he had seemed to desert, What dost thou here Elijah? He attempts to excuse himself by accusing Israel. He had been very jealous for the Lord God of Israel: but they had digged down his altars, and slain his prophets with the sword, he only was left, and they sought his life. Thus, according to his account, it seemed time for him to flee. But that which is worse than all, in excusing himself, he does not barely accuse Israel, but seems tacitly to reflect upon the Lord himself, as though he had done little or nothing to vindicate his own name, and what then could his poor servant do there alone?

Jehovah could no doubt have confounded the complaining prophet; but forbearing, like himself, when dealing with erring creatures, he makes him no answer, but calls him forth to appear on the top of the mount. Here he is made to witness a very extraordinary scene.—*The Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks; but the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. And it was so when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave.*

The Lord was not in the wind:—that is, he did not answer Elijah out of the whirlwind, as he did Job; nor out of the earthquake, nor out of the fire. These awful appearances were only harbingers which preceded the voice of Jehovah. On hearing the still small voice, like the seraphim on the appearance of the divine glory, he wrapped his face in his mantle, and retired to his cave. The interrogation, *What dost thou here Elijah?* is repeated, and Elijah repeats his answer. The Lord replies, by directing him to go on his way to the wilderness of Damascus; to anoint Hazael to be king over Syria, Jehu to be king over Israel, and Elisha to be a prophet in the place of himself. This was an answer to Elijah's tacit reflection. It was saying, I have judgments enough in reserve, both temporal and spiritual, to vindicate my name; and

Israel shall feel them in due time: for *it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay.* But is *all* Israel gone off from God? Is it as Elijah supposes, that he only is left; and is it all wrath and terror that is revealed against them? No; there is a heart-reviving exception at the end,—*yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the names which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.*

These great events undoubtedly bear a near resemblance to the extraordinary appearances on the mount; and it seems probable, if not more than probable, that the one were designed to represent the other. If so, the wind, the earthquake, and the fire, would refer to those dire calamities with which God was about to punish Israel for their apostacy; and the still small voice, to the mercy and peace which should follow. Particularly, first, by the great and strong wind that rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks, understand Hazael's wars, by which *the strong holds of Israel were set on fire, their young men slain with the sword, their children dashed, and their women with child ripped up:* by these means God punished the common people. Secondly, by the earthquake, understand Jehu's revolution, who *smote the house of Ahab, and avenged the blood of the prophets, and of all the Lord's servants, at the hand of Jezebel;* by this God punished the Royal family. Thirdly, by the fire understand Elisha's trying prophecies, and

the judgments which accompanied them: by these it is probable the idolatrous priests and false prophets were confounded. Fourthly, by the still small voice, understand the mercy and goodness which followed these dire calamities. It was doubtless soothing to Elijah's mind to be told of seven thousand faithful men in reserve; and while they remained in the nation a reserve of mercy in its favour might be expected, notwithstanding all their transgressions. And this was actually experienced under the reigns of Jehoahaz the son, and Joash the grandson of Jehu. The former *besought the Lord, and the Lord hearkened unto him: for he saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Syria oppressed them.—Hazeel king of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz; but the Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet; so Hazeel king of Assyria died, and Benhadad his son reigned in his stead.*

As there appears to have been a resemblance in the wind, the earthquake, the fire, and the still small voice, to the events which succeeded, so there is something in the *order* of these things analogous to the general tenor of the divine proceedings. It is common for the still small voice to succeed the wind, the earthquake, and the fire; or, in other words, for the blessings of mercy and peace to be preceded by terrible things in righteousness.

When God revealed his word unto Moses, and by him to Israel, the terrors of mount Sinai were preparatory to other things of a different nature. Many of the appearances on that solemn occasion resembled those on the present; and indeed there appears a manifest allusion in the account of Elijah to that in the nineteenth chapter of Exodus. Nor does the still small voice which terminated the one, less resemble the declarations of mercy which followed the other. Jehovah proclaimed himself, *the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth*; promising also to *raise up unto them a prophet from the midst of them, like unto Moses, to whom they should hearken.*

The dispensations of providence have generally moved in a similar order. Many terrible judgments have fallen on the world; but they have been commonly followed with peace and mercy to the church. The plagues of Egypt, and the destruction of Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea, terminated in the joyful deliverance of the people of God. The same was true of the overthrow of Babylon by the Persians. Thus it was, that by terrible things in righteousness God answered the prayers of his people. The great calamities with which the world was afflicted by the successive struggles of the four great monarchies of Babylon, Persia, Macedon, and Rome, terminated in the peaceful empire of the Son of God. The diadem was overturned, overturned, and overturned again, till he came whose right it was, and to him it was given.

Similar observations might be made on the Lord's proceedings in the dispensation of his grace. As the thunders of Sinai preceded the blessings of Zion, so the terrible is still seen in many instances to go before the peaceful. Deep conviction may produce fearful expectation of eternal ruin; but if it terminate in a well-grounded peace, we do not regret the pain of mind, because it renders the hope of the gospel more welcome.

Finally: Is there not reason to hope from these things, that the present convulsions of the world will be followed with peace and prosperity to the church? The fall of ancient Babylon was followed by the liberation of the people of God; and it is intimated in prophecy, that the fall of the New-testament Babylon shall be followed by the *marriage-supper of the Lamb*. The present may be the time of whirlwinds, earthquakes, and fires, and God as the God of grace may be in none of them; but they may be preparatory to the still small voice of truth and peace. In this God will be present, and will be heard. Then *the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it*. Should this be the issue of the present convulsed state of the nations, afflictive as it may be, it will be more than compensated, and serve as a foil to heighten the glory that shall follow.

AN ANSWER TO THE FOLLOWING QUERY:

How could Jesus grow in wisdom and knowledge, if he were the true God, and consequently infinite in both?

IF there be any difficulty in reconciling these ideas, it must be on the supposition that an union of the divine and human natures in the person of Christ implies a *communication of properties*; i. e. that whatever property belongs to him as a divine person, it must, on his assuming human nature, belong to him as human. But I know of no such sentiment being held by any trinitarian. It is always maintained, so far as I know, that as Christ was very God, he retained all the peculiar properties of Godhead; and as he was made very man, he assumed all the peculiar properties of manhood. The above supposition, so far from belonging to the doctrine of what is called the hypostatical union, is utterly inconsistent with it: for if the union of the human nature to the divinity imply that it must become infinite in wisdom and knowledge, it also implies that it must become omnipresent and almighty. And it might be with equal propriety asked, How could Jesus grow in stature and strength, if he were infinite in power? as How could he grow in wisdom and knowledge, if he were infinite in both? But this is equivalent to asking, How could he be *a child born*, and yet be called *the mighty God*? that is, How could he be both God and man?

Further: If an union between the divine and human natures of Christ imply a communication of properties, why should not that communication be mutual? There is just as much reason for concluding that all the imperfections of humanity should be imparted to the divinity, as that all the perfections of divinity should be imparted to the humanity. But this would form a contradiction; as it would be supposing him to retain neither perfection nor imperfection, and so to be neither God nor man.

But if we admit the scripture account of things, no such consequences will follow. *If that eternal life that was with the Father was so manifested to us, as to be capable of being heard, and seen with our eyes, and looked upon and handled; in other words, if he were a divine person, always existing with the Father, and was manifested to us by the assumption of human nature, and if each nature, though mysteriously united, yet retains its peculiar properties, all is consistent.* Things may then be attributed to Christ which belong to either his divine or his human nature; he may be a child born, may grow up from infancy to age, increase in knowledge, in wisdom, and in stature; be subject to hunger, and thirst and weariness and pain; in a word, *in all things be made like unto his brethren;* and at the same time be, in another respect, *the mighty God, upholding all things by the word of his power.*

If thou be the Son of God, said Satan, *command that these stones be made bread.* This was

insinuating that it was inconsistent for so divine a personage, who had the command of the whole creation, to be subject to want; but the answer of Jesus intimates, that he was also the Son of Man; and that, as such, it was fitting that he should feel his dependence upon God.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, after asserting the dignity of the great Author of Christianity, as not only superior to angels, but acknowledged by the Father as God, *whose throne was for ever and for ever*, obviates an objection that would arise from his deep humiliation; showing the necessity there was for his being made like unto his brethren. Chap. i. ii.

Socinians may amuse themselves and their admirers, by talking of the absurdity of God being exposed to suffering, and of a man of Judea being the Creator of the world. They know well enough, if they had candour sufficient to own it, that it is not as God that we ascribe the former to him, nor as man the latter: yet, owing to the intimate union of divinity and humanity in his person, there is an important sense in which it may be said, that *the Prince, or author, of life was killed*; that *God purchased his church with his own blood*; that *hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us*; that *our great High-priest, Jesus, the Son of God, was touched with the feeling of our infirmities*; and that *he who was born in Bethlehem was before all things, and by him all things consist*.

LIFE AND DEATH SET BEFORE THEE, OR THE BROAD
AND NARROW WAY.

Matt. vii. 13, 14.

THE whole world are travellers: there is no rest for the sole of man's foot: the ways in which they walk are extremely various, yet all reducible to two;—"To heaven or hell we daily bend our course." These two are here described by their properties and end. The one is attended with things which are smooth and agreeable to the flesh; but the end is destruction: the other with things which are hard and disagreeable; but the end is everlasting life.

If you incline to the first of these ways, it has many things, it must be owned, to recommend it; particularly,

You have no difficulty in your entrance upon it: it is *a wide gate*: it just suits your depraved inclinations. As soon as the powers of your souls begin to act, they will incline that way: so of every particular evil course that you may take, it is easy to get into it: the gate of temptation is wide, and is set wide open to invite you: you are in, ere you are aware. Evil habits are readily contracted; the transition from occasional to habitual indulgence is very short, and that of which you are scarcely sensible at the time.

You have also full scope for inclination in your progress. *Broad is the way*. Though there is but one way to heaven, and that a strait one; yet there are many ways to hell, out of which you

may take your choice. The broad way admits of many divisions, and subdivisions. You may walk in the path of gross immorality; may swear and lie, or drink and commit lewdness; or if you covet a degree of reputation, which does not comport with such a life, you may pursue a much more decent course, in the indulgence of avarice or pride. You may be a mean sycophant, cringing to the great; or a haughty, overbearing oppressor to those who are beneath you; nay, you may be both these at the same time. You may revel with the vulgar, or banquet with the genteel, as circumstances and inclination may lead you. You may scoff at all religion; or, if that does not suit, you may be religious yourself. You may be righteous in your own eyes; or if that does not accord with your creed, you may be an advocate for grace, and turn it, when you have done, into lasciviousness.

Moreover, you will be in no want of company, for *many go there*. Rich and poor, rude and learned: it is impossible you should be at a loss for agreeable society. You will have the majority on your side, and that with many is a great matter; yea, the majority in all the nations, cities, towns, and villages in the world. You will hardly go into any company or place, but you will find fellow travellers to keep you in countenance *but the end thereof is destruction!!*

If, on the other hand, you incline to the last of these ways, I must direct you to count the cost: be assured it will be hard and disagreeable to the

flesh. The difficulties which attend it are given as the reason why it is so little occupied.

If you incline to this way, there may be great difficulties attending your entrance; for *strait is the gate*. While you are under convictions, and your hearts are not subdued to the obedience of Christ, these difficulties will appear insurmountable. To escape the wrath to come, it will appear absolutely necessary that you should enter in: yet to forego all hope of mercy on the ground of your good deeds, or even of your prayers and penitential tears, and to sue for pardon as one of the chief of sinners, wholly for the sake of Jesus Christ, is hard work for a proud heart. If you enter in, it is also necessary that you give up all your former idols, without a single reserve; but this also is hard work to a corrupt heart: these are things which make many people hesitate about religion for a long time, labouring under darkness of mind, and unable to find rest for their souls. But let me add, these difficulties exist only in your own mind: *ye are not straitened in God, but in your own bowels*. If you can be contented to accept of mercy as one of the chief of sinners, all will be easy. Come to Jesus as such, and you will find rest unto your soul: and if his name be precious unto you, his yoke also will be easy, and his burden light. Denying self, taking up the cross, and following him, will then be no hard service, but your very meat and drink. The way of salvation through his atoning blood, will also be a source of joy unspeakable, and of peace which passeth all

understanding; and you will be amazed at your former ignorance and aversion.

Farther: There may be hard struggles attending your progress; for, *narrow is the way*. You may meet with contempt from the world, persecution from your connexions, and if you be faithful, with many a hard speech, and hard measure, from loose professors; you may be annoyed by temptations from without, and confounded by strong struggles from within; old companions may invite you to turn back; the allurements of the world may be placed on the right hand and on the left, to induce you to turn aside; and through the remaining corruption of your nature, you may be too apt at times to listen to their counsels; you may also expect to meet with things that will make your heart sink within you; despondency may lay fast hold of you; and the very hand of God be stretched out against you. Let me add, however, that this way is infinitely less rugged than that in which Jesus walked to accomplish your salvation: and if your heart be with his heart, I need not add more to reconcile you to it.

Moreover: In pursuing the narrow way, you may have but little company; for *few there be that find it*. Compared with the ungodly, religious people are but as the gleanings of the vintage; and your lot may be cast in a part of the world where few of those few are to be found. You may reside in a village where no one cares for Christ, or in a family that calls not upon his name. In such circumstances, you may be the object of derision;

a man wondered at, and persecuted; and even hated by your nearest relations! But be of good cheer: though there be but few who will accompany you, yet those few are the excellent of the earth. You will also hold society with an invisible host of heavenly spirits that watch over you; an host so numerous, that more are they that are with you than they that are with your adversaries; and what is more than all, the narrow way *leadeth unto life*.

Thus reader, life and death are set before thee; which wilt thou choose? Recollect that the *destruction* which awaits the ungodly, is not a loss of being, but of well being; it is the loss of all that is desirable, and an exposedness to all that is dreadful; the weeping of desolation, the wailing of despair, and the gnashing of teeth which attends the most intolerable anguish. Consider also that the *life* which awaits the godly, is not mere being, but well being; it is an entire freedom from evil, and an eternal enjoyment of bliss, *which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and which hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive*. It will also be heightened by the trials through which we pass to the possession of it.

If you enter the strait gate, and walk in the narrow way, an abundant entrance will be ministered unto you, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ: but if found pursuing the broad way, you shall hereafter strive to enter into that kingdom, and shall not be able.

ON CHRIST'S WASHING THE DISCIPLES' FEET.

John xiii.

THIS significant action, so full of kindness and condescension on the part of our Saviour, is recorded for our example. Happy shall we be, if we truly copy it. Here is no affectation of humility, but humility itself; nor is it performed as a mere ceremony, but to teach us *in love to serve one another*. Its being done at a time when *Jesus knew that his hour was come, that he should depart out of this world unto the Father*, renders it additionally impressive. It was the same night in which he was betrayed: a night in which it might have been thought, his own approaching trials would have engrossed his whole attention: yet then he was fully employed in behalf of others; setting an example of brotherly affection, ordaining a standing memorial of his death, fortifying, by a speech full of unparalleled consolation, the hearts of his disciples, and commending them to the care of God his Father. *Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows*; not only in making his soul an offering for sin, but in every step that led on to that awful crisis.

Laying aside his garments, he took a towel, girded himself with it, poured the water into a bason, and went from one to another, performing the work of a menial servant. When it came to Peter's turn his feelings revolted at the idea. *Lord*, saith he, viewing his dignity on the one hand, and his own insignificancy on the other,

dost THOU wash MY feet? Jesus answered, *What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter*: intimating that he had a reason for so doing; which, though it might not be manifest at present, would at a future time be rendered plain. Nay, saith Peter, almost indignantly, *thou shalt never wash my feet!* As though he had said, 'This is too much, and what I can never submit to!'

Jesus answered him, *If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.* What! If he washed not his feet? No, his soul, from the pollution of sin. Transitions like this, from things natural to things spiritual, were usual with our Saviour. Thus, when he had healed a blind man, he took occasion to observe, *For judgment I am come into this world, that they who see not, may see; and that they who see, may be made blind.* The answer in the present instance was to this effect; 'Dost thou account it too great a stoop for me to wash thy feet? Let me tell thee, I must stoop lower than this, or woe be to thee! I must cleanse thee from a defilement much more loathsome than this, or thou canst have no part with me in my kingdom.'

-Peter, perceiving now that he spake of the purifying of his soul from sin, suddenly changed his tone. Lord, saith he, *not my feet only, but also my hands and my head.* q. d. 'If this be thy meaning, I know that I need to be cleansed throughout.'

Jesus saith unto him, *He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet; but is clean every whit, and ye are clean, but not all.* As it is sufficient for persons who have bathed their bodies in the stream,

to wash off the defilement attached to their feet by walking on the shore; so they that have believed in Christ, shall never come into condemnation, and need not the repetition of a passing from death to life; but merely an application for the pardon of their daily sins. Such was the character of all the disciples, except Judas, who, notwithstanding his profession, was yet in his sins.

From this interesting conversation, we are taught several important truths.

First: We may sin against Christ, under a show of modesty and reverence for his name. There is no doubt but that Peter's first objection sprang from these motives; and had he yielded to the first answer, perhaps he had been blameless; but to resist after he was assured that his Lord had a good reason for what he did, though he at present did not comprehend it, was setting up his own wisdom and will against his. Nor was this the first instance in which Peter was guilty of so doing. When our Saviour spake of going up to Jerusalem, and of suffering many things, and being killed, and rising again the third day, he rebuked him, saying, *Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.* In all this he savoured not the things that were of God, but the things that were of men.

There is much of this spirit in our self-righteous objections to the grace of the gospel, and self-willed oppositions to Christ's revealed will. One pleads, that salvation by mere grace is dishonourable to God's moral government: but let him know, from the example of Peter, that there may

be a regard to Christ's honour, which he doth not require at our hands; and that we should act much more becoming by acquiescing in his will, than by obtruding our own conceits in opposition to it. Another alleges, It is too much for a sinner so unworthy as I am, to hope for so great salvation. But can you do with less? and is it the comparatively worthy that mercy delighteth to honour? True wisdom will fall in with that way of honouring God which is revealed in the gospel; and genuine modesty will not dispute with the Saviour, but humbly take him at his word. And the same spirit that receives his grace without hesitation, will obey his precepts without delay; not asking why or wherefore the Lord requireth this, but accounting it our meat to do his will.

Secondly: A cordial and practical acquiescence in the way of salvation through the blood of Christ, is necessary to a participation of his benefits. It may seem rather singular that Christ should suspend his blessing on his own act—*If I wash thee not*, &c. but that act supposes the concurrence of the party. He stood ready to wash Peter, and stands ready to wash the foulest of sinners. If therefore they be not washed, it is owing to their preference of pollution, or their self-righteous objections to the way of being cleansed. To feel ourselves entirely polluted, and ready to perish; to despair of being cleansed by any thing that we can perform, or work ourselves up to; to place no dependance on prayers or tears, on our bitterest repentance or most unfeigned faith, considered as

acts of holiness ; and to repair altogether vile as we are, to the blood of Jesus, as to a fountain set open for sin and for uncleanness—this is the hinge of true religion ; without which, we shall have no interest with him in his benefits, nor portion with him in his heavenly kingdom. If we come not to him as polluted sinners to be washed, our iniquities are still upon our head ; and if we die in this state, they will go down with us to the grave, rise with us at the resurrection, be found upon us at judgment, and for ever bar against us those gates, through which nothing unclean can enter. In this case, so far as we are concerned, the Saviour might as well have never come into the world, nor have laid down his life : nay, better ; for if our filthiness be found upon us at the last day, it will be the bitterest of all aggravations, that the kingdom of Christ has been nigh unto us.

Thirdly: Though the believer, who hath passed from death to life, shall never come into condemnation ; yet he standeth in need of continual cleansing from his daily defilements. The notion that it is inconsistent for a believer to pray for the pardon of his sins, is contrary to the express directions of Christ, and to the example of the godly in all ages. It belongs to a *life of faith on the Son of God* ; and without it, whatever self flattering ideas we may entertain, we are dead while we live : and in whatever degree we come short of such a life, wearing away our transgressions by forgetfulness, instead of washing them away by repeated application to the blood of the cross, we

incur the displeasure of Christ, and forsake our own mercies.

EVANGELICAL TRUTH THE GRAND OBJECT OF
ANGELICAL RESEARCH.

1 Peter i. 12.

Which things the Angels desire to look into.

IT is a truth allowed by all Christians, that the dispensation under which we live, affords us far greater advantages for spirituality and heavenly enjoyment, than any other which preceeded it. To us, life and immortality are brought to light. The spirit that properly belongs to it, is not a spirit of bondage, but of adoption; crying, *Abba, Father*. The happiness attainable under it approaches near to that of the heavenly world; so nigh does its land border as it were upon it, that believers in the present state are said to be *come to mount Sion, to the city of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, to the innumerable company of angels, to the spirits of the just made perfect, &c.* Yet it is not less true, that the greater part of professing Christians live as though they stood upon no such ground, and possessed no such opportunities. We possess an Old-testament spirit amidst New-testament advantages. A promise is left us of entering into rest; but we seem, at least, to come short of it. How is this? Is it not owing, in a great degree, to the *neglect of the gospel*? Having assented to a system of doctrines, we fancy we know almost the whole that is to be known upon this

subject, and have nothing more to do but to hold them fast against the errors of the times, and take heed that we do not dishonour them by inconsistency of conduct. Hence what is called religious conversation seldom turns upon the gospel, unless any part of it be called in question; but either upon our own want of spirituality, or the pleasures that we have formerly experienced; or perhaps, upon the talents of this or that popular preacher.

When a company of Christians meet together, and feel a wish for improving conversation, let one of them take a Bible and read; and, as he reads, let him frequently pause, and let any one who can, make a remark, or ask a serious question, so as upon the whole to promote the understanding of what is read. This would draw off the attention from less profitable things; and the blessing of the Lord attending it, would, ere we are aware, produce those holy pleasures which, while poring over our own barrenness, we shall sigh after in vain.

To comfort the primitive Christians who, as well as we, were *in heaviness through manifold temptations*, Peter took no other course than to declare unto them the glorious truths of the gospel, and the vast advantages which they had over all others of former ages, in possessing the knowledge of them. Three things in particular he holds up to their consideration: 1. That the prophets were ministering servants to us; *Not unto themselves, but unto us, did they minister things which are*

now reported. They sowed that we might reap. 2. That the things which they foretold, and which we possess, were the objects of their own most intense research. *Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently; searching what, and what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ, which was in them, did signify, when it testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.* 3. That such is the excellence and glory of the gospel, as not only to be the study of prophets, but of angels: *Which things the angels desire to look into.*

It is generally supposed, I believe, that the phrase *look into*,* alludes to the cherubim which were placed bending over the mercy-seat, and looking as it were with intenseness at it. Thus Mary stooped, and looked into the sepulchre, in hope of discovering her Lord; and thus believers are described as *looking into* the perfect law of liberty, or the gospel of Christ.

In former ages, the angels employed their capacious powers on other themes. At first, the display of the divine perfections in creation furnished them with matter for praise and gladness. *The morning stars sang together, and the sons of God shouted for joy.* Afterwards, the providence of God, in the government of the world, enlarged their mental boundary. *One cried to another, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory!* But since the

* Παρακνιπω, to bend, or stoop.

coming of the Son of God in our nature, and the laying down of his life, they appear to have been so engaged on this subject, as to be comparatively indifferent to every other. In the other works of God, they had seen sometimes one perfection glorified, and sometimes another; but here all unite their beams, and form one general blaze. These are the things, therefore, which now *they desire to look into*.

The powers of angels are far superior to those of men. Their means of instruction also, and long experience of divine things, must render them far more capable of understanding the gospel than we. Yet, with all their advantages and discoveries, such is the fulness of the subject, that they are at an infinite distance from comprehending it: all that is said of them is, that *they desire to look into it*.

Angels were doubtless acquainted with the general design of salvation, from its first discovery to man; but the particular way in which it should be accomplished, appears to have been, in a great measure, hidden from them. It was a way so much above what any creature would have expected, that though there were hints of it under the Old Testament, and some very plain intimations, yet it was far from being clearly comprehended. The prophets, as we have seen, did not fully understand their own prophecies; but diligently searched into the meaning of them: neither did the apostles with all their advantages prior to the event: neither did evil angels, with all their

subtilty; for if Satan had known that from the death of Christ his cause would receive so deadly a wound, it is scarcely conceivable that he would have stirred up Judas and the Jewish rulers, to accomplish it. He appears to have entertained a kind of forlorn hope, that by getting him put to death in the most ignominious form, and by the only religious nation upon earth, he should be able to stamp everlasting infamy upon his name, and that all future generations would be ashamed to own him. The disappointment and unexpected shock that he and his adherents met with on this occasion, seem plainly intimated by our Saviour's *a show of them openly, triumphing over them on his having spoiled principalities and powers, and made cross*: and though the holy angels might be supposed to understand much more than fallen ones, yet were they not equal to this subject till events made it manifest. Hence it is said, *from the beginning of the world to have been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, to the intent, that now unto the principalities and powers it might be known by the church,* (that is, by the redemption of the church,) *the manifold wisdom of God.* When the event transpired, therefore, it was like a flood of light bursting forth upon them. The resurrection of Christ filled all heaven with transport. Hence, perhaps, we may account for the question of the angel to Mary, *Woman, why weepest thou?* q. d. 'Did you but know all, you would not weep? It is not you that should weep now, but your adversaries!'

The cross of Christ, instead of issuing in disgrace, is followed with glory. His friends learned to glory in it; yea, and to glory in nothing else: and well they might. It was glorious to see the powers of darkness stripped naked, as it were, to their shame; to see Satan foiled by the woman's seed, and his schemes exposed to the derision of the universe; to see him taken in his own net, and falling into the pit that himself had digged. It was glorious to contemplate the numerous and important bearings of this one great event. By this, the divine displeasure against sin is manifested in stronger language than if the world had been made a sacrifice:—by this a way is opened for the consistent exercise of mercy to the chief of sinners:—by a believing view of this, peace arises in the mind, and at the same time, purity in the heart:—for this he is crowned with glory and honour in the heavens, principalities and powers being made subject to him. This is the only hope of a lost world, the only medium of acceptance with God, and the only admissible plea in our approaches before him. This it is which will put every grace in exercise in this world, and impart all the happiness in that to come, of which created minds are susceptible.

These are a few of the bearings of the doctrine of the cross. Is it any wonder that angels should desire to look into it? Rather is it not matter of wonder and shame that we who are more immediately interested in it than they, should be so far behind? How is it that we should be the last

to bring back the king, who are his bone and his flesh? Our Redeemer took not upon him the nature of angels; yet they love him, and the gospel of salvation by him; and wherefore? They love God, and therefore rejoice in every thing that glorifies him in the highest:—they love men, and therefore rejoice in that which brings peace on earth, and good-will to them:—they rejoice in every instance of the prosperity of Christ's kingdom, and in being themselves made subject to him. Had we but their love with our interest, we should not only emulate, but exceed their highest praise. While they, in innumerable myriads, were saying with a loud voice, *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing*, we should not only say, *Amen*; but add, *Thou art worthy; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation!*

HOPE IN THE LAST EXTREMITY.

Jonah ii. 4.

Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple.

THE greater part of the writings of the prophets contain little history; but this book is an exception. It is a history of a prophecy against a city, which at that time was the metropolis of the world. It affords a singular example of the influence which the true religion, as presented among the Israelites,

had upon the surrounding nations. When we read of the idolatrous Gentiles, we are apt to think they were altogether sunk in ignorance; and without any means of knowing better, except what were afforded by the light of nature. But in those early times, God had a people, as he has now, who were witnesses for him; and whose testimony left a strong impression on the minds of mankind about them. If Jonah, when overtaken by the tempest, had been a heathen, and had committed a crime, the mariners might have been alarmed, concluding, from their general notions of an unseen providence, that vengeance had overtaken him; but when they were told that he was an Hebrew,—and feared Jehovah, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land, but had fled from his presence,—then they were *exceedingly afraid*. They had heard, no doubt, of this God of gods, who was worshipped by the Hebrews, and trembled at his judgments. So when Jonah entered into Nineveh, and threatened its overthrow, if he had been a heathen soothsayer, his message might have influenced a few; but government would doubtless have apprehended him, and either have punished him as a disturber of the public peace, or confined him as a madman; but finding him to be a prophet, sent by Jehovah, the God of Israel, whose judgments upon Egypt and other nations had rung through the world, they were struck with amazement. The king rises from his throne, lays aside his robe, covers himself with sackcloth, sits in ashes, and causes a fast to

be proclaimed, accompanied with an admonition for every one to turn from his evil way, saying, *Who can tell if God will repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?* Great is the force of truth and true religion upon the conscience!

But let us observe more particularly the history of Jonah, in which we see an affecting example of human depravity, and of the mystery of Providence. God commands him to go and prophesy against Nineveh, a great city, north of Judea. He dislikes the errand; and, in downright rebellion, takes a ship for Tarshish; a sea-port of the Mediterranean, in nearly a southern direction. But whither can he flee from God's presence? Though suffered to take his course for a while, he is soon pursued. A tempest overtakes him. One would have thought his restless mind must have anticipated it, and been the first to interpret it; but instead of this all parties are alarmed before him:—he is asleep at the bottom of the ship. A guilty mind cannot be always on the rack of reflection; yet its repose is not peace, but the stupidity of horror and wretchedness. The rebuke of the ship-master seems scarcely to have awakened him. At length however, the lot of God falls upon his guilty head: and now we have to witness a most humiliating sight;—a prophet of the most high God, arraigned at the bar of a company of heathen sailors! We should have said, 'Let it not be known unto the heathen!' He, if he could have prayed at all, would have said, 'Make me not a reproach to the

foolish.' But God says, 'It shall be known.' He knows how to vindicate the honour of his name, without having recourse to the little arts of concealment, of which creatures commonly avail themselves. The whole must come out:—his country, his religion, his character, his sin! And do the heathens reproach him? If they had, we could not have wondered; but it operates in a different way. God knows how to soften the hearts of men by that which we might expect would harden them; and things which appear to us injurious to his cause shall tend to establish it. They inquire of him what they shall do; and he pronounces his own doom. Humanity, notwithstanding, and the fear perhaps of incurring the displeasure of his God, struggle hard for his deliverance; but struggled in vain. He must be cast away, or they must all perish. No time is to be lost; they must come to a decision. Lifting up their eyes to heaven, they appeal to God for the painful necessity under which they acted; and then taking up the unhappy man they cast him into the sea! Reader, had you and I been spectators of this affecting scene, and in possession of our present views, we should probably have not only dropped a tear over the watery tomb of the prophet, but have exclaimed, *How unsearchable are God's judgments, and his ways past finding out!* Viewing the effect of all upon the mariners, we should have seen men, who till now were strangers to Jehovah, calling upon his name; we should have seen, perhaps, the hopeful conversion of some, and

rejoiced in the *sacrifices and vows* which on this mysterious occasion were offered: but what would have been a damp to our pleasure, we should have seen Jonah himself committed to the deep, prayerless, and, to all appearance, without a ray of hope! But O! the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! When the closing waves had parted him from human observation, divine providence still follows him. He is swallowed by a *great fish*; probably a shark.* In this perilous situation, his life and consciousness are preserved; and here he is brought to his right mind. From hence he who could not offer one petition while in the presence of the mariners, *prays unto Jehovah his God*. What were his prayers and the workings of his mind, he recorded after his deliverance. A part of it is contained in the sentence on which this paper is founded: *Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple*. It describes the crisis of his distress, the moment he was sunk to the greatest despondency, bordering on utter despair; out of which he is recovered by the hope of divine mercy.

I said, I am cast out of thy sight. Did he mean that he was now beyond the reach of God's omniscience? No; though mortal eyes could follow him no farther, he was well aware of his being naked to the eyes of Him with whom he had to do. His meaning was, I suppose, that he was cast out of God's favour; alluding to the practice of princes

* See Parkhurst's Greek Lexicon, on *σπρεο*.

and great men, who admit their friends into their presence, but banish those who have offended them out of their sight. Thus the divinely favoured land of promise is described as that on which *the eyes of the Lord were set, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year*; and thus the children of Israel, when they had for a long time offended God are said to be removed by captivity out of his sight. Now Jonah had been favoured of God in several ways: As an Israelite, he had long enjoyed the means of grace, of which those of other nations had been destitute; but now he is deprived of them. ‘No more shall I peruse the lively oracles of Jehovah. No more frequent his temple, in company with his people! No more join in the melody of Zion! Far from the holy abodes of hope and peace, I die alone! No fellow-servant of God to attend me in my last hours! no eye to pity me, nor hand to help me! I die an outcast, an outcast of the heathen!’ He had also been highly honoured in being made a prophet. The Lord had employed him as an ambassador extraordinary; but having offended him he appears now to be cast off. ‘God,’ as if he should say, ‘will employ me no more. In this shameful and painful manner ends my stewardship.’ Finally: As a religious man, he had enjoyed communion with God, and cherished hopes of everlasting life; but now, what can he think of himself, and of his prospects for eternity? If by this language he meant that all was over with him, for this world and that to come, it is no more than might be expected. Sin must needs cloud our evidences for

heaven, and render our state doubtful. *They that observe lying vanities, forsake their own mercies.*

There is something in this language peculiarly awful. Of all the ills that can befall us, being cast out of God's sight is the most to be dreaded; because this is the source and sum of evil. As God's presence is heaven, to be cast out of it is hell. Deprived of his favour, what is life, even though we were possessed of every earthly comfort, and could insure it for a long series of years? What then must it be to one in the very article of dissolution? To live without the divine favour is dreadful; but to die without it is much more so!

It is also observable, how the punishment corresponds with the nature of the offence; and this we shall find to be a general character of the divine administration. They that receive not the love of the truth, are given up to believe a lie; deceivers are deceived; adulterers are cast into a *bed*, and those who have committed adultery with them; and they that have loved cursing, the curse shall come upon them, as oil into their bones. Thus Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord; and now his conscience forebodes the issue—*I am cast out of thy sight.*

There are two other remarks which present themselves from this desponding sentence, of a more pleasing complexion. One is, that happily for him, it was only *he that said* it. It was the punishment awarded by conscience at the time; but the awards of conscience are not final. They respect what ought to be, if we had our desert;

but not always what shall be. Sovereign mercy reserves to itself the right of revising and reversing these decisions. If the Lord had said Amen, all had been over with Jonah; but *his thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways: as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his thoughts higher than our thoughts, and his ways than our ways.*—Zion said, *the Lord hath forsaken me*; but the Lord her God did not say so too! The other remark which offers is, the *piety* or *godliness* which appears even in the despondency of this good man. How different is the spirit of it from that of Cain! Future punishment is sometimes distinguished into a punishment of *loss* and a punishment of *sense*. The latter is the dread of the wicked. Could they but be exempted from positive misery, they would not be much concerned for the loss of God's favour; nor indeed at all, but as depriving them of natural enjoyment. But it is not thus with a good man. The loss of God's favour is, to him, the heaviest of all punishments. This was the distress of Jonah. One sees in him also, in his darkest state, a tenderness of sinning against God by being any otherwise accessory to his own death, than as owning what was his desert. Some men if they had felt half his burden, would have plunged themselves into the sea; but he, humiliating as it must be, pronounces his own doom, and submits to be cast away by their hands!

But we have now arrived at the period of his dejection. Lo, when he was just giving up all for lost; nay, when he had actually pronounced his

doom; when death had laid hold upon him, and he seemed already in his grave; a thought glances across his mind; a gleam of hope accompanies it: *yet, before I die, I will look again toward thy holy temple!* The thought proves a resurrection to his soul.

But, let us observe what it was on which his hope at this affecting crisis caught hold. Was it the temple, the material building, to which he looked for relief? Surely not. An Israelite in name only, might have indulged a superstitious confidence in the place: but Jonah looked farther. It was to the temple with respect to *Him that dwelt therein*, and the manner in which he dwelt therein, namely, *upon the mercy seat, or propitiatory*, that he looked.- If expressed in New-testament language, it would be looking to God through a Mediator, who is our Advocate with the Father, and whose advocacy is founded on his having been made a propitiation.

The encouragement which the prophet felt to look toward the temple for relief, appears to have arisen from two sources, namely, *scripture* and *experience*. The prayer of Solomon at the dedication was recorded in the scriptures, and must have been familiar to every godly Israelite. After having enumerated divers particular cases, he adds, *What prayer and supplication soever be made by any man, or by all thy people Israel, who shall know every man the plague of his own heart, and shall spread forth his hands toward this house, then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place, and forgive,*

and do, and give. This was doubtless a directory for Jonah, when other help failed; and the answer given to Solomon, *I have heard thy prayer, and thy supplication that thou hast made before me*, turned all his petitions into promises. Here therefore was rest for the soul of every distressed Israelite, throughout all their generations; and for Jonah, though in the most deplorable state. *I will look*, saith he, *toward thy holy temple; and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling-place; and forgive, and do, and give.* To scripture direction was added former experience. The language implies, that this was not the first time that Jonah had looked to the temple for relief. He had looked before, and would now look again. It had long, no doubt, been his practice, under every load of guilt or sorrow of any kind, to repair to the mercy-seat, where Jehovah had promised to commune with his people. This, to Old-testament believers, was as common as coming *to the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help us in time of need*, is to believers under the New-testament; and having formerly found relief in looking, they would be encouraged to look again. It is a good use to make of past experiences, to take encouragement from them to make renewed applications for mercy. They are not designed for a pillow of repose under the load of a guilty conscience; nor the source from which our comfort is to be derived; but a directory to point us to the Saviour, and an encouragement that we shall not apply to him in vain.

From the whole, we learn the following important instructions:—First: The great evil of departing from God, and of flying in the face of his commands. The story of Jonah leaves an impression behind it of the justness of his own reflection, *They that observe lying vanities, forsake their own mercies.* What are all the reasonings of the flesh against God's revealed will? Vanities, lying vanities; the end of which, if grace prevent not, will be death. Secondly: Yet if any one have sinned, let him not despair. While there is a propitiation, an Advocate with the Father, to despair were to add sin to sin. Thirdly: If, through sin we have lost the light of God's countenance, and would recover it, it must be sought in the same way as that in which we first obtained it. If ever we regain rest to our souls after having backslidden and lost it, it must be by applying to him, as guilty, unworthy, and perishing sinners, intreating to be forgiven through the bloodshedding of the Saviour. This was the manner in which we first looked; and in this manner we must look again. Fourthly: Draw no positive conclusions of the state of the dead from what we see in the last hours of life. There may be no ground to conclude any thing in their favour; yet the case of Jonah is sufficient to deter us from concluding that they are lost. Had we been present when he was convicted and cast away, and seen the manner in which he went down to the watery grave, we might have drawn an unfavourable conclusion of him. All that took place of a favourable kind, was after every human

eye had left him. Such a case proves the possibility of a penitent and believing look to the mercy-seat, when the party is removed beyond the ken of human observation; and this is sufficient to teach us our own ignorance, and incompetency to judge of the future state of any individual.

ON THE DANGEROUS TENDENCY OF THE DOCTRINE OF
UNIVERSAL SALVATION.

AS the scriptures abound in representations of divine truth, and of its influence in sanctifying and saving the souls of men, so they are no less explicit in declaring the unholy and destructive influence of error. It is said to *increase unto more ungodliness*, and to *eat as doth a gangrene*. The same divine writer speaks of *strong delusion*; or the energy, mighty working, or effectual operation of error. It is often alleged in behalf of the advocates of certain doctrines, that allowing them to be in an error, yet there is no reason to question their sincerity; and if so, it may be only an innocent mistake. If by sincerity be meant no more than that they really believe what they teach, there is no reason to doubt their being possessed of it; but the same was true of the persons described by Paul. Their doctrine was a *lie*, yet they *believed* it. Paul, however, was far from reckoning their error on this account an innocent mistake. On the contrary, he represents it as leading to *damnation*; and its abettors as righteously given up of God on account of their not having

received *the love of the truth*, even while professing to embrace it.

Without taking upon us to decide how far, and for how long a real Christian may be drawn aside from the simplicity of the gospel, or what degree of error may be found after all to consist with being *of the truth*,—It is sufficient that the natural tendency of these things is destructive. Every man who sets a proper value on his soul, will beware of coming within the sweep of that by which multitudes, in all ages of the church, have been carried into perdition.

Under the fullest conviction that what has been said of error in general, is applicable to the doctrine of universal salvation, or the restoration of men and devils from the abodes of misery to final happiness, we wish, in the most serious and affectionate manner, to caution our readers against it. To this end, we shall point out a few of its dangerous consequences; which if clearly ascertained, will be so many presumptive proofs of the falsehood of the principle.

First: The violence which requires to be done to the plain language of scripture ere this doctrine can be embraced, goes to introduce a habit of treating the sacred oracles with levity, and of perverting them in support of a preconceived system. If he who offendeth in one point of the law, is guilty of all, in that he admits a principle which sets aside the authority of the lawgiver; he who perverts a part of the scriptures to maintain a favourite doctrine, in the same way perverts the

whole, and thus renders the word of God of none effect. Hence it is that Universalism leads to Socinianism, as that does to Deism. One of the leading advocates of this system was warned of this at his outset; and by his late publications, and those of his party, they appear to have given full proof of the propriety of the warning.

Secondly: To explain away the scripture threatenings of eternal damnation, is intimately connected with light thoughts of sin; and these will lead on to a rejection of the gospel. The whole doctrine of redemption by the Son of God, rests upon the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and the lost condition of sinners; for *the whole need not a physician*. If these, therefore, be given up, the other will follow; and this is another reason why Universalism will be almost certain to end in Socinianism. The benevolence which is ascribed to God by the advocates of both, is in reality, connivance; it is that which must induce him to pardon the penitent without a vicarious sacrifice, and to punish the impenitent only for a time, and that for their ultimate advantage. The Socinians openly renounce the atonement; and though some of the Universalists may at present retain the name, yet they have abandoned the thing.* The corruption of Christian doctrine among the Galatians, went to introduce *another gospel*, and to make *Christ to have died in vain*. But what would Paul have said

* See "Letters on the Atonement," by the Rev. C. Jerram; a piece in which the real opinions of the Universalists, concerning this all-important doctrine, are clearly developed and answered,

of this? Let those who have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil, judge.

Thirdly: If the scripture threatenings of eternal damnation be set aside, and light thoughts of sin admitted, sinners will be more and more hardened in their impenitence. The greatest object of desire to a wicked man is, doubtless, a heaven suited to his inclinations: but if this cannot be, his next object is to be exempted from punishment; on which principle he would gladly be annihilated: but if this cannot be, he would next prefer a punishment of short duration; and if God be supposed, notwithstanding what has been said of *eternal damnation*, and of sinners being *never forgiven*, to intend nothing more than this, he will naturally conclude that the degree of it will be abated, as well as the duration shortened. The same kind of reasoning from the Divine benevolence, which brings him to believe the one, will bring him to believe the other. It cannot be a very *fearful thing*, he will suppose, to fall into the hands of a Being who will inflict nothing upon him but for his good; and therefore he will indulge for the present, and abide the consequence. This is not an imaginary process: it is a fact that these are the principles by which profligate characters, in great numbers, comfort themselves in their sins. When Rosseau was impressed with the doctrine of eternal punishment, he could scarcely endure his existence; but a lady with whom he says he was very familiar used to tranquilize his soul by persuading him that, "The supreme being would

not be strictly just, if he were just to us." If all such characters were as free in their confessions, as this debauchee has been in his, there is no doubt but the same tale, in substance, would be told by millions. It is the hope that they shall not *surely* die; or if they die, that the second death will consist of annihilation, or at most of only a temporary and tolerable punishment, that makes them comparatively easy. So Universalists and Socinians preach, and so profligates believe, or at least are very willing to believe, if their consciences would suffer them.

Fourthly: It is a principle that will universally hold good, that there is no ultimate risk in adhering to truth; but that the utmost danger attends a departure from it. It is thus that we reason with unbelievers: 'It is possible at least, that Christianity may be true; and if it be, we have infinitely the advantage. But allowing that it may be false, yet what risk do we run by embracing it? While we are taught by it to *deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world*, neither your principles nor your consciences will allow you to deny that we are safe. But if that Saviour whom you have despised, be indeed the Son of God; if that name which you have blasphemed, be the only one under heaven given among men, by which a sinner can be saved, what a situation is yours!' Apply this reasoning to the subject in hand. If Universalism should prove true, there are few if any dangers that can follow from disbelieving it:

but if it should prove false, the mistake of its abettors will be inexcusable and fatal. If *we* be wrong, we can plead that we were misled by interpreting the terms by which the scriptures ordinarily express the duration of future punishment, in their literal or proper sense; that we found the same word which describes the duration of future life, applied in the same passage to the duration of future punishment; and thence concluded it must mean the same: moreover, that if any doubt had remained on this head, it must have been removed by *eternal damnation* being explained in the scriptures, by *never having forgiveness*. (Mark iii. 29.) But if *they* be wrong, they can only allege, that observing the terms to be often applied to limited duration, they concluded they *might* be so in this; and this sense best comporting with their ideas of divine benevolence, they adopted it. In the one case, our fears will be disappointed: in the other, their hopes will be confounded. If the mistake be on our side, we alarm the ungodly more than need be; but if on theirs, they will be found to have flattered and deceived them to their eternal ruin, and so to have incurred the blood of souls! If we err, our error is much the same as that of Jeremiah, on supposition of the Babylonians having been repulsed, and Jerusalem delivered from the siege: but if they err, their error is that of the false prophets, who *belied the Lord*, and said, *It is not he; neither shall evil come upon us*. Which of these paths, therefore, is wisdom's way, we leave our readers to judge.

THE WISDOM PROPER TO MAN.

Job xxviii.

IN the warm disputes between Job and his friends, the great question was, Whether the providence of God towards men, in a way of prosperity or adversity, afforded any criterion of character? They contended it did; and therefore concluded, from the sore calamities which had befallen him, that he was a wicked man. He, on the contrary, contended that it did not; and that there is a depth in God's ways, which surpasseth mortal scrutiny. Such is the drift of his argument, all through this chapter; in which he allows that man had dug deep, but contends that it was not deep enough for this: that this was wisdom peculiar to God, and that the wisdom which was proper to man, was of another description.

Man, he allows, had found out many things; he had not only surveyed all that was visible on the face of the earth, but had gone into the bowels of it, in search of hidden treasures. By carrying artificial light into the mineral regions, he had in a manner contracted the reign of darkness. Subterranean floods had yielded to his controul. Leaving far behind him that part of his species who obtained bread by cultivating the surface, he had descended in search of the sparkling ore and the brilliant gems. He had trodden a path unoccupied by either bird or beast. By applying his skill to the massy rocks, though so deep as to form as it were *the roots of mountains*,

he had piece by piece fairly overturned them. Being incommoded by waters, he had for the purpose of drawing them off, and for washing away the rubbish, that the precious objects of his pursuit might become visible, made channels at the bottom of the mine like *rivers*; and lest they should rise and overflow him, he had contrived by the use of machinery, to diminish, and thereby to confine them within proper bounds. In short, by his skill and perseverance, he had brought forth the precious articles to light. See him walking upon the earth in triumph! Who can deny him their applause?

After all these deep and successful researches, however, one question remained unanswered—*Where shall wisdom be found; and where is the place of understanding?* The vein or mine where wisdom grows, was yet unexplored. The depths of providence were still beyond human reach. Industry could not discover it, nor all its precious treasures purchase it! You may search, not the earth only, but the ocean, and still the question will return, *Whence cometh wisdom; and where is the place of understanding?* It is hid from the eyes of all living, even from the most soaring minds. Death or futurity may throw some light upon it; but even that will be partial. A perfect comprehension of it is the prerogative of God only. He only who made all things can comprehend his own designs.

There is, however, a species of wisdom within the province of man; and let him attend to that, as his own proper concern. Unto man he said, *The*

fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.

From the whole, we see there are three species of wisdom:—The first is the wisdom of this world, which is common among men;—the next is the wisdom peculiar to God, but to which men too frequently aspire;—and the last is the wisdom from above, which is proper to man.

With respect to the first, there is much to admire. The extent to which human ingenuity will go, in accomplishing worldly objects is astonishing. The energies herein exerted are worthy of a better cause. What self-denial, what resolution, what contrivance, what application, what patience, what perseverance! There is scarcely a danger, but men will encounter it; or a difficulty, but they will surmount it. That which strength cannot effect at once, art and application will accomplish by degrees. But alas! the prize for which all these energies are exerted is perishing, and will shortly be of no account. *Where then is wisdom; and where is the place of understanding?* Surely it is not here!

With respect to the second, it is not Job's friends only that have intruded into things which they have not seen. "It is well," said a great writer, "for man to know the length of his tether." Our Saviour was asked, *Whether there were few that should be saved?* But he refused a direct answer; and there are hundreds of questions started in divinity, which I believe Christ and his apostles would have treated in the same manner. I have

seen attempts to ascertain *how* God exists in three persons,—*how* divine predestination consists with human agency and accountableness,—*how* a pure creature, came to entertain the idea of casting off the government of his Creator; and many other things of the kind: but they always seemed to me to darken counsel with words without knowledge. We find the solution of no such question in the word of God; and we find Moses warning the Israelites that *secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those things which are revealed, belong unto us and to our children for ever.* We also hear David declaring, *Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted, myself as a child that is weaned of his mother, my soul is even as a weaned child.* Let vain men on this account go on to speak of the scriptures as not adapted to “any high perfection in knowledge:”—let them charge the sacred writers, and even their Lord himself, with ignorance;* but let not serious Christians aim to be wise above what is written. When we see a writer of this description discussing subjects too high for him, and concerning which the scriptures are silent, however we may respect his character or his talents, we must needs say to him as Job does to the miner, *Where is wisdom; and where is the place of understanding?* It is beyond the limits of thy researches.

* Lindsey's Apology, Chap. II. Priestley on Necessity, p. 153.

The third and last kind of wisdom is that which is proper to man. *Unto man he said, The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.* It is practical, and not merely speculative. All speculative knowledge is either in itself injurious, or, through the corruption of the human heart, dangerous: but this directly tends to humble, and so to profit the soul. The very words are of a humbling nature: it is the language of a wise master, to a weak but conceited servant, charging him to keep to that employment which he has set him about, and not to neglect it by interfering in what does not concern him. It is language that abases the pride of science; for in fearing the Lord, and departing from evil, the unlearned and the learned stand upon the same ground. Science, it is true, is in many ways friendly to religion; but to render it truly profitable, it is necessary, that amidst all its acquirements, a man should *become a fool that he may be wise.* Finally: the language implies that man is so sunk and entangled in *evil*, that there is work enough for his *understanding*, during the short space allotted him in this world, to *depart* from it. Instead of perplexing himself with things too high for him, let him ask, *Wherewith shall a young man cleanse his way?* How is the love of evil to be conquered? What principle is that which will raise my soul from the bondage of corruption? Where is the good way, that I may walk in it, and find rest for my soul? *Here is wisdom, and here is*

the place of understanding, at least that which is proper to man.

ON THE ABUSE OF ALLEGORY IN PREACHING.

AFTER what several able writers have produced of late years upon this practice, particularly the late Dr. Stennet on the Parable of the Sower, it might have been expected that, this evil would at least have been considerably diminished. But the misfortune is, those who are most addicted to this way of preaching, seem in general to have very little inclination to read. Whether they deem it unlawful, as involving them in the sin charged upon the prophets, of stealing every one from his neighbour; or, whether they be so enamoured of their own thoughts as to set all others at defiance, I cannot decide; but certain it is, that many preach as if they had never read or thought upon the subject.

Very little observation will convince us, that the preachers with whom this practice mostly prevails, are of the lower sort with respect to seriousness and good sense, however high they may affect to soar in their notions. Of such characters I have but little hope. But as some godly men are, I believe, too much infected with this disease, if the Editor will indulge me with two or three pages in the magazine, I will expostulate with one of them on the *causes* and *consequences* of his conduct.

Let me intreat you then, my friend, to consider, in the first place, Whether, when you turn plain historical facts into allegory, you treat the word of God with becoming reverence? Can you seriously think the scriptures to be a book of riddles and conundrums? and that a Christian minister is properly employed in giving scope to his fancy, in order to discover their solution? I have been asked the meaning of certain passages of scripture; and when I have answered according to what appeared to be the scope of the sacred writer, it has been said, "Yes, that may be the *literal* meaning; but what is the *spiritual* meaning of it?" as though every part of scripture had a spiritual, that is, a hidden, or allegorical meaning, besides its obvious one. That some parts of scripture are allegorical,—that some prophecies have a double reference,—and that the principle suggested by many a passage may be applied to other things besides what is immediately intended, there is no doubt: but this is very different from the practice to which I allude. All scripture is profitable in some way; some for doctrine, some for reproof, some for correction, and some for instruction in righteousness: but all is not to be turned into allegory. If we must play, let it be with things of less consequence than the word of the eternal God!

Secoudly: Consider whether the motive that stimulates you to such a manner of treating the sacred oracles, be any other than *vanity*? If you preached to a people possessed of any thing like

good sense, they would consider it as perverting the word of God, and whipping it into froth. Instead of applauding you, they would be unable to endure it. But if your people be ignorant, such things will please them; and they may gaze, and admire and smile, and say one to another, it may be in your hearing too, 'Well, what a man! Who would have thought that he would have found so much gospel in that text?' Ah, very true: who indeed? But what would the apostle Paul say? *Are ye not carnal.* Is it for a man of God to "court a grin when he should woo a soul?" For shame! desist from such folly, or lay aside the Christian ministry! You are commanded to *feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood:* but it is not every thing pleasing to a people that feeds them in the sense of the Apostle. He did not mean to direct the Ephesian elders to feed men's fancies, and still less their prejudices; but their spiritual desires: and this is accomplished only by administering to them the words of truth and soberness. If your preaching be such as God approves, and if you study to show yourself approved of him, it will lead the people to admire your Saviour rather than you, and render him the topic of their conversation.

Thirdly: Consider whether both you and your people be not in danger of mistaking this spiritualizing passion, for spirituality of mind and a being led into *the deep things of God?* There are few objects at a greater distance than the effervescence of a vain imagination, and that holy and humble

spirit by which spiritual things are discerned; yet the one is often mistaken for the other. The preacher dreams of deep discoveries: and the people wonder to hear them: but what saith the scriptures? *The prophet that hath only a dream must tell his dream; but he that hath God's word, let him speak it faithfully: for what is the chaff to the wheat?*

Finally: Consider the consequences which must follow from this practice. If an unbeliever come into your assembly, and find you arraying Christianity in this fancy-dress, is it likely he should be convinced of all,—and, the secrets of his heart being made manifest, fall down and worship God, and report that God is among you, and that of a truth? If he hear you treat of the historical parts of scripture, as meaning something very different from what they appear to mean, will he not say, you are mad, and be furnished with a handle for representing religion itself as void of truth and good sense? Or if he hear you interpret the miracles which Christ wrought in proof of his Messiahship, of that change which is now wrought in the minds of sinners by the Spirit of God, will he not say, that you yourselves appear to consider the whole as a string of fables, and are employed in finding out the morals of them?

But perhaps you are seldom attended by men of this description. Be it so; what, think you, must be the effect of such preaching on professing Christians, either nominal or real? The former will either fall asleep under it, as something which

does not concern them; or, if they attend to you, and understand your interpretations, they will think they are quite in the secret, and set themselves down for deep Christians; when, in truth, they know nothing yet as they ought to know. And as to real Christians, their souls will either pine under your ministry, or, by contracting a false taste, will thirst after the froth of human fancy, to the neglect of the sincere milk of the word; and instead of growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, will make no progress in either.

It is an easy thing for a man of a luxuriant imagination, unincumbered by judgment, to make any thing he pleases of the scriptures, as well as any other book; but in so doing he must destroy their simplicity, and of course their efficacy; which in fact is reducing them to nothing. If they be not applied to their appropriate uses, they are perverted; and a perverted good proves the greatest of evils. Thus it is that characters abound who are full of scripture language, while yet they are awfully destitute of scripture knowledge, or scriptural religion.

ON COVETOUSNESS.

Luke xii. 13—21.

WHEN our Lord was preaching on subjects of eternal importance, a certain young man interrupted him, requesting him to speak to his brother to divide the inheritance with him. It

seems as if his father had lately died, and that his brother could not be induced to do him justice in the division of the estate. He might possibly have heard of some such case as that of Zaccheus; in which Jesus, by a few words speaking, had rendered a selfish man both just and generous. Jesus, however, instead of complying with his wishes, disclaims having any thing to do in such matters; and warns others, from his example, to *take heed and beware of covetousness*.

Allowing the propriety of our Lord's declining to be a judge in such matters, as not comporting with the spiritual nature of his kingdom, yet how was it that he should take occasion from hence to warn his followers against the sin of covetousness? There is nothing in the story that gives us to suppose that the young man coveted what was not his own. Wherein then consisted his sin? Let us suppose a person under a mortal disease, who, seeing an eminent physician passing by him, instead of telling him his case, should request him to settle a dispute in his family! What should we say? If any thing, it would be to this effect:—‘Settle those matters as you can; in applying to the physician, treat him in character, and have regard to your life.’ For a sinner to come to the Saviour on a mere secular business, and this while his soul was in a perishing condition, must prove his heart to be set supremely on this world, and his regard to Christ to be only a wish to render him subservient to his temporal interest.

Here then we perceive the species of covetousness that our Lord meant to censure. It is not that which breaks out in acts of robbery, theft, or oppression;—not that which withholds the hire of the labourer, or studies the arts of fraud;—it is not any thing, in short, which respects the conduct of man to man;—but that which immediately relates to God, withholding the heart from him, and giving it to the world.

Such is the idea conveyed by the parable of the rich fool, which is here introduced by our Lord in illustration of the subject. He is not accused of any thing injurious to those about him; his *grounds brought forth plentifully*; and who can blame him for this? All that he proposed was, by the bounty of Providence on his labours, to accumulate a fortune, and then to spend it on himself. And what harm (most men will ask) was there in this? Truly, it is the general opinion of mankind that this is all fair and right. If a man regard not God, but himself only, so long as he acts well towards them, he will not only be acquitted, but applauded at their tribunal: *Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself*. Howbeit, this is not the doctrine of Christ. In his account, it is not the miser only that is covetous, but he who sets his heart upon the world rather than God, even though he lays out a part of his substance in building and other accommodations; and proposes, when he has got things a little in order, to *eat, drink, and be merry* with the surplus.

In the case of the young man who came to Christ on a secular errand we see that things in themselves lawful, by being pursued out of place and out of season, may become sinful. It is lawful, at proper seasons and in subordination to higher objects, to follow our worldly affairs; but if we go to the house of God with this end in view, it is profaning it. The same is true if while we are there our thoughts are employed in forming plans and schemes for the week, by which we may promote our temporal interest. Such things are: nor is it confined to the house of God. Even when upon our knees, the busy mind will wander after this and that pursuit, till we have in a manner forgotten where we are! Nor does the evil of such things consist merely in a few volatile, wandering thoughts, but in that of which they are an indication; namely, a mind cleaving to the earth instead of ascending to God. In the case of this young man, we may also see the danger of regarding Christ and religion in only a secondary or subordinate manner, while the world is treated as supreme. Religion may have changed a bad husband into a good one; or induced a customer to leave off his expensive habits, and to pay his bills with punctuality and promptitude; and, as such, you may respect it; but such respect will not be approved of Christ. If we have any thing to do with him it must be in his proper character of Lord and Saviour. To attempt to render his religion subservient to worldly interest, is to lean

upon him, while you are worshipping in the temple of mammon.

It was not without cause that our Saviour said, on this occasion, *Take heed and beware of covetousness!* Truly, this is a sin which presents itself under so many specious forms and names, which so insensibly insinuates itself on almost all occasions, and which may be indulged with so little danger of losing our good name among men, that, without much prayer and watchfulness against it, and much communion with Christ, there is no hope of overcoming it.

In observing my own mind, and the behaviour of my acquaintance, I see matter for both pleasure and pain. I see a goodly number of professing Christians, who appear to me to live *not unto themselves, but unto him that died for them and rose again*. I see some of this description, into whose hands God is pouring plenty, and who, though continually imparting, still increase. The poor people of Glasgow used to say of a late great and good man in that city, 'David Dale gives his money by sho'elsful, and God Almighty sho'els it back again.' Characters like-minded still live; and long may they live and be blessings to the world! They afford a striking contrast to those described by David, *Let them be as grass upon the house-top, which withereth before it groweth up; wherewith the mower filleth not his hand, nor he that bindeth sheaves his bosom; neither do they that go by say, The blessing of the Lord be upon you!—we bless you in the name of the Lord!*

Nor is it in men of opulence only that this grace shines! I see men who have learned to be economical in order to be generous; men whose *deep poverty abounds to the riches of their liberality!* This is to *cast our bread upon the waters*; and this may be more in the esteem of Christ, than the most splendid donations of those who, in giving, exercise no self-denial.

But I see, on the other hand, not only sordid misers, but men who profess godliness, and who would be thought liberal, full of anxiety about appearance. They *must* dress, visit, and show away in their circle. The consequence is, they have nothing to spare in the way of doing good; or if they give a little, it is chiefly to save appearances. It may be thought this belongs to vanity, rather than covetousness; it is, however, living to ourselves rather than God; and this is the covetousness against which our Saviour warns us.

There are three descriptions of men, each of which, if I mistake not, has some peculiar temptations to this sin; and who, if destitute of grace, are likely to be carried away by it: these are the prosperous, the aged, and the professor of religion.

With respect to the *prosperous*, it is a fact which falls under common observation, that men who while possessing little were compassionate and willing to communicate, when they come to rise in the world are hard-hearted, and part with their money with great reluctance. This is not difficult to be accounted for. While necessity calls for

nearly the whole of what is received, there is no room for a plan of accumulation : but when money flows in, and rises beyond the mark of immediate wants, and the advantages of it begin to be felt, a saving system is adopted ; and the mind is employed in calculating the number of years necessary to the arrival at such and such a point ; and when this comes to be the case, every application for benevolence strikes a damp upon the spirits, as interfering with the system, and lengthening the time ere it will reach the proposed point. Hence arises the force of the caution, *If riches increase, set not your heart upon them.* Hence also we perceive the folly and self-deception of thinking, that if we had such-a-one's estate what great things we would do ; or if we should live to possess so and so, then how charitable we will be. All such thoughts are framed to excuse the neglect of present duty ; and are as if a person engaged in a race should desire, in order to make swifter progress, to have his feet laden with thick clay.

With respect to the *aged*, it is a fact which also falls under common observation, that persons as they get older, get more covetous. This observation, however, is not universally true. There is a goodly number of men who bring forth other *fruits in old age* ; or who, as they draw nearer to heaven, become more heavenly-minded. The truth seems to be, that as every principle tends to maturity, those who have been covetous in their younger years, provided there be no change of heart, will be more covetous in old age. The

stream of depravity in early life had several channels,—such as the lust of the flesh and the pride of life; and these would of course diminish the strength of avarice: but in the last stages of life, those channels are in a manner stopped by the decay of the natural powers, and the whole current flows in one direction. Hence we perceive many an old wealthy churl living to himself; and repelling every application for a divine or benevolent object: *Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? There be many servants now-a-days that break away every man from his master. Shall I then take my bread, and my water, and my flesh, that I have killed for my shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?*

When I see such a spirit in aged people, recollecting that every principle, as was said, tends to maturity, I cannot help considering it as a strong indication that they have all their lives been under the dominion of this vice, only that it has been checked by a regard to appearances, and it may be by other vices; and that they are now fast ripening for destruction.

But in what way, it will be asked, are the third class, namely, *professors of religion*, subject to this sin, more than other men? As a fact, it has long impressed my mind; and I conceive it is not difficult to be accounted for. Supposing a person to be merely a professor, whatever impedes his evil propensity in all directions but one, will be certain to strengthen it in respect of that one. This is exactly the case as to a profession of

religion. If you would be thought a Christian, you must not be a drunkard, nor a debauchee, nor a gamester, nor a liar, nor a blasphemer, nor an injurious person; but you may love the world more than God: for this being confined to things between God and your own conscience, does not fall under human cognizance, or though it may affect your liberality to men, yet as the discipline of the New Testament leaves every man to judge of his own ability, and to give what he gives, *not as if it were of necessity, but willingly*, you may here live undetected, and with a little management, unsuspected, by your brethren. Of this, the case of Judas Iscariot will furnish you with a notable example!

In this view, perhaps, Dissenters from the Established Church, may be more in danger of indulging in covetousness than in most other evils. They are shut out from things which are principally adapted to feed other dispositions as well as this; such as promotion in the church, in the army, and in the navy. The chief openings for them are found in manufactures, trade, and husbandry: openings which it is certainly very lawful for them to embrace; but which, in case of success attending them, are often great temptations to covetousness.

I close with two remarks:—First: That the danger of falling into covetousness is not confined to the mere professor: a Christian may be greatly impeded by it in his way to heaven; and, like Lot, whose heart was seduced by the well-watered

plains of Sodom, may die under a cloud. Lastly: That the most effectual preservative from this sin, as well as others, is believingly to converse with the doctrine of the cross. By this the world was crucified to the apostle, and he unto the world.

THE CHRISTIAN MINISTRY.

Mr. Editor,

HAVING been engaged in the work of preaching the gospel for nearly forty years, and feeling that according to the course of nature it cannot be long ere I shall have to give an account of my stewardship, your readers will accept of a few serious and affectionate thoughts on this most important subject.

A remark which I once heard from the lips of that great and good man, the late Mr. Abraham Booth, has often recurred to my recollection. "I fear," said he, "there will be found a larger proportion of wicked ministers than of any other order of professing Christians!" It did not appear to me at the time, nor has it ever appeared since, that this remark proceeded from a want of charity, but rather from a deep knowledge of the nature of Christianity, and an impartial observation of men and things. It behoves us, not only as professing Christians, but as ministers, to *examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith*. It certainly is possible, after we have preached to others, that we ourselves

should be cast away! I believe it is very common for the personal religion of a minister to be taken for granted; and this may prove a temptation to him to take it for granted too. Ministers, being wholly devoted to the service of God, are supposed to have considerable advantages for spiritual improvement. These they certainly have; and if their minds be spiritual, they may be expected to make greater proficiency in the divine life than their brethren.

But it should be remembered, that if they are *not* spiritual, those things which would otherwise be a help, will prove a hindrance. If we study divine subjects merely *as ministers*, they will produce no salutary effect. We may converse with the most impressive truths, as soldiers and surgeons do with blood, till they cease to make any impression upon us. We must meditate on these things *as Christians*, first feeding our own souls upon them, and then imparting that which we have believed and felt to others; or, whatever good we may do to them, we shall receive none ourselves. Unless we mix faith with what we preach, as well as with what we hear, the word will not profit us. It may be on these accounts that ministers, while employed in watching over others, are so solemnly warned against neglecting themselves: *Take heed unto YOURSELVES and to all the flock, &c.—Take heed UNTO THYSELF, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee.*

It is a very discriminating account of the work of the ministry that is given us in 2 Cor. iv. 5. *We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.* It may prove in the end that this is the character of every faithful pastor, and that every one who is not faithful, preaches himself, rather than Christ Jesus the Lord. It is true that none, except a few gross impostors, would think of holding up themselves as the way of salvation, instead of Christ; but there are more ways of preaching ourselves than this: Christ may be the topic of our preaching, and the object of our zealous commendation, while self is the governing principle of the whole discourse.

If *worldly advantage* be our object, whatever be the subject-matter of our preaching, we certainly preach ourselves, and not Christ. It is true, there is but little food for this lust in the far greater part of our congregations, whether in or out of the establishment; yet there doubtless are cases in which it is otherwise. Some have made their fortunes in this way; and if such was their end, they have had their reward. If this had not been a possible case, Paul would not have disavowed it as he does:—*Not a cloke of covetousness, God is witness!*

If we make the ministry subservient to a life of *ease and indolence*, we preach ourselves rather than Christ. We may get but little for our labour, and yet, being fond of a life of sloth, (if a *life*

it can be called,) it may be more agreeable to us than any other pursuit. It is from this disposition that many ministers have got into the habit of spending a large part of every week in gossiping from house to house; not promoting the spiritual good of the people, but merely indulging themselves in idle talk. I might add, it is from this disposition and practice that a large proportion of the *scandals* among ministers have arisen. Had there been no danger from these quarters, we should not have met with another of Paul's solemn disavowals:—*Our exhortation was not of uncleanness.*

If the *applause* of our hearers be the governing principle of our discourses, we preach ourselves, and not Christ. To be acceptable is necessary to being useful; and an attention to manner with this end in view is very proper; but if the love of fame be our governing principle, our whole ministry will be tainted by it. This subtle poison will penetrate and pervade our exercises, till every one perceives it, and is sickened by it, except ourselves. It will inflate our composition in the study, animate our delivery in the pulpit, and condescend to fish for applause when we have retired. It will even induce us to deal in flattering doctrine, dwelling on what are known to be favourite topics, and avoiding those which are otherwise. It is a great matter to be able to join with the Apostle in another of his solemn disavowals:—*For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know,—nor of men sought we glory.*

Finally: If our aim be to make *proselytes to ourselves*, or to our party, rather than *converts to Christ*, we shall be found to have preached ourselves, and not him. We certainly have seen much of this species of zeal in our times:—*Men speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.* Nor do I refer merely to men who would be thought singularly evangelical, and even inspired of God; who are continually holding up themselves as the favourites of heaven, and denouncing judgments on all who oppose them; and the tenor of whose preaching is to persuade their admirers to consider themselves as the dear children of God, and all who disapprove of them as poor blind creatures, knowing nothing of the gospel. Of them and their followers I can only say, *If any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.* But men who have paid great attention to the scriptures, and who have preached and written many things on the side of truth, have nevertheless given but too evident proof that the tenor of their labours has been to make proselytes to themselves, or to their party, rather than converts to Christ.

We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord! Let Christ be not only the theme of my remaining ministry, but the exaltation of him and the enlargement of his kingdom the great end of my life! ‘If I forget THEE, O my Saviour, let my right hand forget; if I do not remember THEE, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth!’

THOUGHTS ON THE MANNER IN WHICH DIVINE TRUTH
IS COMMUNICATED IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

IT is a fact which must have struck every attentive reader, that God has not communicated his mind to us by giving us a set of principles, arranged in the form of a scheme; or that we have no such creed as formally includes all the things necessary to be believed, in either the Old or New Testament. On the contrary, we see divine truth introduced rather incidentally, than systematically. It is scattered from one end to the other, through all the historical, devotional, prophetic, and epistolary writings.

I have no intention to derive an argument from hence, as some have done, against creeds and confessions of faith; nor do I conceive that such an argument can from hence be fairly derived. We might with equal justice argue against the science of botany being reduced to a system, on the ground of herbs and flowers of the same kind not growing together, but being scattered over the earth in beautiful variety. The variegated face of nature is not marred by its productions being scientifically collected and arranged; on the contrary, its beauties are so much the better understood. Yet, with respect to the *actual position* of the products of nature, we must needs decide in favour of variety; and the same may be said of the actual position of divine truth in the holy scriptures; the

incidental manner in which it is commonly introduced, gives it great energy and beauty. It may be worthy of attention to consider a few of the incidents and occasions on which some of the most important truths are introduced, and to notice the wisdom of God in his thus introducing them.

It is a truth which lies at the foundation of all religion, that there is a *first cause* and Creator of all things, visible and invisible. But this truth is never introduced, that I recollect, in the form of an abstract proposition. At the commencement of revelation, it is rather supposed than asserted: *In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth.* Moses does not expressly inform us that there was a God who existed prior to this, but leaves us to infer it; hereby intimating, perhaps, that this is so evident a truth, that they who doubt it, need reproof rather than information.

The perfections of God are taught abundantly in the scriptures; yet I do not recollect a single instance where they are introduced merely as a proposition, without some practical end to be answered. When Abraham, through Sarah's unbelief and impatience, had deviated from his usual conduct, in taking Hagar to wife, hoping thereby to see the divine promise fulfilled, Jehovah thus reproved him: *I am the ALMIGHTY, (or ALL-SUFFICIENT) God. Walk before ME, and be thou perfect.* When Israel despondingly exclaimed, *My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is passed over from my God,* he was thus answered:

Hast thou not known, hast thou not heard, that the EVERLASTING God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, FAINTETH NOT, NEITHER IS WEARY? There is no searching of his UNDERSTANDING.

In this manner also we are taught the moral government of God, and the accountableness of rational creatures. These important truths, as they stand in the sacred page, do not barely meet our eyes, or our understandings, but our consciences. They give us no time to dispute: ere we are aware we feel ourselves arrested by them, as by an almighty and irresistible force. *They say, the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard. Understand, ye brutish among the people; and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see? He that chastiseth the heathen, shall not he correct? He that teacheth man knowledge, shall not he know? Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth!*

Thus also we are instructed respecting the fall and depravity of human nature. We have no encouragement curiously to inquire beyond the fact; but are told that *God made man upright, and he sought out many inventions.* If we would wish to flatter ourselves, or our species, from a partial view of human virtue, we are instantly cut short, in being told that *God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil*

continually. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no not one. And the substance of this is stated to induce our acquiescence in the doctrine of justification by free grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

The doctrine of the *trinity* is never proposed to us as an object of speculation, but as a truth affecting our dearest interests. John introduces the sacred Three as witnesses to the truth of the gospel; Christ, as objects of instituted worship, into whose name we are baptized; and Paul exhibits them as the source of all spiritual good; *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen. Again: The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.*

In this manner we are taught that great mystery of godliness, *God manifest in the flesh*, or the proper deity and humanity of Christ. One sacred writer announces, in prophetic language, *Unto us a CHILD is born, and his name shall be called the MIGHTY GOD.* Again he describes him as the *Lord God, coming with strong hand; yet, feeding his flock like a shepherd, gathering his lambs with his arm, carrying them in his bosom, and gently leading those that are with young.* Another directs his followers to him, and says, *This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a MAN who is preferred before me, FOR HE WAS BEFORE ME.* A third

draws from his quiver an arrow of conviction: *Ye have KILLED the AUTHOR of life!* A fourth finds in it a motive of compassion to the murderers: *Who are Israelites, of whom as concerning THE FLESH Christ came, who is over all, GOD BLESSED FOR EVER.* On one occasion, it is introduced as affording a pattern of humility and condescension: *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being IN THE FORM OF GOD, THOUGHT IT NOT ROBBERY TO BE EQUAL WITH GOD; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.* On another, it accounts for the wonderful extremes in his character: the sacred writer having exhibited him as GOD, whose *throne was for ever and ever*; as having *laid the foundations of the earth*, and declared *the heavens to be the work of his hands*, an objection might arise from his being well known to be *a man*, and to have lived among men. In answer to this he adds, *He was made a little lower than the angels. The children being partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same. In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a faithful and merciful High-priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.* Finally: it is brought in at the close of the Revelation, to seal it with divine authority: *I Jesus have sent mine angel, to testify unto you these things in the churches. I AM THE ROOT AND THE OFFSPRING OF DAVID.* What a

majestic sweetness does this truth afford in these connections!

It is impossible to enumerate the various occasions on which the scriptures introduce the doctrine of *atonement* by the death of Christ. This is, to the doctrines and precepts of the Bible, as the life-blood to the animal system. The first chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians is often resorted to, as treating on evangelical blessings: but there is a design which runs through that whole chapter, nay almost through the whole Epistle, which is *to endear the name of Christ, and to exhibit the invaluable worth of his redeeming love*. Are we blessed with all spiritual blessings? It is *in Christ Jesus*. Were we predestinated to the adoption of children? It was *by Jesus Christ*. Are we accepted? It is *in the Beloved*. Have we redemption, even the forgiveness of sins? It is *through his blood*. And so on. Christ crucified is the *substance* of the Jewish ceremonial, and the *spirit* of its prophecies; the theme of the Christian ministry on earth, and the song of the blessed above!

It is not very difficult to discern the wisdom of God in introducing truth in such a manner. If every species of plants and flowers were to grow together, instead of the whole being scattered over the earth, the effect would be very different, and much for the worse: and if all truth relating to one subject, were to be found only in one book, chapter, or epistle, we should probably understand

much less than we do. There are some divine truths which are less pleasant than others. Even good men have their partialities, or favourite principles, which would induce them to read those parts of scripture which favoured them, to the neglect of others. But truth being scattered throughout the scriptures, we are thereby necessitated, if we read at all, to read the whole mind of God; and thus it is that we gradually and insensibly imbibe it, and become assimilated to the same image. The conduct of God in this matter, resembles that of a wise physician, who, in prescribing for a child, directs that its medicines be mixed up with its necessary food.

Moreover: Scripture doctrines being introduced in some practical connexion, we learn them in that connexion. The occasions and ends of truth being associated in our minds with the truth itself, the great design of God in giving us a revelation, which is to sanctify our spirits and fit us for every good word and work, is more effectually answered. To one that has learned truth from the scriptures, and in whom it dwells richly, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, it is scarcely possible to think of a doctrine but in connexion with its correspondent duties, or of a duty without the principles by which it is enforced.

Once more: Truth being introduced in connexion with some case or incident, it more readily occurs to us, when such case, or something similar to it, becomes our own. If, through distrust of

the divine power and goodness, and with hope of better accomplishing my object, I be tempted to turn aside from the straight-forward path of uprightness; having once read and felt the story of Abraham, and the admonition that was given *him* on that occasion, it is much more likely to occur to my mind, and to correct my folly, than if I had barely read that God was *Almighty*, or had only found a general admonition to *walk before him, and be perfect*. Or if I be tempted to sink in despondency on account of dark and intricate providences; having read of the promises of God to Jacob, of his subsequent fears, and of the happy issue; such promises are much more likely to be a ready remedy, than if I had barely read, unconnected with any particular case, that God *will surely do his people good*. In the one case, truth is laid down, as it were, in abstract propositions; in the other, it is illustrated by particular examples.

MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS,

&c.

FROM

THE MISSIONARY MAGAZINE,

1801—1812.

THE MYSTERY OF PROVIDENCE.

Job xii. 6—25.

THE great controversy between Job, and his friends respected the system of providence. They maintained that God governed the world upon the principle of minute retribution, rendering to every man in the present life according to his works. When therefore great calamities befel an individual, they concluded that he was more wicked than other men. He, on the contrary, maintained that the system of providence proceeded on no such principle, but on a large scale, full of inscrutable wisdom; and that good and evil came alike to men, whether they were righteous or wicked.

In proof of this, he appeals to the following things.

First: The success which often attends the worst of men, even in the worst of causes. *The*

tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure, into whose hand God bringeth abundantly.

Secondly: The large proportion which wicked men possess of the earth and its productions: *But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee; or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee; and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee.* As if he should say, Ask them to whom they belong. Is it to good men only, or chiefly? Is it for the righteous few that the animals breed, or the productions of the earth vegetate? Is it not also, yea principally, the proud and the luxurious?

Thirdly: Adverse providences towards individuals and families, which are dispensed alike to good and bad, which there is no withstanding, and from which there is no escaping: *Behold he breaketh down, and it cannot be built again: he shutteth up a man, and there can be no opening.*

Fourthly: Public calamities, which also come alike to all; such as drought, and consequent famine at one time; and desolating inundations at another: *Behold, he withholdeth the waters, and they dry up; also he sendeth them out, and they overturn the earth.*

Fifthly: The absolute and supreme controul of God over all the devices and intrigues of men. Instead of preserving the weak, and punishing the mighty, according to the minute rules of retributive justice, he, in this world, lays his mighty hand on both, and causes each to subserve his infinitely

wise purposes : *With him is strength and wisdom ; the deceived and the deceiver are his.*

Lastly : He appeals to those events which agitate the world, and involve the overthrow of nations ; in which, calamities come alike to all, without respect to character.

It is a very affecting picture which is here drawn, from the 17th verse to the end of the chapter, of the overthrow of a nation by invasion. It is described as follows.

The great advisers of public measures are driven from their seats, and the administrators of government are like men beside themselves, not knowing what measures to take : *He leadeth counsellors away spoiled, and maketh the judges fools.*

The strong band of power, which kept all orders of the state in subjection, is dissolved, and the sovereign himself becomes bound with the cord of a captive : *He looseth the bond of kings, and girdeth their loins with a girdle.*

Governors of provinces are led captive, and the commanders of armies defeated in battle : *He leadeth princes away spoiled, and overthroweth the mighty.*

The patriotic orator, whose eloquence has so often charmed a nation, and whose counsel has been frequently resorted to in a perilous hour, is heard no more ; the wisdom also of the most experienced statesman is nonplussed : *He removeth away the speech of the trusty, and taketh away the understanding of the aged.*

The most illustrious characters are stripped of their excellency, and those whose words made nations tremble, having lost their influence, are become weak as other men: *He poureth contempt upon princes, and weakeneth the strength of the mighty.*

On such an awful occasion, a darkness supernatural seems to have burst upon the world; as though the shades of death had found their way from beneath, and had covered the face of the earth, so that men are bewildered and lost in their pursuits: *He discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death.*

Such an event has an influence on surrounding nations. Like a mountain sinking into the sea, and agitating the waters, it puts every thing out of place. Some are increased by its spoils, others ruined by its overthrow, and even the same nation is by turns both sunk and raised, contracted and enlarged: *He increaseth the nations, and destroyeth them: he enlargeth the nations and straiteneth them again.*

Finally: Those great characters of the land, who have escaped the hands of the conqueror, yet having lost all spirit to resist, or to stand their ground, betake themselves to flight. Wandering up and down the world, like men who have lost their way in a wilderness, they become intoxicated with grief and dismay, and know not what measures to take to retrieve their losses; or if they did, have no resolution to pursue them; *He taketh away*

the heart of the chief of the people of the earth, and causeth them to wander in a wilderness where there is no way. They grope in the dark without light, and he maketh them to stagger like a drunken man.

O my soul! can I meditate on such a catastrophe without feeling for others, or fearing for my native country? Yet if such should be its lot, it is a part of that great system of providence that directs all human affairs, and will ultimately issue in the greatest good. Meanwhile, *having received a kingdom that cannot be moved*, may I have grace that I may serve God acceptably, with reverence and with godly fear!

NOTES

On 1 Cor. xii. 24.

"For our comely parts have no need; but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked."

AMONG other disorders in the church at Corinth, they were lifted up with their gifts. Hence this whole chapter is spent on the subject. Indeed the same spirit is noticed at the outset of the Epistle, (Chap. i. 12.) where, though he mentions his own name, and those of Apollos, &c. as the idols of their admiration, yet it was only in a figure, (Chap. iv. 6.) that he might with a better grace pull them down. Probably, the objects of their idolatry were neither Paul nor Apollos, but their own false teachers. In order to impress a true sense of things upon their minds, he represents

them under the form of a human body, composed of many members, insinuating that it was no less absurd for invidious distinctions and divisions to take place on account of different gifts, than it would be for certain members of the body to be exalted, and the rest set at nought.

The Apostle first addresses himself to the inferior members, who were in danger of being discouraged: *If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body?* And, afterwards to the superior members who were in danger of discouraging them; *And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again, the head to the feet, I have no need of you.* Finally: he notices the peculiar honour which we confer upon those parts of the body which are least comely, or honourable: *And those members of the body which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour, and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.* And he intimates in the text that God does the same to his church. Consequently we ought to follow the example, giving more honour, rather than less, to the feeble members of Christ's body. What is this? *What is the peculiar honour which God has conferred on the less splendid members of the church, rather than the other?*

First: That which distinguishes the ordinary members of Christ's body, is of far greater importance than that which distinguishes the extraordinary, or gifted ones. The one is *grace*, the other *gifts*. This idea is held up in the text,

After speaking of apostles and prophets, and pastors and teachers, &c. he allows them to covet the best gifts. Yet, says he, *show I unto you a more excellent way.* And what was this but *charity*, or love? Hence he goes on to contrast gifts and tongues with charity, in Chap. xiii. giving the decided preference to the latter. Now this was *giving honour to the part that lacked*; making that which was common to Christians, even the meanest, of infinitely greater account than that which was possessed by a few of the gifted among them.

Secondly: The most gifted members of Christ's body, in a proper state of mind, when they have expressed their strongest desires, and the objects in which they have gloried, have never selected those things which were peculiar to them as gifted, but those which are possessed by good men in common. The highest object of David's desire, was that which was possessed by the meanest good man. *ONE THING have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.* That in which Paul gloried, was not his greatness, but his infirmity, and the *cross of Christ*: and that which he desired was, to be *found in him, not having his own righteousness.*

Thirdly: The greater is subordinate to the less, and not the less to the greater. Churches are not for ministers, but ministers for churches. The poor, the feeble, and the afflicted, are not ordained

to honour a splendid orator, by attending upon him and admiring him; but the most accomplished orator, or even apostle, to be *their servants for Jesus' sake*. As the eye and the hand are subservient to the body, so, *whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, or life, or death, ALL ARE YOURS*. The greatest of all must be the servant of all: *And he gave some, apostles: and some, prophets: and some, evangelists: and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*

Fourthly: In their vocation God has conferred peculiar honour upon the poor and the weak and the feeble, in taking the generality of his people from among them. *God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.—Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.*

Fifthly: All the consolations and promises of God are addressed to us, not as gifted, but as gracious. God speaks encouraging words to both rich and poor; but mark the difference. *Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted; but the rich, in that he is made low; because as the*

flower of the grass he shall pass away. See also the beatitudes.

Sixthly: That which distinguishes the gifted members of Christ is only for time, and is found in hypocrites; but that which is common to the weak, is *a well, springing up unto eternal life.*—*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me 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? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*

This subject may be applied to *the suppression of vanity, and the removal of despondency.*

Gifts and knowledge puff men up now, as well as formerly. A poor, or feeble-minded Christian, is in danger of being overlooked, and men are valued by the splendour of their appearance or talents. Ministers also of less splendid abilities are often despised by those who have itching ears, and curious minds. But these things ought not so to be. We have seen that God does not proceed on any such principle. If ye say, I am for this great man, and I for that, *Are ye not carnal?* And if any one set himself above his brethren, let him know that he could not do without them. *The eye, beautiful and piercing as it is, cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee.* The greatest of Christian ministers, such as Paul, felt his need of his brethren. Hence he frequently intreats their

prayers for him. The influence which the early attendance, lively attention, and affectionate reception of the word in common Christians has upon a minister's heart, is indescribable. O what a difference do we feel in preaching to a humble, spiritual, and affectionate congregation, to what we do, when addressing a haughty, worldly, and unfeeling people! The uniform demeanour of serious Christians in life, recommends the doctrines delivered from the pulpit; yea, it has been known to carry conviction where the gospel itself has been preached without effect. Listen, ye wives! *Be in subjection to your own husbands, that if any obey not the word, they also may without the word, be won by the conversation of the wives.*

And as some are puffed up in these times, as well as formerly, so others are consequently cast down. Many a poor Christian, because he is poor, thinks himself a dry tree, of little or no use, like the strangers, or eunuchs, Isa. lvi. and many a feeble-minded, low-spirited Christian, whose words are few, feels the same. Yea, many a worthy minister of less splendid talents, being overlooked by others, his heart sinks within him, and he is as if he were not of the body. *But if the foot say, because I am not the hand, I am not of the body, is it therefore not of the body? &c.* Assuredly it is a necessary part of it. *Nay much more, those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary.* And as God has put more abundant honour upon the part which lacked, let them not be discouraged.

That one question, *Is it not of the body?* is full of meaning. It denotes that you are connected with Christ your head, and partakers of his fulness, even all that is common to the body. Particularly you have an interest in Christ's love. *For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. In his salvation: For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the Saviour of the body.* In all that is communicated from him, you have a part: *But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things which is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in love.* Yea, you are necessary to his relative fulness, the fulness of him that filleth all in all: *Which is the body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.* If the least member were gone, it would not be a full, or perfect body.

THE CONVERSION OF THE JEWS.

Mr. Editor,

I WAS lately reading a book, published about eighty years ago, in which the author reproves another for having prayed for the conversion of the Jews, contending that they had sinned *the sin unto death*; that therefore prayer for them was not the prayer of faith; and that there was nothing in the

scriptures from whence we could conclude that they ever would be converted. I shall not trouble your readers with the author's arguments, which appear to me to have no weight; but having been employed of late years in a morning exposition, I have met with several parts of the prophecies which have appeared to me inexplicable on any other supposition; and as it may furnish Christians with matter and motives for prayer, I will offer a few remarks on two or three passages which I conceive to relate to this subject. My present paper will be grounded on *the vision of the dry bones*, in the 37th chapter of Ezekiel.

This vision, I allow, had its first and immediate accomplishment in the restoration of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity, who in that country were like dead men, or rather like bones of a dead man disunited and scattered, and in a manner without hope of recovery. Their restoration by Cyrus was a kind of resurrection from the dead; and as the Assyrian power, which carried away the ten tribes, had been swallowed up by that of Babylon, and Babylon was now in its turn swallowed up by that of Media and Persia, opportunity would probably be afforded for many of the other tribes to attach themselves to Judah, and return with them. The inquiry at that time does not appear to have been, whether they were of Judah, or Benjamin, or Levi; but *whether they were of Israel?* This may in some degree answer to *the two sticks of Ephraim and Judah becoming one*. Being governed also by princes of the house

of David, he might be said to reign over them, and to be their one shepherd. Ver. 16—24.

But as it is not unusual for the same thing (the passover for instance) to refer immediately to one event, and remotely to another, so it is common for a prophecy to have a partial fulfilment in something at, or near the time, and a more perfect one at some distant period. God's works being a whole, and the end seen from the beginning, there is often a dignified analogy between them; system as it were within system; one train of events making way for another, and furnishing an earnest of its fulfilment. Thus the kingdom of the Messiah is manifestly predicted in the 72d Psalm, though it is mostly under the form of the prosperous reign of Solomon. In like manner, the vision in question contains a prediction of the restoration and conversion of the Jews in the latter days, though it is mostly under the form of the return of their forefathers from Babylon. In proof of this, let the following particulars be considered. First: The number of the ten tribes who might return with Judah was too small to contain a full accomplishment of the prophecy which is expressly applied to *the whole house of Israel*. Secondly: Those who were to return are described as an exceeding great army, but that of Judah, and the other tribes which returned from Babylon, was very far from answering to this description. They were but a small company compared with the number which usually composed an Eastern army. Ezra ii. 64. Thirdly: It is said of David, God's servant, who

was to be king over them, that he should be their prince for ever. This is language which very much resembles that of the covenant with David, that *his seed should be established for ever, and his throne built up to all generations, even as the sun and moon in the heavens*, which is clearly to be understood of the kingdom of Christ. There is also a similar phraseology in a prophecy of Hosea: *For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim.* Afterward shall the children of Israel return and seek Jehovah their God, and *David their king, in the latter days.* Fourthly: Though the company who returned with Zerubabel were many of them godly people, yet the history of the nation from thence to the coming of Christ, is far from answering to what is said of them in this prophecy, that they should *walk in God's judgments, observe his statutes, and do them.* Such promises also of *his tabernacle being with them, and his sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore*, seem to be much too strong for the above period. Finally: It accords with the general design of this prophet, towards the latter end of his prophecies, which was, under the form of Jewish phraseology, to foretel the glory of the latter days. Hence his description of a new temple; (Chap. xl. xli. xlii.) of the glory of the God of Israel as dwelling in it; (xliii.) of the division of the land by lot; (xliv.) of the holy waters; (xlvii.) and of the city

whose name should be called Jehovah-shammah, *The Lord is there.* (xlviii.)

Admitting the prophecy to refer to the condition of the Jews in their last dispersion, and future return to Christ, there is something very impressive in the whole account. Their present *scattered* and *unconverted* state is fitly represented by a number of dry bones. The allusion may be to a field of battle, where many years before, thousands upon thousands fell by the sword, and their bodies remaining unburied, their bones lay scattered over all the plain. Once they lived, but can they live again? Israel was once a living *body*, and what was more, lived to God; yea, they were the only people who did so. But what are they now? scattered over the face of the earth; no longer a body, but separated bone from his bone; no more possessed of that life and spirit which distinguished their holy predecessors, but *dry* as bones which have been long dead; not only devoid of every thing like true religion, like other sinners, but singularly averse to it. All unconverted sinners are dry, but they are *very dry*. They indeed retain something of the resemblance of religion; but it is that which a skull retains of the human countenance—ugly, disgusting, and horrid.

Their *hopeless* condition is also fitly expressed by the question to the prophet, *Can these bones live?* judging by sense, the answer must have been, They cannot. There is no people so apparently hardened against conviction; none who have lived among Christians so much in vain; none who

manifest such diabolical enmity and wrath when reasoned with, though it be in the meekest manner. The frequent disappointments which we have met with in attempting their conversion, is almost enough to overcome us with despair. Even they themselves seem to have no hopes, except what are of a worldly nature. Yet, hoping in him with whom all things are possible, we may answer with the prophet, *O Lord God, thou knowest.*

Their restoration and conversion are no less fitly represented by a *resurrection*. Such is the idea given us by the Apostle of this very event. *If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but LIFE FROM THE DEAD?* So extraordinary an instance of divine power and goodness, could scarcely be illustrated by any thing more suitable.

The *order* in which it will be accomplished is worthy of notice. Several things, it seems, will precede their becoming truly alive to God, some of which may be preparatory to it. If they should be collected and combined by some occurrence in providence, previous to their conversion to Christ, it will correspond not only with the account here given, of their first *coming forth out of their graves, &c.* and then *having the Spirit of God imparted*, but with another given by Zechariah. Jerusalem is, by him, represented as *a torch of fire in a sheaf to her enemies*, and afterwards as having *a spirit of grace and supplication* given her, by which her inhabitants should look on *him whom they had pierced and mourn*. Though sinners do nothing

preparatory to their own conversion, yet God frequently does much in this way with them, and for them; and many events may precede the effectual calling of God's ancient people, which may answer to the *noise*, the *shaking*, and the *bones coming together, bone to his bone*. Even the *sinews and the flesh may come upon them, and the skin cover them from above*, while yet there is *no breath in them*. In other words, they may become a body politic, and possibly have the form of devotion as heretofore, while yet it is only a form. But if, while the doctrine of the cross is preached, the Spirit of life from God out of heaven breathe upon these slain that they live, then shall they *know that the Son of God is come, and, having an understanding given them to know Him that is true, shall believe and be in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ*. 1 John v. 20.

In two or three future papers, I may offer some remarks on a few more prophecies on this subject. At present, I only observe that God's designs of mercy towards the descendants of his ancient people are, I hope, sufficiently manifest to afford a ground for the prayer of faith.

Mr. Editor,

HAVING in a former paper considered the vision of the dry bones, I shall here offer a few remarks on some passages which I conceive have reference to the same subject, in the prophecies of Hosea. These are chiefly addressed to the ten tribes, as those of Ezekiel were to Judah.

Under the form of signs and parables, as I suppose, he delivers in the *first* chapter some very pointed reproofs to that idolatrous people; but concludes with great and precious promises to their distant posterity.

He is commanded to go and take *a wife of whoredoms, and children of whoredoms*, and is supposed to have children by her. Such a command communicated to the people, would shock them as grossly indelicate. *Nay*, saith the prophet, like Nathan to David, *but ye are the men! If the Lord be a husband to you, he must have a wife of worse whoredoms than these!*

This wife of whoredoms is supposed to bear him three children, each of whose names are prophetic. The first, *Jezreel*, predicts evil against the government, of which this place was a seat; the second, *Loruhamah*, intimates the discontinuance of the divine mercy to the nation; and the third, *Loammi*, God's renouncing them as his people. Yet these terrible denunciations are followed, (in verses 10, 11.) by something not a little encouraging to the faithful, whose hearts would tremble as for the ark of God. The promises to Abraham should nevertheless be fulfilled; children should be raised up to him from among the Gentiles: nor is this all, the children of Judah and of Israel, forgetting their former enmities, should unite in the Messiah, as under a captain, or leader; and then Jezreel, from being a scene of wickedness and bloodshed, should have her day of mercy. Nor does this seem to conclude the prophecy; the first verse of

the second chapter seems properly to belong to the preceeding, rather than the following subject, and to contain an address to the faithful of the land, directing them to look out of the then present generation for *brethren and sisters*, even to the latter days, and, in the name of the Lord, to greet them with the cheering names of *Ammi* and *Ruhamah*, My people having obtained mercy!

After many cutting things in the second chapter, in which, to show the odiousness of Israel's conduct, and to bring it home to their bosoms, they are again compared to an adulterous wife, who having dissolved the marriage-bond, deserved to be stripped, and, with her spurious offspring, turned out by her injured husband. They are even told, that such will actually be their portion. Yet after this, from ver. 14. to the end, the most precious promises are made to their posterity. His *alluring her, and bringing her into the wilderness*, however seems rather to be expressive of present judgments than of future mercies. It denotes, I apprehend, not the drawings of love, but the devisings of providence to render her sin its own punishment.* As an injured husband makes use of the adulteries of his wife to convict and banish her; so the Lord would cause the fondness of this people for idolatry and idolaters to draw them into the Assyrian net,

* I cannot find that פתה any where signifies to influence in a way of mercy, but properly means to *entice*, or *deceive*; and thus God, in just judgment, entices and deceives sinners, by giving them up to their own delusions. See 2 Chron. xviii. 19—22. Ezek. xiv. 9.

(Chap. vii. 11, 12.) and they should be carried away captive among the nations as into a wilderness, and for a long time be in a manner lost. Ezek. xx. 35. Yet as in the wilderness of old he spake kindly to their fathers, and from thence gave them the land of promise, so from thence shall she again *receive her vineyards*: and as *the valley of Achor*, where Achan's idolatry was punished, was to Israel a *door of hope*, in that the fierce anger of the Lord was hereby turned away; (Josh. vii. 26.) so shall it be in this case. After having made an example of many for their idolatry, his anger will be turned away, and he will comfort the survivors. Then shall they *sing as in the days of their youth, as in the day when they came up out of the land of Egypt*. See also Exod. xv. 1—21. compared with Isa. xi. 11—16. and xii.

And now, being brought to believe in the Messiah, she shall be cured of her spiritual adultery, and become chaste to God, no more polluting his worship with idolatrous mixtures, but cleaving to him with singleness of heart, as to the husband of her youth. Ver. 16. 27.

In that day, the whole creation, which has in a manner been at war with her, shall be at peace, (ver. 18.) and he that had cast her off, saying, *She is not my wife, neither am I her husband*, shall *betroth her unto him for ever in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies*. Nor are these the only attributes that shall be glorified in her recovery; he will betroth her unto him in *faithfulness*, and *she shall know the Lord*;

his covenant promises, made even from the days of Abraham, shall now be fulfilled, and the veil which has so long remained on her heart shall be taken away. Ver. 18, 19, 20.

Finally: He who had taken away his corn, his wine, his oil, and his flax, owing to their being ascribed to idols, and abused to idolatry, will now graciously restore them. God will hear, and supply the heavens with water; they, the earth with rain, and the fruits of it with moisture; and these the people with plenty. The earth shall yield her increase, and God, even their own God, will take pleasure in blessing them. Nor is this all; Israel shall be a blessing to the world. What the seed is to the harvest, that shall they be to the nations among whom they have sojourned. And now, instead of *Loruhamah* and *Loammi*, they are called *Ruamah* and *Ammi*; for *I will have mercy upon her, saith the Lord, that had not obtained mercy, and will say to them that were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.* Thus like friends re-united after a long separation, their communion is more intimate than ever.

The *third* chapter contains another prophecy on the same subject. Like the former, it is introduced under the form of a parable. The case supposed, is that of a man attached to a woman who is an adulteress. 'Go, saith the Lord to the prophet, see if thou canst love such an one; yet such, if any thing, must be my love to this people.' The prophet is farther supposed to go, and covenant with

this adulteress, engaging her to desist for many days from her lewd courses, living as it were a widow by herself, and afterwards she should become his wife. Such was the love of the Lord to the children of Israel. He loved them notwithstanding their idolatry, and intended at a future time to take them to be his people. He would not receive them, however, in their idolatry, nor till a proper time had elapsed, in which they should live in a state of separation; but in due season he would take them to himself as his church and people, remembering their sin no more.

The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice. Never surely has a prophecy corresponded more exactly with fact. Nor is this all: The whole of the Israelitish race with whom we have any acquaintance, have also been *without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim*; that is, though mixed with the nations of the world, and in other respects wicked in the extreme, yet they have not been suffered to go into their former idolatrous practices; and thus have answered to the adulteress ceasing from playing the harlot, and abiding for her husband in a state of separation many days. *Afterwards shall the children of Israel return and seek Jehovah their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days.* On this, no reflection need be made, save this, that the superabundant grace of God towards them in their outcast and perishing condition, shall not only fill their hearts

with gratitude, but inspire them with a holy fear of offending him any more.

Mr. Editor,

IN my last I offered some observations on those prophecies which I considered as relating to God's future designs of mercy towards Israel, in the three first chapters of Hosea; in this, I shall notice some others in the remaining part of that book, together with a passage from Jeremiah.

The ten tribes, in this and other prophecies, are frequently personified under the name of *Ephraim*. Much is said of Ephraim's sin, and of his punishment; but several strong intimations are also given of his being brought to repentance, and obtaining mercy. Of this we have a beautiful example in chap. xi. 8, &c. *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim! Shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah! Shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together.* Half the force and meaning of this melting passage appears to me to be lost, by twice introducing the supplementary term *how*. So read, it contains one continued appeal of Jehovah to his own mercy and faithfulness; but without it, it is an alternate appeal, first in the language of covenant mercy, addressed to himself, and then in the language of justice, addressed to the conscience and other feelings of the offender: q. d. 'How can I bear to give thee up, Ephraim? yet thou deservest to be delivered over to destruction. What sayest thou? Shall I deliver thee? How can I bear to

make thee as Admah? Yet this is thy due. What sayest thou? Shall I set thee as a monument of endless displeasure, like Zeboim? Ah no! my heart revolts at the thought, my repentings are kindled together; I will not execute the *fierceness* of mine anger, I will not return to *destroy* Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in the midst of thee; and I will not enter into the city as an avenger, but rather as a father will turn away mine eyes from thee, that I may not be provoked by thy sins.'

In verses 10, 11. it is intimated that there should come a time when Ephraim should be of another mind, and the Lord would spare that generation, as well as many succeeding ones, for their sakes; that the signal of their return to God should be some terrible event in the world, in which he would *roar like a lion*, filling the minds of men with consternation and terror; and that, in the midst of these alarms, they should come from the west, and from the south, and from the east, as trembling doves to their windows, *and I will place them in their houses, saith the Lord.*

In Chap. xiii. 14. Ephraim is considered as dead and buried; and now what will his father do? Will he lament over him, like David over Absalom? No, his power is equal to his mercy. He will storm the castle that detains him. *I will ransom him from the power of the grave, I will redeem him from death. O death! I will be thy plagues. O grave! I will be thy destruction. Repentance shall be hid from mine eyes!* In this astonishing language,

we see the anger of the father towards his disobedient son, now that he is dead, turned against death itself that cut him off, and the grave that inclosed him, resolving to rescue him by destroying his destroyers.

To the above, I think I ought to add Chap. xiv. 4—8. as belonging to the same subject. It is, I am aware, expressive of the blessings which the Lord *would have* bestowed upon Israel in case of their return to him, as they were most pathetically exhorted to in the preceding verses. But if there come a time when they *shall* thus return, the blessings will then be actually bestowed. Like a field refreshed by dew, like a lily blossoming with beauty, like Lebanon casting forth her roots, God will bless him, and he shall be a blessing to all about him. Nor shall this goodness be abused as heretofore, but shall heighten his abhorrence of his former courses. Ephraim, being grafted into *the green fir-tree* shall answer to his name; he shall be *fruitful* among his brethren: nor shall he, as formerly, bring forth fruit unto himself, but to him that hath had mercy upon him.

I shall conclude this piece with a few remarks on a well known passage in the prophecies of Jeremiah, as belonging to the same subject. I refer to Chap. xxxi. 15—21. The ten tribes are here, as in other prophecies, personified under the name of *Ephraim*. They had, at the time of its delivery, been carried away captive more than a century. Alluding to the distresses of that period, the prophet spake as follows: *Thus saith the*

Lord, A voice was heard from Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rachel, weeping for her children, refused to be comforted for her children because they were not! Rachel was the mother of Joseph, from whom Ephraim descended: and by a most affecting figure of speech, she is here represented as risen from her grave, and looking about for her children; but finding none of them in the land of their fathers, she weeps for the loss of them with bitter lamentations. But let not Rachel, or rather the church of God whom she personates, despair. Thus saith the Lord, Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord, and thy children shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope IN THINE END, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border. But whence is this hope to be entertained by Rachel? Her children had been gone for more than a century; and their name and memorial were in a manner perished. Observe the answer, I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself, Thou hast chastized me, and I was chastized as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art Jehovah my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth. This confession of Ephraim is not historic, but prophetic: for the state of mind here depicted, is represented as taking place at a time so very distant, that he

should look back upon the days of his idolatry as the period of his *youth*. Nevertheless, when he shall return to the Lord, he shall obtain mercy. Ephraim has not only a mother to bewail him, but a father, who, as soon as he hears the voice of the prodigal, is moved with compassion, and runs to meet him. *Is Ephraim my dear son? is he a pleasant child; for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.* The virgin of Israel is then directed to prepare for returning home. *Set thee up way-marks, make thee high heaps; set thine heart toward the high way, even the way which thou wentest: Turn again, O virgin of Israel, turn again to these thy cities.*

But Rachel was not only the mother of Joseph, and so of Ephraim, but also of Benjamin, whose tribe adhered to Judah; and inasmuch as her voice was heard from *Ramah*, a city of Benjamin, the prophecy would not only have a retrospective aspect to the captivity of Ephraim by Assyria, but a prospective one to that of Judah and Benjamin by Babylon. It was in the latter that the children were carried away from Ramah, which seems to have been the head quarters of the Babylonish general, after the taking of Jerusalem, and from whence he disposed of his prisoners, Jer. xl. 1—3. Thus both the ten and the two tribes, sustaining a relation to Rachel, are combined in the prophecy, as they should actually be in their restoration. Hence it follows, *How long will thou go about,*

O thou backsliding daughter? For the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth. A woman shall compass a man. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, as yet they shall use this speech in the land of Judah, and in the cities thereof, when I shall bring again their captivity. The Lord bless thee, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness. And there shall dwell in Judah itself, and in all the cities thereof together, husbandmen, and they that go forth with flocks. For I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul. The import of these verses I take to be this: ‘How long wilt thou seek deliverance, from human help? God will cause, what is contrary to all human calculation, weakness to overcome strength, and the church to be triumphant. Judah, with Ephraim, shall return; and righteousness, holiness, and peace, shall be established in their land.’ The prophecy being a vision, the prophet adds, *Upon this I awaked, and beheld; and my sleep was sweet unto me.*

As there is nothing in all this which intimates the return of the ten tribes *as a distinct nation*, but in connection with Judah, so neither is there any thing which leads us to look for the fulfilment merely in the return of Judah from Babylon, accompanied with a few of the Israelites; and if we read on to ver. 31—34. we shall find that the blessings promised were not to be under the *same covenant* as that of their fathers, but a *new covenant*, in which God will *put his law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts, and will be their*

God, and they shall be his people; all which determines it to have reference to gospel times.

See Isa. xi. xii.

THAT these chapters refer to the gospel dispensation, there can be no doubt, seeing they are introduced with a prophecy, *that a rod shall come forth out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots*; and by some passages in them, they would seem to have a special reference to the latter part of it. The language in which peace and amity, as succeeding to a state of enmity and hostility, is described in ver. 6—8. seems much too strong for any thing the church has yet seen, and to accord with no period short of that mentioned ver. 9. *when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*

Ver. 10. describes the great accession to the church of Christ from among the Gentiles. *In that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign to the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek, and his rest shall be glorious.* The term *rest* denotes an established government, succeeding to wars and troubles, like the reign of Solomon to that of David. Such will be the government of Christ in that day, to what it has been in all former periods, during which it has been engaged in one continued struggle. And as the reign of Solomon was exempted from wars, and distinguished by its buildings, so shall be the reign of Christ in that day. The Lord will then build up Zion, and appear in his glory.

In the midst of this glory, God is represented as remembering his ancient people, both Israel and Judah. *It shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand A SECOND TIME to recover the remnant of his people which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah, from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim.* This second time of God's setting his hand, cannot refer to the restoration of the Jews from Babylon; for though that event might be so denominated in respect of their being first brought out of Egypt, yet the period of the whole prophecy does not answer to it. That which is here referred to, is something which should be wrought for Israel under the reign of the Messiah, and at a time when *the earth should be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea*; which, what it can be but their conversion to him, I am not able to conceive.

What follows, in ver. 14—16, compares the return of the remnant of God's ancient people to the coming up of their fathers out of Egypt. The kingdom of the Messiah shall be enlarged, as the borders of Israel were formerly by their victories over the surrounding nations; and as then God

dried up the tongue, or bay, of the Red Sea, and caused the waters of Jordan to go backward, so now he will remove every obstruction out of their way, and bring them home to himself with a high hand and an outstretched arm.

Chap. xii. is a continuation of the subject, and contains a hymn, or sacred song of praise, suited to the joyful occasion of their deliverance. It is observable, that their first deliverance from Egypt was followed by a triumphant song, on the shores of the Red Sea. So also was their deliverance from Babylon, Psa. cxxvi. Their joy on that occasion was so great, that what had taken place seemed to them a dream; too much to be true. Surrounding nations beheld and acknowledged, *That the Lord hath done great things for them*; while their thankful spirits echoed the acknowledgment, *The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad*. But neither of these deliverances were equal to that which is here celebrated.

We may observe, in the first place, the use of the *singular pronouns*: *THOU shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee*, &c. This may denote the *unity* that shall prevail among them. In their divided and scattered condition they said, *OUR bones are dried, and OUR hope is lost; WE are cut off for OUR parts*; but now they are of one heart and of one soul.

With respect to the matter of the song, they begin with praise to Jehovah for his great mercy in pardoning their sins, or removing that fierce

anger which had for so many ages burned against them. *Thou shalt say, O Lord, I will praise thee: though thou wast angry with me, thine anger is turned away, and thou comfortedst me.* This is perfectly in character: true penitents look back upon past sins with bitterness, and thankfulness for having escaped them, and the wrath of God revealed from heaven against them. The anger of God against the Jews for their crucifying his Son the Lord of glory, and continuing in such bitter enmity against him, has indeed been great. It was truly said of them, that *wrath was come upon them to the uttermost.* The calamities which befel them in the destruction of their city, the length of their dispersion, the contempt they have endured, and what is more than all, the judicial blindness and hardness of heart to which they are given up, are so many expressions of divine displeasure against them, with which their former history furnishes no parallel. The remembrance therefore of this, while it fills them with the deepest self-abasement, furnishes them with the highest sensations of grateful joy. It is this compound sensation that is described in Hos. iii. 5. *They shall fear the Lord, and his goodness, in the latter days.*

The language of ver. 2. though suited to Old-testament times, conveys the strongest ideas of joyful amazement. *Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid: for the Lord JEHOVAH is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation.* Had this part of the song been expressed in New-testament language, it

might have been nearly in the words of the Apostle, *I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. —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.* Of old he had been the salvation of their fathers; of late, of the Gentiles: but now *all Israel shall be saved; as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.* Such an interposition of free and great grace may well be introduced with the note of attention, *Behold!* And now he will be to them a refuge. Though their sins have been great as the sea, yet, *without fear*, they may trust in him to heal them; and though their builders formerly set him at nought, yet, without any apprehension of being confounded, they may rest their hopes upon him: and wherefore? Because in him they shall recognise, *the everlasting* JEHOVAH, the God of their fathers.

The effect of so great a salvation must needs be a general, an exceeding, a mighty joy. Such is that described in ver. 3. *With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.* It is said to have been the custom of the Jews, on the last day of the feast of tabernacles, to draw water in a golden pitcher, from the well of Siloam, and to

pour it, mixed with wine, on the sacrifice as it lay on the altar, singing all the while a part of this hymn, especially this 3d verse, with great rejoicings, and looking forward to that abundance of blessings which they expected in the times of the Messiah. If so it was, they were not far from the true intent, either of their feast of tabernacles, or of the prophecy. The words of our Saviour, in John vii. 37. will from hence appear peculiarly appropriate. *In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any one thirst, let him come unto ME and drink!* As the keeping of the feast of the passover was prefigurative of the joy and obedience of faith under the gospel, (1 Cor. v. 8.) so was the keeping of the feast of tabernacles: hence, in the prophecy of Zechariah, a rejection of Christ is expressed by a refusal to come up to Jerusalem to keep this feast, Chap. xiv. 16. 19. But though some, even in the latter days, will thus stand out against the Saviour, yet the feast shall be kept by the great body of mankind, especially by God's ancient people the Jews. The salvation of Christ shall be to them as wells of water in a dry land, from which they shall draw in abundance. Such will be the types and prophecies of their own sacred writings; which though full of living water, have, through their unbelief, been of no account to them. The wells were deep, and they had nothing to draw with. Such also will be the doctrines and ordinances of the New Testament, in which they have heretofore seen no beauty, but rejected the counsel of God against themselves.

And now, being filled with joy themselves, they will not be able to contain it, but feel an ardent desire to recommend the Saviour to the Gentile nations. *In that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name be exalted. Sing unto JEHOVAH; for he hath done excellent things: this is known in all the earth,* ver. 4, 5. From this and other passages, especially Rom. xi. 12. 15. it appears, that the conversion of the Jews will be a kind of resurrection to the world. In every way, God, according to his promise, will make Abraham's seed a blessing to mankind. Their fall and diminution were an occasion of our riches; but their recovery will be much more so. So great an event, *known in all the earth*, will in a manner put infidelity out of countenance. Their coming over to Christ will be like Abner's coming over to David, which broke up the power of his enemies, and issued in the peaceable establishment of his kingdom.

Finally: Zion is congratulated and called upon to *cry out and shout, for that God will then dwell in the midst of her*, ver. 6. I am not sure that Zion in this place is not to be understood literally of the city of Jerusalem. I may be mistaken in thinking, that God has promised, not only to convert the great body of Abraham's descendants, but to restore them to their own country; but I am not able, on any other supposition, to understand several passages of scripture; especially Zech. xii. 6. and Luke xxi. 24. *Jerusalem shall be inhabited*

again IN HER OWN PLACE, EVEN IN JERUSALEM.—
They shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, UNTIL THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES BE FULFILLED. Whatever figurative meaning may be put upon the words of the prophet, which, however, appears to me must be very forced; yet there can be no figure in those of our Lord; which clearly intimate that that same Jerusalem which shall be for a time trodden down by the Gentiles, shall be no longer so than TILL the times of the Gentiles shall be fulfilled. But whether Zion in this passage be taken literally for Jerusalem, or figuratively for the whole church of God, both Jews and Gentiles being united in the faith of Christ, the presence and blessing of God will be her greatest glory. The name of the city from that day shall be called *Jehovah-Shammah*, THE LORD IS THERE.

See Zechariah, Chap. xi. xii. xiii. 1.

THAT we may perceive the connexion of the prophecy in Chap. xii. it will be proper to observe, that Chap. xi. contains a prediction of the overthrow of the Jewish nation by the Romans. It is introduced by the burning of the temple, composed of the wood of Lebanon, (ver. 1.) by the fall of some of their great men, (ver. 2.) and by the consternation of others, (ver. 3.) To represent the state of religion among them at this time, the prophet is directed to *take unto him the instruments*; that is, to personate certain shepherds which God

would raise up in the land. First, the great and good Shepherd of the sheep, who should now make his appearance upon earth, ver. 4—14. Secondly, a foolish and sordid shepherd, to which they should be given up after having rejected him, ver. 15—17. While personating the *former*, the prophet speaks of himself as commissioned to feed the flock of slaughter, especially the poor of the flock, whose possessors slew them and held themselves guiltless, ver. 4, 5. These possessors, with the great body of the nation, are given up, ver. 6. But a remnant should be saved from among the poor, and these should be fed by the good Shepherd, (ver. 7.) who also would set himself against those who sought not them, but theirs, ver. 8, 9. By the breaking of his staves, Beauty and Bands, (the instruments of his rule as a shepherd,) is set forth the dissolving of the covenant of peculiarity made with Israel, and the giving them up to divisions one among another. This judgment should be so manifest, that the believing part of the nation should see the hand of God in it, and that it was his design thereby to put an end to their place and nation, ver. 11. The cause of these great evils is found in their contemning, rejecting, and crucifying Christ, ver. 12, 13. And now, having rid themselves, as they supposed, of him, God would, in just judgment, raise up for them a foolish shepherd; denoting, that they should not only be deserted of God, and punished by the Roman sword, but given up to the influence of a set of blind and sordid priests, who should lead them into the

ditch, and there perish with them, ver. 15—19. Such appears to be the sum of Chap. xi. which is altogether *against* the body of the Jewish nation; but Chap. xii. contains a prophecy of their restoration, and is therefore called, *The burden of the word of the Lord FOR Israel.* Ver. 1.

The events of this and the foregoing prophecy, though wide asunder as to time, yet very properly follow each other. Paul takes but little notice of the state of the Jews during their long dispersion; but passing over that chasm, as included in their being *broken off*, proceeds to speak of their being *grafted in again.* Rom. xi.

The prophecy finds Jerusalem *beseiged* by enemies, but very differently circumstanced from what she was in the foregoing chapter. Her enemies were then avenging the cause of God and of his Christ; and therefore, whatever might be their motives, were successful: but in this siege God is on her side, and therefore she is *a cup of trembling* to her enemies. Of course, this must refer to the period when she shall be restored.

The character which Jehovah assumes in the preface to the prophecy is worthy of notice. Thus *saith the Lord, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.* Each of these mighty works relate to the first creation of the world, and intimate, that at the time of the prophecy being fulfilled, they shall in a manner be acted over again. That which he will then accomplish towards his ancient people shall be a kind of new creation.

It were presumptuous to be very positive as to the meaning of a prophecy which is yet to be accomplished; but, comparing it with other prophecies of the same event, the following particulars appear to be conveyed by it. First: That the Jews shall be restored to their own land prior to their conversion. *Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place, even in Jerusalem*, ver. 6. This event may be accomplished in the ordinary course of providence, by some of the great conquerors of the world, who shall find their interest in it, and be induced, as Cyrus was in a former instance, to favour it. Secondly: That a grand combination will be formed against them with a view to dispossess them, ver. 2. 9. Thirdly: That the nations engaged in this combination will be repulsed, and sorely punished for their presumptuous attempt, which, after witnessing the remarkable fulfilment of prophecy towards the Jews, must be against the light of their own consciences: *Jerusalem shall be a cup of trembling, a cup as it were of poison, to those who go up against her; a rock falling upon their heads; a hearth of fire among the wood; and a torch in a sheaf*, ver. 2—6. Fourthly: That the country and the city shall be united against the enemy, ver. 5. 7. Fifthly: That they shall be guarded by Providence, and strengthened to encounter the greatest difficulties: *The Lord will defend them, and he that is feeble among them shall be as David*, &c. ver. 8. Sixthly: That after all these temporal interpositions, the Lord will pour upon them a spirit of grace and of

supplications, and they shall lament over their sins, and the sins of their fathers, particularly in having crucified the Lord of glory, ver. 10.

This order of things seems perfectly to agree with what is said in Ezek. xxxvii. where the process is described, first, by *a noise*, then *a shaking*, *a coming together bone to his bone*, a being covered with *sinews and flesh and skin*, and last of all by their having breathed into them *the breath of life*, ver. 7—9. To the same purpose, they are described, in ver. 13, 14. as first brought out of their graves, and then as knowing their deliverer.

The only difficulty attending this statement, seems to arise from ver. 5. where, previous to the pouring out of the spirit of grace upon them, the governors of Judah are supposed to strengthen themselves, and one another, *in the Lord of hosts, their God*. But it is no unusual thing for the leaders of a people in time of war, though destitute of true religion, yet to have so much of a conviction of the dependance of all upon God, as to strengthen themselves and their armies by a hope of divine assistance. Joab could say to his brother, *Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God; and the Lord do that which seemeth him good*. 2 Sam. x. 12.

A few remarks on the *spiritual* part of the prophecy, shall conclude this paper. First: The *subjects* of this great change: these will be both princes and people. In the pouring out of the

• So Abijah, 2 Chron. xiii.

of the latter, but few if any of the former; but Spirit on the day of Pentecost, there were many now all descriptions of men shall bow to our Redeemer's sceptre. Secondly: The *cause* of it; namely, the pouring upon them *a spirit of grace and of supplications*. The spirit of true religion is a spirit of *grace* in respect of its source, and of *supplications* in respect of its issue, importunate prayer. Looking at the state of these people at present, we are grieved for the hardness of their hearts; but when the Spirit of the living God shall take the work in hand, the heart of stone shall become an heart of flesh. Thirdly: The grand *medium* of it; namely, the remembrance of Him whom their fathers crucified, and whom they themselves have pierced by justifying them in it. A believing view of Jesus on the cross will dissolve the most obdurate spirit in godly sorrow. Fourthly: The *intenseness* of the grief: it shall be a *great* mourning, like that of a father for the loss of an only son, or like the lamentations at the death of Josiah, in the valley of Megiddon. Fifthly: Its *universality*: the land shall mourn, and every family of every remaining tribe. Scarcely a house shall be found, but on entering it, you shall find them weeping over their former obstinacy and unbelief. Sixthly: The *individuality* and *retirement* of it: *Every family shall mourn apart, and their wives apart*. They will not only weep together when they meet, but retire to lament in secret over their own iniquity. Scarcely a closet or private place shall be found, but some one will be watering

it with his tears. Finally : The *remedy* to all this grief : *In that day, there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.* By looking to Jesus they were wounded, and by looking to Jesus they are healed. The *first fruits* of this great work appeared on the day of Pentecost, when thousands were pricked to the heart, repented, and were baptized in that name which they had despised ; but *the lump* is yet to appear. *Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever : and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and amen !*

ON THE MYSTERY OF PROVIDENCE, ESPECIALLY IN
RESPECT OF GOD'S DEALINGS WITH DIFFERENT
PARTS OF THE WORLD IN DIFFERENT AGES.

IT has frequently been objected, that if the religion first taught among the posterity of Abraham, and afterwards among the Gentiles, by the preaching of Jesus Christ, be of God, how is it that it has been so partial in its operations ? The promulgation of a religion adapted to man, it is said, should be as extensive as the globe. The force of this objection has been felt ; and Christian writers, in general, have acknowledged that there is a depth in this part of divine providence, which it is difficult, if not impossible, to fathom. There are hints to be found in the scriptures, however, which may throw some glimmerings of light upon the subject ;

and when the mystery of God is finished, we shall perceive that he has done all things well.

In general, we are given to understand that God is an absolute sovereign in the dispensation of his favours. He was under no obligation to any ; and he will bestow his blessings in such a manner as shall cause this truth to be manifest to all. Man would fain put in a claim, and accuse the ways of Jehovah with being unequal ; but this only proves the perverseness of his own way. The blessings of civilization are undoubtedly adapted to man ; yet a large proportion of the human race are mere barbarians : even those countries which have, in past ages, ranked high in this respect, are now sunk far below mediocrity ; while others, whom they were in the habit of treating with the greatest contempt, have been raised above them. It is thus that the valley is exalted, the mountain made low, and the glory of Jehovah revealed : but if God may act as a sovereign in dispensing the bounties of providence, who shall call him to account for doing the same in the distribution of the blessings of grace ? He has, in all ages, manifested his determination however, to act in this manner, let sinful creatures think of it as they may. With respect to individuals, the things of God have been hid from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes ; and the same principle has been carried into effect with nations and continents. When the adversaries of sovereign grace meet with this doctrine in the scriptures, they endeavour to get rid of it by applying it in the latter sense only ; but God's

dealings with nations and continents are of a piece with his dealings with individuals: they are only different parts of the same whole.

It is observable, that, in the dispensations of mercy, God has in a wonderful manner, balanced the affairs of men, so as, upon the whole, to answer the most important ends in the great system of moral government. In the early ages, for instance, mercy was shown to the posterity of Abraham; and hereby the world was provoked to jealousy. On the coming of Christ, mercy was shown to the world; and the posterity of Abraham, in their turn were provoked to jealousy: and there is reason to believe that before the end of time, and perhaps before many years have passed over us, God will show mercy to both; and each will prove a blessing to the other. The conversion of the Gentiles shall in the end effectually provoke them to jealousy; and thus, *through our mercy, they shall obtain mercy*. On the other hand, their return to God will be a kind of moral resurrection to the world. Probably, the conversion of the great body of Pagans and Mahometans may be accomplished by means of this extraordinary event. Their fall has already proved our riches; how much more their fulness! *If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be but LIFE FROM THE DEAD?* God's mercy towards them is, at present, righteously suspended, *till the fulness of the Gentiles shall have come in*. The Gentiles were as one behind in a race; let them first come up, and then

all Israel shall be saved, and become as life from the dead to the world.

The fifty-second chapter of Isaiah appears to contain a prophecy of the restoration and conversion of the Jews; but in the last three verses it is intimated, that God's servant, the Messiah, by whom it should be effected, should deal prudently. Now, much of prudence consists in the proper timing of things. This glorious work was not to take place immediately; there must ere this be a long and awful pause. *He must first come and suffer many things, and be rejected.* The wrath of God must be poured on the Jews, on this account, to the uttermost; and the Gentile nations must be sprinkled with the showers of gospel-grace. Such is the import of these last three verses, and the whole fifty-third chapter. Then in the fifty-fourth, she that had been *a wife of youth*, but of late *refused and forsaken*, is called upon to *sing* for joy; and yet the mercy should not be confined to her; for the Redeemer should not only be called *the Holy One of Israel*, but *the God of the whole earth*. *O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*

If God had called the Gentiles without having first *concluded, or shut them up as it were, under sin*, their salvation would not have appeared to be the effect of free promise; (Gal. iii. 22.) and if he had not, in like manner, *shut up the Jews in their unbelief*, his mercy towards them had been far less conspicuous. Rom. xi. 32. As it is, we behold the

goodness and severity of God, each blazing by turns, in the most lovely and tremendous colours.

Something analogous to this is observable in the conduct of God towards the Eastern and Western parts of the earth. For more than two thousand years after the flood, learning, government, and the true religion were, in a manner, confined to the East; and our forefathers in the West were a horde of barbarians. For the last two thousand years, learning, government, and the true religion have travelled westward; they have been, within the last few centuries, extended even beyond the Atlantic Ocean. But before the end of time, and perhaps before many years have passed over us, both the East and the West shall unite, and become one in Christ Jesus. Such an idea, I apprehend, is conveyed in Isa. lx. 6—9. The geographical descriptions of nations, as given in prophetic language, is commonly by way of *synecdoche*, putting those parts which are nearest the Holy Land for the whole, or all beyond them. Thus Europe is commonly called *the Isles of the Gentiles*, (Gen. x. 5. Isa. xlix. 1.) because those parts of it which lay nearest to Judea were the Archipelago, or Grecian Islands. And those nations which lay next to Judea, eastward, include, in the prophetic language, all beyond them, or the whole of Asia. Thus *the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah, all they from Sheba, the flocks of Kedar, and the rams of Nebaioth*, denote the accession of the Eastern world to the church of God. On the other hand, *the isles waiting for him, and the ships of Tarshish*

bringing the sons of Sion from far, denote the accession of the Western world. Thus all shall be gathered together in Christ, and become one holy family. *O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*

One great cause of the mercy bestowed on the western part of the earth, was the Roman conquests, which, whatever were the motives of the conquerors, were over-ruled for the introduction of the gospel among European nations. And who knows but the British conquests in the East, whatever be the motives of the conquerors, may be designed for a similar purpose? Even that iniquitous traffic, which we and other nations have long been carrying on in the persons of men, I have no doubt, will eventually prove a blessing to those miserable people, though it may be a curse to their oppressors. At this day, there are many thousands of negroes in the West India Islands, who have embraced the gospel, while their owners, basking in wealth, and rolling in debauchery, will neither enter into the kingdom of God themselves, nor suffer others who would enter in. God is gathering a people in spite of them. Behold the goodness and justice of God! Men, torn from their native shores and tenderest connexions, are in a manner driven into the gospel net; the most abject and cruel state of slavery is that by means of which they become the Lord's freemen. Their oppressors, on the other hand, who lead them captive, are themselves led captive by the devil at his will, and under the name

of Christians are heaping up wrath against the day of wrath. *O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*

From the whole, we are led to consider the sovereignty of God, not as a capricious, but as a wise sovereignty. While those who are saved have nothing to boast of, those who perish, perish as the just reward of their own iniquity. Jacob will have to ascribe to distinguishing grace all he is more than Esau; while Esau, having lost the blessing, has to recollect that he first despised it.

ON THE BEATITUDES, Matt. v. 1—12.

VER. 1, 2. We have already had a general account of our Saviour's ministry; (iv. 23.) but here the Evangelist informs us of his doctrine. Of this, the sermon on the mount is an important specimen. Observe, First: The occasion of this sermon—it was on *seeing the multitudes* that he betook himself forthwith to a convenient place to instruct them. Christ never beheld a multitude of people without sentiments of compassion. It was on seeing the Samaritans coming down the hills to hear the word, that he told his disciples, *the fields were white already to harvest*, and like Abraham's servant, refused to eat bread till he told his tale. Secondly: The place—*He went up into a mountain*. Mountains were commonly covered, at least in part, with wood. Hence they afforded secrecy and retirement. In,

or among these mountain woods, the defeated forces of the five kings found shelter. (Gen. xiv. 10.) Thither also the spies fled and hid themselves three days, when they departed from the house of Rahab the harlot. (Josh. ii. 22.) The object of our Saviour was retirement. Seeing multitudes of people who wished to hear him, he drew them away from the interrupting concerns of cities and towns, into a place where all was still, solemn, and impressive. Thirdly: The *posture*—*He sat and taught them*. This is said to have been the usual posture of eminent teachers among the Jews. It certainly was befitting the majesty of this teacher, who taught as one having authority; as a judge, rather than as a counsellor. Fourthly: *He spake in the hearing of all, but with a special respect to his disciples*. Not that our Saviour confined his preaching to believers; but *this* discourse seems to have been principally addressed to them. Having lately called his disciples, it was his intention to instil into their minds, at the outset, right sentiments. At the same time, if the *multitudes* mixed faith in hearing, they would be no less profited by it than if it had been immediately addressed to them.

Our Saviour begins his sermon, by declaring *who were blessed*; and considering him as the future judge of the world, an extraordinary importance attaches to his decisions. It is observable in general, that the characters which he pronounces blessed, are not those accounted so by the world: on the contrary, they are such as the

world hate, despise, and persecute. On this account, all these beatitudes possess the air of paradox. It is also observable, that it was our Saviour's manner of preaching, to exhibit *marks*, or *signs of grace*, and to pronounce those, and those only who possess them, in a blessed state. The offer of salvation was made to every creature; but the blessings were promised only to believers. Some have pretended that marks and signs are no certain evidences of grace; and that this is a legal and dangerous way of preaching, as tending to lead men to look into themselves for comfort: but so far as comfort proceeds from evidence of our interest in the divine favour, it must imply a consciousness of our being the subjects of those spiritual dispositions to which the promises are made. It is true, the first genuine comfort which a soul possesses, is by directly believing in Christ; or from a view of what he is, rather than from any thing in himself: for it is impossible that he should be conscious of any good in himself, till he has believed in him. I may add, it is equally true, that the richest consolations to a believer are derived from the same source; namely, from beholding the glory of Christ, and of salvation through his name. But there is no contradiction between this and his knowing himself to be interested in that salvation, by an habitual consciousness of his possessing those dispositions, or sustaining those characters to which it is promised. *Hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.* If our hearts condemn

us of hypocrisy, much more will the all-searching eye of God : but if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God. 1 John iii. 19—21.

Ver. 3. The first of these beatitudes is pronounced on *the poor in spirit*.—Many seem to think, that because they are poor in circumstances, or great sufferers in this world, therefore they shall be blessed in another : but this will prove a fatal mistake. Nor is every kind of poverty of spirit that which the Lord approves. The Laodiceans were censured for being poor ; and the same censure falls on multitudes in the present day. It is not what we are, but what we are *in our own estimation*, that is here intended ! To be poor in spirit, is the opposite of being proud in spirit, or rich and full in our own eyes. He who trusts in his own righteousness, his own wisdom, his own strength, or his own inherent graces, has this lesson yet to learn : and let me add, it is a lesson that none can learn but he that is taught of God. A lowly spirit is one of the most difficult things in the world to assume, where it is not possessed.—The blessing pronounced, is suited to encourage them under the contempt of the present world, and to teach them to bear it with patience. An everlasting kingdom awaits them ; and even in the present state they have received a kingdom that shall not be moved.

Ver. 4. The next blessing is on the *mourner*.—The mourning to which Christ promises *comfort*, must be restricted to that which is spiritual ; as mourning on account of our own sins, or the sins of others, or for any thing by which the name

of the Lord is dishonoured, or his cause injured, or impeded. We are hereby taught, First: The folly of measuring the profitableness of preaching by the degrees of comfort which it affords us. We may not go to hear in a condition for the gospel to comfort us. Conviction may be more necessary for us than comfort. If the gospel comfort those that mourn, that is all which it professes to do. Secondly: The connexion between godly sorrow and gospel joy. We have heard much of the gospel containing comfort for the *mere sinner*; and if, by the mere sinner, be meant one that has nothing to plead but the mercy of God, through the atonement, like the publican in the parable, it is to such, and only such, that the gospel contains consolation. But if, by the mere sinner, be meant the impenitent, though distressed sinner, it has no comfort for such in their present state.* Repentance is ne-

* On this observation, a Constant Reader addressed some Queries to Mr. Fuller, in the Missionary Magazine of September, 1806, pp. 378—380. To this communication Mr. Fuller replied as follows:

The Queries put to me, with so much candour and kindness, by a Constant Reader, are such as I feel no difficulty in answering. And I do it with the greater pleasure, because it is not the first time of my being misunderstood on this subject; and I might add, in one instance, largely misrepresented. Your correspondent then will give me credit, when I assure him, that I should never think of addressing an awakened sinner in the way in which he supposes I should not; but in the way in which he supposes I should. If he be still at a loss how to reconcile this acknowledgment with the passage he calls in question, I must request him to consider, whether there be not a manifest difference between comfort being held out in a way of *invitation*,

cessary to forgiveness, in the same sense as faith is necessary to justification; for it is not possible for

to induce a sinner to return to God by Jesus Christ, and its being given in a way of *promise*, on the supposition of his having returned. The wicked is *invited* to forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and to return unto the Lord; and all this while he is wicked. Mercy also, and abundant pardon are *promised* him, not, however, *as wicked*, but *as forsaking his way, and his thoughts, and as returning to the Lord*. The weary and heavy-laden, by which I understand sinners considered as miserable, are *invited* to come to Jesus with their burdens: but it is *as coming to him, and as taking his yoke*, that rest for their souls is *promised* to them. All the comfort contained in the gospel is to be presented to the sinner in a way of invitation; but no comfort is afforded him in a way of promise, but as repenting and believing the gospel. *Say ye to the wicked, it shall be ill with him.—There is no peace, saith my God, unto the wicked.*

Now, it requires to be noticed, that the beatitudes which I was expounding, are not *invitations to believe*, but *promises to believers*. In saying, "The gospel has no comfort for impenitent, though distressed sinners, in their present state," I meant, It promises no mercy *but* on supposition of their coming off from that state to Jesus Christ. My design was not to direct the attention of the awakened sinner to any thing in himself for comfort; but to beat him off from false comfort, by assuring him, that mere distress was no proof of his being, as yet, in a state of salvation. If such a one should ask me, *What must I do?* I should think of nothing but of pointing him to the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world. But if he tell me his tale of woe, under an idea that *something may be found in it* to which the promises of mercy are made, (and such cases are not uncommon,) I should answer, Think nothing of this, my friend; unless your distress lead you to relinquish every false way, and to cast yourself as a perishing sinner on Jesus Christ for salvation, it is of no account. The gospel promises nothing to mere distress. Your concern is not to look into yourself for

a sinner either to embrace the Saviour, or prize the consolations of the gospel, while insensible to the evil of sin. There is no grace in the gospel, but upon the supposition that God is in the right, and that sin is exceedingly sinful; and consequently none to be *perceived* or *prized*.

Ver. 5. The next blessing is on the *meek*.—The word signifies *gentle, humble, lowly*. Every grace, however, has its semblance. There is a kind of meekness, as well as of mourning, which is merely natural, or constitutional. A lamb-like temper is a blessing, and however it may be despised by the hectoring spirits of this world, it is highly advantageous to society: but the gentleness of a renewed mind is a different thing, and has the promise of different blessings. Saul of Tarsus was naturally violent: but being apprehended of Jesus, he came to him, took his yoke, and learned his spirit. This is that spirit which receives the engrafted word; which insures our being guided in judgment; which is an ingredient in the wisdom from above; which submits to God under adverse providences; which stands aloof from noise, contention, and clamour, and renders our religion still and affectionate; which, in fine, is the ornament of Christians, and causes them to resemble the myrtle trees that grew in the valley, and had the Lord among them.—But how is it that such characters should have the promise of *inheriting*

evidences of grace, (the existence of which, at present, is extremely doubtful, and the discernment of it may be impossible,) but to the atonement of Christ, the hope set before you.

the earth? It seems to be supposed, that in one respect, they have but little of it. But, First: Meekness of spirit is connected with rest to the mind; and this makes much of a little. The proud and restless do not inherit the earth, though it be in their hand. The humble Christian has far more enjoyment in a cottage than they can have in distressing and dividing the world. *A little with the fear of the Lord, is better than great treasure, and trouble therewith.* Secondly: The meek ones shall have the rule of the world in God's due time. Dan. vii. 27. Nor need they lay aside their meekness, or engage in revolutionary schemes to accomplish it: God will revolutionize the world, by planting fear in the hearts of princes as well as subjects, and then the work is done; and Christian principles will govern the nations.

Ver. 6. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, &c.—It is a truth, that the obedience of Jesus unto death, which is the righteousness on account of which believers are justified, is the object of their most intense desire; but, as this is less introduced prior to its being actually wrought than afterwards, I doubt not but that the term in this place refers to the universal prevalence of righteousness in the mind and in the world. Unbelievers are hungering and thirsting, but it is after carnal and worldly gratifications. Some thirst for gold, and care not much by what means they obtain it; others may be more scrupulous on this head, yet it is chiefly on account of their own honour. Self, in one shape or other, is the idol in

the heart of every sinner. What then is true religion? An earnest desire to do right, and to see righteousness toward God and toward man prevail in the earth. Hence arise the believer's desires for the spread of Christ's kingdom, his sighs for the evils among men, and his secret moans over those of his own heart.—It is a source of great joy, that while those who hunger and thirst after the world are disappointed, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled. The way to have our desire, is for the mind to be one with the mind of God.

Ver. 7. Blessed are the merciful, &c.—This character respects our dispositions towards men. It is that kindness and goodness which feels the miseries of others, not only as our fellow-creatures, but as God's creatures, and it may be, the purchase of the Saviour's blood. There is a principle of compassion in that mutual affection which God has planted in all men, and even in animals towards their kind; and where it is cherished by the grace of God, or even by an enlightened conscience, it is productive of great and good effects to society. The true knowledge of God, as taught among the Israelites, had such an influence upon Ahab and his predecessors, that, idolaters as they were, its effects were not wholly obliterated; for the kings of the house of Israel were still known and acknowledged among the heathen as *merciful kings*. The same effects are seen to this day in countries where the gospel is preached, compared with those where it is not preached. This is certainly to the

honour of religion, and affords much cause for thankfulness. It must not, however, be confounded with that spirit of which our Saviour speaks. True religion may cherish natural affection, and false religion quench it; but its proper origin is not religion, but creation. That merciful spirit to which Christ annexes the blessing, is an effect of the grace of God, or of love written upon the fleshly tables of the heart. Christ was full of compassion; and as we learn of him, we feel as he felt. An unmerciful spirit is inconsistent with true religion.—Whatever pretences we may make to orthodoxy, or to devotion, if we show no mercy to the poor and the afflicted, we shall on a future day meet with judgment without mercy. But he who imbibes the merciful spirit of Jesus, and acts upon the principles upon which he acted, shall *obtain mercy*. He shall seldom want a sympathizing friend in this world; and, what is infinitely more, shall obtain mercy of the Lord another day.

Ver. 8. Blessed are the pure in heart, &c.—The import of this phrase, I take it, is much the same as what we mean by *pure intention*, or *godly simplicity*. It is the opposite of subtilty and duplicity. Genuine Christianity lays aside, not only malice, but guile and hypocrisy. It is not enough to be pure in words, nor in outward deportment, and still less to be pure in our own eyes, for all this may consist with inward wickedness. True religion has its seat in the heart, from whence are the issues of life.—Purity is a quality but little esteemed in the world. Men bless the subtle,

rather than the simple-hearted; but Christ judges otherwise; the one may succeed in his measures, and rise high in things of this life; but the other shall see God, and stand accepted in his presence.

Ver. 9. Blessed are the peace-makers, &c.—As one of the ways in which lust operates, is by breeding divisions, contentions, strifes, wars, and the like, and thus diffusing death through every vein of society; so one of the ways in which true religion operates, is by preventing, or allaying them. The desire of such persons is not merely to avoid giving or taking offence, and to stand aloof from the quarrels of the neighbourhood; but if possible, by a wise, temperate, and friendly interference, to heal them at an early stage. It is a great blessing to a church, a neighbourhood, or a nation, to have such characters among them. There is no calculating the mischiefs which have raged in these different departments of society, and which might have been prevented by listening to a few words from a pacific friend.—The blessedness pronounced on these characters, is the honour of being called *the children of God*; and this no doubt because they resemble him. He that seeks peace on pure and honourable principles, is of God's mind, acting on the same principles as God acts in reconciling the world to himself through Jesus Christ.

Ver. 10—12. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, &c.—It is a strong proof of human depravity, that men's curses and Christ's blessings should meet on the same persons. Who

would have thought that a man could be persecuted and reviled, and have all manner of evil said of him, for righteousness sake? And do wicked men really hate justice, and love those who defraud and wrong their neighbour? No; they do not dislike righteousness as it respects *themselves*: it is only that species of it which respects God and religion, that excites their hatred. If Christians were content with doing justly, and loving mercy, and would cease from walking humbly with God, they might go through the world, not only in peace, but with applause: but he that will *live* GODLY IN CHRIST JESUS *shall suffer persecution*. Such a life reproves the ungodliness of men, and provokes their resentment. Persecution is not confined to those acts of violence which are sanctioned by law, and affect liberty, property, or life; but extends to slanderous and reproachful language, and every other way in which enmity is expressed. Through the goodness of God we have been long protected from legal persecution; but the enmity of the serpent will find ways of expressing itself. If from the most disinterested compassion you warn your wicked neighbours of their danger, you will be called disturbers of the peace; crimes will be imputed to you of which you are innocent; and even your best actions ascribed to the worst motives. If you model your religion by the word of God, and pay no regard to human establishments, any farther than as they agree with it, you may expect to be represented as enemies to government, a discontented sort of people, *turning the*

world upside down. A view of such a state of things, to one that is weak in faith, may appear discouraging ; but there is no just cause for being cast down. Only see to it that whatever you suffer, be *for righteousness' sake*, and that all the evil which is said of you be *false*, and *for Christ's sake*, and instead of being discouraged you will have reason to *rejoice and be exceedingly glad*. Unbelievers may tell you that this is extravagant and impossible, and that no man can be happy in such circumstances ; but it is not so. The primitive Christians entered into the spirit of their Lord's doctrine, 'rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name's sake.' When to this is added the promised *kingdom*, the *reward in heaven*, which awaits those that overcome, miserable as your lot may be accounted by the world, it will be found to be not only preferable to that of your persecutors, but even to that of such Christians, as by yielding in a measure to the world, escape a few of its censures. You have more satisfaction, and consequently more happiness in this life ; and your reward in heaven will be greatly augmented : for if afflictions in general 'work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,' much more those which we have suffered for righteousness' sake. Every wound received in this warfare will then be a scar of honour : a seed, productive of a harvest beyond all our present conceptions.

CHARACTER OF CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIAN MINISTERS:

Matt. v. 13—16.

VER. 13. *Ye are the salt of the earth, &c.*—This character, I conceive, applies to the disciples, both as Christians and as Christian ministers. There are three things observable.

First: *Their use as a preservative.*—The world is corrupt, and if left to itself, would, in a little time, work its own ruin: but, as the Lord of hosts had a seed in Israel, who otherwise would have been as Sodom and Gomorrah, so he has a people scattered over the towns, cities, and nations of the earth, who to them are that which salt is to a substance tending to putrefaction. The influence which a few people, who imbibe the gospel and act up to its principles, have upon the consciences and conduct of others, is much beyond calculation. Had the ruling powers of France been friendly to the servants of Christ, in the seventeenth century, it might have prevented the horrors of a revolution in the eighteenth: but having destroyed or banished them, nothing was left to counteract the torrent of infidelity; which, being natural to the carnal mind, and cherished by popery, had before risen to a great height, and now overwhelmed the country. Humble and serious Christians, though often accused of being inimical to civil government, are in reality its best friends; while those governments which persecute them are their own enemies.

Secondly: *Their value, as consisting in their savour.*—There are many things, which though useless for one purpose, yet may be very useful for another: but things which, by possessing only one distinguishing property, are designed for a single specific purpose, if that property be wanted are good for nothing. It is thus with the vine, as to bearing fruit. If other trees were barren, yet their trunks might be applied to various uses: but if a vine be barren, it is good for nothing but to be burnt. Ezek. xv. 1—6. The same may be said of salt. Many things which have ceased to be good for food, may yet be useful for manure: but salt, if it once lose its savour, is good for nothing: it is fit for neither the land nor the dunghill. And thus if Christians lose their spirituality, or Christian ministers cease to impart the savour of the heavenly doctrine, of what use are they? of what in the family—of what in the church—of what in the world?

Thirdly: *Their irrecoverable condition, on having lost their savour.* It is true all things are possible with God; but where persons, after having professed the name of Christ, and in some cases preached his word, turn back, or go into another gospel, there is little hope of them, and indeed none from the ordinary course of things. Salt may recover unsavoury meat; but what is to recover unsavoury salt?

Ver. 14—16. Ye are the light of the world, &c.—This character implies that the world, notwithstanding its attainments in science, is in a state of

darkness; and that the only true light that is to be found in it, is that which proceedeth from Christ. It may seem too much to our Saviour to give that character in his disciples, which he elsewhere claims as his own. The truth is, He, as the sun, shines with supreme lustre, and they as the moon, derive their light from Him, and reflect it on the world. As ministers, it is for them to show unto men the way of salvation; and as Christians, to set the example of walking in it. On this account they require to be *conspicuous*. There is indeed a modesty in true religion, which, so far as respects ourselves, would induce us to steal through the world, if possible, unnoticed: but this cannot be; Christians being diverse from all people in their principles and pursuits, all eyes will be upon them. They are as *a city set upon a hill, which cannot be hid*. Their faults, as well as their excellencies, will be marked both by friends and enemies. Nor is it desirable it should be otherwise. Light is not intended to be hid, but exposed for the good of those about it. On this account we must even be *concerned* to let our light shine before men; not by any ostentatious display of ourselves, but by a practical, and faithful exhibition of the nature and effects of the gospel, by which our heavenly Father is glorified. It is not merely by words, but works, that gospel light is conveyed to the consciences and hearts of men.

There is another saying of our Lord in another place, nearly akin to this, though under a different image. *Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bring*

forth much fruit: so shall ye be my disciples. The glory of a husbandman does not arise from his fields or vines bearing fruit, but *much* fruit. A few ears of corn in the one, nearly choaked with weeds, or here and there a branch, or a berry on the other, while the greater part is covered with leaves only, would rather dishonour than honour him. And thus it is in spiritual fruitfulness. A little religion often dishonours God more than none. An undecisive spirit, halting between God and the world, walking upon the confines of good and evil, now seeming to be on the side of God, and now on that of his adversaries, causes his name to be evil spoken of, much more than the excesses of the irreligious. Hence we may see the force of the rebuke to Laodicea. *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.* It is also intimated, that without bearing *much* fruit we are unworthy to be considered as *Christ's disciples*. He was indeed a fruitful bough. His life was filled with the fruits of love to God and man. It behoves us either to imitate his example, or forego the profession of his name.

The glory of God being manifested by the good works of his children, implies that they are all to be ascribed to him as their proper cause. Though we act, he actuates. A mind set on things too high for it, may deny the consistency of this with the free-agency and accountableness of creatures: but the humble Christian will turn it to a better

use. *Thou wilt ordain peace for us, for thou hast wrought all our works in us.*

THE PERPETUITY AND SPIRITUALITY OF THE
MORAL LAW:

Matt. v. 17—32.

VER. 17—19. It might appear to some of our Lord's disciples, as if he intended to set aside the religion which had been taught by Moses and the prophets, and to introduce an entirely new state of things. It was true indeed that he would abolish the ceremonial law, and explode all dependance upon the works of any law for acceptance with God, as indeed Moses and the prophets had done before him; but it was no part of his design to set aside the law itself. Being about to correct various corruptions which had obtained among the Jews, he prefaces what he has to say, by cautioning them not to misconstrue his design, as though he were sitting himself against either Moses or the prophets, neither of whose writings were at variance with his kingdom, but preparatory to it. So far from his having any such design, he, with the most solemn asseveration, declares the law to be of perpetual obligation. Such also was his regard for it, that if any one professing to be a minister in his kingdom, should break the least of its precepts, and teach others to make light of it, he should be as little in the eyes of his Lord, as the precept was in his eyes: while, on the contrary, those ministers who should practise and inculcate every part of it, should have his highest approbation.

Ver. 20. Having made these declarations by way of introduction, (and to which we may have occasion hereafter to refer,) our Lord proceeds to denounce the system of pharisaical religion, and to exhibit in contrast with it that of Moses and the prophets: which, purified from all corrupt glosses, he recommends to his followers. In general he declares, that *except their righteousness exceed that of the scribes and pharisees, they could in no case enter the kingdom of heaven.* This, at the time, must have been a most extraordinary and alarming declaration. The scribes and pharisees were the reputed models of strict religion. The common people seem to have thought, that men in general could not be expected to attain the heights of purity to which they had arrived. If, therefore, any had attached themselves to Jesus, in hopes of obtaining a little more latitude than was allowed them by their own teachers, they would find themselves greatly mistaken. For not only did he inculcate an equal, but even a superior degree of strictness to that which they practised. Nor did he, by *righteousness*, mean that which was imputed to them for justification; but that judgment, mercy, and love of God, of which the scribes and pharisees, with all their tenacity for forms and ceremonies, were woefully destitute.

In proof of the gross defectiveness of the pharisaical system of morality, he goes on to account for it, by convicting its authors of having by their glosses, in a course of time, greatly corrupted the law: and this must have the cut the deeper on

account of an attachment to the law being their principal pretext for opposing him.

Ver. 21, 22. The first example alleged is the sixth commandment, **THOU SHALT NOT KILL**. All that the pharisees understood by this, was, a prohibition of the act of murder: but our Lord insists, that the commandment, taken from its true intent, prohibited not only the overt act, but every evil working of the mind, which led to it; such as causeless anger, with contemptuous and provoking language. This was going to the root or principle of things. The different degrees of *punishment* here referred to, allude doubtless to the courts of justice among the Jews; and express not merely what sin was in itself as a breach of the divine law; (for in that sense all sin exposes to hell fire) but how many degrees of evil there were, short of actual murder, which would endanger a man's salvation.

Ver. 23, 24. Of this doctrine our Lord proceeds to make some practical uses, by applying it to certain cases. First, he enforces *speedy reconciliation with an offended brother*. 'Be sure there be no enmities rankling in thy bosom from day to day, every one of which is murder in embryo; nor let any conduct of thine be the cause of their rankling in the bosom of another. The best means of preventing both, is, to examine thyself in thy most solemn approaches to God: for then, if ever, the conscience is tender, and likely to bring to remembrance what is wrong between thee and thy brother.' What must I do, say you, who have offended my brother? Must I not worship God

nevertheless? No, not in that state, for God will not accept of thy gift. What then, must I keep away? No; but go immediately to thy brother, and acknowledge thy fault, or if no offence were intended, explain matters to him, and thus being reconciled to thy brother, then come and offer thy gift.' If the door of God's house were shut against every one who refused to comply with this direction, it would make many feel; yet the door of mercy, or divine acceptance is shut; which is of far greater account. It is observable, that the exhortation is given to the offender, and the term *reconciled* is not expressive of a conciliatory spirit on his part, but of its *effect* upon his brother. The meaning of it is, *Be restored to thy brother's favour*. And this is the sense in which the word is sometimes used on a higher subject, namely, that of reconciliation to God. We are often told, by the adversaries of the atonement, that God is never said to be *reconciled to us* by the death of Christ, but to have *reconciled us to himself* by it. This is true; but the term in this connexion does not mean his appeasing our anger by offering us mercy through Christ; but his making his soul an offering for sin, and thereby *restoring us to his favour*. Hence God's having reconciled us to himself by Christ, is alleged as a motive to our being as to the state of our minds reconciled to him. 2 Cor. v. 18—20.

Ver. 25. From the case of an offended brother, he proceeds to that of an *adversary*, recommending a speedy agreement with him also. The law of love,

if truly complied with, would promote universal peace. But a small difference where there is little or no love to counteract it, often terminates in mutual and settled dislike; and, being accompanied with a proud reluctance to concession, litigations and contentions frequently follow, to which death only puts a period. But what is this? It is murder! 'And wouldest thou wash thy hands in thy neighbour's blood? Go then, and be at peace with him! Human prudence would recommend a timely agreement for thine own sake: let religion, let benevolence, even to thine adversary, recommend it for his. Say not, Our differences shall be tried before legal judges, whatever be the consequences: but offer just and generous terms whilst thou art in the way with him, that if the breach can be healed it may, or if not, that the fault may not lie at thy door.' It were desirable that there were no strife among us, and if we loved one another as God's law requires, there would be none: but seeing it is otherwise, the same principle which in innocent creatures would operate to prevent it, must in guilty creatures operate to heal it.

Ver. 27, 28. Having taken an example from the sixth commandment, and reproved the pharisaical system with respect to sins of the mind, our Lord proceeds to the seventh, and detects the sins of the flesh. They had heard that it was said to them of old time, **THOU SHALT NOT COMMIT ADULTERY**; and they had heard the truth: but the pharisaical glosses would confine its meaning, as in the former instance, to outward actions; whereas in its true

intent, it comprehended the inward affections of the mind, censuring the wanton look, and the impure desire. The pharisees were worldly men, and the religion of such men is merely *political*: so far as good and evil affect society, they feel in some degree; but as to the honour of God, they have no concern about it.

Ver. 29, 30. As Christ had turned his former decision to practical use, so he does the present one. *If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, or if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, &c.* The word rendered *offend*, in this, and several other passages in the New Testament, does not mean to *displease*, but to *cause to offend*, and so it is rendered in the margin. The meaning is not, If they displease thee; but If, by becoming a stumbling-block or snare to thy soul, they cause thee to offend God, &c. Neither was it our Lord's design that we should literally go about to maim our bodies; but he hereby teaches us, either that we had better be without eyes or hands, than to employ them in wantonness; or that we must on pain of eternal damnation, give up those companions, situations, or pursuits, though dear to us as right eyes, or right hands, which prove a snare to our souls.

The tremendous consequences held up to induce such sacrifices, teach us, that a single lust persisted in, will issue in eternal ruin; and that it is necessary even for those whom the Lord may know to be the heirs of salvation, in certain situations, to be threatened with damnation, as the means of preserving them from it.

Ver. 31, 32. Under the head of adultery there occurred another case, namely, that of *divorce*, in which the pharisaical doctrine had greatly corrupted the law. In this case our Saviour may seem to depart from the law of Moses, rather than to expound it; and true it is, that he took for his standard, in this instance, the original law of creation, to which it was his design, under the gospel dispensation, to bring his followers. This law, however, as well as the other, was given by Moses; and the difference between them he elsewhere accounts for, by alleging that Moses rather suffered divorce than required it, and *that* because of the hardness of their hearts. In what he now taught, therefore, he was not against the *mind* of Moses or of God, neither of whom approved of divorce, except in case of fornication; but barely permitted it to prevent a greater evil. And though the law respecting marriage, as given to Israel, was less pure than the original law of creation, yet it was much purer than it had since become in the hands of pharisaic expositors, through whom divorces were become so common, as, in a manner, to deluge the land with adultery.

ON OATHS.

Matt. v. 33—37.

WHAT our Lord says of swearing may have respect to the third commandment, in which we are forbidden to *take the name of the Lord our God in vain*. It had also been said, *Thou shalt*

not swear by my name falsely; neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God. And again, If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth. To these passages, and to the construction which had been put upon them, our Lord seems to have alluded in what he here teaches.

Many have supposed, that oaths of every kind are here forbidden, and therefore refuse in any form, or on any occasion, to take them. To determine this question, we must have recourse to the principles laid down at the outset of the sermon, *Think not that I am come to DESTROY THE LAW or the prophets, I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all be fulfilled,* ver. 17, 18. The question is then, whether oaths of any kind belonged to the law, or whether they arose from the false glosses of the elders? If the former, it was not Christ's design to destroy them; but if the latter, it was. That they were a part of the divine law, and not of merely human authority, is sufficiently manifest from Deut. vi. 13. *Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt SWEAR BY HIS NAME.* Consequently, it was not our Lord's design to destroy them.

If it be objected, that though Christ did not destroy the moral law, yet there were various precepts pertaining to the ceremonial and judicial

laws of Israel, which, on his appearance, ceased to be binding, and that oaths might be of this description—I answer, In abolishing things which had been of divine authority, he is never known to have cast reproach on them, or to have imputed the observance of them to evil. He could not therefore be said to have *destroyed* even the ceremonial law, but rather to have fulfilled it. But the oaths against which he inveighs, are expressly said to *come of evil*; and therefore could never have been of divine authority.

To this may be added, If *all* oaths be unlawful under the gospel dispensation, some of the most solemn and impressive passages in the epistles of Paul must be utterly wrong. *The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not—God is my witness, whom I serve in the gospel of his Son.* Each of these are oaths, and that of the most solemn kind; yet who ever thought of accusing the Apostle of violating his Lord's precept?

The truth appears to be this—the Jews had construed the commandment merely as a prohibition of *perjury*; accounting, that if they did but swear *truly* as to matters of fact, or *perform* their oaths in case of promise, all was right. They seem to have had no idea, or at most but a very faint one, of sinning by swearing *lightly*. But for an oath to be lawful, it required, not only that the affirmation were true, or the vow performed; but that such a mode of affirming or vowing were *necessary*. This is evident from the words of the

divine precept, *Thou shalt not swear by my name falsely*, NEITHER SHALT THOU PROFANE THE NAME OF THY GOD. Thousands of things are true, which yet it would be profaning the name of God to swear to. Here lay the sin which it was the design of Christ to reprove. He did not censure his countrymen for what was said before a magistrate, to put *an end to strife*; but for what passed in their ordinary *communications*, (ver. 37.) that is, for light, and unnecessary oaths, by which the name of God was profaned. This was a sin so prevalent among the Jews, that even Christians, who were called from among them, stood in need of being warned against it. James v. 12.

It may appear rather extraordinary, that any person who fears God should stand in need of these warnings; and if profane swearing were confined to expressly naming the name of God, they might be in general unnecessary among persons who had any claim to seriousness of character. But as both Jews and Christians have learned to mince and soften their oaths, by leaving out the name of God, while yet it is implied, and consequently profaned, such warnings cannot be considered as superfluous. We perceive by our Lord's words, that it was common among the Jews to swear *by heaven, by earth, by Jerusalem, by the temple, by the altar, by their own head, &c. &c.* They had also some curious distinctions between swearing by the temple, and by the gold of the temple; the altar, and the gift upon the altar; but our Lord, looking deep into the principles of

things, considers them all as amounting to the same thing—the profanation of God's holy name. Matt. xxiii. 16—22.

It is thus that oaths are used among men calling themselves Christians. In popish countries, your ears are continually stunned by hearing people swear, not only by their saints, but *by Jesus*, by *his blood* and *his wounds*: and even in protestant countries, these terrible oaths are turned into exclamations on many a trivial occasion. The words '*S blood*, '*S wounds*, &c. are no other than these old popish oaths minced, or contracted by the dread of expressly naming the blood and wounds of Christ. Every person who uses such language, may not be apprised of the meaning; but every thing of the kind *cometh of evil*. The same may be said of all such phrases as the following—*Of faith*, *By my troth*, *Upon my soul*, *Upon my life*, *Upon my honour*, and even *Upon my word*. By our Lord's exposition of such language, in Matt. xxviii. 16—22. all these modes of speaking would be found to bear a relation to God, and so to be a *profaning of his name*.

How opposite to all this profane jargon, is the simple and dignified language prescribed by our Lord.—*Let your communication be Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil*. He that is conscious of a want of veracity, may find it necessary to confirm his words with oaths; but he that habitually speaketh the truth, will have no occasion for resorting to such mean and profane expedients.

ON RESISTING EVIL.

Matt. v. 38—42.

IN the judicial law of Israel, it had been enacted as follows:—*If men strive and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow, he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband shall lay upon him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.* This law, in the hands of the magistrate, was equitable, and adapted to the general good: nor was it our Lord's design to undermine its authority. But by the glosses of the Jews, it had been perverted in favour of *private retaliation and revenge*. Against this principle our Saviour inveighs. He did not complain of the law in the hands of the magistrate, nor forbid his followers appealing to it for the public good: but they must neither take upon them to judge of their own cause, nor repair to a magistrate from a principle of revenge; but must keep in view the good of the party, or at least that of the community. He does not crush any passion,* no not that of

* The *passions* are commonly confounded by infidel writers, with *vicious propensities*. The former is the name indeed by which they chuse to denominate the latter; and that with the obvious intent of apologizing for them. But they are, nevertheless, perfectly distinct. The first belong to us as creatures;

anger; but merely requires that it be not selfish, but subordinate to the glory of God, and the good of mankind. And however unbelievers may affect to deride this precept, it so approves itself to the judgment of men in general, that you shall rarely know an individual appeal to justice, but under a profession, at least of being inflamed by some other motive than that of private revenge.

With respect to the precept of *turning the other cheek to him that smiteth thee*, it certainly does not mean that we should court insult, or in all cases submit to it, without any kind of resistance; for this was not the practice of our Lord himself. When unjustly smitten before the high-priest, he did not invite the repetition of the indignity; but on the contrary, remonstrated against it. *If, said he, I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?* In this remonstrance, however, he was not influenced by a spirit of retaliation, but of justice to his own character, which under the form of striking his person, was assaulted; and what he said had a tendency to convict the party and the assembly. Such remonstrances are doubtless allowable in his followers. But the meaning of the precept is, that we render not evil for evil; but rather suffer injury and that injury to be repeated, than go about to avenge ourselves. It is the principle rather than the act, which is inculcated;

the last as sinners: the scriptures regulate the one, but prohibit the other. Elias was a man of *like passions* with other men; but in praying for the giving or withholding of rain, he did not act under the influence of vicious propensity.

yet even the act itself would be right in various cases; and instead of degrading the party, would raise him in the esteem of the wise and good. When Greece was invaded by Persia, Themistocles, the Athenian General, by warmly urging a point in a council of war, is said to have so provoked the displeasure of Eurybiades, the Spartan, the commander in chief, that the latter lifted up his cane over his head in a menacing posture. "STRIKE, (said the noble Athenian,) BUT HEAR ME!" He did hear him, and the country was saved. And why may not a Christian act, or rather forbear to act, on the same principle, and for an infinitely greater end, even the eternal salvation of his enemies? What else has been the language of the noble army of martyrs from the beginning? Have they not practically said to an enraged world, STRIKE, BUT HEAR US!

Similar remarks might be made on the precept of giving our *cloak to him that would sue us, and take away our coat*. It is the principle that is to be regarded, rather than the act. It would be far from just in many cases, to give place to the overbearing treatment of men; as it must tend, not only to ruin our own families, but to encourage the wicked in their wickedness. But the *spirit* here inculcated is of the greatest importance: it is that disposition which would rather put up with injury, than engage in litigious contests. All strife for victory, or for the sake of having our will of men, is here forbidden, as carnal and Antichristian.

The precept of going *two miles with him that would compel you to go with him one*, teaches us to need no compulsion in works of benevolence; but to be willing to do good to all men, even beyond their requests.

In harmony with this, is the practice of *giving, and lending to them that ask us*. To suppose, that Christ is here laying down a literal and universal rule of action, would be supposing him to inculcate a practice which must soon destroy itself, by putting it out of our power either to give or lend. But by this language he recommends a kind and liberal spirit, ready to do good to the utmost of our power. Such was the spirit of Christ himself towards an impoverished world, and such is the spirit of his religion; selfishness, in every shape and form, is Antichristian,

ON LOVE TO ENEMIES:

Matt. v. 43—48.

IT was written in the law of Moses, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*. The construction which the Jews put upon this precept is easily discerned by the question of the self-justifying lawyer, *And who is my neighbour?* They excluded from that character, heathens and Samaritans, and indeed all those of their own country who were unfriendly towards them; and so considered the command to love their neighbours, as allowing them to hate their enemies.

In opposing this sentiment, our Lord did not oppose the law ; but merely the selfish gloss of the Rabbies ; for the law did not allow of any such hatred as they cherished. Yet in comparing it with David's language in the Psalms, some Christian writers have seemed willing to concede, that the Jewish gloss was really founded upon the spirit of the Old Testament, and have represented the doctrine of love to enemies as peculiar to the gospel dispensation. That it is more clearly taught, and powerfully enforced, by our Saviour, than it had been before, is allowed ; but the notion of his opposing his doctrine to that of Moses or David, is inadmissible ; for this had been to *destroy the law*, and to render the New Testament at variance with the Old.

That good will to men, is both taught and exemplified in the Old Testament, is manifest from the joy expressed by David and the prophets, when predicting the conversion of the heathen. They even prayed, and taught their countrymen to pray, for the blessing of God upon themselves *in subserviency to it*. See Psal. lxxvii. Isa. xlix. Nor are the prayers of David against his enemies at variance with this principle. If they be however, the New Testament is also at variance with it : for the same kind of language is used in Paul's Epistles, as abounds in David's Psalms. *If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed.—Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works !* Much confusion has arisen on these subjects, from not

distinguishing between *benevolence* and *complacency*. The one is due to all men, whatever be their character, so long as there is any possibility or hope of their becoming the friends of God: the other is not, but requires to be founded on character. The Old-testament writers, being under a dispensation distinguished by awful threatenings against sin, dwell mostly upon the latter; avowing their love to those who loved God, and their hatred to those who hated him: the New-testament writers, living under a dispensation distinguished by its tender mercy to sinners, dwell mostly upon the former: but neither of these principles is inconsistent with the other. We may bear the utmost good will to men as the creatures of God, and as being within the limits of hope; while yet, considered as the Lord's enemies, we abhor them. If we love others as we love ourselves, that is all that is required: but the love which a Christian bears to his own soul, is consistent with his abhorring himself as a sinner. Our Lord exemplified both these dispositions at the same time. In denouncing the damnation of hell against the scribes and pharisees, you would think him void of every feeling but that of inflexible justice: yet looking upon the same people, in reference to their approaching miseries, he burst into a flood of tears. The same spirit possessed the apostle Paul towards his countrymen. When they rejected the gospel, he did not scruple to apply to them the awful prophecies of Isaiah, *Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see*

and shall not perceive, &c. yet the same apostle solemnly declares, that he had great heaviness, and continual sorrow in his heart on their behalf. So far from an abhorrence of the wicked in *respect of their wickedness*, being inconsistent with genuine benevolence, it is necessary to it. The compassion that is void of this, is not benevolence, but the workings of disaffection to God, and of criminal partiality towards his enemies.

Benevolence has not, as observed before, an immediate respect to character; yet it considers its objects within the limits of hope, in respect to their becoming the friends of God. If a creature be a confirmed enemy to God, as in the case of devils and lost souls, true benevolence will cease to mourn over them, as it would imply a reflection upon the Creator. It is on this principle that Aaron was forbidden to mourn for his sons, Nadab and Abihu, and that Samuel was reproved for mourning over Saul. Lev. x. 6. 1 Sam. xvi. 1. Hence also we see in the benevolence of David and Isaiah towards the heathen, (Psal. lxxvii. Isa. xlix.) a prospect of their future conversion: and as this prospect was to be realized under the gospel dispensation, we perceive the reason of benevolence in it, arising to its highest pitch. By the appearance and sacrifice of Christ, the glory of God was to be manifested in a way of good will to men, even to enemies; angels therefore dwelt upon this idea at his birth, and the disciples were taught to cherish it.

But to bear good will to our enemies, to pity them that hate us, and to pray for them that despitefully use us and persecute us, is, after all, a strange doctrine in the account of a selfish world. If the love of God be not in us, self-love, in one shape or other, will have possession of our souls. Hence Infidels have treated this precept as extravagant, and imputed the conduct of Christians to affectation. Conscious, it seems, that self-love is the governing principle of their own actions, they imagine it to be the same with all others. The general prevalence also of this spirit leads them to expect little else from one another, and to act as if it were a law of nature, for every one to love himself supremely, and all other beings only as they are subservient to him. Nor are infidels the only persons who have spoken and written in this strain: many of the advocates of Christianity have so formed their systems as to render self-love the foundation on which they rest. Neither God nor man is to be regarded but on our own account. On this principle, however, it would follow, that there is no such thing as glorifying God *as God*, nor hating sin *as sin*, and that the gospel has no charms on account of its revealing mercy *in a way of righteousness*, any more than if it had revealed it in a way of unrighteousness. If our love be directed merely "to that which relieves us," it would be equally worthy of acceptance in our account, let that relief come how it might; and thus the character of God as *the just and the JUSTIFIER of them that believe in Jesus*, forms no

part of the good news to sinful men: the glory of the gospel is no glory.

There is much meaning in the words of the apostle John—*We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.* Every false system of religion originates and terminates in self. This is the character of the spirit of error. But if we be of *God*, we shall love him, and every image of him in creation. Those objects which bear his *moral* image, such as his holy law, his glorious gospel, and his renewed people, will occupy the first place in our esteem; and those which at present bear only his *natural* image, while there is any hope of their recovery to a right mind, will be the objects of our tender compassion, and their salvation the subject of our earnest prayers.

It is thus that we manifest ourselves to be *the children of our Father who is in heaven*; who, till sinners are fixed in a state of irreconcilable enmity to him, and to the general good, *causeth his sun to rise, and his rain to descend* upon them, whatever be their characters.

If self-love be the spring of our religion, it is declared by our Saviour to be of no value, and that it will issue in no divine reward. How should it be otherwise, when it differs not from the spirit of the world? The most abandoned men love those that love them. If this were true religion, we do not need to be taught it of God; for it is perfectly suited to our depraved nature. But if

true religion consists in being of the mind of God, or in being *perfect, as our Father who is in heaven is perfect*, it is absolutely necessary that we be born again, or we cannot see the kingdom of God.

ON ALMS-GIVING, AND PRAYER:

Matt. vi. 1—8.

OUR Saviour, having detected various false glosses upon the law, and shown the spirituality of its requirements, proceeds to discourse on some of the most common and important duties of religion. Of these he instances *alms-giving* and *prayer*. Three things are observable from what is said of the former, ver. 1—4.

First: It is taken for granted that the disciples of Christ were in the habit of giving alms; and this notwithstanding they generally consisted of persons who laboured for their subsistence. And would this bear to be taken for granted of the body of professors among us? They might have said, 'We have enough to do to provide for our own houses: it is for the rich, and not for labouring people, to give alms.' But feeling, as they did, for the afflicted and necessitous, especially for those of the household of faith, they would deny themselves many comforts for the sake of being able to relieve them. True religion always teaches men to be merciful.

Secondly: As, through the deceitfulness of the human heart, the most beneficial actions may arise

from corrupt designs, and thereby be rendered not only void, but evil in the sight of God, we are warned as to our motives—*Take heed that ye do not your alms BEFORE MEN, TO BE SEEN OF THEM—do not SOUND A TRUMPET before you, as the hypocrites do.* In what concerns the relief of individuals, this counsel will commonly apply in the most literal sense of the words. The liberality of vain men, having no other object than to be thought generous, is commonly, either publicly proclaimed, or exercised in a way that shall by some means come to the knowledge of the neighbourhood; while that of the modest Christian, desirous only of approving himself to God, is done in secret. The words, however, do not apply in all cases. It is not so much the *act* as the *principle*, or *motive*, that our Lord condemns. If we understand it literally of the former, it would follow, that nothing ought to be given in *public* subscriptions or collections for the poor; for in this, concealment would be improper, if not impossible. The primitive Christians did not always conceal their donations; but consulted, and subscribed for the poor brethren at Jerusalem, Acts xv. 29, 30. Nor would privacy be consistent with other commandments; particularly that in Chap. v. 16. *Let your light so shine before men, that others seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven.* There is no evil in our works *being seen of men*, provided they be not done *for this end, but for the glory of God.* Secrecy itself may become a cloak to avarice: and it is a fact, that

many, by affecting to be very private in their donations, have contrived to keep their money to themselves, and at the same time to be thought very generous. The evil lies in the *motive*; doing what we do from ostentation, or *to be seen of men*. The desire of human applause, is a canker that eats out the charity of many gifts, and renders that which would otherwise be good and well-pleasing to God, a mere exercise of selfish hypocrisy.

Thirdly: As every thing in this world bears a relation to eternity, we are reminded of the final issue of things. If we give from ostentation, we *HAVE our reward*: but if from love, and with an eye to the glory of God, *that which has been done in secret, shall be rewarded openly*. It is so ordered in the divine administration, that the selfish soul shall be disappointed in the end; while he who seeks the good of others, shall find his own. But how is it that the works of sinful creatures should be *rewarded* with eternal life? In themselves considered, they cannot; and if any man think, by a series of beneficent actions, to atone for the sins of his past life, and to obtain the kingdom of heaven, he will be awfully deceived. But if he believe in Jesus, he is accepted in him; and being so, his offerings are accepted and rewarded, both in this world and that which is to come.

From alms-giving our Lord proceeds to *prayer*, ver. 5—8. The former respected our conduct to men, the latter our approaches to God. And here also it is observable, that it is taken for granted

that Christ's disciples are praying men. What he says is not to persuade them to prayer, but to direct them in it. Infidels may imagine that God does not concern himself with the affairs of mortals, and may excuse themselves by pretending that it were presumption in them to solicit the Supreme Being to do this or that: formalists may *say* their prayers, and be glad when the task is over: but Christians cannot live without communion with God. Prayer has with propriety been called the breath of the new creature. To satisfy Ananias that Saul was become a Christian, it was enough to say, *Behold, he prayeth!*

What is said of the privacy of prayer will literally apply to that which is personal, or expressive of individual desire. The proper resort for this is the closet, or a place of retirement from the interruptions and observations of men. A vain-glorious professor may enjoy no freedom in this, because there is none to witness and admire his devotions: but the child of God is here at home, even in the presence of his Father, who heareth him in secret. If we have no freedom in private prayer, but live nearly, if not entirely in the neglect of it, and at the same time possess great zeal and fluency in our public exercises, we ought surely to suspect that things are far from being right between God and our souls.

The words of our Lord, however, must not be literally applied to all cases. Respect is had more to the principle of the act, than to the act itself. To understand it of the latter would be to

censure all *public* prayer, and *standing* in prayer, which was no part of the design. A good man *might* pray *standing in the synagogue*, or even at *a corner of the street*, on some occasions. Paul prayed with the Tyrian disciples, with their wives and children, and gave thanks to God, in the presence of a ship's company. That which Christ meant to censure, was the loving to pray in public places *in order to be seen of men*. His object was not to appoint the *place* or the *posture* of prayer; but to detect the vanity of the mind, and to direct his followers to seek the approbation of God, rather than the applauses of men.

The *motive* with which these counsels are urged is very impressive. *Verily I say unto you, they have their reward!* God will apportion our rewards according to the things we seek. If the objects of our desire be confined to this world, this world shall be our all: but if they extend to another, that other shall be our portion.

What is said of *vain petitions*, and *much speaking*, admits of similar remarks as that which goes before it. In general, it is right to avoid long prayers, especially in the family, and in the church, which are not only wearisome to men, but offensive to God. A proper sense of the majesty of the great Supreme would cure this evil. *God is in heaven, and we on earth: therefore let our words be few.* The contrary practice savours of heathenism. Let the devotees of Baal vociferate from morning to noon: but let not the worshippers of Jehovah imitate

them.* Our heavenly Father knoweth what things we need. If he require importunity in prayer, it is not because he needs to be persuaded; but that his favours may be known, accepted, and prized.

It is not our Lord's design, however, to condemn *all* long prayers, nor all repetitions. He himself, on some occasions, continued for a whole night; and in Gethsemane he three times repeated the same words. They are *vain* repetitions which he censures, and the hope of being heard *for* much speaking. It is observable, however, that whenever Christ or any of the apostles were long in prayer, it was in private. If many who pray for an hour or longer, in public, and with tedious repetitions, were equally circuitous in the closet, whether we should commend their discretion or not, we might hope well of their sincerity. But where the reverse of this is true, it certainly has the appearance of the very spirit which it was our Saviour's intention to condemn.

ON THE LORD'S PRAYER:

Matt. vi. 9—15.

THIS admirable summary of prayer as introduced by Matthew, would seem to be only for the

* Heathenism still retains the same character as it did in the days of Elijah. The Hindoos at this day, in worshipping the idol Kreeshnoo, or Hurry, will cry for hours together, without intermission, "Hurry bolo! Hurry bolo!" i. e. Kreeshnoo, speak! Kreeshnoo, speak!

purpose of illustrating by example, the foregoing precepts. Luke, however, represents it as occasioned by our Saviour's being engaged in prayer at a certain place, and when he ceased, one of his disciples saying unto him, *Lord teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.* If in any thing we need divine instruction, it is in drawing near to God. It does not appear to have been Christ's design to establish a form of prayer, nor that it was ever so used by the disciples: but merely a brief *directory* as to the matter and manner of it. Such a directory was adapted not only to instruct, but to encourage Christians in their approaches to God. It was putting words into their mouths. In supplicating divine mercy, they might plead, 'Thus and thus our Saviour taught us to say; even he in whom thy soul delighteth: hear us for his sake!' Observe,

First: The *character* under which we are allowed to draw near to the Lord of heaven and earth.—*Our Father.* It has been a question, though I conceive it ought not, whether God is here to be considered as our Father in Jesus Christ, and not rather as our Creator; and whether the prayer be not suited to all men, who are God's creatures, as well as to believers. That the prayer is free to every one who can cordially utter its sentiments, there is no doubt: but whatever others have done, Christ would never prescribe a prayer suited to an unbeliever. As the scriptures inculcate no precept, but what, if obeyed in its true intent, would prove us in the way to eternal life, so they prescribe no

prayer but what, if offered up in its true meaning, would be heard and answered. It is true that God is the Father of all men by creation; but like prodigals, they are by sin alienated from him, and his love to them as a Creator is in a manner extinguished. He cannot consistently treat them as children, but as strangers and enemies. If strict justice had its course, he would *destroy man whom he hath created, from the face of the earth*. The effect is, that if any of the sons of men approach him as a Father, it must be through a mediator. The original relation is, as to any access to him, or communion with him, dissolved. If any sinner be now treated as a child of God, it is as an *adopted alien, put among the children*. See John i. 13.

It is no small proof that the privilege of approaching God as a Father has respect to the mediation of Christ, that it is almost confined to the gospel dispensation. To Israel it is true, pertained the national adoption; but this was only a shadow of that to which believers were predestinated through Jesus Christ. Old-testament believers were no doubt related to God as a Father, as well as we; but they were not ordinarily in the habit of addressing him under that endearing character. The spirit of that dispensation was, when compared with ours, a spirit of bondage. It was reserved for the times of the Messiah, in the spirit of adoption, to cry *Abba, Father*. The encouragement contained in this tender appellation is inexpressible. The love, the care, the pity

which it comprehends, and the filial confidence which it inspires, must, if we are not wanting to ourselves, render prayer a most blessed exercise.

Secondly: The *place* of the divine residence.—*Our Father, who art IN HEAVEN.* As the endearing character of a father inspires us with confidence, this must have no less a tendency to excite our reverence; and both together are necessary to acceptable worship. *As for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy: and in thy FEAR will I worship toward thy holy temple.* Fear without hope, would sink us into despair; and hope without fear, would raise us to presumption; but united together, they constitute the beauty of holiness. It is not, however, for the purpose of inspiring reverence only, that God is said to be in heaven, but to encourage us to confide in his absolute supremacy, and almighty power. He is above all our enemies, and has the direction and control of all events. What can be more consoling than the thought of having the Lord of the universe for our father! When the heathen triumphed over the church, and sneeringly asked each other, *Where is now their God?* it was sufficient to answer, *Our God is in the heavens, he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.*

Thirdly: The *social* principle which pervades the prayer.—*OUR Father—forgive us, &c.* Assuredly we are hereby taught not to confine our petitions to what respects ourselves, but to identify with our own cases those of our brethren. Nor is it necessary that they should be actually present

to hear us, and join with us : the prayer of faith and love will embrace in its arms brethren at the greatest distance; and not only such as are known, but such as are unknown, even the whole family of God upon earth. Neither is it necessary to social prayer, that all who are present should be believers. Were this the case, we must restrain prayer in our congregations, and in our families. The worship of the primitive churches had in it both prayer and singing, and that in a language that might be understood; yet it was open to unbelievers, or any person who chose to join in it. 1 Cor. xiv. 15. 23—25. If either prayer or praise were *positive institutions*, we might be under the necessity of refusing admission to some characters, as is the case in other positive institutions; but if they are immediately binding on all men, whatever be their characters, any man has a right to be present. If he can join in either, let him; and if not, it is to himself only. Our only concern in such cases is, not to give unbelievers to understand that they are considered differently from what they are; and this may be avoided, without refusing to pray or praise in company with them. Paul would not have united with the ship's company in celebrating the Lord's supper, but he did not scruple to take common bread, and *give thanks* on their behalf, *in the presence of them all*.

Fourthly: The *brevity* of it.—*Use not vain repetitions, but in THIS MANNER pray ye.* The prayers recorded in the scriptures are commonly as brief as they are impressive. It is true our

Lord continued in prayer for a whole night ; but he was then by himself. The importunity which induces us when alone, to wrestle with our heavenly Father for a blessing, and to be unwilling to retire without it, is very different from that tedious circumlocution, so wearisome to families, and disgusting to the most solemn assemblies. There may be indeed an extreme on the other side. Some persons conclude their prayers ere they have well begun them ; and without affording opportunity for their own hearts or the hearts of others, to be affected in them. Prayer is the pouring out of the soul before God ; it therefore requires to be long enough to interest the mind and affections, and not so long as to drown them in a flood of unmeaning words.

Fifthly : The *order* of it.—Our attention is first directed to those things which are of the first importance, and which are fundamental to those which follow. Such are sanctifying and hallowing the name of the Lord, praying that his kingdom may come, and that his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. After this, we are allowed to ask for those things which pertain to our own immediate wants, both temporal and spiritual. This is seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. The glory of God's character, and the coming of his kingdom, stand first in all his works, and therefore must have the precedence in all our prayers. The love of God stands before the love of our neighbour, or of ourselves, in the divine law ; and the glory of God, before peace on earth and

good will to men, in the gospel. We must subscribe to this, ere we are allowed to ask for our daily bread, or the forgiveness of our sins. To desire salvation at the expense of the divine honour, would be direct rebellion against the majesty of heaven and earth. Self-love may induce a sinner to regard a doctrine which relieves him, and merely on account of its relieving him; but that which endears the gospel to a Christian is, that it reveals a way in which *God can be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus*. Why is it that sinners under the preaching of the gospel, continue averse to the way of salvation? It is not because they would not be glad to have their sins forgiven; but having no regard for the honour of God's name, they see no need for such an interposition as the gospel exhibits, in order to sanctify it, and render forgiveness consistent with it. Hence, like Cain, they present their offerings without an eye to the gospel sacrifice. That which some have denominated "disinterested love," or the love of God for what he is in himself, as far as I understand it, is no other than hallowing his name, which is essential to true religion. Not that we are called upon to love any thing in the divine character which is not *manifested in the work of saving sinners*, nor to be *unconcerned about our own salvation*; but to embrace the gospel as first glorifying God, and then giving peace on earth; and to seek our own interest as bound up with the honour of his name, and as tending to promote it.

We are taught to pray for even the coming of God's kingdom, and the universal prevalence of righteousness in the world, in subserviency to the honour of HIS NAME. It is to this end that God himself pursues these great objects; to this end therefore we must pray for them. But though they are placed *after* the hallowing of his name, yet they stand *before* any private petitions of ours, and in this order each requires to be sought. Why is it that so little has been done from age to age, for the general interest of Christ? Is it not owing to a practical error on this subject? placing our own private interests before his, dwelling in our ceiled houses, while the temple of God has been in ruins, or at most, seeking the prosperity of a small part of the church which happens to be connected with us, to the utter neglect of the general kingdom of the Redeemer.

As Christ has taught us to pray for the coming of God's kingdom, and the universal spread of righteousness in the world, we may rest assured that these things will come to pass. Christ would not have directed us to ask for a specific object, and without any proviso, when he knew it would never be granted. Whether the kingdom of God here means the same as the Messiah's kingdom; or whether it relates to that state of things when the kingdom shall be delivered up to the Father, and God shall be all in all, it makes no difference. The coming of the latter supposes the gradual completion of the former: to pray therefore for what is ultimate in the system, is to pray for

whatever is intermediate. At present God's name, instead of being sanctified in the earth, is disregarded and blasphemed. He reigns in the hearts of but few of the children of men. Instead of earth resembling heaven, as to obedience to the divine will, it bears a much nearer resemblance to hell. But it shall not be thus always. He who taught us thus to pray, was manifested to destroy the works of the devil, and destroyed they will be. And as the grand means by which this great end will be accomplished is the preaching of the cross, we have abundance of encouragement to persevere in that arduous employment.

As there are three petitions in respect of God's name and cause in the world, so there are three which regard our own immediate wants; one of which concerns those which are temporal, and the other two those which are spiritual.

Give us this day, (or day by day,) our daily bread. Bread comprehends all the necessities, but none of the superfluities of life. If God give us the latter, we may receive them with thankfulness, only considering them as a trust committed to us; but are not at liberty to ask for them. Nor are we allowed to ask for what may be necessary in days to come; but, as children on their father, must depend upon God for the bread of each day as the day occurs. Still less are we allowed to ask for the bread of others, or to covet our neighbours' goods; but must be contented with what the Lord gives us in the way of honest industry, or by the kindness of our friends.

Such is the spirit inculcated by this petition. How opposite to the spirit of this world! Man as a sinner aspires to be independent of God, and to raise himself out of the reach of adversity. He cannot trust God to provide for him and his children, but desires to take the charge upon himself. Unlike the sheep of Christ's pasture, who go in and out as he leads them, he emulates the wild beasts, which roam through the forest in quest of prey for themselves and for their young ones. Ever anxious to accumulate, he has neither time nor inclination to think of any thing else, till in some unexpected hour, he is arrested in his course, and is obliged to spare time—to die! Christian, canst thou envy such a character? wilt thou learn his ways? No surely! Covet not to be rich, lest it should cause thee to deny thy God, and by treating sacred things with lightness, to take his name in vain. Is it best for thee, is it best for thy children, even in the present world, that thou shouldest emulate the beast of prey in providing for thy young ones? Remember, *the young lions do lack and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.*

Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. As bread in this prayer comprehends all the necessities of life, so the forgiveness of sin comprehends the substance of all that is necessary for the well being of our souls. Sin is the only bar between God and man: if therefore this be removed, there is nothing left to impede the most ample communications of his favour. Sins are called

debts, not properly, but metaphorically. All that belongs to a debt will not apply to a crime. The former, as being a mere private obligation, may be remitted by the creditor, if he please, without any satisfaction; but the latter being a public evil, committed against God as the governor of the world, cannot be consistently forgiven without an atonement, which shall effectually distinguish that forgiveness from connivance. There is a sufficient resemblance, however, between them to justify the use of the term. We *owe* to God as his creatures supreme love and unreserved obedience; and in default of paying it, fall under an obligation to punishment. As a rebel against the state forfeits his life, which is his all, to his injured country; so, as rebels against God, we have forfeited our souls, which are our all, to his injured government.

From this petition we learn four things. First: That we have *daily* sins to be forgiven. It is to our shame that it should be so; but so it is. To disown it does not make it the better, but the worse. The direction of Christ contains an insuperable objection to the notion of those deluded people who imagine themselves to have attained to a state of sinless perfection. No man that is not blinded to the spirituality of that law which requires supreme, perfect, and unabated love, can be insensible of his vast defects. The highest degree of love that we at any time attain comes immensely short of what we ought to feel, and of what we shall feel when presented faultless before the presence of the divine glory. The only reply

that can be made is, that the petition may refer to past sins, and not to present ones. But is it not presented along with a petition for our *daily* bread, and in a prayer, which is supposed to be daily offered? Secondly: That the shedding of Christ's blood as the price of our redemption is perfectly consistent with the free grace of God, not only in providing the Saviour, but in forgiving the sinner for his sake. If we had borne the full penalty due to sin in our own proper persons, all must allow there had been no place for forgiveness. And if the union between Christ and his elect people had been so intimate, as to render the actions or sufferings of one the very actions and sufferings of the other, the same consequence would follow. Or if the satisfaction made by Christ in our stead had been on the principle of debtor and creditor, whatever obligation we might have been under to the surety, or to the creditor for providing him, the debt could not be said to have been forgiven. But as we have not borne the penalty of sin in our own persons; and as sin itself is transferable to another only in its *effects*, we must still be considered as *deserving* of death, and, whatever be the considerations on which God proceeds in our forgiveness, as being freely forgiven. We may plead the atonement as that for the sake of which we may be forgiven, in a way glorious to the divine character, together with the invitations and promises of the word; but this is all. We must not go as claimants, but as supplicants. Thirdly: That the perfection and perpetuity of justification are consistent with a

daily application to God for forgiving mercy. It is an important truth that he that believeth in Christ *shall not come into condemnation*. There is no such idea, however, held out in the scriptures as the pardon of sins, *past, present, and to come*. Forgiveness invariably presupposes repentance. It is not bestowed *on that account*, yet it is inseparably connected with it. As justification includes forgiveness, we may be said to be fully forgiven from the first moment that we believe in Christ; but it is in some such way I conceive as we are said to be *glorified*. The thing is rendered *sure* by the purpose and promise of God; but as in that case a perseverance to the end is supposed and provided for, so is repentance and a continued application for mercy through Jesus Christ in this. If it were true that a believer might not persevere to the end, it would be equally true that he might never be glorified: and if it were possible for him to live in sin, and never repent of it, it would be equally possible that he would never be forgiven—but he that has promised that which is ultimate, has provided for every thing intermediate. Fourthly: That we are not allowed to ask or hope for forgiveness at the hand of God while we refuse it to those who have offended us. It is not enough to say, we cannot expect the comfort of it: we cannot expect the thing itself. While we indulge in implacable resentment, it is presumption to expect any other than that we shall perish in our sins, ver. 14, 15.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. The last petition respected the bestowment of the greatest good ; this, deliverance from the worst of evils. Christ teaches us to suspect ourselves. To be delivered from evil, we must not only avoid running into temptation, but pray that God in his providence may not lead us into it. Though temptation and sin be not in themselves necessarily connected, yet there is almost a moral certainty of their being so in our case. Christ indeed went into the field of contest, and came out unhurt ; but this is more than can be said with certainty of any of his followers. They have indeed been preserved from actual compliance with many evils ; but the temptation may nevertheless have left such impressions upon their imaginations and desires, as to be a source of guilt and shame for years to come. He that carries about him inflammable materials will do well to keep at the greatest possible distance from fire. Many a fair character, both in the world and in the church, if led into temptation, would be soon stripped of his glory. What then do we mean by courting applauses, by forming carnal connexions, by plunging into unnecessary cares, or by coveting lucrative situations ? Much of what men call *the leadings of providence*, is in fact God's leading them into temptation, for the detecting of their true character. Lot might no doubt have pleaded, that providence led him to discover *a rich and well-watered plain*, and he only followed its openings. Gehazi had a fine opportunity afforded him ; and he only

embraced it. Moses however had a much greater opening than either of them; but he declined it. The truth is, providence is no rule of duty, independent of scripture. If the scriptures warrant a measure, and providence open the way, we may safely walk in it: but woe to him that catcheth every opportunity that offers, to aggrandize himself. Many a man would have killed Saul in the cave of Adullam, and have pleaded, as David's servants did, that *the Lord had delivered his enemy into his hand*: but so did not David, because of the fear of God.—I only add, There is no necessary connection between going into temptation, and coming out of it. Both Judas and Peter went in: but only one of them returned: and those who go in on a presumption of coming out again by repentance, will probably be fatally mistaken.

The concluding doxology, though omitted by Luke, and thought by some not to have been originally included by Matthew, appears to agree with the foregoing petitions, and to furnish encouragement to hope for an answer.

ON FASTING, AND OTHER DUTIES:

Matt. vi. 16—34.

OUR Lord's discourse is not designed to amuse his disciples with curious disquisitions, but to direct them as to their daily walk; partly in their approaches to God, and partly in their conversation with the world.

Ver. 16. Moreover, when ye fast, &c. Fasting is supposed to be the ordinary practice of the godly. Christ does not make light of it, but merely cautions them against its abuses. There has doubtless been much formality and hypocrisy in some who have attended to it: but it does not follow that the thing itself should be neglected. It is an appendage to prayer, and designed to aid its importunity. It is humbling, and in a manner chastising ourselves before God. The spirit of it is expressed in the following passages—*So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or ought else, till the sun be down.—Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, nor slumber to mine eye-lids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.* No mention is made of the time, or how often the duty should be attended to. It seems to be proper, on various occasions, especially when, as the scripture phrase is, we *set ourselves to seek the Lord*. It is only a *mean* however: if rested in as an *end*, it will be an abomination in the sight of God. In the direction of our Lord concerning it, respect is had to the *principle* of things rather than to the things themselves. *A sad countenance*, if it be expressive of a sad heart, and in our secret approaches to God, has nothing in it improper. The evil consists in counterfeit sadness, and ostentatious grief. Whatever be your concern of mind, make no show of it before men, but rather appear, when in

company, as at other times. Let all be between thyself and thy Father, who seeth in secret.

Ver. 19, 20. Lay not up for yourselves treasures, &c. The Lord here proceeds to a variety of counsels, and all upon things in common life. The inhabitants of this busy world are taken up in accumulating something which may be called their own, and in setting their hearts upon it rather than upon God. So common is this practice, that, provided they do not injure one another, it insures commendation rather than reproach. *Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself.* Hence we are in greater danger of this sin than of most others. In opposition to this, we are directed to *lay up treasures in heaven.* Not that the heavenly inheritance is the reward of our doings: but, believing in Christ, and setting our affections on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God, every thing we do in his name, whether it be to the poor, or any others, for his sake, turns to our account. Heavenly enjoyment accumulates, as we in this way make much of it. It is thus, that in *giving alms, we provide ourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens which fadeth not.* Men commonly choose a safe place to lay up their treasure. It is said, that many millions, during the late depredations on the continent, have been placed in the English funds; and no wonder. But still there is nothing secure in this world. If we would place our treasure in a bank where no marauder cometh, it must be *hid with Christ in God.*

From this passage, some have seriously concluded, that it is forbidden us in any case to add to our property. To be consistent, however, they should not stop here, but go on to *sell what they have and give it to the poor*; for the one is no less expressly required than the other. But this were to overturn all distinctions of rich and poor, and all possession of property, which is contrary to the whole current of scripture. To *lay up treasures upon earth*, is to trust in them, or make them our chief good, instead of using them as a mean of glorifying God, and doing good in our generation. This is evident from the reason given against it, that *where our treasure is, there will our heart be also*. The Lord prospered David; yet David's *treasures* were not in this world. On the contrary, he was distinguished from *men of this world, who had their portion in this life*; declaring, *As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake in thy likeness*. If, however our treasure be in heaven, we shall not be eager to lay up worldly wealth; but rather to lay out that which God intrusts in our hands for promoting the good of his cause, and the well being of mankind.

Ver. 22—24. The light of the body is the eye, &c. Our Lord here, seems to illustrate and enforce the principle on which he had all along proceeded; namely, the importance of *pure design*, or *right motive* in every thing we do. This, to the soul, is that to which a clear sight of the eye is to the body. A single eye has but one object, and

this is God.* It is opposed to an evil eye. The one is expressive of that spirituality of mind, which, as the Apostle says, *approves the excellent*, Phil. 1. 10. The other is a mind blinded by the love of the world, or other corrupt affections, by which the judgment, which should be the guide of the soul, becomes dark, and leads it into evil. Thus the gospel is rejected, and some false doctrine received instead of it; and thus religion, by which men hope to find their way out of their labyrinths, serves only to bewilder them more and more, till at length they plunge into perdition. To show the importance of a *single eye*, it is added, *No man can serve two masters*, &c. He that has his eye partly on God, and partly on mammon, wishing to grasp both worlds, will deceive his soul. He may lose both; or if not, he will certainly lose the kingdom of God. Our minds must be supremely set on him, and the world must be sought only in subserviency to him. Two masters we cannot serve.

Ver. 25. Therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your life, &c. This affectionate dissuasive from worldly anxiety, is supposed to be the natural consequence of what had been spoken. It is as though he had said, Seeing you cannot serve two masters, serve the Lord; and as you must not look two ways, let your eye be single;

* Dr. Campbell excludes the idea of *single*, rendering the word "sound," as opposed to "distempered:" but the context clearly favours the common translation.

keeping one great end in view, and treating every thing else as a secondary or subordinate object. The command, *Take no thought*, may seem to be inconsistent with that diligence in business which the scriptures commend, and which is necessary to the providing of things honest in the sight of God and man. Certain it is, that this cannot be done without *thought*: but the word here used, is expressive of *anxious solicitude*. It does not mean every care, but the care which groweth of distrust. It becomes us, after using all lawful means, to be anxiously careful for nothing, but in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to let our requests be made known unto God.

Ver. 26—34. To enforce the most entire confidence in our heavenly Father, we are reminded that, having done the greater, he will do the less: (he has given us our lives, and our bodies; and the life is more than meat, and the body more than raiment)—that he provides for the fowls of the air, which, without anxiety, receive their food at his hand—and that all our fretfulness is unavailing; for however we may think to raise ourselves by it, we can accomplish nothing beyond the will of God, any more than we can add to our stature. And as to dress, God clothes the lilies, without any solicitude on their part, so as to cause them to surpass us all in finery. To be anxious concerning what we shall eat, what we shall drink, and where-withal we shall be clothed, is heathenism, and more suited to men who live without God in the world, than to the children of the Most High. All

such anxiety and distrust, must proceed on the principle, that God either does not know our wants, or that he careth not for us. Let it suffice us, therefore, to be told, that *our heavenly Father knoweth that we have need of all these things*. Seek those things first which are of the first importance. Take care of God's interest, and God will take care of yours. The ills of the time present are sufficient for us, without calling in those of futurity. God has promised strength for the day, but no more: the evils which we bring in from the morrow, we must bear ourselves.

ON JUDGING OTHERS, AND CASTING OUR PEARLS
BEFORE SWINE.

Matt. vii. 1—6.

VER. 1—5. *Judge not, &c.* This prohibition, like many others in our Lord's discourse, if interpreted in its utmost latitude, would go to censure what is elsewhere commended. If we judge not truth and error, good and evil, we cannot embrace the one, and avoid the other. Neither can we discharge the duties of our station in the world, or in the church, without forming some judgment of those about us. Paul and Silas are supposed to have judged Lydia to be faithful, ere they entered her house; and Peter did not scruple to tell the sorcerer that he *perceived him to be in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity*. We are not only allowed, but directed even in this discourse, to judge of men as of trees, by their

fruit, ver. 16—20. It is a part of our duty as ministers to declare from God's word, that they who live after the flesh will die; and that they who are carried away by strong delusions and the belief of a lie, are in the utmost danger of damnation. They may be displeased with us for thinking so hardly of them, and may allege this passage as a reproof to our presumption. The judgment which Christ forbids is that which arises not from good-will, and a faithful discharge of duty; but from a *ensorious spirit*, which takes pleasure in thinking and speaking evil of those about us; puts the worst construction upon actions of doubtful motive, and is severe in detecting lesser faults in another, while blinded to far greater ones in ourselves. It stands opposed by Luke to a forgiving spirit, Chap. vi. 27. It is therefore the judgment of rancour, selfishness, and implacability. "All men," says Calvin on the passage, "do flatter and spare themselves; and every man is a severe censor against others. There is a certain sweetness in this sin, so that there is scarcely a man who itcheth not with a desire to enquire after other men's faults. This wicked delight in biting, carping, and slandering, doth Christ forbid, when he saith, *Judge not.*"

It is remarkable that those who are most disposed to detect the faults of others, are commonly the most faulty themselves, and therefore the least qualified for that which they are so eager to undertake. And herein lies their hypocrisy: they would seem to be great enemies to sin, whereas,

if this were the case, they would begin with their own. It is therefore nothing better than selfish rancour, under the mask of zeal and faithfulness. It also deserves notice, that he who is under the dominion of any sin, is utterly unqualified to reprove; but he that has first repented of his own sin, shall thereby be fitted to deliver his brother from his. *When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.*

To deter us from this evil spirit and practice, we are given to expect that if we judge we *shall be judged*, and that *with what measure we mete, it shall be measured to us again*. Such is the ordinary course of things even in the present life. A censorious spirit towards others, brings censure in abundance upon ourselves. Hence arise debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults. Thus the sweets of society, both civil and religious, are embittered; and instead of the ills of life diminishing, they greatly accumulate in our hands. Neither is it in this life only, nor chiefly, that such things will meet with a righteous retribution. If we go on condemning in this manner till death, we must expect to be condemned at a judgment-seat, from the decisions of which there is no appeal.

Ver. 6. Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, &c. This precept may have no immediate connexion with the foregoing one, and may apply to the disciples as teachers. Though they must preach the word to all, yet it must be with due discrimination, giving to every character that which the

scripture assigns him. Thus did Christ himself, at the beginning of this sermon. I am inclined to think, however, that there is a connexion between this precept and the foregoing one; and that the former dissuades from *evil-minded* censures, and this from *imprudent* ones. Though we should reprove men from the purest motives, yet if what we say, be harsh or unseasonable, instead of doing them good, we shall provoke their resentment, and do both them and ourselves harm. The conduct of Paul in his voyage to Rome, (Acts xxvii.) furnishes an example of the contrary. He was not so awed as to leave the company in any doubt who he was, nor yet so obtrusive as unnecessarily to draw upon him their displeasure. His behaviour was such from the beginning, as to procure him a courteous treatment from Julius the centurion, ver. 3. When danger approached, he gave them a respectful admonition, and to excite their attention to the gospel, foretold what would be the disastrous issue of the voyage. ver. 10. Finding his word disregarded, he held his peace, till *all hope that they should be saved was taken away*. Then, with a gentle reproof for their unbelief, he renews his predictions, declares the ground on which he uttered them, acknowledges himself more fully the servant of God, and addresses them in encouraging language, ver. 21—25. After this, he rises in their esteem, his influence among them is extended, he takes bread and gives thanks in the presence of them all, and they are cheerful, and eat with him, ver. 31—36. Whether this conduct

issued in the conversion of any of them, or not, it so interested the centurion, that when the soldiers wanted to kill the prisoners, he kept them from their purpose, for Paul's sake. We see in it a union of zeal, which never lost sight of its object, and of discretion which selected the best means, and seized the fittest opportunities for accomplishing it. All was the effect of good will, which, wherever it prevails, either prevents the violent attacks of the wicked, or if they come unprovoked, enables us to bear them.

ON PRAYER AND EQUITY:

Matt. vii. 7—12.

FROM negative religion, our Lord proceeds to enforce that which is positive—prayer to God, and justice to men. We have had directions already, concerning the *duty* of prayer, and are now furnished with *encouragements* to engage in it.

Observe the terms by which it is expressed—*asking, seeking, knocking*. No mention is made of what we are to ask or seek for; but it is understood that every thing we want, both for this world and that to come, is richly *provided*, and that the way of access to God is opened by the Saviour. Such an invitation would not else have been given. It is also understood that what we receive is of *grace*, and that we must apply for it, not as haughty claimants, but as needy and unworthy supplicants. The prayer of the Pharisee had not a single petition in it. We may also perceive

that true prayer, is that by which we look *out of ourselves*, and seek help from above. The formalist rests in the deed done, but the believer in Jesus thinks not of his own seekings, but of the objects sought. There is also a *gradation* of desire expressed in the terms. Seeking is somewhat more than asking, and knocking more than seeking. The mind when properly engaged in this exercise, increases in its importunity, like his who said, *I will not let thee go except thou bless me.*

Observe next, the encouragements afforded us in the exercise. It is wonderful how they are heaped, as it were, one upon another. Here are first promises; *It shall be given you, &c.* next examples; *Every one that asketh, receiveth, &c.* and then an appeal to the feelings of a parent, arguing from thence, to the compassion of our heavenly Father.

It is of great account in prayer, to lay hold of the *promises*. It is this constitutes it the prayer of faith. It is true, we may pray for temporal things, which are not specifically promised, provided it be in submission to the will of God, leaving it to his wisdom, to give or to withhold, as seemeth good to him. But even here we must not lose sight of his general promise, to withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly. It is also true that if there were only a possibility of success in matters of salvation, considering the urgency of our case as lost and helpless sinners, we might well supplicate mercy. Such were the reasonings of the four lepers, and of Esther the queen; but though they have

sometimes been applied to the sinner's application for mercy, yet they are not cases in point. We must not compare our heavenly Father, to capricious heathens, who might have spurned their supplicants, instead of hearing their petition; nor an application at a mere peradventure, to coming on an invitation, and under a promise of acceptance.

And then, with respect to *examples*, our Lord directs the attention of his followers to facts. *Every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth.* This is like challenging them to find an instance of a poor suppliant, perishing at a throne of grace, or of a single petition offered in the faith of Jesus, falling to the ground. Lastly: His appealing to the heart of an earthly parent, and arguing that *if we, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, much more will our heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him;* is truly overwhelming. And is it possible, after all this, that we should ever feel reluctant to draw near to him? O what must be that alienation of heart, which can make light of such a privilege, that guilt and shame that makes it seem almost a duty to stand aloof, and that distrust of God which gives to our approaches before him an appearance of presumption!

Ver. 12. Therefore all things, whatsoever, &c. It may seem as if there could be no connexion between this precept, and those which preceded it. On close inspection however, we may find it otherwise. It may have a connexion with various

other precepts which had gone before, and (so far as they related to the duty of man to man,) contain a sort of summary of the whole. Or it may well be considered as connected with what is said on prayer. All inordinate affection toward this world, (which is the impetus that moves men to over-reaching practices,) has its root in a distrust of God. Were we daily to ask for all we want of him, seeking first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and relying upon his promise to add other things as he sees them to be best for us, we should have no inclination to covetousness or injustice. But if, instead of depending like sheep on the care of their shepherd, we set off like beasts of prey, to forage the world for ourselves, we shall often judge it to be wise and necessary to seize on that which equity forbids. Hence arises the hateful distinction among statesmen between what is right and what is politic, and hence all the rapacity which desolates the earth. It will be found in the end, that whatever was right was wise; but this lesson is seldom learned till it is too late. O what a world would it be, if this rule were acted upon! What families, churches, cities, and nations would our eyes behold! But this is not to be expected till it shall be written in the hearts of men, by the Spirit of God.

It is remarkable, that this golden rule, as we call it, is God's witness in every human breast. Every one has so much regard for himself as quickly to feel wherein *he* is wronged, and to pass censure on the person who has wronged him. He has therefore

only to apply the principle to his own conduct, and the right and the wrong must instantly appear. Hence, no one can plead ignorance. Even the heathens, who have not the written law, *are a law unto themselves, their consciences bearing witness and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.*

THE BROAD AND NARROW WAY; AND HOW TO JUDGE
OF TEACHERS WHO DIRECT TO THE ONE, AND TO
THE OTHER:

Matt. vii. 13—20.

VER. 13, 14. *Enter ye, &c.* Our Lord now proceeds to set before his hearers life and death, exhorting them to choose life. From the whole of what he had advanced, it must appear, that the way of the world was broad, and that his own was narrow, or difficult; but though the one might be agreeable to the flesh, and the other disagreeable, his counsel is, *Enter ye in at the strait gate.* It is as if he had said, If you walk in the way which I have been warning you against, the entrance will be easy, and you will meet with but few obstructions in your progress. Every thing will accord with your corrupt propensities. The transition from sin to sin, and from occasional to habitual indulgences, will be quite easy. You will have full scope for inclination, and free choice of the vices best suited to your birth, rank, or turn of mind. Temptations, like wind and tide, will help you on! You will be in no want of company; for old and young, rich and poor,

learned and illiterate, walk there; but remember, *it leadeth to destruction!* If, on the other hand, you walk in the way which I have marked out, great difficulties may present themselves at your entrance, hard struggles will attend your progress, and you may expect but few to keep you company: but it *leadeth unto life!* Whosoever therefore chooses the broad way, *enter YE in at the strait gate.*

Ver. 15—20. Beware of false prophets, &c. As this warning was designed for Christians in every age, the term rendered *prophets* must here, as it often is elsewhere, be understood of ordinary teachers. There are few, if any, more dangerous temptations, than those which arise from false teaching. Men are led on by one another, and by preaching more than by most other things. As the true doctrine directs to the narrow way, which leadeth unto life; so false doctrine directs to the broad way, which leadeth to destruction. It is the characteristic of false teachers that they recommend a loose religion, a flesh-pleasing scheme, the effects of which are commonly fatal. A criterion therefore by which they may be known and avoided, must needs be of the greatest importance.

It is remarkable that this criterion does not consist of any external distinction conferred by others. Whatever may be said in favour of ordination from any order of men, it is not this that will render us true ministers. It is not any profession that may be made by the parties; for they may come in sheep's clothing, and yet be wolves.

Loud professions of zeal and sanctity may be resorted to merely as means of success. It is the *spirit and conduct*, by which we are directed to judge of men, and of the tendency of their ministry. *Ye shall know them by their fruits.*

The principle on which this rule proceeds is this; true teachers have imbibed the true doctrine, which is productive of good fruit, both in themselves and others; and false teachers have imbibed a false doctrine, which is productive of evil fruits, both in themselves and others. There may be difficulties in applying the rule: we may be mistaken both on the favourable and the unfavourable side; yet as a general direction for those who sit not as final judges, but merely for the practical purposes of the present life, there is none like it. Man may put on the demure and the devout for mere selfish purposes, but follow them into private and domestic life, and they will ordinarily declare themselves. We may at least know enough of men by this medium to guide us in our choice of them; and that is the end to be answered.

There are two kinds of fruit, by the presence or absence of which we are directed to judge of teachers; namely, *good* and *evil*. With respect to the first, every true minister of Christ is a good tree, and bringeth forth *good* fruit. Having believed the gospel himself, he speaks it from the fulness of his heart. The love of Christ constrains him. The love of souls induces him to labour, and to deny himself for their salvation. He seeks not theirs, but them. And where it is so, it will appear and

approve itself to the consciences of those about him. A false teacher, on the other hand, can no more bring forth this good fruit, than a thorn can bear grapes, or a thistle figs. There will be a manifest want of those fruits of the Spirit, enumerated by the Apostle; namely, *of love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance*. Even in those who may have maintained a fair character, as it is commonly accounted by the world, you will often perceive a shocking vacancy with respect to these things. When the Pharisee, full of scorn and self-complacency, thought ill of Christ, even for his suffering a sinner to wash his feet with her tears, he was told of his own sins. But what were they? Neither himself nor his acquaintance might know of any that could be laid to his charge. Jesus, however, was not at a loss to find them; and they consist, not so much in what he *had* done, as in what he had *not* done. In this view, how naked does the poor creature appear, and what a disparity is there between him and the sinner whom he had despised! *I entered into thy house; thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she hath washed my feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss; but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet: mine head with oil thou didst not anoint; but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.*

With respect to the presence or absence of evil fruit, a true minister of Christ cannot live in sin,

no not in private, any more than a good tree *can bring forth evil fruit*. Neither can a false teacher suppress for any considerable time, the ruling propensity of his heart, nor forbear to manifest it, though undesignedly, to those about him. *A corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.*

The motives which influence these different characters being opposite, their effects will ordinarily correspond with them. All the labours of a false teacher originate and terminate in *self*. Some, under the disguise of apparent sanctity, are seeking to gratify the foulest propensities. Others flatter their audiences either as to what human nature is, or what they are in distinction from the many around them. Some are adepts at gaining an ascendancy over the minds of the people, and so of getting possession of a considerable part of their property. Others, less addicted to avarice, are eager after applause; hence their chief study is to obtain the graces of a public speaker, or that elegance of diction which shall render them admired. Where such things are, they cannot be concealed, unless it be from those who are willingly ignorant. But how opposite to every thing of the kind is the spirit and conduct of the man of God! Read 1 Thes. ii. *Our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor of guile: but as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even 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. Being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. False teachers will often be on their guard before enemies, but when with their friends only, will throw off their disguise, and indulge in licentious freedoms, under the name, it may be, of the liberty of the gospel: but it was not so with the apostles and true ministers of Christ: Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblamably we behaved ourselves among you that believe.

THE LAST JUDGMENT, AND WHAT WILL BE ACCOUNTED
TRUE RELIGION IN THAT DAY:

Matt. vii. 21—29.

OUR Lord, in drawing to the close of his discourse, is unusually solemn and impressive. He anticipates the last judgment, and places his hearers before the great tribunal. The sum of what he says is, that mere profession will avail nothing, and that real practical godliness is the only thing which, in that day, will be approved.

Ver. 21—23. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, &c. The greater part of those who, in that day, will have to stand before him, have not acknowledged him as their Lord; and not every one of them that have will be accepted. Professions, though repeated with earnestness, will avail nothing. It is not what we *say*, but what we *do*, that will be admitted as evidence in that day. As

to what we *do*, unless the Father's will be our will, Christ will not regard us. Such is the union between the Lawgiver and the Saviour, that each is guarantee, as it were, to the honour of the other. If the Father's wrath abide on all who believe not on the Son, the Son no less excludes from the kingdom of heaven, all who obey not the Father. Many who in this world have said, *Lord, Lord*, in a way of high profession, will, in that day, repeat their words with very different sensations, and with earnest importunity for admittance, but all in vain. They may plead their having been not only professing Christians, but Christian teachers, and some of them possessed of extraordinary gifts, but all in vain. Having been workers of iniquity, whatever else they have wrought, it stands for nothing. They were never known as his friends in this world, and shall be utterly disowned in the next. Nothing will avail in that day but what is holy. Holiness is made of little account here, shining talents carry the bell: but there the meanest Christian is approved; while the most distinguished preacher, who has lived in sin, will be cast out.

Ver. 24—29. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, &c. The regard or disregard we pay to the doctrine and precepts of Christ in this world, is here compared to building a house on a good or a bad foundation, and the issue of things at the last judgment, to a tempest that shall try our work. Still he presses the necessity of practical godliness. It is he that heareth his

sayings and *doeth* them, whose religion will stand the test; while he that heareth them and doeth them *not*—he who has heard and talked about repentance, but never repented; has heard and talked about believing, but never believed; has heard and applauded the morality of the gospel, but never walked by it—his building shall fall, and *great will be the fall of it!* Other losses have been repaired by time, but this will be irreparable and eternal.

There are two ways, and perhaps I may say three, in which this solemn passage has been perverted. We see here, say some, that it is by *doing*, rather than by *believing*, that we shall stand approved! But though *doing*, in the article of justification, stands opposed to believing, (Gal. iii. 10—12,) yet here, being introduced as the *evidence* of a state of salvation, it is opposed to *saying*, or to mere profession, and *includes believing*. Faith itself is a practical persuasion of the truth of Christ's sayings, and is followed with a course of obedience to his precepts. Moreover, the doctrine of Christ's sayings is not the rock, but the building upon it.—We see, say others, that it matters but little what doctrines we believe, provided we lead a good life; it is not by what we have *believed*, but by what we have *done*, that we shall be judged? But if doing Christ's sayings, instead of being opposed to believing, *includes* it, this remark is altogether unfounded.—Finally: Others, overlooking the scope of our Lord, are from this passage, continually insisting on the doctrine of justification

by faith, in opposition to the works of the law, and comparing those who believe in the Saviour for acceptance with God, to the wise man who built his house upon a rock; and those who depend upon their own righteousness, to the foolish man who built his house upon the sand. But this way of treating the scriptures betrays the truth into the hands of its adversaries, who, perceiving the force put upon them in supporting a favourite doctrine, conclude that it has no foundation in scripture. The truth is, our Lord is not discoursing on our being justified by faith, but on our being *judged according to our works*, which, though consistent with the other, is not the same thing, and ought not to be confounded with it. The character described is not the self-righteous rejecter of the gospel, but one who, though he may hear it, and profess to believe it, yet brings forth no corresponding fruits.

The impressive manner in which he who will be our Judge enforces the *practice* of religion, reminds me of the words of that miserable man, Francis Spira, who was a fearful example of the contrary. "Take heed," said he to the spectators who surrounded his bed, "of relying on that faith which works not a holy and unblamable life, worthy of a believer. Credit me, it will fail. I have tried; I presumed I had gotten the right faith; I preached it to others; I had all places in scripture in memory that might support it; I thought myself sure, and in the mean time lived impiously and carelessly; and behold now the judgment of

God hath overtaken me, not to correction, but to damnation."

BRIEF VIEW OF MATT. XI. 12, 13.

And from the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent taketh it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.

THERE is no doubt, I think, that the question sent by John to Jesus, *Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?* must have arisen from a misconception of the design of his appearance, probably of the same kind with that which occupied the mind of Christ's disciples, as to the nature of his kingdom. It has been a question whether John himself was the subject of this misconception, or some of his disciples whom he personated. There is certainly an air of reproof contained in the answer; ver. 4—6. First: In its being *indirect*. Jesus would not say whether he was the Messiah, or not; but left it for his works, and their correspondence with prophecy, to determine the question. Secondly: In its implying that his outward meanness had proved an occasion of offence. Whether it were John or his disciples, some must have been offended, and sinfully too, else such language would not have been used.

It may be thought that John himself, like the disciples of Christ, might be infected with the notion of the kingdom of Christ being a temporal kingdom; that on his being cast into prison, he

expected Christ would publicly assume his throne, and release him; and that hearing of nothing more than of his being followed up and down by a number of poor people, and by few if any of better condition, he was stumbled, and knew not what to make of things. But on reviewing the chapter, and comparing it with other things spoken of John, it seems more natural to think that the doubt belonged to his disciples. Two reasons may here be mentioned for this. First: There appears to have been a greater degree of gospel light in the mind of John, than in any of Christ's disciples, prior to his resurrection. They never seem to have understood the doctrine of his putting away sin by the sacrifice of himself till the thing was accomplished; but he pointed his disciples to the Saviour as the *Lamb of God that should take or bear away the world*. And when an attempt was made to excite his jealousy, (John iii. 25, 26.) his answer contains an exhibition of the person and work of Christ, worthy of an evangelical minister. *The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.* He was a burning and a shining light, while as yet darkness covered their minds. He was not allowed to enter into the gospel rest; but he had a Pisgah's view of it beyond any of his contemporaries. Secondly: Jesus, on the departure of the messengers, vindicated him before the multitudes, and that from being *a reed shaken*

with the wind, as the message which had been sent by him would seem to represent him.

The chief design of our Lord, however, in this his vindication of John, was to establish his ministry, and former testimonies, and by consequence, that he was the Messiah. These, by the message recently sent, were in danger of suffering in the esteem of the people. It is in respect of this his ministry, as the Messiah's harbinger, rather than of his personal qualities, that he is declared to be *more than a prophet*, and yet *less than the least in the kingdom of heaven*. Thus it is that Jesus continues magnifying his own spiritual kingdom, and describing the interest which it had already excited from the time that John had proclaimed it. The Pharisees and lawyers indeed refused to enter in, and did all they could to hinder others; but the common people and the publicans justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. See Luke vii. 18—30. By comparing this passage with that in question, it is manifest that this was the *violence* which the kingdom of heaven suffered. As the two blind men, when rebuked by the multitude, and charged to hold their peace, cried the more a great deal, and pressed towards the Saviour, so the publicans and sinners were not to be deterred by the rebukes of their leaders; but on hearing of the kingdom of God, *pressed into it*.

To account for the mighty effects of John's ministry, on those who believed it, and to show the inexcusableness of those who disbelieved it, his preaching is contrasted with that of Moses and

the prophets. They spake of things as *at a distance*, but he of things as *at hand*. There seems to be an elipsis in ver. 13, which requires to be supplied as follows. *All the prophets and the law prophesied until John*, BUT HE DID MORE THAN PROPHECY. He declared that the Messiah was now among them, and that his kingdom was at hand. Hence, the door being opened, there was a pressing into it, it was taken in a manner by force.

PAST TRIALS A PLEA FOR FUTURE MERCIES:

Make us glad according to the days wherein thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil.

Psa. xc. 15.

THIS *prayer of Moses the man of God*, as it is entitled, is thought to have been occasioned by the sentence denounced against that generation of Israelites, which came out of Egypt, viz. that they should perish in the wilderness. In it we see much of the plaintive, and yet much of the *man of God*; cleaving to God under his judgments, and hoping in his covenant mercy and truth. Forbidden to enter their promised *dwelling-place*, they are directed to make up their loss in God, ver. 1. 2. Cut short as to the number of their days, to apply their hearts to wisdom, ver. 12. And though they and himself with them, were doomed to die, they are taught to pray that the cause of God may live, ver. 16, 17.

The language of ver. 15. implies that it is usual for God, in dealing with his people in this world,

to balance evil with good, and good with evil. He neither exempts them from chastisement, nor contends with them for ever. If he had dealt with us on the mere footing of justice, we had had a cup of wrath only; but through his dear Son, it is mixed with mercy. The alternate changes of night and day, winter and summer, are not more fixed in the course of nature, than the mixture of judgment and mercy, in the present state.

The children of Israel were long afflicted in Egypt, and when delivered from that grievous yoke, their numerous sins against God, brought on them numerous evils in the wilderness; till at length it issued in the dismal sentence, which is supposed to have occasioned this plaintive song. Yet this dark night, was preparatory to a morning of hope and joy. The people that were left of the sword, found grace in the wilderness. The judgments upon the first generation proved a source of wholesome discipline to the second, who appear to have been the best of all the generations of Israel. It was of them that God spake in such high terms by Jeremiah. *I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first fruits of his increase.* All that God had done for them till then, was but plowing up the fallow-ground: but now he began to reap the fruits of his work. Now Balaam, instead of being able to curse them, is compelled to bless and envy them. And now the prayer of the man of God is answered. They are

made glad according to the days in which they were afflicted, and the years in which they had seen evil. God's work appeared to his servants, and his glory unto their children. His beauty was upon them, and he prospered the work of their hands.

We might refer to numerous instances in the scriptures, in which the same truth is exemplified. In the first one hundred and thirty years of Adam's life, he drank deeply of the bitter effects of his fall. He had a son; but after high hopes had been entertained of him, he proved wicked. He had another son, but him his brother murdered; and as the murderer was spared and his family increased, it would seem as if the world were to be peopled by a race of wicked men. But it did not end thus: God gave Adam another seed, instead of Abel whom Cain slew; and soon after this, men began to call upon the name of the Lord. It must have been very afflictive for Noah to have been a *preacher of righteousness* century after century, and at last, instead of seeing his hearers converted to God, to see them all swept away by the deluge. But, as the waters were assuaged when they had risen to their height, so the wrath of heaven issued in mercy. God accepted the sacrifice of his servant, and made a covenant of peace with him and his posterity.

Similar remarks might be made from the histories of Jacob and Joseph and David, and many others: these were made glad according to the days wherein they had been afflicted, and the years wherein they had seen evil. Nor is it confined to individuals.

When idolatrous Israel drew down the divine displeasure in Hazael's wars, Jehu's revolution, and Elisha's prophecies, it was very afflictive. Yet when Jehohaz besought the Lord, the Lord hearkened unto him, and was gracious to his people, in respect of the covenant which he had made with their fathers. 2 Kings xiii. 3—5. 23. Thus the wind, the earthquake, and the fire, were succeeded by the still small voice. 1 Kings xix: 11, 12. Finally, the great afflictions of the church during the successive overturnings of the monarchies, issued, according to Ezekiel's prophecy, (Chap. xxi. xxvii.) in Christ's coming and kingdom.

It is not difficult to perceive the wisdom and goodness of God, in thus causing evil to precede good, and good to follow evil. If the whole of our days were covered with darkness, there would be but little of the exercise of love, and joy, and praise; our spirits would contract a habit of gloominess and despondency; and religion itself would be reproached, as rendering us miserable. If, on the other hand, we had uninterrupted prosperity, we should not enjoy it. What is rest to him that is never weary; or peace to one that is a stranger to trouble? Heaven itself would not be that to us which it will be, if we came not out of great tribulation to the possession of it.

Evil and good being thus connected together, the one furnishes a plea for the other. Moses pleaded it, and so may we. We may have seen days of affliction, and years of evil, both as individuals and families. Borne down, it may be, with

poverty and disappointment, our spirits are broken. Or if circumstances have been favourable, yet some deep-rooted disease preys upon our constitution, and passes a sentence of death within us long before it comes. Or if neither of these evils have befallen us, yet relative troubles may eat up all the enjoyment of life. A cruel and faithless husband, a peevish and unamiable wife, or a disobedient child, may cause us to say with Rebecca, What good does my life do me? Or if none of these evils afflict us, yet if the peace of God rule not in our hearts, all the blessings of life will be bestowed upon us in vain. It may be owing to the want of just views of the gospel, or to some iniquity regarded in our heart, that we spend days and years with but little communion with God.

Finally : If, as in some cases, a number of these evils should be combined, this will make the load still heavier. But, whatever be our afflictions, and however complicated, we may carry them to the Lord, and then turn them into a plea for mercy. Though the thorn should not be immediately extracted, yet if God cause his grace to be sufficient for us, we shall have cause to be glad."

We have also seen days of affliction, and years of evil as a *nation*. It is true we have less cause to apply this language to ourselves than most other nations at the present time: yet to a feeling heart there is matter for grief. What numbers of widows and fatherless children have been left even among us, within the last sixteen years! Let the faithful of the land turn it into a prayer, not

only in behalf of our country, but of a bleeding world.

Many of our churches too, have experienced days and years of evil. The loss of faithful and useful pastors, disorders, scandals, strifes, divisions, the consequent withdrawalment of the Holy Spirit, are evils which many have to bewail. Let the faithful remnant in every place, carry these things to the throne of grace, and there plead with the God of mercy and truth, by whom alone Jacob can arise: and though weeping may continue for a night, joy will come in the morning.

The whole church of God, has seen much evil hitherto. Its numbers have been few and despised. It has often been under persecution. Compared with what might have been expected, in almost six thousand years, *we have wrought no deliverance in the earth, neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen.* But all these things furnish a plea for better times. Even the wickedness of the wicked may enable us to plead with the Psalmist, *It is time for thee, O Lord, to work, for they have made void thy law.* We may urge the prayer of *faith* too on this subject; since glorious things are *spoken* of the city of God. Both the world and the church have their best days to come.

It is necessary, however, to recollect that the happy issue of all our troubles depends upon our union with Christ. If unbelievers, our troubles are but the beginning of sorrows. It is a fatal error in many, that great afflictions in this life, indicate that we have had our evil things here. Few men

have been more miserable than Saul was in his latter days. But if, renouncing every other ground of hope, we believe in Jesus the crucified, whatever our sorrows may be in this life, they will be turned into joy.

ON THE TRIAL OF SPIRITS.

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits, whether they are of God ; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

John iv. 1.

THE predicted enmity between the seed of the woman and of the serpent, has been peculiarly fulfilled in the times of the gospel. No sooner was the Christian church established, by the preaching of the cross, than it began to be assailed by a flood of false doctrine. Christ had his ministers in every quarter, and Satan had his. It is in this way that the devil has wrought his greatest achievements. The persecutions of the first three centuries accomplished but little in his favour, but the corruptions of the fourth, introduced a species of apostacy which has deluged the Christian world for more than a thousand years.

The design of God in permitting these things may surpass our comprehension: we are told, however, that *it must needs be that offences come*, and that *there must be heresies among us, that they who are approved may be made manifest*. The existence of such things, therefore, should neither vex nor surprise us, but merely excite in us that

circumspection which is necessary in walking among pits and snares. Such was the temper of mind which the apostle John aimed to excite in the primitive Christians. *Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God ; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.* If such caution was necessary for the primitive Christians, unless we could depend on the floods of false doctrine having of late ages subsided, or on our having better securities against them than those who were contemporary with the Apostles, it must be necessary for us. As neither of these suppositions can be admitted, I may be allowed to apply the warning language of the Apostle to our own times.

The *spirits* which are to be tried, seem to refer not so much to persons as to things ; things which are presented for belief, or *doctrines*. The *spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh* appears to be the same thing, as the doctrine that is opposed to that great truth.* This doctrine may be called *a spirit*, not only as professing to come from divine inspiration, but on account of its *energies*. False doctrines are described as contagious winds, that waft poison into the minds of men ; a pestilence that walketh in darkness, insinuating its malignant influence in so insensible a manner, that the work of death is effected ere the party is aware.

* The three unclean spirits coming out of the mouth of the dragon, of the beast, and of the false prophet, (Rev. xvi. 13.) may be no other than delusive and destructive principles.

Beloved, believe not every doctrine that is proposed to you, whatever may be the pretensions or the confidence of the proposer. Error seldom or never goes abroad undisguised.

Believe not every doctrine that comes to you in a *rational* garb. There is nothing in true religion repugnant to sound reason; but a system that hangs upon subtle reasoning, is not the gospel. There is no cause but what may be made to appear plausible by ingenious men; of this any one may satisfy himself, who listens but a few hours to the speeches of the bar or the senate. For a doctrine to be of God, it must not only be conveyed in plain language, such as without any force put upon it naturally suggests the idea to a humble and intelligent reader, but must quadrate with the whole word of God, and be productive of effects similar to that of Christ and his apostles. The same divine oracle which teaches us to *incline our ear unto wisdom, and apply our heart to understanding*, directs to *cry, and lift up our voice for it, to trust in the Lord with all our heart, and not to lean to our OWN understanding*.

Believe not every doctrine that comes to you in a *holy* garb. That the gospel is holy, and of a holy tendency, cannot be doubted by one who believes it: but holiness itself is capable in a degree of being assumed. The false teachers, who corrupted the Corinthians, found it necessary, in order to accomplish their ends, to *transform themselves into the apostles of Christ*; and no marvel, saith Paul, *for Satan himself is transformed into an angel*

of light. It is no uncommon thing for the gospel to be undermined by a pretended zeal for morality. The Pharisees were wont to be considered as almost the only friends to good works; alleging against Jesus, that he kept company with *sinners*, and ate with them. Yet they were denounced as hypocrites. If an evangelical minister among us be called to contend for the purity, spirituality, and perpetual authority of the divine law, or for any particular branch of practical godliness; it is not unusual for others, who are very differently affected to evangelical truth, to claim kindred with him, and to wish to have it thought that all the suspicions that had been entertained of them, were merely owing to their zeal for holiness. But there are few men who are farther off from the holiness of the New Testament, than those who urge the duty, and the neglect of the principles from which it rises. We must both *rebuke and exhort*, but it must be with *all long-suffering and doctrine*.

Believe not every doctrine that comes to you in an *evangelical* garb. Nothing can be truly evangelical but it must be of God; but under the pretence of this, some of the most pernicious errors have been introduced. That species of religion which by the professed adherence to faith *maketh void the law*, is chiefly under the disguise of exalting grace. Of this kind was the religion of those of whom James writes, whose *faith was dead, being alone*. Of this kind was the religion of those awful characters described by Peter and Jude.

Speaking great swelling words of vanity, alluring through the words of the flesh and much wantonness, those who were clean escaped from them who live in error, promising them LIBERTY, while they themselves were the servants of corruption. Finally : Of this nature appears to have been the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which led to unholy deeds, and which the Lord hated.

Believe no doctrine in matters of religion but what is of God. This is the criterion by which we are directed to try the spirits. For a doctrine to be of God, it must be expressive of *the mind of God as revealed in his word*. If we lose sight of this, we shall soon be lost in the mazes of uncertainty. *We are of God*, saith the Apostle; *he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.* The doctrine of the Apostles being itself of God was a test by which to try the spirits, and such it still continues. We see in their writings, the very mind of God on all the great subjects pertaining to his character, government, and gospel. If they write of God, it is with the profoundest reverence, as of Him who is *blessed for ever*; if of his law, it is *holy, just, and good*; if of sin, it is *exceeding sinful*; if of sinners, *they are under the curse*; if of Christ, *as concerning the flesh, he was of the seed of David*; but as concerning his original nature, *the Son of God, over all, God blessed for ever*; if of salvation, it is of *grace, through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the*

gift of God. Finally : If they describe the end for which Christ gave himself for us, it was that he might *redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.* This doctrine is of God; and he that knoweth God heareth it. But that which begets high thoughts of ourselves, low thoughts of God, light thoughts of sin, and mean thoughts of Christ, is not of God, and it is at the hazard of our salvation to receive it.

Lastly : That which is of God, will lead us to *side with God in the great controversy between him and his apostate creatures.* The spirit of apostacy has always been complaining of the ways of the Lord as *unequal.* ‘His precepts are too rigid at least for a poor fallen creature; his threatenings are too severe; it is hard to punish with everlasting destruction the errors of a few years: it had been hard if he had not sent his Son to save us; and is still hard, if after doing all we can, we must stand upon the same ground as the chief of sinners: surely he does not mean, after all, to punish unbelievers with eternal punishment.’ Such are the workings of an apostate mind, and every false system of religion favours them. But that which of God will take a different course. While it teaches us to seek the salvation of our fellow sinners, it will never suffer us to palliate or excuse their sin. Its language is, *I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.—Thou art holy in all thy ways,*

and righteous in all thy works.—Behold I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no further.—Thou shalt be justified when thou speakest, and clear when thou judgest.—If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand?—God be merciful to me a sinner.

MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS,

&c.

FROM

THE THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL MAGAZINE.

1801—1805.

REPLY TO A QUERY ON MORAL INABILITY.

FIRST: You inquire, “Whether any person *by nature* possesses that ‘honest heart,’ which constitutes the ability to comply with the invitations of the gospel?” I believe the heart of man to be by nature the direct opposite of honest. I am not aware, however, that I have any where represented an honest heart as constituting our ability to comply with gospel invitations, unless as the term is sometimes used in a figurative sense, for moral ability. I have said, “There is no ability wanting for this purpose in any man who possesses an honest heart.” If a person owed you one hundred pounds, and could find plenty of money for his own purposes, though none for you; and should he at the same time plead inability, you would answer, *there was no ability wanting, but an honest heart*: yet it would be an unjust construction of your words, if an advocate for this dishonest man

were to allege, that you had represented an honest heart as that which *constituted the ability to pay the debt*. No, (you would reply,) his ability, strictly speaking, consists in its being in *the power of his hand*, and this he has. That which is wanting is an honest principle; and it is the former, not the latter, which renders him accountable. It is similar with regard to God. Men have the same natural powers to love Christ, as to hate him; to believe, as to disbelieve; and this it is which constitutes their accountableness. Take away reason and conscience, and man would cease to be accountable; but if he were as wicked as Satan himself, in that case no such effect would follow.

Secondly: If no man by nature possess an honest heart, you inquire, "Whether, if I be not what you call an *elect sinner*, there are any means provided of God, and which I can use, that shall issue in that 'honesty of heart,' which will enable me to believe unto salvation?" Your being an elect, or a non-elect sinner, makes no difference as to this question. The idea of a person destitute of honesty using means to obtain it, is in all cases a contradiction. The use of means *supposes the existence* of an honest desire after the end. The scriptures direct to the sincere use of means for obtaining eternal life; and these means are, *repent and believe the gospel*; but they nowhere direct to such a use of means as may be complied with without any honesty of heart, and in order to obtain it. Nothing appears to me with greater evidence than that God *directly requires uprightness of heart*, not

only in the moral law, but in all the exhortations of the Bible, and not the dishonest use of means in order to obtain it. Probably you, yourself, would not plead for *such* a use of means; but would allow, that even in using means to obtain an honest heart, we ought to be *sincere*: but, if so, you must maintain what I affirm, that nothing short of honesty of heart *itself* is required in any of the exhortations of scripture; for a sincere use of means *is* honesty of heart. If you say, ‘No; man is depraved: it is not his duty to possess an honest heart, but merely to use means that he may possess it.’ I answer, (as personating the sinner,) I have no desire after an honest heart. If you reply, ‘You should pray for such a desire,’ you must mean, if you mean any thing, that I should express my *desire* to God, that I may have a *desire*; and I tell you that I have none to express! You would then, Sir, be driven to tell me, I was so wicked, that I neither was of an upright heart, nor would be persuaded to use any means for becoming so; and that I must take the consequences. That is, I must be exposed to punishment, because though I had “a price in my hand to get wisdom, *I had no heart to it.*” Thus, all you do is, to remove the obstruction farther out of sight: the thing is the same.

I apprehend it is owing to your considering human depravity as the *misfortune*, rather than the *fault* of human nature, that you and others speak of it as you do. You would not write in this manner in an affair that affected *yourself*. If the debtor above supposed, whom you knew to have

plenty of wealth about him, were to allege his want of an honest heart, you might possibly think of *using means with him*; but you would not think of directing him to use means to become what at present he has no desire to be—an honest man!

Thirdly: You inquire, If there be no means provided of God, which I can use, that shall issue in that honesty of heart which will enable me to believe unto salvation, “how can the gospel be a *blessing bestowed upon me*; seeing it is inadequate to make me happy, and contains no good thing which I can possibly obtain or enjoy?” If I be under no other inability than that which arises from a dishonesty of heart, it is an abuse of language to introduce the terms “possible, impossible,” &c. for the purpose of diminishing the goodness of God, or destroying the accountableness of man. I am not wanting in power provided I were willing; and if I be not willing, there lies my fault. Nor is any thing in itself less a blessing on account of our unreasonable and wicked aversion to it. Indeed, the same would follow from your own principles. If I be so wicked as not only to be destitute of an honest heart, but cannot *be persuaded to use means in order to obtain it*, I must perish: and then, according to your way of writing, the gospel was “inadequate to make me happy, and was no blessing to me!” You will say, ‘I might have used the means:’ that is, I might *if I would*, or if I had possessed a sincere desire after the end: but I *did not* possess it; and therefore the

same consequences follow your hypothesis, as that which you oppose.

If these things be true, say you, we may *despair*. True, sir; and that is the point, in a sense, to which I should be glad to see you and many others brought. Till we despair of all help from ourselves, we shall never pray acceptably: nor, in my judgment, is there any hope of our salvation.

Let a man feel that there is no bar between him and heaven, except what consists in his own wickedness; and yet that such is its influence over him, that he certainly never will by any efforts of his own extricate himself from it; and he will then begin to pray for an interest in salvation by *mere grace*, in the name of Jesus—a salvation that will save him *from himself*; and so praying, he will find it: and when he has found it, he will feel and acknowledge that it was grace alone that made him to differ; and this grace he is taught in the scriptures to ascribe to the purpose of God, given him in Christ Jesus before the world began.

SKETCH OF A SERMON,

At the Association of Baptist Ministers and Churches, at Oakham,
June 3, 1801.

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

Jude 3.

THE writer of this Epistle is, in the Gospel of John, called *Judas, not Iscariot*. The Epistle

itself is called *general*, not being addressed to any particular person or people; and may, therefore, be of more common concern. In the passage which I have now read we may notice, First, *The occasion* there was for writing: *it was needful*. The Apostle did not write for writing's sake; but to guard them against *certain men* who had crept into the churches *unawares*—*turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.* (Ver. 4.) Secondly: *The earnestness* with which he engaged in it: *he gave all diligence*. The word signifies haste, forwardness, diligent care; somewhat like that which a person would feel in pulling a child out of the fire. (Ver. 23.) Thirdly: *The subject* on which he wrote: *the common salvation*. This furnishes a reason for his being so much in earnest!—The very vitals of Christianity were struck at. Had not this been the case, it may be they would not have heard from him. When Haman had conspired against the Jews, you may recollect the petition of Esther, and the manner in which it was addressed to the king. After having invited him to her banquet, and postponed the matter until she had whetted his desire to the uttermost, she at length uttered her request. *If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my LIFE be given me at my petition, and my PEOPLE at my request! For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish: but if we had been sold for bondmen and bondwomen, I had held my peace,*

although the enemy could not countervail the king's damage! Something like this seems to be the spirit of this passage. It is as if the writer had said, If the enemy had levelled his weapon against any thing but the very heart of the gospel, I might have held my peace. The amount is: **THE COMMON DOCTRINES OF THE GOSPEL ARE OF THE FIRST IMPORTANCE TO BE TAUGHT BY US AS MINISTERS, AND RETAINED BY US AS CHRISTIANS.**

In discoursing on the subject, I shall endeavour to ascertain wherein the common salvation consists; inquire why it is so called; and show the importance of its being made the grand theme of our ministrations, and the first object of our attachment.

I. Let us endeavour to ascertain **WHEREIN THE COMMON SALVATION CONSISTS.**

There can be no doubt, I think, that by this phrase, is meant the gospel salvation. It is the same thing as *the faith once delivered to the saints*: the *common faith*, after which Titus is said to have been begotten. In a word, it is that which in the New Testament is peculiarly denominated *the gospel*.

But the question returns: What is the gospel? Great diversity of opinion prevails on this subject. One denomination of professing Christians tell you it is one thing, and another, another; and how shall we judge amidst such discordant accounts? If I were to tell you that such and such doctrines constitute the gospel, you might answer, This is only your opinion, which is subject to error, equally

with that of other people. For this reason I shall not attempt to specify particulars, but mention certain scriptural mediums by which you yourselves may judge of it.

1. We may form a judgment wherein the gospel consists, by *the brief descriptions* which are given of it.—The New Testament abounds with these descriptions; it delights in epitome. For example: *God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* This is the common salvation; and surely I need not ask whether the doctrine which denies the *perishing* condition of sinners by nature, and supposes the unspeakable *gift* of heaven to be a mere fellow-creature, sent only to instruct us, and to set us a good example, can comport with this representation. Again: *The Jews require a sign, or miracle, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness; but unto them that are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.* This is the common salvation. We hear of preachers knowing their auditors, and preaching accordingly: but Paul went straight forward, regardless of the desires of men. Again: *I determined not to know any thing among you but Jesus Christ and him crucified.* In each of these passages, the gospel is supposed to be summarily comprehended in what relates to the person and work of Christ. This is the foundation which

God has laid in Zion: this is the common salvation. Again: *I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory, or hold fast, what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day, according to the scriptures.* Here also we see what is *the gospel*, and what that is on which the *present standing*, and *final salvation* of Christians depends: and I appeal to every thing that is candid and impartial in my hearers, whether such importance can be attached to the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ upon any other principle than that of his dying in our stead, and rising again as our forerunner? Finally: *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.* This language supposes, that in coming into the world, our Lord was *voluntary*, or that it was with *design*, which supposes his pre-existence; and that this design was to *save sinners, the chief of sinners.* In calling it a faithful, or true *saying*, it is intimated that it was so much the theme of the Apostle's ministry, and so well known amongst Christians, as to become proverbial. *A saying grown into credit by experience of its truth*, is the definition which has been given of a proverb; and such was the true saying of

Paul. This, therefore, must be the gospel—the common salvation.

2. We may judge wherein the common salvation consists, by the *brief descriptions which are given of the faith of primitive Christians*.—This, as well as the gospel, is frequently epitomized in the New Testament; and it may be expected that the one will agree with the other. *So we preach, and so ye believed*. The creed of the first believers, it has often been remarked, was very simple. *I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.—Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God.—Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?* Believing is called *receiving the witness, or record of God*. *And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son*. There are many other important truths, no doubt, the belief of which is necessary to salvation; such as, the being and perfections of God, the evil of sin, &c.; but they are all involved in the doctrine of *Christ and him crucified*. This all-important principle is a golden link, which if laid hold of, draws with it the whole chain of evangelical truth. Let a man cordially embrace this, and you may trust him for the rest.

There are, I conceive, four things which essentially belong to the common salvation; its *necessity*, its *vicarious medium*, its *freeness* to the chief of sinners, and its *holy efficacy*. If we doubt whether we stand in need of salvation, or overlook the atonement, or hope for an interest in it any

otherwise than as unworthy, or rest in a mere speculative opinion, which has no effectual influence on our spirit and conduct, we are at present unbelievers, and have every thing to learn.

II. Let us inquire WHEREFORE IT IS CALLED THE COMMON SALVATION? Three reasons may, perhaps, be assigned for this.

1. It is *that in which all the sacred writers, notwithstanding their diversity of ages and gifts, are agreed in teaching.*—The Old-testament writers understood it much less than the New: but they all *died in the faith of it.* They *testified of the sufferings of Christ, and of the glory that should follow.*—*To him gave all the prophets witness.* The New-testament writers differed widely as to talents. *Paul* reasoned; but Christ and him crucified was his theme. *John* had more of the affectionate: he was baptized, as it were, in love; but the Lamb that was slain was the great object of it. There is no other name, said *Peter*, given under heaven, or among men, whereby we must be saved; and *John* stood by his side and assented. If any of the New-testament writers could be supposed to dissent, it would be *James*, who wrote fully upon the necessity of good works; but he was of the same *faith*, and only pleaded for *showing* it by his works.

2. It is *that which is addressed to sinners in common, without distinction of character or nation.* The messages of grace under the Old Testament, were principally addressed to a single nation; but under the gospel they are addressed to all

nations, to every creature. The promises of the gospel are indeed made only to believers; but its invitations are addressed to sinners. The gospel feast is spread, and all are pressed to partake of it, whatever has been their previous character.

3. It is *that in which all believers, notwithstanding their different attainments and advantages, are in substance agreed.*—It is fitly compared to milk, which is the natural food of children. There may be great darkness, imperfection, and error; and many prejudices for and against distinctive names: but let the doctrine of the cross be stated simply, and it must approve itself to a renewed heart. A real Christian cannot object to either of those four things which were considered as belonging to the common salvation:—to the necessity of it, the vicarious medium of it, the freeness of it, or its holy efficacy.

III. Let us show THE IMPORTANCE OF ITS BEING THE GRAND THEME OF OUR MINISTRATIONS, AND THE FIRST OBJECT OF OUR ATTACHMENT.

It is that which God has ever blessed to the salvation of sinners, and the edification of believers. The primitive Christians lived upon it. Times of great revival in the church have always been distinguished by a warm adherence to it. In the dark ages of Popery, the schoolmen, as they are called, employed themselves in deciding curious points; but at the time of the reformation, the common salvation was the leading theme. Those ministers whose labours have been more abundantly owned for the promotion of true religion, have been

distinguished by their attachment to the common truth; and those churches which have abounded the most in vital and practical godliness, are such as have not descended to curious researches, nor confined their approbation to elegant preaching; but have loved and lived upon the truth, from whomsoever it has proceeded. There are three things in particular, from which we are in danger of neglecting the common salvation, both as preachers and as hearers :—

1. *A pretended regard to moral and practical preaching, to the disregard of evangelical principle.* All preaching, no doubt, ought to be practical; and there are no greater enemies to the cross of Christ than men who can bear nothing but what soothes and comforts them : but this is not the only extreme. Almost all the adversaries of evangelical truth endeavour to cover their dislike to it under an apparent zeal for ‘morality, the Christian temper, and Christian practice.’ If we neglect the common salvation in our ordinary labours, morality will freeze upon our lips, and neither the preacher nor the hearer will be much inclined to practise it. To lose a relish for the common salvation, is the first step toward giving it up; and the effects of this we are warned against from the example of *the angels who kept not their first estate.*

2. *The love of novelty.* Both preachers and hearers are in danger of making light of common truths, and of indulging in a spirit of curious speculation. This will render preaching rather

an entertainment, than a benefit to the soul. We are commanded to *feed* the church of God—not their fancies, or imaginations; nor merely their understandings; but their renewed minds. It indicates a vicious taste, and affords a manifest proof of degeneracy, where the common salvation is slighted, and matters of refinement eagerly pursued. The doctrine of Christ crucified is full of the wisdom of God, and will furnish materials for the strongest powers; and here we may dig deep in our researches. But if this subject has no charms for us, what are we to do in heaven, where it is the darling theme.

3. *A partial attachment to one or two particular truths, to the neglect of the great body of truth.* It has frequently been the case, that some one particular topic has formed the character of an age or generation of men; and this topic has been hackneyed in almost every place, till the public mind has become weary of it; while other things of equal importance have been overlooked. Beauty consists of lovely proportion; and herein consists the holy beauty of religion. When every part of truth has its due regard, and every part of holiness its share in our affections, then will the *beauty of Jehovah, our God be upon us*, and then will he *establish the work of our hands*.

Finally: The common salvation, though it affords grounds for a universal application for mercy, yet will be of no essential benefit to us, unless it be *especially embraced*. Notwithstanding the indefiniteness of gospel invitations, it is

nevertheless true, that, *he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved, and he that believeth not, shall be damned.*

AN INQUIRY INTO THE RIGHT OF PRIVATE JUDGMENT
IN MATTERS OF RELIGION.

IN former times, liberty of conscience, and the right of private judgment in matters of religion, were denied both by ecclesiastics and politicians. Of late, they have been very generally admitted, and much has been said and written in their defence. But the nature and extent of these rights, in reference to religious society, have not been so clearly ascertained; and claims have been instituted, which appears to be subversive of those very principles so often pleaded in their support.

The right of private judgment in matters of religion appears to be, THE RIGHT WHICH EVERY INDIVIDUAL HAS TO THINK, AND TO AVOW HIS THOUGHTS ON THOSE SUBJECTS, WITHOUT BEING LIABLE TO ANY CIVIL INCONVENIENCE ON THAT ACCOUNT. The subject in this view has been successfully supported by writers of ability, and the principle has been acted upon by the great body of non-conformists and dissenters of later times. There can scarcely be any doubt remaining with respect to the power of the civil magistrate to interfere with the religious sentiments and private judgment of the subject: this is now very generally and very justly exploded. But of late, the subject has taken

another turn; and men have pleaded, not only an exemption from civil penalties on account of their religious principles, in which the very essence of persecution consists, but also that are not subject to the control of a religious society with which they may stand connected, for any tenets which they may think proper to avow. The right of private judgment now frequently assumed, is, *a right in every individual, who may become a member of a Christian church, to think, and avow his thoughts, be they what they may, without being subject to exclusion, or admonition, or the ill opinion of his brethren on that account.* Any thing that is inconsistent with this, is thought to be a species of spiritual tyranny, and repugnant to that *liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.* But this appears to be highly extravagant, and is what no man can claim as a right. The following considerations are submitted to the reader.

First: The supposed right of the individual is *contrary to the principles on which Christian churches were originally founded.* Not only were those who disbelieved the gospel refused admission to a Christian church, but those who perverted the gospel, or maintained pernicious errors concerning it, were subject to admonition and exclusion. The apostle Paul directed that a heretic, after the first and second admonition, should be *rejected.* And, in his Epistle to the churches of Galatia, he expressed a wish, that those who troubled them, by subverting the gospel of Christ, and introducing another gospel, were *cut off.* The church at

Pergamos is reproved for having those *among them* who held the doctrine of Balaam, and of the Nicolaitans. If the churches of Galatia complied with the Apostle's desire, their false teachers might have exclaimed against them, as invading the right of private judgment, and with as much justice as some in later times have done against the censures of their brethren. And had the church of Pergamos been formed on the principles above mentioned, they might have replied to the solemn message of our Lord in some such manner as the following: 'Why are we blamed for having those *among us* who hold the doctrine of Nicolas? It is sufficient for us as individuals to think for ourselves, and leave others to do the same. We cannot refuse these men, without invading the right of private judgment!'

If it be objected, that inspiration rendered the judgment of the Apostles infallible, and that, therefore, their conduct in this case is not a rule for us; it may be replied, that if the Apostles were infallible, the churches were not so, and the blame is laid on *them* for having neglected to exclude the characters in question. Besides, this objection would tend to prove that primitive Christians, on account of the infallibility of the Apostles, *did not possess the right of private judgment*; and that the right sprung up in the church in consequence of our being all equally fallible! But this is contrary to the declaration of an Apostle: *Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy.* Hence, it

appears, that admonishing, or excluding from the primitive church, those who held pernicious errors, was not reckoned to be subversive of the right of private judgment; and the churches being exhorted to such discipline by the Apostles, was exercising no dominion over their faith.

Secondly: Not only is this supposed right of private judgment inconsistent with apostolic practice, but it is also *contrary to reason, and the fitness of things*. All society is founded in mutual agreement. It is no less a dictate of common sense, than of the word of God, that *two cannot walk together, except they be agreed*. No society can subsist, unless there be some specific principles in which they are united. In political societies, these principles will be of a political nature; in civil ones, of a civil kind; and in those of religion, of a religious nature. According to the degree of importance in which those principles are held by the parties associating, such will be their concern to maintain and act upon them; and the terms of admittance, or continuance in such society, must be regulated accordingly. If there be no definite principles in which it is necessary that a society should be agreed; but every member of it be at liberty to imbibe and propagate whatever notions he pleases, then all societies, civil, political, and religious, have hitherto been mistaken; for all of them have had in view the attainment of some specific object: and this is more especially the case with societies that are purely religious. A community must entirely renounce the name of

a Christian church, before it can act upon the principle here contended for; and those who entirely reject Christianity ought, nevertheless, to be admitted or retained in fellowship, if they *choose it*; seeing they have only exercised the right of private judgment!

Farther: If a Christian society have no right to withdraw from an individual, whose principles they consider as false and injurious; neither has an individual any right to withdraw from a society in a similar case: and then there is an end to all religious liberty at once.

Whether it be right for us to think the worse of any person on account of his erroneous principles, must depend on a previous question; namely, Whether he *be* either better or worse for the principles which he imbibes? If he be not, then it must be allowed that we ought not to think so of him: but if he be, undoubtedly we ought to think of one another according to truth. To say that no person is better or worse in a moral view, whatever be his principles, is to say that principles themselves have no influence on the heart and life; and that amounts to the same thing as their being of no importance. But if so, all those scriptures which represent truth as a mean of sanctification, ought to be discarded; and all the labours of good men to discover truth, and of the Apostles to disseminate it; yea, and those of the Son of God himself, who came into the world to bear witness to the truth, were totally in vain.

THE SONSHIP OF CHRIST.

THE meaning of the terms, *Son of God*, and *Only-begotten Son of God*, must needs be of importance, inasmuch as the belief of the idea signified by them was made a leading article in the primitive professions of faith.* Whatever disputes have arisen of late among Christians, there seems to have been none on this subject in the times of the Apostles. Both Jews and Christians appear to have agreed in this : the only question that divided them was, whether Christ was the Son of God, or not? If there had been any ambiguity in the term, it would have been very unfit to express the first article of the Christian faith.

It has been frequently suggested, that the ground of Christ's sonship is given us in Luke i. 35. and is no other than his miraculous conception : *The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee : therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.*

It is true that our Lord was miraculously conceived of the Holy Spirit, and that such a conception was peculiar to him ; but it does not follow that by this he became the *Son*, or *only-begotten Son of God*. Nor does the passage in question prove any such thing. It has been thought that the phrase *Son of God*, in this place, is used in a peculiar sense, or that it respects the

* John vi. 69. iii. 18. xx. 31. Acts xviii. 37. 1 John iv. 15.

origin of Christ's human nature, as not being by ordinary generation of man, but by the extraordinary influence of God; and that he is here called the Son of God in the same sense as Adam is so called, (Luke iii. 38.) as being produced by his immediate power. If this be the meaning of the term in the passage in question, I should think it will be allowed to be peculiar, and therefore that no general conclusion can be drawn from it, as to the meaning of the term in other passages. But granting that the sonship of Christ, in this place, is to be understood in the same sense as it is commonly to be taken in the New Testament, still it does not follow that the miraculous conception is the origin of it. It may be a reason given why Christ is *called* the Son of God; but not why he *is* so. Christ is called the Son of God as raised from the dead, and as exalted at the right-hand of God.* Did he then become the Son of God by these events? This is impossible; for sonship is not a progressive matter. If it arose from his miraculous conception, it could not, for that reason, arise from his resurrection or exaltation: and so, on the other hand, if it arose from his resurrection or exaltation, it could not proceed from his miraculous conception. But if each be understood of his being hereby *proved, acknowledged, or, as the scriptures express it, declared* to be the Son of God with power, all is easy and consistent.

Whether the terms, *Son of God*, and *only-begotten Son of God*, be not expressive of his

* Acts xiii. 33. Heb. i. 4, 5.

divine personality, *antecedent* to all consideration of his being conceived of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the virgin, let the following things determine.

First: The glory of the *only-begotten of the Father*, and the glory of the *Word*, are used as convertible terms, as being the same: but the latter is allowed to denote the divine person of Christ, antecedent to his being made flesh; the same therefore must be true of the former. *The Word was made flesh, and we beheld his glory*; that is, the glory of the Word, *the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth*. It is true, it was by the Word being *made flesh, and dwelling among us*, that his glory became *apparent*; but the glory itself was that of the eternal Word, and this is the same as *the glory of the only-begotten of the Father*.

Secondly: The Son of God is said to *dwell in the bosom of the Father*; that is, he is intimately acquainted with his character and designs, and therefore fit to be employed in making them known to men. *The only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him*. If this be applied to his divine person, or *that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested to us*, it is natural and proper; it assigns his omniscience as qualifying him for making known the mind of God: but if he became the only-begotten of the Father by his miraculous conception, or by any other means, the beauty of the passage vanishes.

Thirdly: God is frequently said to have *sent* his Son into the world: but this implies that he was his Son antecedently to his being sent. To suppose otherwise, is no less absurd than supposing that when Christ sent forth his twelve disciples, they were not disciples, but that they became such in consequence of his sending them, or of some preparation pertaining to their mission.

Fourthly: Christ is called the Son of God antecedently to his miraculous conception, and consequently he did not become such by it.—*In the fulness of time God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law; that he might redeem them that were under the law—God sent his own Son, in the likeness of sinful flesh.*—The terms, *made of a woman, made under the law*, are a parenthesis. The position affirmed is, that God sent forth his Son to redeem the transgressors of the law. His being made of a woman, and made under the law, or covenant of works, which man had broken, expresses the necessary means for the accomplishment of this great end; which means, though preceding our redemption, yet follow the sonship of the Redeemer. There is equal proof that Christ was *the Son of God* before he was *made of a woman*, as that he was *the Word* before he was *made flesh*. The phraseology is the same in the one case as in the other. If it be alleged, that Christ is here called the Son of God *on account* of his being made of a woman; I answer, if so, it is also on account of his being *made under the law*, which is too absurd to admit of a question.

Moreover: To say that *God sent his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh*, is equal to saying that the Son of God assumed human nature: he must therefore have been the Son of God before his incarnation.

Fifthly: Christ is called the Son of God antecedent to his being *manifested to destroy the works of the devil*: but he was manifested to destroy the works of the devil by taking upon him human nature; consequently he was the Son of God antecedent to the human nature being assumed. There is equal proof from the phraseology of 1 John iii. 8. that he was the *Son of God* antecedent to his being *manifested to destroy the works of the devil*; as there is from that of 1 Tim. iii. 16. that he was *God* antecedent to his being *manifested in the flesh*; or from 1 John i. 2. that *that eternal life which was with the Father* was such antecedent to his being *manifested to us*.

Sixthly: The ordinance of baptism is commanded to be administered *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*. The terms, *Father* and *Holy Spirit*, will be allowed to denote divine persons; and what good reasons can be given for another idea being fixed to the term *Son*?

Seventhly: The proper deity of Christ preceeds his office of Mediator, or High Priest of our profession, and renders it an exercise of *con-
descension*. But the same is true of his sonship: *He maketh the Son a High Priest—Though he was a Son, yet learned he obedience*. His being

the Son of God, therefore, amounts to the same thing as his being a divine person.

Eighthly : It is the proper deity of Christ which gives *dignity* to his office of Mediator : but this dignity is ascribed to his being the *Son of God*. *We have a GREAT High Priest, Jesus, the SON of God*. His being the Son of God, therefore, amounts to the same thing as his being a divine person.

Lastly : It is the proper deity of Christ which gives *efficacy* to his sufferings : *by HIMSELF he purges our sins*. But this efficacy is ascribed to his being the *Son of God* : *The blood of Jesus Christ, HIS SON, cleanseth us from all sin*. His being the Son of God therefore amounts to the same thing as his being a divine person.

Those who attribute Christ's sonship to his miraculous conception, (those however to whom I refer,) are nevertheless constrained to allow that the term *implies* proper divinity. Indeed, this is evident from John v. 18. where his saying that *God was his own Father*, is supposed to be *making himself equal with God*. But if the miraculous conception be the proper foundation of his sonship, why should it contain such an implication? A holy creature might be produced by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, which yet should be merely a creature ; that is, he might, on this hypothesis, profess to be the Son of God, and yet be so far from making himself equal with God, as to pretend to be nothing more than a man.

It has been objected, that Christ, when called the Son of God, is commonly spoken of as engaged in the work of mediation, and not simply as a divine person antecedent to it.—I answer, In a history of the rebellion in the year 1745, the name of his Royal Highness, the commander-in-chief, would often be mentioned in connexion with his equipage and exploits ; but none would infer from hence that he thereby became the king's son.

It is further objected, that sonship implies *inferiority*, and therefore cannot be attributed to the divine person of Christ.—But, whatever inferiority may be attached to the idea of sonship, it is not an inferiority of *nature*, which is the point in question: and if any regard be paid to the scriptures, the very contrary is true. Christ's claiming to be the Son of God, was *making himself*, not inferior, but *as God*, or *equal with God*.

Once more: Sonship, it is said, implies *posteriority*, or that Christ, as a Son could not have existed till after the Father: to attribute no other divinity to him therefore, than what is denoted by sonship, is attributing none to him ; as nothing can be divine which is not eternal.—But if this reasoning be just, it will prove that the divine purposes are not eternal, or that there was once a point in duration in which God was without thought, purpose, or design. For it is as true, and may as well be said, that God must exist before he could purpose, as that the Father must exist before he had a Son: but if God must exist before he could purpose, there must have been a

point in duration in which he existed without purpose, thought, or design; that is, in which he was not God! The truth is, the whole of this apparent difficulty arises from the want of distinguishing between the order of nature and the order of time. In the order of nature, the sun must have existed before it could shine; but in the order of time, the sun and its rays are coeval: it never existed a single instant without them. In the order of nature, God must have existed before he could purpose: but in the order of time, or duration, he never existed without his purpose; for a God without thought or purpose, were no God. And thus in the order of nature, the Father must have existed before the Son; but in that of duration, he never existed without the Son. The Father and the Son therefore are properly eternal.

THE CHANGES OF TIME; A NEW YEAR'S MEDITATION.

The acts of David, first and last, behold they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, with all his reign, and his might, and the times that went over him, and over Israel, and over all the kingdoms of the countries.

1 Chron. xxix. 29, 30.

THERE is something in the manner of the sacred writers peculiar to themselves. A common historian might have glanced at the reign of David, and referred to other books in which it was described; but viewing the events of it only with the eye of a politician, his diction, though elegant and instructive, would leave no impression upon the

heart. The sacred historians felt what they wrote. Eyeing the hand of God in all things, they conceive of them, they represent them, in an affecting light. There is something in the phraseology of this passage which is singularly impressive. It opens at once to our contemplation the constant vicissitudes of human affairs. We see and feel, as in a moment, that the same affecting scenes which are passing over the world in our times have passed over it in former ages. Society may assume different shapes and forms; but it is essentially the same. *The things that are, are the things that have been; and there is no new thing under the sun.*

We are also led to view the great current of human affairs, as moving on without our consent, and without being subject to our control. We bear a part in them, but it is like the fishes playing in the stream; which passes over them independent of their will, and returns no more. What an idea does it give of our insignificance, and entire dependence upon God! But though our influence in counteracting the great events of time be very small, yet their influence upon us is great. They bear a relation to us, as they formerly did to David and Israel, and the kingdoms of the countries, and leave an important impression upon us. We are either the better or the worse for the times that have gone over us, and may be so to eternity. The vicissitudes that pass over us *during a single human life, and the impressions which they leave behind them*, are subjects, which, if realized, would overwhelm the mind. There is a current

of *national changes* which are passing continually. What times have passed over the nations of Europe within our remembrance! Some have risen, some have fallen, some enlarged, and some contracted. What multitudes of lives have been lost! How much of human nature has been developed! What evidence has been afforded of the enmity of man's heart against the gospel, and the insufficiency of all human devices, to give happiness to the world without it! What seeds have been sown for future change, the fruits of which may be seen to the end of time!

And while the page of history records the acts of the great, whether good or bad, there are others which it overlooks, but which are no less interesting, on account of the near relation they bear to us. There is a current of changes *within the circle of our immediate acquaintance*. What a number of deaths, of new faces, and of new circumstances! Property, power, and influence have changed hands; those whose fathers were abject, are raised on high; while others who have been delicately educated, are sunk into wretchedness. Nor do these changes extend merely to our acquaintance, but to *ourselves*. There are few of us but have had our times of sickness, and of health, of prosperity and of adversity, of joy and sorrow. Times when unions were formed, and times when they have been dissolved; times when children have been born, and times when they have died; times when we have been so happy, that we have thought nothing could make us miserable, and times when

we have been so miserable, as to despair of ever again being happy.

But these are things mostly of a *civil* nature. There is also a current of changes continually passing over us of a religious kind. The cause and kingdom of Christ while in this world, is subject to constant vicissitude. In some places it prospers, in others it declines. Upon the whole, however, it is going on, and it becomes us to mark its progress. It was in one life, that Israel forsook Egypt, and was planted in Canaan: in one life they were carried into captivity; and in one life brought back again: in one life the Son of God became incarnate, and accomplished our redemption: in one life the gospel was preached almost over the whole earth; in one life the reformation was effected; and it may be in one life that Antichrist may come to his end, and the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. Our life has been cast in an eventful period, and that of our children may be more so.

But if, as has been remarked, the events of time bear a relation to us, and leave an impression upon us, it becomes us to inquire what impression those times which have passed over us, have left upon our minds:—

Great numbers of them are *disregarded*, and they can leave no good impression. All that was wrought in Judea, in the times of Augustus and Tiberius, was overlooked by the great mass of mankind. It filled some few with joy unspeakable; but the world in general took but little

notice of it. The Greeks, Romans, and other nations, went on just as we do; scheming, intriguing, buying, selling, amassing fortunes, spending them, waging wars, and struggling for the highest posts of honour. Many never heard of it, and most that did, cared for none of these things. With what contempt did Festus speak of a cause which came before him, relative to faith in Christ. *Certain questions of Jewish superstition, and of one Jesus who was dead, and whom Paul affirmed to be alive?* Many of those who beheld the miracles and heard the preaching of the gospel, *wondered and perished*. Thus things of the greatest moment may pass over us disregarded, and consequently can leave no good impression. It was the same at the reformation from Popery. God wrought a great work in that day: but the mass of mankind saw it not. They were each pursuing their schemes of ambition, or covetousness, or sensuality; and so did not profit by it: and thus it is at this day. The principal actors upon the theatre of human affairs have their respective objects in view; but they see not God's hand. Nor is it much otherwise with the spectators: some admire, others fear, and others are filled with abhorrence; but few regard the works of the Lord, or discern the operation of his hands.

In others, the things which have passed over them, may have made *some degree of impression upon them, and yet the issue of it may be doubtful*. Under threatening providences, or close preaching, they have been affected not a little; have heard

the word gladly, and done many things: have been greatly moved, and reformed in their behaviour: but after all, it is doubtful whether their hearts be divorced from their idols.

On some, however, the things which have passed over us have had a good effect, and require to be recollected with *thankfulness*. One can remember a providence which brought him under the word, or into a praying family, or religious connexion; another, a conversation, a sermon, or a solitary walk, in which he saw and felt the light of life, and from which period his feet were turned from the ways of death.

Finally: A recollection of the times which have passed over us, over Israel, and over the nations, will furnish matter for much *humility and trembling*, even though we should have profited by them; and if we have not, it is a subject the realizing of which would overwhelm us. What opportunities have we had of glorifying God, which have passed by unnoticed; what instructive lessons, under which we have been dull of learning; what rebukes, without being effectually corrected; and what narrow escapes from temptation, the falling into which had been worse than death! Neither have we sufficiently regarded the operations of God's hand upon the world and the church, so as to be properly affected by them. And if such reflexions be furnished in regard of good men, what must be the retrospection of the wicked! Youth has passed over them, and left only the impression of guilt, shame, and remorse; or what is worse, a gust to

re-act its follies, even when they have lost the capacity. Prosperity has made them proud, and adversity filled them with hardness and rebellion of heart. They have been afflicted, and have not called upon God ; or if they have, no sooner has it subsided, than they have ceased. Death has approached them, and in their fright they have entered into solemn vows ; but all have quickly been forgotten. How many slighted opportunities, solemn warnings, tender sermons, and powerful convictions will come into the account at the last day !

SKETCH OF A SERMON,

Delivered at the opening of the New Baptist Meeting-House, at Boston,
Lincolnshire, June 25, 1801.

THE GOOD MAN'S DESIRE FOR THE SUCCESS OF GOD'S CAUSE.

Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us : and establish thou the work of our hands upon us ; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

Psalm xc. 16, 17.

IN every undertaking we have an end, or ends to answer, to which all our labours are directed. It is no less so in religious undertakings than in others ; and as these are pure, and worthy of pursuit, such is the good or evil of our exertions. What are, or at least should be, the great ends of a Christian congregation in rearing a place for divine worship ? What are the main desires of

serious people among you now it is reared? If I mistake not, they are depicted in the passage I have read:—That *God's work may appear among you in your own time*—that *it may be continued to posterity*—that God would *beautify you with salvation*—and *prosper the work of your hands*?

The Psalm was written by Moses, probably on occasion of the sentence of mortality passed upon the generation of Israelites which came out of Egypt, on account of their unbelief, as recorded in the sixth Chapter of Numbers. It was a heavy sentence, and very affectingly lamented by the holy man; but he discovers a greater concern for the cause of God, than for the loss of temporal comfort. He prays that they may be taught to make such a use of this awful providence as to *apply their hearts unto wisdom*; and that however God might afflict them, during forty years wandering in the wilderness, he would bless them with spiritual prosperity.

This prayer was answered. That generation which was trained in the wilderness, was perhaps, the best that Israel exhibited during their existence as a nation. It was of them that the Lord himself spake, saying, *I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel then was holiness to the Lord.* May our prayer for the prosperity of God's cause among us be thus answered!

All I shall attempt will be, to review the *objects* desired, and show the *desirableness* of them.

The objects desired, though expressed by the Jewish lawgiver, have nothing in them peculiar to that dispensation ; but are equally suited to our times, as to others. They prove that the cause of God is one, through every dispensation, and is directed to one great end—the establishment of truth and righteousness in the earth.

The *first* branch of this comprehensive petition is, that *God's work might appear unto his servants*. All God's works are great. Creation is full of his glory : providence is no less so : and each is sought out by them that have pleasure therein. But it is evident that by the work of God, in this connexion, is meant the operation of his *grace*. When the Almighty took Israel to be his people, he bestowed blessings upon them of two kinds ; temporal and spiritual. He gave them the promise of a good land, and of great prosperity, in case of their obedience to his will. But this was not all : he set up his cause among them. They were his visible people, by whom true religion was practised, and its interests promoted. It was the carrying on of this cause that is here intended. It was begun from the time when God made promise to Abraham their grand progenitor, and was carried on during the lives of the patriarchs. When they were brought out of Egypt with a high hand, and formed into a people for himself, it became more apparent, and wore a more promising aspect : but when they were doomed to die in the wilderness, it seemed as if it must sink. Hence Moses, who was tenderly affected with what concerned the honour of God,

pleads as he does. Thus he pleaded his *great name* on a former occasion: and thus the prophet Habakkuk pleaded when Judah was going into captivity, and the cause of God was likely to be ruined: *O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years; in the midst of the years make known: in wrath remember mercy.*

The work of God may be said to *appear among us* when sinners are converted to himself. Conversion is not confined to Jews and heathens; but extends to sinners of all ages and nations. Is it not enough that we are born and educated under the light of revelation, nor that we yield a traditional assent to it. Nicodemus could boast of all this, and more: yet he was told by the faithful and true Witness, that *except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven.* Conversion work is peculiarly the *work of God*. Ministers and parents may be the instruments; but God is the proper cause of it. None but he who made the heart of man can turn it from its rooted aversion to the love of himself. Ministers and parents know this by painful experience; and therefore can each adopt the prayer here presented, as their own. Wherever this work is, it will *appear* by its holy and happy effects. The drunkard will become sober, the churl liberal, the unclean chaste, and the malignant persecutor of Christ's people a humble sufferer for his name's sake.

The work of God will also appear among us if Christians grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The power

of divine grace is no less apparent in the carrying on of God's work, than in the beginning of it. Nothing short of an almighty arm can preserve creatures, so prone to fall away, *from falling*, and present those who are so faulty, *faultless before the presence of his glory*. And where this part of the work is, it will *appear* also by its holy and happy effects. Such Christians bear the most impressive testimony to the world, of the reality and importance of religion.

A *second* branch of the petition is, that God's work might so appear as that there might be an illustrious display of his *glory*. All God's works display his glory; but the work of grace in the salvation of sinners most of all. Other things manifest his wisdom and power; but this, his holy nature. The carrying on of his cause in the world, by the conversion and sanctification of sinners, gives a kind of visibility to the divine character. It is seen, and even felt, by the most abandoned of men. God is said to have *appeared in his glory in building up Zion*, after it had been broken down by the Chaldeans. Even the heathen, when they saw what he had wrought, could not forbear to acknowledge, *the Lord had done great things for them!* But the building up of the gospel church, by turning the captivity of those who were the slaves of satan, is still more glorious. The Lord could accomplish the former merely by his providence; but the latter is the effect of the travail of his soul.

It is requested, *thirdly*, that God would impart

to them his beauty : *Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us !*—All God's works are beautiful ; but saints, who are his workmanship, are the subjects of a *holy* beauty, or of the beauty of holiness. They are comely through the comeliness which he puts upon them. Conceive of the camp of Israel after they had been humbled, and taught to fear the Lord their God. Two or three hundred thousand godly young people, following him implicitly in the wilderness, and trembling at the idea of repeating the iniquities of their fathers ! This was a sight at which even a wicked prophet was struck with awe, and could not forbear exclaiming, *How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel !* Powerful are the charms of genuine piety. There is something in it that disarms malignity itself, and extorts admiration even from those who hate it. Milton represents the devil himself, on his approaching paradise, as awed by innocence, as staggered, as half inclined to desist from his purpose, and feeling a kind of perturbation within him, composed of malignity and pity. Something like this existed, methinks, in Balaam. He wanders from hill to mountain, seeking for curses, but scattering blessings ; sometimes half inclined to unite with God, and concluding with a vain desire to die the death of the righteous. Powerful, I repeat it, are the charms of genuine piety. Conceive of a society of Christians drinking into the spirit of Christ, and walking according to his commandments ! What an amiable sight ! *Beautiful*

as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, and terrible as an army with banners! So much as we possess of the spirit of true religion, so near as we approach its original simplicity, so far as our doctrine is incorrupt, our discipline pure and impartial, and our conversation as becometh the gospel, so much *of the beauty of the Lord our God is upon us.*

A *fourth* branch of the petition is, that God would set his seal to their undertakings, and establish the work of their hands. *Establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.* It was the work of Moses and Joshua, and the rest of God's servants, to mould and form the people, especially the rising generation; to instruct them in the words of the Lord, and impress their hearts with the vast importance of obeying them. And this has been the work of God's servants in every age. This is our object in our stated and occasional labours; in village-preaching, and in foreign missions; this is the object in the present undertaking: but all is nothing unless God establish the work of our hands. *Except the Lord build the house, the builders labour in vain.* As we must never confide in God to the neglect of means; so we must never engage in the use of means without a sense of our dependance on God.

It is requested, *finally*, that these blessings might appear both in their own times, and be continued to their posterity: *Let thy work appear unto thy servants, who are now alive: and thy glory unto their children, when they are no more.* It is

desirable that true religion should be promoted *in our time*. This, indeed, should be our first and chief concern. Worldly men may care nothing about this. If they gain but the corn, the wine, and the oil, it is enough for them: but God's *servants* cannot be happy with mere temporal prosperity, if the interest of Christ do not prosper. Nehemiah might have lived in affluence at the court of Persia; but he could not enjoy it while the city of his God was going to ruins. The true labourers in God's husbandry long to see it abound in fruits: the builders of his temple desire to see it rise.—And though our times lie nearest us, yet our prayers and efforts must not be confined to them, but extend to *posterity*. The succeeding generation should lie near our hearts. In them we hope for materials for God's building. The prayer of David would fit the lips of every godly man, and especially of every godly parent; *that our sons may be as olive-plants, grown up in their youth; and our daughters as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace!*

Such were the particular objects desired: I shall only add a few words on their desirableness.

We have seen already that the manifestation of the *glory* of God depends on the progress of his *work*: by how much, therefore, we are concerned for the one, by so much shall we be importunate for the other. It is for the glory of God that satan's kingdom should be overturned, and the kingdom of his Son established on its ruins. This work is the *harvest* of all God's other works of

glory. It was glorious in him to promise to give his Son the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession: but the glory of this also depends upon its being performed. It was glorious for Christ to die, that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works: but it is by the actual accomplishment of this object that his glory is perfected. It was glorious for God in his providence to drive out paganism and Popery from this kingdom; but if it stop here, what are we the better? The cutting down of weeds will be of but little use, if the pure seed be not sown, and spring up, and bring forth fruit in their place.

The progress of God's work in heathen countries has a close connexion also with our spiritual prosperity at home. There is much beauty and propriety in the petitions offered up in the sixty-seventh Psalm. *God be merciful unto us—THAT thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations!* God blesses the world by blessing the church, and making it a blessing. A statesman would wish for an increase in population, that the army, and navy, and every other department of society might be filled; and shall not we pray for the prosperity of the church of God; that faithful ministers, missionaries, and every other description of Christians, may not be wanting.

Finally: The regard we bear to the souls of men, especially to the rising generation, must render these blessings desirable. It is not yours, but you, that we seek. Our hearts' desire, and

prayer to God for you, is, that you may be saved. If we recommend you to attend the gospel and embrace it, is it because we want to enlist you under the banner of a party? God knoweth! Yet we shall say to you, and especially to the rising generation, as Moses said to Hobab, *Come with us, and we will do you good; for the Lord, we trust, hath spoken good concerning us: and it shall come to pass that whatsoever good thing the Lord shall do unto us, that will we do unto you.*

REMARKS ON THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION.

Mr. Editor,

ALLOWING all due honour to the English translation of the Bible, it must be granted to be a human performance, and as such, subject to imperfection. Where any passage appears to be mistranslated, it is doubtless proper for those who are well acquainted with the original languages, to point it out, and to offer, according to the best of their judgment, the true meaning of the Holy Spirit. Criticisms of this kind, made with modesty and judgment, and not in consequence of a pre-conceived system, are worthy of encouragement.

But besides these, there is a species of criticism which offers itself from a more familiar source, and of the propriety of which the mere English reader is competent to judge; namely, the division of chapters, the use of supplementary terms, &c.

If the following example of the former kind, be thought worthy of a place in the Biblical Magazine, it is probable I may on a future occasion, send you more of the same nature.

The seventh chapter of John ends with these words: *And every man went unto his own house.* The eighth begins with these: *Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives.* Here, I conceive, the former chapter ought to have ended: for here ends the labour of the day, and each party is described as withdrawing to his place of retirement.

The whole passage contains a beautiful representation of the breaking up of a fierce dispute between the chief priests, the Pharisees, the officers whom they sent to arrest our Saviour, and Nicodemus. In the picture which is here drawn of it, we see at one view the very hearts of the different parties; and if the subject were made to end with the retirement of Jesus to the Mount of Olives, it would appear to still greater advantage.

The Pharisees and chief priests having sent officers to take Jesus, return without him.

Pharisees. Why have ye not brought him?

Officers. Never man spake like this man!

Pharisees. Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers, or of the Pharisees, believed on him? But this people, who know not the law, are cursed.

Nicodemus. Doth our law judge any man before it hear him?

Pharisees. Art thou also of Galilee? Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.

Historian. And every man went unto his own house: Jesus went unto the Mount of Olives.

What an exhibition is here given in a few simple words, of the workings of mind in the different parties! Follow them respectively, to their places of retirement, and judge of their feelings. The officers, stunned with conviction and stung with the reproaches of their employers, retire in disgust. The Pharisees, transported with rage and disappointment, go murmuring to their houses.—Nicodemus, having ventured, though mildly, to repel their outrage, feels himself suspected of a secret adherence to the Galilean, and is full of thought about the issue of things. Jesus, with the most perfect calmness and satisfaction, retires to the place whither he was wont to resort for prayer and communion with God!

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? My heart is turned within me; my repentings are kindled together.

Hosea xi. 8.

THIS most beautiful passage, by the addition of the supplemental *how*, to the second and fourth questions, is made to be a continued address from Jehovah, to Israel; but read it without them, and it is an alternate appeal to his own goodness, and to the conscience of the offender. In the one he looks within himself, and addresses himself in a kind of divine soliloquy. *How shall I give thee*

up? How shall I make thee as Admah? In the other, he looks at Ephraim as an offended father would look at a disobedient child, and asks him to say, whether he should give him up or not? *Shall I deliver thee, Israel? Shall I set thee as Zeboim?* Speak sinner, speak! Pronounce thine own doom! Art thou willing to be cast off? Can thy heart endure, and thy hands be strong, in the day that I shall deal with thee? What sayest thou? Wilt thou, by persevering in sin, set seal to thine own condemnation?

It is a kind of debate between justice and mercy, wonderfully adapted to convince and to affect. On the one side there is a most pointed implication that Ephraim, or the ten tribes, *deserved* to be given up to the destroyer; for that his wickedness was equal to that of Admah and Zeboim, Sodom and Gomorrah. Give him up, (saith justice,) and let him reap the due reward of his deeds! Set him as a mark for mine arrows! Make him an example of divine displeasure! Let the smoke of him rise up for ever and ever!

On the other hand, mercy interposes, contends with judgment, pleads ancient love and ancient promises: and thus arrests the arm of vengeance. *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I make thee as Admah? My heart is turned within me! My repentings are kindled together!* This appeal of Jehovah to his own love and faithfulness, I need not say, is inimitably tender. It teaches us also, that in showing mercy, he is influenced by no cause out of himself; that all

arises from undeserved favour and self-moved goodness.

ANSWER TO AN ANONYMOUS LETTER FROM "AN OBSERVER,
ON HIS OBJECTIONS TO FOREIGN MISSIONS.

Mr. Editor,

I SHOULD not have thought it necessary thus publicly to notice an anonymous letter; had it not afforded me an opportunity of answering an objection to foreign missions, which has been more than once advanced—That of its *interfering with exertions in favour of our own countrymen*. I shall say but little of the gross misstatement in the letter, as that my going to Scotland in 1799 was to "witness the state of that country," and to "concert measures for doing good;" that I did not "condescend" to halt, and preach between York and Newcastle; and that "it cannot be said that one convert has been made" in foreign missions. Such assertions must have arisen from the want of information. My journey was merely owing to a kind invitation given me to go and receive the donations of a number of my fellow-Christians, who were willing to contribute to the giving of the holy scriptures to a great nation which had them not, as all the country between York and Newcastle has. My excursion was not a preaching one, though I did preach, and that to the utmost extent of my power. If I had taken half a year, I might have stopped much oftener than I did: but then it is possible my own congregation would have reminded me that "charity

begins at home." Whether success has, or has not attended foreign missions, the accounts which have been printed of them, so far as human judgment can go in such matters, will enable us to decide.

The only question that requires attention is, *Whether the spirit which, within the last ten years, has prompted Christians of different denominations to engage in foreign missions, has been favourable or unfavourable to the propagation of the gospel at home?*—It is a fact which cannot be disputed, that within the above period there have been far greater exertions to communicate the principles of religion to the heathenized parts of both England and Scotland, than at any former period within the remembrance, at least, of the present generation. If I were to say they have been five times greater than before, I think I should not exceed the truth. Nor has that part of the kingdom, to which the writer of the letter alludes, been overlooked. And how is this fact to be accounted for? Will this friend to village-preaching unite with Bishop Horsley, and say, it is the effect of political motives; and merely a new direction of the democratic current, which was interrupted by the treason and sedition bills in 1795? If so, we might ask, How came it to commence two years before those bills were passed? How is it, that it should have prevailed, not so much among those dissenters who took an eager share in political contention, as those who had scarcely ever concerned themselves in any thing of the kind? And, finally, How is it, that it should have extended to other nations, as well

as Britain, and other quarters of the world as well as Europe? But I suppose the writer of this letter would not attribute it to this cause. How then will he account for it? The truth most manifestly is, that the very practice of which he complains has been more conducive to that which he recommends, than all other causes put together. It is natural that it should be so. A longing desire after the spread of the gospel, when once kindled, extends in all directions. The same principle which induces some to leave their native land to impart the heavenly light, induces others to contribute and pray for their success: and while they are doing this, it is next to impossible to forget their own countrymen, who, though they have access to the written word, yet live without God in the world.

It is very singular that the example of "Paulinus," (I suppose he meant Austin the monk) who came to Britain as a missionary from Rome, about the year 596, and is said to have baptised ten thousand people in the river Swale,* should be alleged against foreign missions. Allowing Austin's converts to have been real Christians, (which, however, is very doubtful;) according to the "Observer," there was 'much blame attached to his labours of love, since the probability of greater success was in favour of Italy; a country far less distant than Britain, and more deserving of his charity, which should have begun at home.'

* Fox's *Acts and Monuments*. Vol. I. p. 132. 9th edition.

Unfortunately for this proverb, I do not recollect ever hearing it alleged but for a selfish purpose. Go and ask relief for some distressed object, of a wealthy man. His answer is, "Charity begins at home." True, and it seems to *end* there. And by the reasoning of this observer, his would do the same. So long as there are any sinners in Britain, we must *confine* our attention to them. A person of a contracted mind once objected to the exportation of our manufactures. "We have many poor people in England, (said he) who are half naked, and would be glad of them; and charity begins at home." He was informed, however, by a merchant, that to send our commodities abroad is not the way to impoverish, but to enrich ourselves, and even to furnish the poor with clothing, by providing them with plenty of good employment.

THOUGHTS ON THE DOCTRINE OF THE TRINITY.

NO sober Trinitarian would take upon him to say precisely to what degree the distinctions in the Godhead extend. It is generally supposed, however, that the term *person* approaches the nearest to the scriptural idea, of any term that could be applied to this subject: yet those who use and contend for this term, in opposition to that of three *names* or three *properties*, do not mean to suggest, that the distinctions in the deity are in all respects the same as between three persons among men. The latter have no necessary

connexion or union with each other, so as to denominate them one. It is highly probable, that there is nothing in creation perfectly analogous to the mode of the divine subsistence; and therefore nothing by which it can be fully conceived. And what if this should be the case? Where is the wonder that there should be something in God peculiar to himself in the mode of his existence, which we cannot comprehend? If Socinians would but modestly consider the weakness of the human understanding, they would not decide so peremptorily on the other hand concerning the unity of God, as that it must needs be *personal*, or not at all. If it be too much for us to say with exactness to what degree the distinction reaches: is it not also too much for them to decide upon the precise kind and degree of *union* which is necessary to denominate the great Creator of the world—the ONE GOD.

The doctrine of a Trinity in Unity, is evidently a doctrine of pure revelation, and could never have been discovered by the mere light of nature. But by comparing scripture with itself, we may plainly perceive, that the divine unity, is not a unity of *person*. Though there are three in the Godhead who are dignified with the same incommunicable titles of Jehovah, God, and Lord; possessing the same attributes and perfections; and entitled to the same worship and adoration; yet the scriptures do not exhibit a plurality of deities, but teach us that Jehovah our God, is one Jehovah. The obvious conclusion is, that these three are one

God, and that the scripture doctrine of unity, is of more persons than one in the Godhead. The following passages, among many others, are very full to this purpose:—

Go teach all nations; baptizing them in the name of *the Father*, of *the Son*, and of *the Holy Spirit*.—There are *three* that bear record in heaven; *the Father*, *the Word*, and *the Holy Spirit*, and *these three are one*.—I am one, that bear witness of *myself*.—*The Father* that sent me beareth witness of me.—It is *the Spirit* that beareth witness.—And *the Holy Spirit* descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him; and a voice came from heaven which said thou art *beloved Son*, in whom I am well pleased.—When the Comforter is come, whom *I will send* unto you, from *the Father*, even *the Spirit of truth*, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.—Now I beseech you brethren, for *the Lord Jesus Christ's* sake, and for the love of *the Spirit*, that you strive together with me in your prayers to *God* for me.—*Through him* (that is Christ) we both have access by *one Spirit* to *the Father*.—Praying in *the Holy Spirit*, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of *our Lord Jesus Christ* unto eternal life.—*The Lord* direct your hearts into the love of *God*, and the patient waiting for *Christ*.—The grace of *our Lord Jesus Christ*, the love of *God*, and the communion of *the Holy Spirit* be with you all.

On reading these and similar passages, together with a great number of others which teach the

proper deity of Christ; we conclude that in a mysterious way, far above our comprehension, there are in the divine unity, three subsistencies: and as the New Testament constantly represents each of these three, as bearing personal names, sustaining personal offices, and performing personal acts, we think ourselves warranted in accounting them three divine *persons*.

Socinians, however, object to the doctrine of the Trinity on account of its being *incomprehensible*: and Dr. Priestly denies that the first teachers of Christianity taught any “mysterious doctrines, or doctrines in their own nature incomprehensible;” * and insists upon the necessity of “considering *in what manner* three persons are one God, upon the general principle that every proposition, before it can be believed, must be understood in some sense or other.” †

The first preachers of Christianity taught the self-existence of God. (Rev. i. 4.) *Grace be unto you, and peace from him, who is and who was, and who is to come.* But the self-existence of God is allowed by Dr. Priestly himself, to be so much of a mystery, that “he does not understand the manner of it.” He can here distinguish between things which are *above* reason, and things *contrary* to it. “Though it be above our reason, (he says,) to comprehend *how* this original being, and the cause of all other beings, should be himself uncaused, it is a

* *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever.* Part II. p. 209.

† *Letters to Dr. Horne.*

conclusion by no means properly *contrary* to reason.* Now, why might not an atheist demand of Dr. Priestly, an account of the mode or manner *how* God himself can exist, upon the general principle, "that every proposition, before it can be believed, must be understood in some sense or other?" Why should not this general principle apply to the manner in which God always existed, as an uncaused being, as well as to the manner in which three persons are one God? And if it be proper to distinguish between things above reason and things contrary to it, in the one case, why not in the other?

The truth is, it is not necessary that every thing contained in a proposition should be clearly understood, in order to our being rationally convinced that such a proposition is true. We ought not to deny every thing we cannot comprehend; otherwise a man born blind, would reason right, when he forms this syllogism: 'We can only know the shape of different substances by feeling them; but it is impossible to handle them at a distance: therefore it is impossible to know the shape of different bodies which lie beyond our reach!' A blind man, by the concurring testimony of all about him, may be convinced that the figure of different bodies may be clearly ascertained by sight, though we cannot handle them. But when convinced of this on the ground of testimony, he never can be made to conceive *how* this is true. It is therefore a fundamental maxim in all true philosophy, that

* *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever.* Part I. p. 46.

many things may be incomprehensible and yet demonstrable; that though seeing clearly be a sufficient reason for affirming, yet not seeing at all can never be a reason for denying.

When it is affirmed that in the Godhead there are three, and that these three are one God, it has been objected, not only that the doctrine is incomprehensible, but that the terms themselves involve a *contradiction*; to this it might be replied that if the divine being were affirmed to be three in the same sense in which he is said to be one, the objection would be valid; but the contradiction here is only a seeming one, and is no other than what appears in other propositions concerning the Divine Being, which are also true. Suppose it were affirmed that it is *possible* for God to do evil, and yet that it is *impossible* he should do evil: this would involve an *apparent* contradiction; and if the two branches of the proposition were to be understood in *the same sense* of possible and impossible, the contradiction would be *real*. But to say that it is not *naturally* impossible for God to do evil, were he so inclined, is only affirming what is necessary to his being a free agent, and so of being virtuous or holy: and to say that it is *morally* impossible for God to do evil, is only ascribing to him that perfection of holiness which constitutes the true glory of his character. So to affirm that the centre and surface of the globe are exceedingly remote, and yet so exceedingly near as to be equally the central point of infinite space, is an apparent contradiction, and yet demonstrably

true. That the remotest periods of time are alike the centre of infinite duration, is also a most evident truth, and yet a caviller might object that the terms of these propositions involve a contradiction: it is like saying that two points may be one, and that one may be two. Yet, opposite as the terms may appear, the truth of the propositions is not at all affected by them, but rests on the strongest demonstration.

REFLECTIONS ON TRUE WISDOM.

Prov. xiv. 8.

Mr. Editor,

I WAS lately struck with the justness of one of Solomon's proverbs, as affording a picture of modern character. The passage I refer to, is in Chap. xiv. 8. *The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way: but the folly of fools is deceit.* This proverb teaches us, That true wisdom is of a *useful* or *practical* nature. There is a great difference between the wisdom of some worldly men, and that of others. Some deal in mere speculation: their discoveries are of no use, either to themselves or mankind. Others, who are of a more *prudent* turn, bend their talents to useful purposes. The philosophy of a Lunardi exhibits an air balloon; that of a Franklin is applied to objects of real utility.

But Solomon seldom, if ever, writes of mere natural wisdom. That on which he chiefly dwells has its origin in *the fear of the Lord*. (Chap. i. 7.)

The passage in question, therefore, may be considered as giving the character of *holy* wisdom, as distinguished from the wisdom of this world: it directs to the understanding of our *way*, in matters of the highest importance. And this is the proper opposite of the *folly* described in the last clause, which is said to be *deceit*. Wicked men are the greatest fools in God's account; and their folly consists in self-deception. While the wisdom of the truly wise turns to a good account, the folly of the wicked puts a cheat upon their souls.

The wisdom of some men is to understand things which *cannot be understood*.—When David appealed to God, saying, *Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty; neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me.—My soul is as a weaned child*.—it implies, that there were men who did; and so there are still. “Man,” says Locke, “should know the length of his tether.” What a deluge of abstract speculations has been poured upon the world in all ages, especially since the invention of printing! There is no end of questions upon such subjects. Instead of finding out truth, we presently lose ourselves. Ask, What is a spirit? What is eternity? What is immensity? How came a pure creature to become sinful? Why did God create man, seeing what part he would act? All these, and a thousand more questions of the kind, belong to the wisdom of the imprudent. It does not lead us a step towards heaven; but in a contrary direction.

Again: The wisdom of others is to pry into things, which, if understood, *are of little, or no use.*—Long, and elaborate treatises have been written on the question, What is space? But, *cui boni?* Even those things which are of use, astronomy for instance, if pursued to the neglect of our *way*, are folly, and will deceive the expectation. We should blame any man, and count him a fool, notwithstanding his learning, if he employed himself in studying the distances of the stars while his family were pining for want, and his affairs going to ruin: and why not, if in the same pursuits he neglects the salvation of his soul?

Further: The wisdom of some is to understand *the way of other men.*—We meet with many who are exceedingly censorious on public measures. For their part, they are wise: and happy would it be for the world, if it were under *their* direction! but whether it be that the affairs of religious and domestic duty are too little for their expanded minds, or whatever be the reason, so it is, that their own concerns are generally neglected. We meet with others who understand all the private concerns of a neighbourhood, and can point out the faults and defects of every one about them; but forget their own. We have even met with professors of religion, who understand the faults, defects, and errors of almost all the religious world; and whenever they meet together, these are the topics of conversation by which they edify one another. Surely, Mr. Editor, this is not the wisdom of the *prudent*.

But it will be asked, What is the wisdom of the *prudent*? And I may answer, It is that which leads to the understanding of our way through life, and to the heavenly home.

Particularly : It will lead us above all things, to see that our way be *right*. There are many by-ways, and many who are walking in them: but true wisdom will not rest till it find out the road that leads to everlasting life. It will know whom it trusts, and whether he be able to keep that which is committed to him. It will lead us also to attend diligently to the *directions* of the way. We shall read the oracles of God : the doctrines for belief, and the precepts for practice ; and shall thus learn to cleanse our way by taking heed thereto, according to God's word. It will moreover induce us to guard against the *dangers* of the way. We shall not be ignorant of Satan's devices, nor of the numerous temptations to which our age, times, circumstances, and propensities expose us. It will influence us to keep our eye upon the end of the way. A foolish man will go that way in which he finds most company, or can go most at his ease: but wisdom will ask, *What shall I do in the end thereof?* To understand the end of the wrong way, will deter ; but to keep our eye upon that of the right, will attract. Christ himself kept sight of the joy that was set before him. Finally: as holy wisdom possesses the soul with a sense of propriety at all times and upon all occasions, it is therefore our highest interest to obtain this wisdom, and to cultivate it by reading, meditation, prayer,

and every appointed means. *My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee, so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous: he is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.*

THE DEITY OF CHRIST ESSENTIAL TO ATONEMENT.

THE doctrine of atonement by the death of Christ, is one of the great and distinguishing principles of the gospel, and its importance is acknowledged by most denominations of professing Christians: yet there are some who suppose that this doctrine is not necessarily connected with the divinity of Christ; and, indeed, that it is inconsistent with it. It has been objected, that according to the scriptures it was the *person* of Christ that suffered; but that this is inconsistent with his divinity, because divinity could not suffer. To which it may be answered, that though the *person* of Christ suffered, yet that he suffered in *all that pertains to his person*, is quite another thing. A great and virtuous character among men might suffer death by the axe or the guillotine, and this

would be suffering death in his person ; and yet he might not suffer in his honour or in his character, and so not in all that pertained to him. A Christian might suffer martyrdom in his body, and yet his soul be very happy. To object, therefore, that Christ did not suffer in his person, because all that pertained to him was not the immediate seat of suffering, is reasoning very inconclusively. It is sufficient if Christ suffered in that part of his person which was susceptible of suffering.

It has been objected, that as humanity only is capable of suffering, therefore humanity only is necessary to make atonement. But this objection proceeds upon the supposition, that the value of atonement arises simply from suffering, and not from the character or dignity of him who suffers : whereas the scripture places it in the latter, and not the former. *The blood of Jesus Christ, HIS SON, cleanseth us from all sin.—He, BY HIMSELF, hath purged our sins.*—Some, who have allowed sin to be an infinite evil, and deserving of endless punishment, have objected to the necessity of an infinite atonement, by alleging, that the question is not what sin *deserves*, but what God *requires* in order to exalt the dignity of his government, while he displays the riches of his grace in the forgiveness of sin. But this objection implies that it would be consistent with the divine perfections to admit, not only what is equivalent to the actual punishment of the sinner, but of what is *not* equivalent : and if so, what good reason can be given why God might not have

entirely dispensed with a satisfaction, and pardoned sinners without any atonement? On this principle, the atonement of Christ would be resolved into mere sovereign appointment, and the *necessity* of it would be wholly given up. But if so, there was nothing *required*, in the nature of things, to exalt the dignity of the divine government, whilst he displayed the riches of his grace; and it could not with propriety be said, that it BECAME *Him*, *for whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.*

If God required less than the real demerit of sin for an atonement, then there could be no *satisfaction* made to divine justice by such an atonement. And though it would be improper to represent the great work of redemption as a kind of commercial transaction betwixt a creditor and his debtor, yet the satisfaction of justice in all cases of offence requires *that there be an expression of the displeasure of the offended against the conduct of the offender, equal to what the nature of the offence is in reality.* The end of punishment is not the misery of the offender, but the general good. Its design is to express displeasure against disobedience: and where punishment is inflicted according to the desert of the offence, there justice is satisfied. In other words, such an expression of displeasure is uttered by the lawgiver, that, in it, every subject of his empire may read what are his views of the evil which he forbids, and what are his determinations in regard to its punishment.

If sinners had received in their own persons the reward of their iniquity, justice would in that way have been satisfied: and if the infinitely blessed God, *whose ways are higher than our ways, and whose thoughts are higher than our thoughts*, has devised an expedient for our salvation, though he may not confine himself to a *literal* conformity to those rules of justice which he has marked out for us, yet he will be certain not to depart from the *spirit* of them. Justice must be satisfied, even in that way. An atonement made by a substitute, in any case, requires that the *same end* be answered by it, as if the guilty party had actually suffered. It is necessary that the displeasure of the offended should be expressed in as strong terms, or in a way adapted to make as strong an impression upon all concerned, as if the law had taken its course: otherwise, *atonement* is not made, and mercy triumphs at the expense of righteousness.

Let it be inquired then, whether *this great end* of moral government could have been answered by the sufferings of a mere creature? Some who deny the divinity of Christ, appear to be apprehensive that it could not; and have therefore supposed that God, in order, it should seem, to bring it within the compass of a creature's grasp, required less of his Son than our sins deserved. It is true, indeed, if Christ be only a creature, it must be less, infinitely less, that was accepted, than what was strictly deserved. In the atonement of Christ, God is said to have SET HIM FORTH *to be a propitiation—to DECLARE HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS, for*

the remission of sins. Now this, as well as the nature of things, implies, That one who makes an atonement, must be of so much account in the scale of being, as to *attract the general attention.* But the sufferings of a mere man, whose obedience could be no more than duty, or whose humiliation contained in it no condescension below the place that became him, would be no more adapted to excite the general attention of the intelligent creation, than the sufferings of an insect would be to attract the attention of a nation. It were as rational to talk of the King of Great Britain setting forth a worm, tortured on the point of a needle, to **DECLARE** his regard to righteousness, while he pardoned the deluded votaries of the Pretender; as to talk of a mere creature being set forth as a propitiation, for the **DECLARATION** of the righteousness of God in the remission of human guilt.

To suppose, because humanity only is capable of suffering, that therefore humanity only is necessary to make atonement, is to render *dignity of character* of no account. When Zaleucus, one of the Grecian kings, had made a law against adultery, that whosoever was guilty of this crime should lose both his eyes, his own son is said to have been the first transgressor. To preserve the honour of the law, and at the same time to save his own son from total blindness, the father had recourse to an expedient of losing one of his own eyes, and his son one of his. This expedient, though it did not conform to the letter of the law, yet was well adapted to preserve the spirit of it; as it served to

evinced to the nation the determination of the king to punish adultery, as much, perhaps more than if the sentence had literally been put into execution against the offender. But if, instead of this, he had appointed that one eye of an animal should be put out, in order to save that of his son; or if a common subject had offered to lose an eye, would either have answered the purpose? The animal, or the subject, were each possessed of an eye, as well as the sovereign. It might be added too, that it was mere bodily pain; and seeing it was in the body only that this penalty could be endured, any being that possessed a body, would be equally capable of enduring it. True, they might endure it; but would their suffering have answered the same end? Would it have satisfied justice? Would it have had the same effect upon the nation, or tended equally to restore the tone of injured authority?

Some have placed all the virtue of the atonement in the *appointment* of God. But, if so, why was it NOT POSSIBLE *that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin*? It does not accord with the divine proceedings to be prodigal of blood, especially in a superior character, where one far inferior might answer the same end. When, in order to try Abraham, Isaac was bound, and ready to be sacrificed, a lamb was found for a burnt-offering: and if any gift from the divine Father, short of that of his only-begotten Son, would have answered the great purposes of moral government, there is no reason to think that he would have made Him a sacrifice; but would

have *spared him*, and not *freely have delivered him up for us all*.

It has been objected against the necessity of Christ's being a divine person in order to his making atonement, that if he who makes atonement be infinite, it must needs be followed by the salvation of the whole human race. But this objection supposes that the number of the saved is to be proportioned to the ability of the Saviour: and then it would seem, that Christ being a mere man, he saved all that his finite merit would extend to. With just as much propriety might it be alleged, that the power by which we were created could not be infinite; for if it had, there must then have been an infinite number of worlds in existence. And the wisdom and goodness by which we are saved cannot be infinite; for if so, all the world, and the fallen angels too, would be interested in that salvation.

In short, the deity and atonement of Christ have always, among thinking people, stood or fallen together; and with them almost every other important doctrine of the gospel. The person of Christ is the foundation-stone on which the church is built. An error therefore on this subject affects the whole of our preaching, and the whole of our religion. In the esteem of the apostle Paul, that which nullified *the death of Christ*, was accounted to be *another gospel*; and he expressed his wish that those who propagated it, and so troubled the churches were *cut off*. The principle maintained by the Galatians, it is true, did not consist in a

denial of the deity of Christ ; but the consequence is the same. They taught that justification was by the works of the law, from whence the Apostle justly inferred that *Christ is dead in vain*. And he who teaches that Christ is a mere creature, holds a doctrine which renders his sufferings of none effect. If the deity of Christ be a divine truth, it cannot reasonably be denied that it is of equal importance with the doctrine of justification by his righteousness. If therefore a rejection of the latter was deemed a *perversion of the gospel*, nothing less can be ascribed to the rejection of the former.

ON CREEDS AND SUBSCRIPTIONS.

IT has been very common, among a certain class of writers, to exclaim against creeds and systems in religion, as inconsistent with Christian liberty and the rights of conscience: but surely they must be understood as objecting to those creeds only which they dislike, and not to creeds in general; for no doubt, unless they be worse than the worst of beings, they have a creed of their own. The man who has no creed, has no belief; which is the same thing as being an unbeliever: and he whose belief is not formed into a system, has only a few loose, unconnected thoughts, without entering into the harmony and glory of the gospel. Every well-informed and consistent believer, therefore, must have a creed, a system which he supposes to contain the leading principles of divine revelation.

It may be pleaded that the objection does not lie so much against our having creeds or systems, as against our imposing them on others, as the condition of Christian fellowship. If, indeed, a subscription to articles of faith were required without examination, or enforced by civil penalties, it would be an unwarrantable imposition on the rights of conscience: but if an explicit agreement in what may be deemed fundamental principles be judged essential to fellowship, this is only requiring that a man appear to be a Christian before he can have a right to be treated as such. Suppose it were required of a Jew or an infidel, before he is admitted to the Lord's supper, (which either might be disposed to solicit for some worldly purpose,) that he must previously become a believer; should we thereby impose Christianity upon him? He might claim the right of private judgment, and deem such a requisition incompatible with its admission: but it is evident he could not be entitled to Christian regard, and that while he exclaimed against the imposition of creeds and systems, he himself would be guilty of an imposition of the grossest kind, utterly inconsistent with the rights of voluntary and social compact, as well as of Christian liberty.

In order to be a little more explicit on the subject, it may be necessary to offer the following remarks.

First: It is admitted that no society has a right to make laws where Christ has made none.—Whoever attempts this, whether in an individual

or social capacity, is guilty of substituting for doctrines the commandments of men, and making void the law of God by their traditions.

Secondly : The fallibility of all human judgment is fully allowed.—A Christian society, as well as an individual, is liable to err in judging what are the doctrines and precepts of Christ. Whatever articles of faith and practice, therefore, are introduced into a community, they ought, no doubt, to be open to correction or amendment, whenever those who subscribe them shall perceive their inconsistency with the will of Christ.

Thirdly : Whatever may be said on the propriety of human systems of faith, they are not to be considered as the proper ground on which to rest our religious sentiments.—The word of God, and that alone, ought to be the ground of both faith and practice. But all this does not prove that it would be wrong for an individual to judge of the meaning of the divine word, nor for a number of individuals who agree in their judgments, to express that agreement in explicit terms, and consider themselves as bound to walk by the same rule.

Fourthly : Whether the united sentiments of a Christian society be expressed in writing or not, is immaterial, provided they be mutually understood and avowed.—Some societies have no written articles of faith or discipline ; but with them, as with others that have, it is always understood that there are certain principles, a professed belief of which is deemed necessary to communion.

The substance of the inquiry therefore would be, whether a body of Christians have a right to judge of the meaning of the doctrines and precepts of the gospel, and to act accordingly? That an individual has a right so to judge, and to form his connexions with those whose views are most congenial with his own, will not be disputed: but if so, why have not a society the same right? If Christ has given both doctrines and precepts, some of which are more immediately addressed to Christians in their social capacity, they must not only possess such a right, but are under obligation to exercise it. *If the righteous nation which keep the truth*, be the only proper characters for entering into gospel fellowship, those who have the charge of their admission, are obliged to form a judgment on what is truth, and what is righteousness; without which they must be wholly unqualified for their office.

If a Christian society have no right to judge what is *truth*, and to render an agreement with them in certain points a term of communion; then neither have they a right to judge what is *righteousness*, nor to render an agreement in matters of practical right and wrong, a term of communion.

There is a great diversity of sentiment in the world concerning morality, as well as doctrine: and if it be an unscriptural imposition to agree to any articles whatever, it must be to exclude any one for immorality, or even to admonish him on that account; for it might be alleged, that he only thinks for himself, and acts accordingly. Nor

would it stop here: almost every species of immorality has been defended and may be disguised, and thus under the pretence of a right of private judgment, the church of God would become like the mother of harlots—the *habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.*

It is a trite and frivolous objection which some have made against subscriptions and articles of faith, that it is setting bounds to the freedom of inquiry, and requiring a conformity of sentiment that is incompatible with the various opportunities and capacities of different persons. The same objection might be urged against the covenanting of the Israelites,* and all laws in society. If a religious community agree to specify some leading principles which they consider as derived from the word of God, and judge the belief of them to be necessary in order to any persons becoming or continuing a member with them; it does not follow that those principles should be equally understood, or that all their brethren must have the same degree of knowledge, nor yet that they should understand and believe nothing else. The powers and capacities of different persons are various; one may comprehend more of the same truth than another, and have his views more enlarged by an exceeding great variety of kindred ideas; and yet the substance of their belief may still be the same. The object of articles is to keep at a distance, not those who are weak in the faith, but such as are

* Neh. x. 29.

its avowed enemies. Supposing a church-covenant to be so general as not to specify one principle or duty, but barely an engagement to adhere to the scriptures as a rule of faith and practice, the objection would still apply ; and it might be said, One man is capable of understanding much more of the scriptures than another, and persons of more enlarged minds may discover a great deal of truth relating to science, which the scriptures do not pretend to teach ; why, therefore, do we frame articles to limit the freedom of inquiry, or which require a conformity of sentiment incompatible with the opportunities and capacities of persons so differently circumstanced ? The objection, therefore, if admitted, would prove too much. The powers of the mind will probably vary in a future world ; one will be capable of comprehending much more of truth than another ; yet the redeemed will all be of one mind, and of one heart.

Every one feels the importance of articles, or laws, in civil society ; and yet these are nothing less than expositions or particular applications of the great principle of universal equity. General or universal equity is that to civil laws, which the Bible is to articles of faith ; it is the source from which they are all professedly derived, and the standard to which they ought all to be submitted. The one are as liable to swerve from general equity, as the other from the word of God : and where this is proved to be the case in either instance, such errors require to be corrected. But as no person of common sense would on this

account inveigh against laws being made, and insist that we ought only to covenant in general to walk according to equity, without agreeing in any leading principles, or determining wherein that equity consists; neither ought he to inveigh against articles of faith and practice in religious matters, provided that they comport with the mind of God in his word. If articles of faith be opposed to the authority of scripture, or substituted in the place of such authority, they become objectionable and injurious: but if they simply express the united judgment of those who voluntarily subscribe them, they are incapable of any such kind of imputation.

ON COMMENDATION.

IT has been observed that sinful propensities are commonly, if not always, the original propensities of human nature, perverted or abused. Emulation, scorn, anger, the desire of property, and all the animal appetites, are not in themselves evil. If directed to right objects, and governed by the will of God, they are important and useful principles; but perverted, they degenerate into pride, haughtiness, bitterness, avarice, and sensuality.

By this remark we may be enabled to judge of the propriety and impropriety of bestowing commendation. There are some, who for fear of making others proud, as they say, forbear the practice altogether. But this is contrary to the

scriptures. We have only to hear what the Spirit saith unto the seven churches in Asia, to perceive the usefulness of commending the good for encouragement, as well as of censuring the evil for correction. Paul, in his Epistles, seldom deals in reproof, without applauding at the same time what was praiseworthy. This, doubtless, ought to be a model for us. Those who withhold such commendation for fear of making others proud, little think of the latent vanity in their own minds which this conduct betrays. If they did not attach a considerable degree of consequence to their own opinion, they would not be so ready to suspect the danger of another's being elated by it. A minister, fifty or sixty years ago, after delivering a sermon and descending from the pulpit, was accosted in rather a singular manner by another minister who had been his hearer. Shaking him by the hand, and looking him in the face, with a smile, "I could," said he, "say something. I could say something, ... but, perhaps, it is not safe; it might make you proud of yourself." *No danger, my friend,* replied the other, *I do not take you to be a man of judgment.*

Yet there is real danger of our becoming tempters to one another, by untimely and improper commendation. Man has too much nitre about him to render it safe to play with fire. Whatever may be said by worldly men, who have adopted Lord Chesterfield's maxims, and whose only study is to *please*, it is not only injurious, but by men of sense considered as inconsistent with good manners to

load a person with praises to his face. Such characters are *flatterers* by profession, and their conduct is as mean as it is offensive to a modest mind; for what is flattery, but insult in disguise? Its language, if truly interpreted is this, ‘I know you to be so weak and so vain a creature, that nothing but praise will please you; and as I have an end to answer by obtaining your favour, I will take this measure to accomplish it.’

The love of praise, has been called “the universal passion,” and true it is that no man is free from it. There are some, however, who are much more vain than others. It is the study of a flatterer to find out this weak side of a man, and to avail himself of it: but good men are incapable of such conduct. If they see another covetous of praise, they will commonly withhold it, and that for the good of the party. It is true, I have seen the vanity of a man reproved by a compliance with his wishes, giving him what he was desirous of, and that in full measure, as it were, pressed down. He did not seem to be aware that he had thirsted for the delicious draft till the cup was handed to him; the appearance of which covered him with confusion. But this kind of ironical praise is a delicate weapon, and requires a quick sensibility in the person who receives the address, as well as in him who gives it. It is, however, hardly consistent with the modesty, gentleness, and benevolence of Christianity.

When two or more persons of a vain mind become acquainted, it may be expected they will

deal largely in compliments; playing into each others hands: where this is the case, there is great danger of the blind leading the blind till both fall into the ditch.

To a wise and humble man, just commendation is encouraging; but praise beyond desert is an affliction. His mind, sanctified by the grace of God, serves as a refiner to separate the one from the other; justly appreciating what is said to him, he receives what is proper, and repels what is improper. Thus it may be, we are to understand the words of Solomon: *As the fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold, so is a man to his praise.*

The scriptures never address themselves to the corrupt propensities of the mind, but to its original powers; or, to use the language of the ingenious *Bunyan*, they have “nothing to say to the Diabolians, but to the *ancient inhabitants of the town of Mansoul.*” Men address themselves to our vanity; God to our emulation. If we follow this example we are safe.

The occasion of all these reflections, Mr. Editor, was my finding the other day, among a number of old loose papers, the following tale which carries in it the marks of being a true one; and with which I shall conclude this paper:—“A young minister, (whom I shall call Eutychus,) was possessed of talents somewhat above mediocrity; his delivery also was reckoned agreeable. He was told by one of his admirers in an evening’s conversation, how much his sermons excelled those of the generality of preachers. Alas, the same thought

had occurred to himself! Hence he easily assented to it, and entered freely into conversation on the subject. On retiring to rest, he endeavoured first to commit himself to the divine protection. It was *there*, while on his knees, that he first felt his folly. Overwhelmed with shame and confusion before God, he was silent; seeming to himself a beast before him. At the same time, a passage in the Acts of the Apostles, flashed like lightning in his mind: And they shouted and said, *it is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And he was eaten of worms, because he gave not God the glory.* There seemed to him a considerable analogy between his case and that of Herod. Herod was flattered and idolized—his heart was in unison with the flattery—he consented to be an idol, and gave not God the glory—for this he was smitten by an angel of God, his glory blasted, and his life terminated by a humiliating disease. I also have been flattered, (said Eutychus,) and have inhaled the incense. I have consented to be an idol, and have not given God the glory. God, I am afraid, will blast my future life and ministry, as he justly may, and cause me to end my days in degradation and disgrace! About the same time, those words also occurred to him. *Woe to the idol shepherd his arm shall be dried up, and his right eye shall be darkened!* He could not pray!—Groaning over the words of David, *Oh Lord, thou knowest my foolishness, and my sin is not hid from thee,* he retired to rest. The next morning, the same subject awoke with him. He confessed,

and again bemoaned his sin : intreated forgiveness for Christ's sake, and that his future spirituality might not be blasted. *Cast me not away from thy presence*, said he, *take not thy Holy Spirit from me!* But he could not recover any thing like freedom with God. The thought occurred to him, of requesting one of his most intimate friends to pray for him : but this only occasioned a comparison of himself with Simon the sorcerer, who importuned Peter, saying, *Pray to the Lord for me, that none of these things come upon me.*

In short, the temptation into which he had fallen, not only polluted his mind, and marred his peace, but rendered him for some time wretched in the exercise of his ministry.

Let hearers take heed, while they give due honour and encouragement to ministers, not to idolize them : and let ministers take heed, that they do not receive, and still more that they do not court applause.

SEEMING CONTRADICTIONS RECONCILED.

It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.—Gen. vi. 6.

The Lord is not a man that he should repent.—1 Sam. xv. 29.

THE seeming contradiction in these passages arises from the same term being used in the one metaphorically, and in the other literally. It is literally true, that repentance is not predicable of the divine nature, inasmuch as it implies mutability, and imperfection in knowledge and wisdom, neither

of which can be applied to the infinitely blessed God. But in order to address himself impressively to us, he frequently personates a creature, or speaks to us after the manner of men. It may be doubted whether the displeasure of God against the wickedness of men could have been fully expressed in literal terms, or with any thing like the effect produced by metaphorical language. To evince this, I shall take the liberty to introduce a few brief expository notes which I have by me, on the six preceding verses in Genesis:—This chapter gives us an account of the corruption which preceded the flood, and which moved an infinitely good and merciful Being to bring it upon the earth. We may notice,

1. The *occasion* of this corruption; viz. the increase of population: it was *when men began to multiply on the face of the earth*, that they began to corrupt one another. Population is itself a good; but it often becomes the occasion of evil; because men, when numbers of them assemble together, excite and provoke one another to sin. Hence it is that sin commonly grows rankest in populous places. We are originally made to be helpers of one another: but sin perverts the course of things, and renders us tempters of one another. We draw and are drawn into innumerable evils. *Oh, draw me not with the workers of iniquity!*

2. The first step towards this corrupt state of things was, the mixing of the church and the world in marriages. *The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them*

wives of all whom they chose. The sons of God were those of the family of Seth, of whom we read lately, that they called upon the name of the Lord. (iv. 16.) The daughters of men were of the race of Cain, whose parents having gone forth from the presence of the Lord, or turned their back on religion, were a kind of atheists. This was a conjunction between the seed of the woman, and the seed of the serpent; which must needs be unnatural and mischievous. The object of a good man's choice should be a *help-meet*. We need to be helped in our way to heaven, and not hindered and corrupted. Hence God forbade all such alliances with idolaters: (Deut. vii. 3, 4.) and hence also Christian marriages were limited to those *only in the Lord*: (1 Cor. vii. 39.) The examples which we have seen of the contrary, have fully justified these restrictions by their lamentable effects. They corrupt and ruin many a promising character; and we see by this history, that they were the first cause of the ruin of a world!

3. The great offence which God took at this conduct, and what grew out of it. *The Lord said, my Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh; yet his days shall be a hundred and twenty years.* Had the sons of God kept themselves to themselves, and preserved their purity, God, it may be supposed, would have spared the world for their sakes: but they mingled together, and became one people. This he considered as a heinous crime. The name by which they are called is worthy of notice—*man*. Seeing

the sons of God have become one people with the daughters of men, they have lost their honourable distinction, and are called by the common name of the species. The special notice taken of the conduct of professors, rather than of others, is likewise observable. *He* also, or *they* also, as some read it, namely, the sons of God, are *flesh*; viz. they, as well as the others, are become corrupt. By the *Spirit of God* is meant, the Holy Spirit *in the prophets*, by which he preached and contended with the wicked. See Neh. ix. 30. 1 Pet. iii. 19, 20. But now, seeing the professedly righteous, who should have stood firm, had, as it were, joined the standard of the enemy, God resolved to give them all up together, or to decline any farther strivings with them. *The ploughman will not plow ALL day to sow—bread-corn is BRUISED, because he will not EVER be threshing it, nor break it with the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it with his horsemen.* Yet amidst all this displeasure, there is great long-suffering. *His days shall be a hundred and twenty years.* God would wait that time ere he brought the flood upon them. (1 Peter iii. 20.) All this time, God did *strive* or contend with them; but that proving ineffectual, they were at last given up.

4. Observe the fruits of these unlawful mixtures; a sort of monstrous beings, whose figures were but emblems of their minds. They seem to have been fierce and cruel men. The word giants signifies *fellers*, or men who caused others to fall before them like trees before an axe. So far as respects character, this was the natural effect of such

inter-marriages: family religion is subverted; and the fear of God has a greater connexion with a proper regard to man than many are willing to allow.

5. Observe the estimate which God makes of things. *God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.* Such is the case when the church is gone and lost in the world. There were some hopeful appearances when the sons of *God began to call upon the name of the Lord*: but now, a very few excepted, they are all gone. What a picture is here given of what the world naturally is! It is *evil*: without mixture—*only evil*: without cessation—*evil continually*: from the very fountain-head of action—the *thoughts of the heart*: and all this is not the exaggerated language of creatures—*God saw it!*

6. Notice the amazing displeasure of God against sin. *It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart!*—Was ever such language uttered! What words besides them, could convey to us such an idea of the evil of sin? It is true, we are not to understand them literally: but they convey to us an idea that the sin of man is so heinous, and so mischievous, as to mar all the works of God, and to render them worse than if there were none. So that if God had not counteracted it, there had better have been no world! Any created being, on seeing all his works thus perverted, would

repent, and wish he had never made them. Oh, the exceeding provoking nature of sin! What must be that grace which could give his only-begotten Son to die for it, and could find in his heart, for his sake, freely to forgive it? Be it our great concern, that, like Noah in the ark, we may be found in him.

I please all men in all things.—1 Cor. x. 33.

If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. Gal. i. 10.

THOUGH both these kinds of action are expressed by one term, to *please*, yet they are exceedingly diverse; no less so than a conduct which has the the glory of God, and the good of mankind for its object, and one that originates and terminates in self. The first of these passages should be read in connexion with what precedes and follows it: ver. 31—33. *Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: even as I please all men in all things; not seeking mine own with profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.* From hence it appears plain that the *things* in which the Apostle pleased all men, require to be restricted to such things as tend to their *profit, that they may be saved*. Whereas, the things in which, according to the latter passage, he could *not* please men, and *yet be the servant of Christ*, were of a contrary tendency. Such were the objects pursued by the false teachers whom he

opposed, and who desired to make a fair show in the flesh, lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. Chap. vi. 12.

The former is that sweet inoffensiveness of spirit, which teaches us to lay aside all self-will and self-importance; that charity which *seeketh not her own, and is not easily provoked*; it is that spirit in short, which the same writer elsewhere recommends from the example of Christ himself: *We then, who are strong, ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification: for even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee, fell on me.*

But the latter spirit referred to, is that sordid compliance with the corruptions of human nature, of which flatterers and deceivers have always availed themselves; not for the glory of God or the good of men, but for the promotion of their own selfish designs.

While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest shall not cease.—Gen. viii. 22.

There are five years in which there shall be neither earing nor harvest.—Gen. xlv. 6.

THE first of these passages contains a general truth, or rule, which, as is common with general rules, has its particular exceptions. And yet it hardly amounts to an exception: for there never was a year since the flood in which there was no harvest *throughout the world*. To understand the

promise of God's engaging never to afflict any particular nation, or number of nations, with famine, is to make it universal as to place, as well as uninterrupted in respect to time; and this would go to insure a harvest to the sluggard who refuses to sow.

Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him.—Prov. xxvi. 4.

Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.—Prov. xxvi. 5.

A "FOOL," in the sense of scripture, means a wicked man, or one who acts contrary to the wisdom that is from above, and who is supposed to utter his foolishness in speech or writing. Doubtless, there are different descriptions of these characters; and some may require to be answered, while others are best treated with silence. But the cases here seem to be one: both have respect to the same character, and both require to be answered. The whole difference lies in the *manner* in which the answer should be given. The terms *according to his folly*, in the first instance means, *in a foolish manner*, as is manifest from the reason given, *lest thou also be like unto him*. But in the second instance they mean, *in the manner which his folly requires*. This, also, is plain from the reason given, *lest he be wise in his own conceit*. A foolish speech is not a rule for our imitation; nevertheless our answer must be so framed by it, as to meet and repel it.

Both these proverbs caution us against evils to which we are not a little addicted; the first, that of saying and doing to others *as they say and do to us*, rather than as *we would* they should say and do; the last, that of suffering the cause of truth or justice to be decried, while we, from a love of ease, stand by as unconcerned spectators.

The first of these proverbs is exemplified in the answer of Moses to the rebellious Israelites; the last in that of Job to his wife. It was a foolish speech which was addressed to the former: *Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there?* Unhappily, this provoked Moses to speak unadvisedly with his lips; saying, *Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?* This was answering folly in *a foolish manner*, which he should *not* have done; and by which the servant of God became but too much like them whom he opposed. It was also a foolish saying of Job's wife, in the day of his distress: *Curse God, and die!* Job answered this speech, not in the *manner of it*, but in the *manner it required*. *What, shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?* —In all the answers of our Saviour to the scribes and pharisees, we may perceive that he never lost the possession of his soul for a single moment; never answered *in the manner* of his opponents, so as to be *like unto them*; but neither did he

decline to repel their folly, and so to abase their self-conceit.

By the works of the law shall no flesh living be justified.—Gal. ii. 16.

Was not Abraham, our Father, justified by works.—James ii. 21.

PAUL treats of the justification of the *ungodly*, or the way in which sinners are *accepted* of God, and made heirs of eternal life. James speaks of the justification of the *godly*, or in what way it becomes evident that a man is *approved* of God. The former is by the righteousness of Christ; the latter is by works. The former of these is that which justifies: the latter is that by which it appears that we are justified. The term justification, in the first of these passages, is taken in a primary sense: in the last, it is taken in a secondary sense only, as in Matt. xi. 19. and other places.

I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.—Exod. xx. 5.

The soul that sinneth, it shall die: the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son.—Ezek. xviii. 20.

NEITHER of these passages appears to be applicable to men, as the individual subjects of God's moral government, and with respect to a future world; but merely as members of society in the present life. Nations, and other communities, as *such*, are considered in the divine administration as

persons. That which is done by them at one period, is visited upon them at another; as the history of the children of Israel, and of all other nations evinces. The effects of the conduct of every generation not being confined to itself, but extended to their posterity, would, in proportion as they were possessed of natural affection, furnish a powerful motive to righteousness; and to them who sinned, prove an aggravation to their punishment.

This part of divine providence was objected to, in the times of Ezekiel, as unjust. *The fathers, said they, have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge—the ways of the Lord are not equal.* To this objection, two things were suggested in reply.

1. That though it was so that the sins from the times of Manasseh fell upon that generation, yet there was no injustice in it; but, on the contrary, much mercy: for what they bore was no more than what *their own sins* deserved; and its not having been inflicted before, was owing to divine forbearance. God might have punished *both their fathers and them.* Hence, *As I live, saith the Lord, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel.—The soul that sinneth, it shall die!* Which is as if he had said, I will no more forbear with you as I have done; but will punish *both father and son*, instead of the son only. Ezek. xviii. 1—4.

2. That if the sins of the fathers fell upon the children, it was not without the children having

adopted, and persisted in their fathers' crimes. The visiting of the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation, is only *of them that hate him*; that is, where the fathers hate him, and the children tread in the fathers' steps. If Judah in the times of Ezekiel had been righteous, they had not gone into captivity for what was done in the times of Manasseh.

Arise, walk through the land, for I will give it unto thee.—
Gen. xiii. 17.

And the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, the field and the cave which was therein, and all the trees which were in the field, that were in all the borders round about, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession.—Gen. xxiii. 17, 18.

He gave him none inheritance in it, no not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him.—Acts vii. 5.

THE first of these passages is the language of *promise*: the last intimates that the promise was not performed to Abraham, but reserved for his posterity. It is true, he purchased a burying-ground of the sons of Heth, according to the second passage: but that could hardly be called ground *to set his foot on*, which expresses an idea different from that of a place to lay his bones in; and much less an *inheritance* of God's giving him. to set his foot on. His having to *purchase* even a grave, was rather a proof that he was considered as a stranger, than of his being a native of the soil. An *inheritance given of God* he had not: that only was such which his posterity enjoyed

without purchase, the inhabitants of the land being driven out before them.

I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.—
Gen. xxxii. 30.

Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me,
and live.—Exod. xxxiii. 20.

THE difference here seems to arise from the phrase, *face of God*. In the first instance it is expressive of *great familiarity*, compared with former visions and manifestations of the divine glory: in the last, of a *fulness of knowledge of this glory*, which is incompatible with our mortal state, if not with our capacity as creatures. What Jacob said of himself, that he had seen God *face to face*, is repeatedly spoken of Moses, and as that by which he stood distinguished from other prophets. (Deut. xxxiv. 10.) Even in the same chapter wherein it is said, he *could not see his face and live*, it is said that Jehovah spake unto him, face to face. (Exod. xxxiii. 11, 20.) He whom Jacob saw had at least the appearance of *a man*, who conversed and wrestled with him till day-break. Yet before they parted, he was convinced that he was more than man, even God; who on that, as on other occasions, assumed a visible and tangible form to commune with his servants, as a prelude of his future incarnation. The *face* which was seen on this occasion was human; though, belonging to one that was divine. Jacob said, *I have seen God face to face*. Thus, also, that which was beheld by Moses is called *the similitude of Jehovah*,

(Numb. xii. 8.) or a glorious divine appearance; of which, though we are unable to form an adequate idea, yet we may be certain that it came short of what he was afterwards told he *could not see and live*. Though, in comparison of other dark speeches and visions, it was seeing him face to face; yet, when compared with a *perfect* knowledge of the glory of God, it was but seeing what among creatures would be called the shadow, or at most *the back parts* of a great personage.

The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them, to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.—2 Sam xxiv. 1.

And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel.—1 Chron. xxi. 1.

THE English translators consider the pronoun *he* in the former of these passages, as relating not to Jehovah, but to satan, referring in the margin to the latter passage as a proof of it. But this seems to be a forced meaning: for not only is the name Jehovah placed as the immediate and only antecedent to the pronoun, but also a reason why he did it.

1. It is certain that God did not so move David to sin, as either to partake of it, or to become his tempter: for *he cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man*. It was satan that tempted David to sin, not Jehovah.

2. It is equally certain that the providence of God was concerned in this affair; and that

Israel having offended him, he determined in this way to punish them.

3. God is said to do that which is done upon the minds of men by the ordinary influence of second causes, which causes would not have been productive of such effects, but for their depravity. The hardness of clay, no less than the softness of wax, is ascribed to the sun; yet the sun's producing this effect, is entirely owing to the qualities of the object on which he shines. God hardened the heart of Pharoah by so ordering things by his providence, that certain considerations should present themselves to his mind when placed under certain circumstances; which (he being righteously given up of God) would be certain to provoke his pride and resentment, and to determine him to run all risks, for the sake of having his will. In other words, God led him into temptation; and there, in just judgment, left him to its influence. With respect to David, it is probable his mind was previously lifted up with his great successes in war. It is after the relation of these that the story is introduced, both in Samuel and the Chronicles. The Lord therefore led him into temptation, and righteously left him in it; the certain issue of which was, that which actually took place.

If it be observed that this is ascribing sin to God *indirectly*, though not directly: I answer, it is no otherwise ascribing it to God than as any man is willing to have it ascribed to him. The conduct of a good father may, through the disaffection of a son, cause him to go on worse and

worse. His threatenings may harden him, and his kindest entreaties and promises excite nothing but contempt. What then? Is this to the father's dishonour? Certainly not. It were strange, if God must cease from doing what is right, lest sinful men should be induced by it to become more sinful.

The best use for us to make of such a doctrine is, not curiously to pry into things too high for us: but when we pray, to say, *Our Father—lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil!*

Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.—Matt. vii. 7, 8.

Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.—Luke xiii. 24.

SOME have supposed a difference in the latter passage, between *seeking* and *striving*: as though it were not enough to seek, without striving, even to an agony. But this does not reconcile the two passages: for seeking in the first is connected with finding, whereas in the last it is not.

The distinction appears to lie in the time and nature of seeking. Seeking, in Matthew, refers to the application for mercy through Jesus Christ, in the present life: but in Luke it denotes that anxiety which the workers of iniquity will discover to be admitted into heaven at the last day. The *strait gate* in this latter passage does not mean an introduction to the kingdom of grace, but of glory; and *striving*, or agonizing to enter in at

it, does not describe an exercise of mind which is necessary to conversion, but to final salvation. The striving here exhorted to, is the life's work of a Christian, in order that he may enter into the kingdom of heaven at last. All this is manifest from the context, which determines it to refer to what shall take place at the great day *when the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and sinners shall begin to stand without, to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto them, I know you not whence you are, depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.*

There is therefore no contradiction whatever in these passages. Every one that seeketh mercy in the name of Jesus, while the door is open, succeeds: but he that seeketh it not till the door is shut, will not succeed. *Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me.*

Let another praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.—Prov. xxvii. 2.

I laboured more abundantly than they all. In nothing am I behind the very chiefest Apostles.—1 Cor. xv. 10. 2 Cor. xii. 11.

So near is the resemblance of good and evil, with respect to their outward expressions, that the one is very liable to be mistaken for the other. Vices pass for virtues, and virtues for vices. Thus indifference is taken for candour, bitterness for zeal, and carnal policy for prudence. The

difference in these things may frequently lie, not in the expression or action, but merely in the *motive*, which being beyond human cognizance, occasions their being so often confounded.

It is thus that a just and necessary vindication of ourselves, when we have been unjustly accused, is liable to be construed into self-applause. That which was condemned by Solomon, and that which was practised by Paul, were far from being the same thing ; yet they appear to be so with respect to the outward act or expression. A vain man speaks well of himself, and Paul speaks well of himself. Thus the branches intermingle. But trace them to their respective roots, and there you will find them distinct. The *motive* in the one case is the desire of applause ; in the other, justice to an injured character, and to the gospel which suffered in his reproaches.

The Apostle, in defending himself, was aware how near he approached to the *language* of a *fool*, that is, a man desirous of vain glory ; and how liable what he had written was to be attributed to that motive. It is on this account that he obviates the charge which he knew his adversaries would allege. *Yes*, says he, *I speak as a fool but ye have COMPELLED me*. This was owning that as to his *words*, they might, indeed, be considered as vain glorying, if the *occasion* were overlooked : but if that were justly considered, it would be found that they ought rather to be ashamed than he, for having reduced him to the disagreeable necessity of speaking in his own behalf.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven. Matt. v. 16.

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them; otherwise ye have no reward of your Father who is in heaven.—Matt. vi. 1.

THIS is another of those cases in which the difference lies in the *motive*. It is right to do that which men may see, and must see; but not *for the sake* of being seen by them.

There are, indeed, some duties, and such are prayer and the relief of the needy, in which a truly modest mind will avoid being seen: but in the general deportment of life no man can be hid, nor ought he desire it. Only let his end be pure, namely, *to glorify his Father who is in heaven*, and all will be right.

Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it.—Matt. ix. 30.

Jesus said unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them what great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.—Mark v. 19.

THE foregoing remarks may be of some use here. Our Saviour did not wish his miracles to be utterly unknown; for then God would not have been glorified, nor the end of establishing the truth of his Messiahship answered: but neither did he wish to make an ostentatious display of them. First: Because he had no desire of vain glory about him. Secondly: He did not wish to give

any unnecessary provocation to his enemies, which might have hindered him in the execution of his work. Thirdly; Where there was no danger from enemies, yet such was the eagerness of the people to see his miracles, that they flocked together from all parts of the country, thronging and hindering him in preaching the gospel. To the two first of these causes the injunction of secrecy, seems to be attributed in Matt. xii. 13—20; and to the last in Mark i. 4. which is the case in question, as related by Mark. We are there informed that, owing to the leper having *blazed abroad the matter, Jesus could no more openly enter into the city; but was without in desert places*, which was a serious injury to that work which his miracles were intended to subserve.

But in the country of the Gadarenes, the case was different. He was there in no danger of being hindered from his great work by the thronging of the people: on the contrary, they were afraid, and *prayed him to depart out of their coasts*; and he did depart. In such circumstances let not the story of the destruction of the swine be the only one in circulation: let the deliverance of the poor demoniac also be told; and let him be the person who should tell it. Let him leave these people who wanted to get rid of the Saviour, and go home to his friends, and tell how great things the Lord had done for him, and had had compassion upon him. Luke tells us that he published it throughout the whole city. Chap. viii. 39.

This is Elias, who was to come.—Matt. xi. 14.

Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, no.—John i. 21.

JOHN the Baptist was not literally the person of Elias; and it was proper for him to say he was not, in order to correct the gross notions of the Jews on that subject. Had he answered in the affirmative, and had they believed him, he would have confirmed them in a gross falsehood.

Yet John the Baptist was that Elias of whom the prophet Malachi spake; (Chap. iv. 5.) that is, as Luke expresses it, he came *in the spirit and power of Elias*; (Chap. i. 17.) and so it was, as it were, another Elias.

This is the heir, come let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.—Matt. xxi. 38.

Which none of the princes of this world knew; for had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.—1 Cor. ii. 8.

IT is difficult to decide whether the Jewish rulers acted directly against the light of their consciences in crucifying the Lord of glory; or whether they did it ignorantly and in unbelief, as Saul persecuted the church. Several passages seem to favour the first of these hypothesis. They who took counsel to put Lazarus to death, because that through him many believed in Jesus; (John xii. 10, 11.) and they who replied to Judas, *What is that to us? see thou to it*; (Matt. xxvii. 4.) do not seem to have acted ignorantly. The

counsel of Caiaphas, to which the rest agreed, did not proceed upon the ground of Christ's being an impostor, but merely that of *expediency*. John xi. 50. That is, *policy* required that he should be made a sacrifice; for the Jewish church was in danger. With this agrees the first of the above passages; *This is the heir, come, let us kill him, and the inheritance shall be ours*. With this also agrees the intimation, that some of them had committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, which should never be forgiven, by ascribing his casting out devils to Beelzebub, the prince of devils, when in their consciences they knew better. Matt. xii. 24—32. Finally: perhaps with this also agrees such language as the following:—*If I had not come and spoken to them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloke for their sin.—He that hateth me, hateth my Father also.—If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now they have both seen and hated both me and my Father*.

On the other hand there are several passages which seem to maintain the contrary. Among these, some have reckoned the last of the above passages, namely, 1 Cor. ii. 8. *Had they known*, &c. But I apprehend the term *known*, in this passage, is put for that *spiritual* discernment which is peculiar to true Christians. The knowledge which the princes, or great ones of this world had not, is said to be revealed to believers by the Holy Spirit, which proves it to be spiritual. Had the murderers of our Lord been possessed of this,

they would not, they could not have crucified him. But whatever light they had in their consciences, they were blind to the real glory of his character, and such is every unregenerate sinner.

But though this passage be easily reconciled with the foregoing hypothesis, yet there are others more difficult; particularly the words of Peter, in Acts iii. 17, and of Paul, in Acts xiii. 27. *And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.—For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of their prophets, which are read every Sabbath-day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him.*

I know of no way to reconcile these things but by supposing, what indeed is very probable, that there were some of each description; and that the former passages refer to the one, and the latter to the other.

He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end.—Luke i. 33.

Then cometh the end when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule, and all authority, and power.—1 Cor. xv. 24.

WHEN the kingdom of Christ is said to have *no end*, it may mean, that it shall never be overturned or succeeded by any rival power, as all the kingdoms of this world have been, or shall be. Such is the interpretation given of the phrase in Dan. vii. 14. *His dominion is an everlasting dominion,*

which SHALL NOT PASS AWAY, and his kingdom, that which SHALL NOT BE DESTROYED.

But this need not be alleged in order to account for the phraseology, which will be found to be literally true. The end of which Paul speaks, does not mean the end of Christ's kingdom; but of the world and the things thereof. *The delivering up of the kingdom to the Father*, will not put an end to it, but eternally establish it in a new and more glorious form. Christ shall not cease to reign, though the mode of his administration be different. As a divine person, he will always be one with the Father; and though his mediatorial kingdom shall cease, yet the effects of it will remain for ever. There will never be a period in duration, in which the Redeemer of sinners will be thrown into the shade, or become of less account than he now is, or in which honour, and glory, and blessing, will cease to be ascribed to him, by the whole creation.

Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see.—
Luke x. 23.

Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.
John xx. 29.

THE first of these passages pronounces a blessing upon those who saw the fulfilment of what others have believed; the last upon those who should believe the gospel upon the ground of their testimony, without having witnessed the facts with their own eyes. There is no contradiction in these blessings, for there is a wide difference between *requiring sight as the ground of faith*, which Thomas did;

and *obtaining it as a completion of faith*, which those who saw the coming and kingdom of the Messiah did. The one was a species of unbelief, the other was faith terminating in vision.

If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true.—John v. 31.

Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true.—John viii. 14.

OUR Lord, in the first of these passages, expresses what was to be admitted as truth *in the account of men*; in the last, what his testimony was *in itself*. Admitting their laws or rules of evidence, his testimony should not have been credible; and therefore in the verses following he appeals to that of John the Baptist, and the works which he had wrought in his Father's name, which amounted to a testimony from the Father. But though he in a manner gave up his own testimony, yielding himself to be tried even by their forms of evidence, yet would he not so far concede as to dishonour his character. He was in fact, whatever they might judge of him, the Amen, the faithful, and the true witness; and as such he taught many things, pre-facing what he delivered with that peculiar and expressive phrase—*Verily, verily, I say unto you!*

Who through faith—obtained promises.—Heb. xi. 33.

And these all—received not the promise.—Heb. xi. 39.

THE *promises* which were obtained by faith, refer to those which were fulfilled during the Old-testament dispensation. It was promised to Abraham that he should have a son; to Israel,

that they should possess the land of Canaan for an inheritance; to David, that they should return from the Babylonish captivity, &c. and by faith each of them in due time obtained the promise.

But there was *one promise* which was of greater importance than all the rest; namely, the coming of the Messiah. In the faith of this the fathers lived and died; but they saw not its accomplishment. To see this was reserved for another generation. Hence the words of our Saviour to his disciples:—*Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.*

It is thus that God has wisely balanced the advantages of different ages. The fathers obtained much, but not all. In respect of the blessings of Messiah's kingdom, they sowed, and we reap; they laboured, and we enter into their labours. Thus it is ordered that *they without us should not be made perfect*. The fulfilments of our times must come in to answer the faith, and complete the hopes of those who have gone before us.

Jesus saith unto Mary, Touch me not: for I am not yet ascended to my Father.—John xx. 17.

Then saith he to Thomas, 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.—John xx. 27.

It is manifest from these and other passages, that the reason why Mary was forbidden to touch

her risen Saviour, was not because the thing itself was *impossible*. Indeed, if it had been so, the prohibition had been unnecessary; for we need not be forbidden to do that which cannot be done. There might, however, be an *impropriety* in her using the same freedoms with him in his immortal state, as she had been wont to do in his mortal state. It might be proper to touch him at his own invitation, and so to answer an important end, (See Luke xxiv. 39.) and yet improper to do so without it. By comparing the passage with Matt. xxviii. 9, 10. it appears that Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary who was with her, *did touch him*; for they are there said to have *held him by the feet and worshipped him*. There is reason to think, therefore, that the words, *Touch me not*, in John, were used merely to induce her to *desist* from what she was doing; and that on account of his having more important employment for her—*Go, tell my brethren!* This agrees with the reason given in John—*Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father, &c.* This was as much as if he had said, ‘You need not be so unwilling to let go my feet, as though you should see me no more: I am not yet ascended, nor shall I ascend at present. Yet do not imagine that I am raised to a mere mortal life, or am going to set up a temporal kingdom in this world. . . . No. . . . *I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and unto my God, and your God.*’

The Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law.—Rom. ii. 14.

Among whom we all had our conversation in times past . . . and were by nature the children of wrath even as others.—Eph. ii. 3.

THE term *nature* in these two passages, is of very different signification. In the first it stands opposed to the written law of God, or the light of revelation. In the latter it is opposed to custom, education, or any thing merely accidental. In the one case, it is expressive of their want of external means; in the other, of the inward disposition of their minds. The phrase *by nature* in the former, refers to the *rule* of action; but in the latter, to the *cause* of it. All arguments, therefore, against the total depravity of human nature, or in favour of a natural disposition to virtue, drawn from the first of these passages, are entirely unfounded.

One man esteemeth one day above another : another esteemeth every day alike : Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.—Rom. xiv. 5.

Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.—Gal. iv. 10, 11.

THE key to this apparent difficulty will be found in attending to the persons addressed. The Roman and Galatian churches were each composed of both Jews and Gentiles; but they are not addressed promiscuously; neither are they the same description of people who are

addressed in both passages. Those who *regarded days* among the Romans were the *converted Jews*, who having from their youth observed them as divine appointments, were with difficulty brought to lay them aside. And as their attachment had its origin in a tender regard to divine authority, they were considered as *keeping the day unto the Lord*; and great tenderness was enjoined upon the Gentile converts towards them in that matter.

Those, on the other hand, who among the Galatians *observed days, and months, and times*, were *converted Gentiles*, as is manifest from the context, which describes them as having, in their unconverted state, *done service to them which by nature were no gods.* (ver. 8.) These being perverted by certain judaizing teachers, were, contrary to the apostolic decision, (Acts xv.) circumcised, and subjected themselves to the yoke of Jewish ceremonies. Nor was this all: they were brought to consider these things as necessary to justification and salvation, which was subversive of the doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ. Acts xv. 1. Gal. v. 4.

Considering these differences, the different language of the Apostle is perfectly in character. Circumcision, and conformity to the laws of Moses, *in Jewish converts*, was held to be lawful. Even the Apostle of the Gentiles himself, 'to the Jews became a Jew,' frequently, if not constantly, conforming to the Jewish laws; and writing to others he expresses himself on this wise: *Is any man called, being circumcised? Let him not become*

uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? Let him not become circumcised. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing; but keeping of the commandments of God. But for Gentiles who had no such things to be alleged in their favour, to go off from the liberty granted to them, (Acts xv.) and entangle themselves under a yoke of bondage; and not only so, but to make it a term of justification, was sufficient to excite a fear lest the labour which he had bestowed upon them was in vain.

And the men which journeyed with him, stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.—Acts ix. 7.

And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. Acts xxii. 9.

THE statement in these two passages contains a variety; but no contrariety. The first observing that the men, *heard a voice*; the last, that they *heard not the voice of him that spake to Saul*. They heard a sound which terrified them; but did not understand the meaning, which Saul did. The one says that they *saw the light*; the other that they *saw no man*. In all this there is no inconsistency.

The reason why they are said to have *seen no man*, is not to distinguish them from Saul, for neither did he see the personage who spake to him: but to account for their terror, or their being struck speechless. It must have been overwhelming to

their minds to have heard a voice, and yet to see no person near from whom it should proceed.

The difference upon the whole, however, between the case of these men and Saul was great, and strongly marks the difference between mere convictions and true conversion. The voice of the Lord was heard by both: but to the one it was a mere general and indistinct sound; to the other it was a word that entered into his soul. *They saw the light, and were afraid*; but that was all: he saw, and heard, and understood, and felt, and inquired, *Who art thou, Lord? Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* Many hear the word in a general way, and see enough to make them tremble; but then it is truly effectual when it is addressed to us, as the voice of one that speaks to us from heaven; when it disarms us of our enmity to Christ, excites in us the desire of knowing him, and makes us willing, without hesitation or delay, to obey his commandments.

God who is faithful, will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.—1 Cor. x. 13.

We were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.—2 Cor. i. 8.

THE *ability* in the first of these passages, and the *strength* in the last, are far from being the same. The former is expressive of that divine support which the Lord has promised to give to his servants under all their trials: the latter, of the power which we possess naturally as creatures. We may be tried beyond this, as all the martyrs

have been, and yet not beyond the other. The outward man may perish, while the inward man is renewed day by day.

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.—Gal. vi. 2.

Every man shall bear his own burden.—Gal. vi. 5.

THE first is an exhortation to Christian sympathy under present afflictions : the last is a declaration of the rule of future judgment, according to character. We may alleviate each other's sorrows in this life ; but cannot stand in each other's place at the last day.

The Lord is at hand.—Phil. iv. 5.

Be not soon shaken in mind, nor troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter, as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.—2 Thes. ii. 2.

EVERY thing with respect to degrees is what it is by comparison. Taking into consideration the whole of time, the coming of Christ *was at hand*. There is reason to believe from this, and many other passages of the New Testament, that the sacred writers considered themselves as having passed the meridian of time, and entered into the afternoon of the world, as we may say. Such appears to be the import of the following, among other passages. *God hath in these LAST DAYS spoken to us by his Son.*—*Once IN THE END OF THE WORLD hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*—*Upon whom THE ENDS OF*

THE WORLD *are come*.—*The coming of the Lord draweth nigh*.—*Surely I come quickly*.

But taking into consideration only a single generation, the day of Christ *was not at hand*. The Thessalonians, though a very amiable people, were by some means mistaken on this subject, so as to expect that the end of the world would take place in their life-time, or within a very few years. To correct this error, which might have been productive of very serious evils, was a principal design of the Second Epistle to that people.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.—1 John i. 8.

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.—1 John iii. 9.

It appears that the word *sin*, in these passages, is of different significations. In the first it is to be taken properly, for any transgression of the law of God. If any man say, in this sense, he has no sin, he only proves himself to be deceived, and that he has yet to learn what is true religion.

But in the last, it seems, from the context, that the term is intended to denote the sin of *apostasy*. If we were to substitute the term apostasy for sin, from the 6th to the 10th verse, the meaning would be clear. 'Whoso abideth in him, *apostatizeth* not: whosoever *apostatizeth* hath not seen him, neither known him.—He that is guilty of *apostasy* is of the devil; for the devil hath been an *apostate*

from the beginning.—Whosoever is born of God doth not *apostatize*; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot *apostatize*, because he is born of God.'

This sense of the latter passage perfectly agrees with what is said of the *sin unto death* (v. 16—18.) *There is a sin unto death We know that whosoever is born of God, sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.* It also agrees with Chap. ii. 19. *They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would, no doubt, have continued with us. But they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.* Altogether, it affords what we might presume to call, an incontestible proof of the certain perseverance of true believers.

All that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution.—2 Tim. iii. 12.

When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.—Prov. xvi. 7.

SOME consideration is required for the difference of *times*. It was the genius of the Old-testament, more than of the New, to connect obedience to God with temporal prosperity; and therefore, that might be said under the one which would be less applicable under the other.

It is allowed, however, that this is not sufficient to solve the difficulty. There has always been the same radical enmity in general between the

seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. He that was born after the flesh, *then* persecuted him that was born after the Spirit; and so it is *now*. And by how much more spiritual the church at any time has been, by so much higher has the enmity arisen against them. It is also true under the gospel, as well as under the law, that where a man perseveres in righteousness and godliness, though he may have many enemies, yet their enmity shall frequently be prevented from hurting him, and even turned away from him into other channels. The truth seems to be, that neither of the above passages is to be taken *universally*. The peace possessed by those who please God does not extend so far as to exempt them from having enemies; and though all godly men must in some form or other be persecuted, yet none are persecuted *at all times*. God has always given his people some seasons of rest. The former of these passages may, therefore, refer to the native enmity which true godliness is certain to excite, and the latter to the divine control over it. The rod of the wicked must be expected to fall, but not to *rest* upon the lot of the righteous. Man's wrath shall be let loose in a degree; but farther than what is necessary for the praise of God, it shall not go. It shall be suffered to shoot forth in measure; but God will debate with it. *He stayeth his rough wind in the day of his east wind.*

REPLY TO A QUERY ON READING THE SCRIPTURES.

Mr. Editor,

I DO not wish the following remarks to supersede any other answer which may enter more fully into the subject. All I have to offer, will be a few hints from my own experience.

In the first place, I have found it good to appoint *set times* for reading the scriptures; and none have been so profitable as part of the season appropriated to private devotion, on rising in the morning. The mind at this time is re-invigorated, and unencumbered. To read a part of the scriptures, previous to prayer, I have found to be very useful. It tends to collect the thoughts, to spiritualize the affections, and to furnish us with sentiments wherewith to plead at a throne of grace. And as reading assists prayer, so prayer assists reading. At these seasons we shall be less in danger of falling into idle speculations, and of perverting scripture in support of hypotheses. A spiritual frame of mind, as Mr. Pearce somewhere observes, is as a good light in viewing a painting; it will not a little facilitate the understanding of the scriptures. I do not mean to depreciate the labours of those who have commented on the sacred writings: but we may read expositors, and consult critics, while the *spirit and life* of the word utterly escape us. A tender, humble, holy frame is, perhaps, of more importance to our entering into the mind of the Holy Spirit, than all

other means united. It is thus, that by *an unction from the Holy One we know all things*.

In reading by myself, I have also felt the advantage of being able to pause, and think, as well as pray; and to inquire how far the subject is any way applicable to my case, and conduct in life.

In the course of a morning's exercise, it may be supposed that some things will appear hard to be understood; and I may feel myself, after all my application, unable to resolve them. Here, then, let me avail myself of commentators and expositors. If I read them *instead* of reading the scriptures, I may indeed derive some knowledge; but my mind will not be stored with the best riches; nor will the word dwell richly in me in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. If, on the other hand, I read the scriptures, and exercise my own mind on their meaning, only using the helps with which I am furnished, when I particularly need them, such knowledge will avail me more than any other: for having felt and laboured at the difficulty myself, what I obtain from others towards the solution of it, becomes more interesting and abiding, than if I had read it without any such previous efforts. And as to my own thoughts, though they may not be superior, nor equal to those of others, in themselves considered; yet, if they be just, their having been the result of pleasing toil, renders them of superior value to me. A small portion obtained by our own labour, is sweeter than a large inheritance bequeathed by

our predecessors. Knowledge thus obtained, will not only be always accumulating, but of special use in times of trial ; not like the cumbrous armour which does not fit us, but like the sling and the stone, which, though less brilliant, will be more efficacious.

I may add, it were well for those who can find leisure, to *commit to writing*, the most interesting thoughts which occur at these seasons. It is thus that they will be fixed in the memory ; and the revision of them may serve to rekindle some of the best sensations in our life.

THOUGHTS ON SINGING.

I HAVE long considered the manner in which our singing is conducted, as equally contrary to scripture and reason. The intent of singing is, by a musical pronounciation of affecting truth, to render it still more affecting. To accomplish this end, the music ought, at all events, to be adapted to the sentiments. As in common speaking there is a sound, or modulation of the voice, adapted to convey every sentiment or passion of which the human soul is at any time possessed ; so, I conceive it is, in a considerable degree, with regard to singing ; there are certain airs, or tones, which are naturally expressive of joy, sorrow, pity, indignation, &c. and the grand art of psalmody seems to consist in applying these to the sentiments required to be sung. When David had composed

a divine song, it was delivered to "the chief musician," who set it to sacred music; and the Levites, and the people would probably learn both the song and the tune, and sing them on the days appointed for public worship.

Our method of singing is the reverse of this. Some person who has a taste for music composes a *tune*, a *mere* tune, without any sentiments to be expressed. He divides and subdivides his empty sounds, into lines, and bars, &c. The poet, instead of going before the musician, comes after him; and a hymn is conformed to the tune, instead of a tune to the hymn. The tune being composed to four, six, or eight lines, is applied to any song that is written in these respective measures, and repeated over, without any regard to the meaning, as many times as there are stanzas to be sung!

I do not mean to object to the division of music into two parts, or breaks, so as to afford proper places for pausing; but this division ought not to be uniform, but governed entirely by the matter to be sung. There ought, I conceive, to be no pauses in music, any more than in speaking, but at the conclusion of a sentence, or of some lesser break in the division of it: and the length of the pause ought to be governed by the meaning, in some proportion as it is in reading. Those notes also which belong to words of but little meaning, the mere particles of speech, should be short; and those which belong to words of full meaning, should be long and full of sound. Nothing can

be more unnatural than for a congregation to dwell in a long-swelling sound upon such words as *that, it, and, from, to, &c.* while they skip over words expressing the very burden of the song, as if they were of no account : yet this will frequently and almost constantly be the case, while we make hymns to tunes, instead of tunes to hymns.

Our *anthems* appear to me, to approach the nearest to the scriptural way of singing : only they possess too much levity for worship, and abound with a number of unnecessary, because unmeaning, repeats.

I have long wished to see introduced into the churches, (and I almost believe it will be at some future time,) A SELECTION OF DIVINE HYMNS, OR SONGS, taking place of all human compositions. By divine hymns, or songs, I mean the pure word of God, translated without any respect to rhyme or number, after the manner of Lowth's Isaiah, and set to plain, serious, and solemn music, adapted to the sentiments.

It has been observed, by some of the ablest critics, that the spirit of David's psalms, (and the same would hold true of the other poetic parts of scripture,) can never be preserved in a translation of them into modern verse, but in a translation like that in our common Bibles, or that of Lowth's Isaiah, it is generally allowed, I believe, that the spirit of them is well preserved. Why then do we not set them as they are, to sacred music? It is of a thousand times more importance to preserve the spirit of a psalm, or scripture song, than to

have it in numbers, even supposing a uniformity in numbers were of advantage.

What is the reason that **HANDEL'S MESSIAH** has had so great an effect? It is in part owing to the scriptures appearing in their native majesty, without being tortured into rhyme and number; and set to music adapted to the sentiments. I do not mean to say that Handel's music is in general adapted to divine worship: it was not designed for it; but rather for a company of musicians, who should display their skill. But the same words might be set to plain music, without any of those trappings which recommend it to the attention of a merely musical audience. Such a sweetness and majesty is there in the poetic language of scripture, that if there were nothing offensive in the music it must needs recommend itself to a serious mind. Without disparaging the labours of any one, there is as great a disproportion between our best compositions and those of the scriptures, as between the speeches of Job and his friends, and the voice of the Almighty.

I am persuaded there are but few, if any divine subjects, upon which a hymn, or song, might not be collected from the poetic parts of scripture. In many instances the whole song might be furnished from a single psalm or chapter: and in others it might be collected from different passages, associated together and properly arranged.

EXAMPLES.

I.

A SONG OF PRAISE TO THE REDEEMER.

Taken from Rev. v.

[*Redeemed sinners signified by the living creatures and the elders.*]

THOU *art worthy* to take the book,
And to open the seals thereof:
For *thou wast slain*,
And hast *redeemed* us to God by thy *blood*,
Out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;
And hast made us unto our God, *kings* and *priests* :
And we shall *reign* on the earth.

[*Thousands of thousands of Angels join the Song with a loud voice.*]

Worthy is the *Lamb* that *wast slain*,
To receive power, and riches, and wisdom,
And strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing !

[*The whole intelligent creation in full chorus.*]

Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power,
Be unto *him* that sitteth upon the *throne*,
And to the *Lamb for ever and ever !*

[*Redeemed sinners close the song in humblest prostration.*]

AMEN.

The *first* should be sung, I think, with a soft tenor only, rather increasing in vigour and rapidity in the fifth and following lines. The *second*, in bold, loud, and animated notes; but not quick. There ought to be a full swell of sound to each of the seven ascriptions. The *third*, in full chorus; yet not so loud as the second, but more pathetic. The *last*, in which they who began conclude the song, though it be only one word, yet the notes to it should express a heart full of humility and gratitude.

II.

ON RECOVERY FROM SICKNESS.

Taken from Hezekiah's Song. Isa. xxxviii. 10—20.

I said in the cutting off of my days,
I shall go to the gates of the grave ;
I am deprived of the residue of my years.
I said, I shall not see the Lord,
The Lord, in the land of the living :
I shall behold man no more,
With the inhabitants of the world !

I reckoned till morning, as a lion
So will he break all my bones :
From day to night wilt thou make an end of me !
Like a crane or a swallow, so did I twitter :
I did mourn as a dove : *
Mine eyes fail with looking upward :
Oh Lord ! I am oppressed, undertake for me !
What shall I say ? He hath promised, and he hath performed :
I shall go softly all my years,
Remembering the bitterness of my soul !

Oh Lord ! By these things men live,
And in all these is the life of my spirit :
So wilt thou recover me, and make me to live.
Behold, for peace, I had great bitterness,
But thou hast in love to my soul
Delivered it from the pit of corruption :
For thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.

The grave cannot praise thee :
They that do down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.
The living, the living, he shall praise thee,
As I do this day.
The father to the children shall make known thy truth.

* I recollect, some years ago, when in a very dejected state of mind, hearing some turtle-doves cooling to one another. Their mourning notes made a deep impression upon my heart, their tones being, as I suppose, in unison with its feelings. Had I so much skill in music as to compose a tune to this song, I would engraft the very moan of the turtle to those words, *I did mourn as a dove.*

The Lord was present to save me.
Therefore will we utter our songs
All the days of our life, in the house of the Lord.

I will conclude with two or three remarks:—
(1.) It is impossible, whatever skill a person may have in music, to compose a tune properly, without entering into the *spirit* of the song.—(2.) It is manifest, from these examples of sacred song, that the original singing was much of it *responsive*: and that justice cannot otherwise be done to it.—
(3.) The criterion of a good tune is, not its pleasing a scientific ear, but its being quickly caught by a congregation. It is, I think, by singing, as it is by preaching: a fine judge of composition will admire a sermon, which yet makes no manner of impression upon the public mind, and therefore cannot be a good one. That is the best sermon which is adapted to produce the best effects; and the same may be said of a tune. If it correspond with the feelings of a pious heart, and aid him in realizing the sentiments, it will be quickly learnt, and sung with avidity. Where this effect is not produced, were I a composer, I would throw aside my performance and try again.

THE CONNEXIONS IN WHICH THE DOCTRINE OF ELECTION
IS INTRODUCED IN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

IT is generally allowed, that to understand the scriptures it is necessary to enter into the *connexion* of what we read: and let it be considered whether it be not equally necessary to the understanding

of any particular doctrine, that we enter into the connexions in which it is introduced in the scriptures. We have seen, in a former essay, that divine truths are not taught us in a systematical form, and also the wisdom of God in scattering them throughout his word in a variety of practical relations. What these relations are, it becomes us to ascertain: otherwise we may admit the leading truths of revelation as articles of belief, and yet, for want of a close attention to these, may possess but very little scripture-knowledge; and the doctrine which we think we hold may be of very little use to us. "When I was a youth, (said a minister lately in conversation,) I *admitted* many doctrines, but did not *feel* their importance and practical efficacy."

It would be a good work for a serious, thinking mind, carefully to inquire into the various connexions in which acknowledged truths are introduced in the scriptures, and the practical purposes to which they are there actually applied. I shall take the liberty of offering a brief specimen, with respect to the doctrine of *election*. The truth of the doctrine I may in this place take for granted, as a matter clearly revealed in the word of God, observing only a few of its principal connexions.

First: It is introduced *to declare the source of salvation to be mere grace, or undeserved favour, and to cut off all hopes of acceptance with God by works of any kind.*—In this connexion we find it in Rom. xi. 5, 6. *Even so then, at this present*

time also, there is a remnant according to the election of grace: and if by grace, then is it no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace; but if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work. All compromise is here for ever excluded, and the cause of salvation decidedly and fully ascribed to electing grace. With this end the doctrine requires to be preached, to saints and sinners. To the first, that they may be at no loss to what they shall ascribe their conversion and salvation; but may know, and own with the Apostle, that it is by the grace of God they are what they are. To the last, that they may be warned against relying upon their own righteousness, and taught that the only hope of life which remains for them, is in repairing, as lost and perishing sinners, to the Saviour, casting themselves at the feet of sovereign mercy.

Secondly: It is introduced *in order to account for the unbelief of the greater part of the Jewish nation, without excusing them in it.*—This appears to be its connexion in the ninth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. To show that the wide-spreading unbelief of that people was not a matter of surprise, and did not affect the veracity of God in his promises, the Apostle distinguishes between those who *were* Israel, and those who were merely of Israel; (ver. 6.) evincing, that from the beginning God had drawn a line between Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau; the former being merely *children of the flesh*, and the latter *children of the promise*, to whom God had an eye in all he had said, and

who were *counted for the seed*. The same argument is pursued and confirmed from the declaration of God to Moses: *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and compassion on whom I will have compassion*; intimating, not only that a sinner had no natural claim of mercy on God, but, that even among the Israelites, who were a people in covenant with him, he ever preserved the right of sovereignty in the forgiveness of sin, and every dispensation of saving grace. The result is, that in God's leaving great numbers of Abraham's posterity to perish in unbelief, and calling a people for himself, partly of Jews and partly of Gentiles, (ver. 24. 27.) he proceeded on the same principle as that on which he had proceeded from the beginning.

Paul saw, indeed, that the corrupt mind of man would allege, that if things were so, the agency and accountableness of man were destroyed; and therefore introduces the objection, ver. 19. *Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault; for who hath resisted his will?* This objection affords irrefragable proof, that the doctrine maintained by the Apostle was that of the absolute sovereignty of God, in having mercy on whom he would, and giving up whom he would to hardness of heart: for against no other doctrine could such an objection have been made with any appearance of plausibility. This objection is the same for substance as has been made ever since, and that by two sorts of people; namely, those who disown the doctrine, as being destructive of human agency;

and those who contend for the doctrine for that very purpose. The language of those who disown the doctrine is this: 'If it be so, that the state of every one is determined by the will of God, why are men blamed for not believing in Christ? God has his will, and what would he have more?' The language of those who contend for the doctrine, with the intent of destroying human agency, is, 'It is true that the state of every man is determined by the will of God; but then it is not right that he should find fault with sinners for their unbelief; for his will is not resisted.' It is easy to see that both these positions are at variance with the gospel. With respect to the first, if we follow the example of the Apostle, we shall think it enough to prove that God *actually exercises* an absolute sovereignty in saving whom he will, and yet *finds fault* with unbelievers as much as if no such sovereignty were exercised; leaving him to justify his own conduct, and them who reply against him to answer it at his tribunal. With respect to the second, if we keep to the principle laid down by the Apostle, we shall not deny the truth because they abuse it; but avow it, and at the same time *find fault* with unbelievers, ascribing their failure, as he did in the same chapter, to their *seeking righteousness as it were by the works of the law, stumbling at the stumbling-stone*. If on this account we be accused of "self-contradiction," "saying and unsaying," "preaching half grace and half works," "beginning with truth and ending with falsehood," &c. &c. we have this

comfort; that the same things might have been objected with equal justice to the writings of the Apostle, as appears from the above remarks, and were in substance actually objected to them.

Thirdly: It is introduced *to show the certain success of Christ's undertaking, as it were in defiance of unbelievers, who set at nought his gracious invitations.* When Esther seemed to hesitate on going in unto the king in behalf of her people, she was answered by Mordecai's order, thus: *If thou holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed!* Such, in effect, is the language of the doctrine of election to sinners of mankind, and that on various occasions. It is not designed to supersede universal invitations; but to provide against those invitations being universally unsuccessful. Thus, our Lord having upbraided Chorazin and Bethsaida for their impenitence under his ministry, it is immediately added by the Evangelist, *AT THAT TIME Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight.* This was like saying, 'Though Chorazin and Bethsaida have not repented, yet shall I not be wanting of subjects; deliverance shall arise from another place!'—Again: When addressing the unbelieving Pharisees, he applied those words in the cxviiith Psalm to them, *The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become*

the head of the corner, his words convey the same idea :—‘ Ye builders may set me at nought ; but God will exalt me in defiance of you. God will have a temple, and I shall be the foundation of it, though you should persist in your unbelief, and perish !’ (Matt. xxi. 42.) Again : Those very remarkable words in John vi. 37. *All that the Father giveth me, shall come to me*, &c. are introduced in the same manner. Addressing himself to those Jews who followed him because they had eaten of the loaves, and were filled, he saith, *I am the bread of life : he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. But I said unto you, that ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the Father giveth me, shall come to me ; and him that cometh to me I will in nowise cast out.* As if he should say, ‘ You have no regard to me in my true character, but merely for yourselves, and for the meat that perisheth : but I shall not lose my reward, however you may stand affected towards me.’

ON THE PROPER AND IMPROPER USE OF TERMS.

NOTWITHSTANDING the number of words found in every language, they are far from being equal to the number of ideas found in the human mind. Hence it is that one and the same term has a variety of meanings ; and hence arises the distinction between the proper, and improper, or figurative use of terms. The word אבִּיב *abib*, e. g. the first in the Hebrew lexicon, signifies, First,

verdure, or *greenness*. Job. viii. 12. Secondly, an ear of corn on its first appearance, being then of a *green* colour. Lev. ii. 14. Thirdly, a month in the Jewish year, falling somewhere about March or April, when corn in that country began to *ear*.— Here we see the progress of language, and the causes of different ideas being affixed to the same term. When a name is wanted to express an idea, men do not think of making a new one; but call it by something already known, to which it bears a *resemblance*: and as this resemblance is frequently confined to one leading property, and sometimes to one that is not so, hence it comes to pass that the more objects a term is applied to, the farther it commonly advances from the original idea. In mentioning the month Abib, e. g. a Jew would think nothing of *greenness* or *verdure*, which is its true and primary meaning; but merely of the time of his forefathers coming out of Egypt, and of the institution of the passover. Yet in arguments from the meaning of scripture terms, it becomes of importance to ascertain the true primitive, or proper sense, and to measure all secondary and figurative applications by it as a standard. It appears to me, that many important errors have been introduced and defended, for want of attending to this rule, which is dictated by common sense. Instead of defining a term according to its primary or proper meaning, and resting nothing upon its secondary or figurative applications, any farther than they accord with it, the reverse has been the practice. The proper

meaning has been made to give way to the figurative, rather than the figurative to the proper.

EXAMPLES.

First : The *Universalist*, finding the terms used to express the duration of future punishment frequently applied to things which *have an end*, endeavours from thence to set aside the evidence of its éternity. That is, he grounds his argument on the secondary and figurative application of terms, to the setting aside of that which is primary or proper. Thus *αιων*, though its proper meaning is *always being*, is made to mean no more than *age* or *ages*; and *αιωνιος*, though it literally signifies *everlasting* or *endless*, yet is said to mean no more than *age-lasting*. Thus, instead of measuring the secondary sense of words by the primary, the primary is measured and excluded by the secondary; which goes to exclude all just reasoning, and to introduce everlasting wrangling. It were just as reasonable to contend that the English word *turnpike* signifies a road made by act of parliament, though it is so called merely in a way of contraction, and because such roads have toll-gates, and such gates a *turnpike* for the accommodation of foot passengers.

Secondly : *The adversaries of the doctrine of the atonement* have taken the same method. "By a *sacrifice*," says Dr. Taylor, "is meant a symbolical address to God, intended to express before him the devotions, affections, &c. by significant emblematical actions; and consequently, whatever is expressive of a pious and virtuous disposition

may be rightly included in the idea of a sacrifice; as prayers, thanksgivings, expences, labours, &c. &c. It is easy to see that the *primary* notion of a sacrifice is here explained away, or lost in the crowd of secondary meanings; by which any thing may be proved, or disproved, as the writer pleases.

Thirdly: Let it be dispassionately and impartially considered, whether the principal objections brought against the ordinance of *baptism* being administered exclusively by immersion, do not originate in the same cause. The word βαπτίζω, it is said, will not *always* agree with the idea of immersion. It is applied to the *effusion* of the Holy Spirit, and to some other things wherein immersion is inadmissible. Be it so: still it amounts to no more than this,—That the term *baptizo*, like almost every other term, has its secondary and figurative senses. Its *proper* and *primary* meaning is allowed by the most learned pædobaptists in all ages, to be that which the anti-pædobaptists contend for; and this is the only meaning which ought to be called in to settle a dispute. By the contrary method, it were easy to prove that the English word immersion does not mean dipping or plunging: for if a person be very wet by rain, it is common to say he is immersed, merely because he is as wet *as if he had been* immersed.

To generalize the meaning of a term, in order to include its secondary or figurative senses, is the way to lose its true and proper sense; and if

applied universally, might go to undermine all the great doctrines of Christianity.

QUERIES ON SOLOMON'S SONG.

Mr. Editor,

I MUST acknowledge, that it seems to me that the Review of *Williams on Solomon's Song*, which appeared in your last number, was calculated, whatever might be the design, to undermine the divine authority of that book; and by consequence, of revelation in general. I must add, I wish that some other pieces, particularly that *on the Time of the Creation*, had had less of a sceptical tendency.

The Reviewer puts the following query: "Had Solomon, in writing this poem, any spiritual intentions in reference to the Messiah; or was it *accommodated* by some pious teachers in the Jewish church, to illustrate the sublime connexion between the Son of God and his church, as the domestic relation of Sarah and Hagar, Isaac and Ishmael, do that of the two covenants?" p. 392.

In answering this query, I shall put a few others to him, and to the reader.

First: If there be no spiritual intention in this poem, wherein consists its excellence as *the Song of Songs*; and has it any right to a place in the oracles of God?

Secondly: If it have no right there, by what evidence, except what is merely internal, can it be

proved that several other books have any right there; those especially to which no express reference is made in the New Testament?

Thirdly: If it have no right there, it had none in the time of our Saviour and his apostles. That it *was* there at that time, is, I believe, denied by none: but if the Old-testament scriptures then contained a book which had nothing spiritual or divine in it, How came they to appeal to them as being *ALL given by inspiration of God, and profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, &c.* Why, especially, did they whose work it was to finish the canon of scripture, leave in it a book uninspired of God, and of no spiritual use?

Fourthly: What reason can be given for questioning the divine authority of Solomon's Song, which does not apply with equal force to the forty fifth Psalm, which in the New-testament is expressly applied to the Son of God?

Fifthly: Is not the insinuation concerning *pious teachers*, who are supposed to have invented the spiritual meaning of this Song, designed to detract from their *wisdom*; and while it detracts from theirs, does it not contain an unworthy reflection upon the apostle Paul?

Whether I can understand the meaning of every part of this divine Song or not; or whether it has ever been rightly interpreted, is no part of the question; all I am concerned about at present is, that its divine authority should not be called in question.

THE NECESSITY OF SEEKING THOSE THINGS FIRST, WHICH
ARE OF THE FIRST IMPORTANCE.

A GREAT part of the evil which prevails in the world, consists in an entire neglect of what God commands, or in doing what he has expressly forbidden ; but not the whole of it. There may be an attachment to many things, which in themselves are right, and yet the whole may be rendered worse than void by the want of *order*, or a regard to things according to their importance. Our Lord did not censure the Pharisees for attending to the lesser matters of the law, but for attending to them *to the neglect of the greater*. If we pursue things as primary, which ought to occupy only a secondary or subordinate place in the system, we subvert the whole, and employ ourselves in doing what is worse than nothing.

I think I see the operation of this principle among us, and that to a wide extent. I see it among the unconverted, among the converted, and among different parties or denominations of Christians.

First: It is by this that great numbers who lay their accounts with obtaining the kingdom of heaven will be found to have deceived themselves. It may be too much to say of them, that they do not seek the kingdom of God ; but they seek it not as a *first* or primary object. The world is their chief good, and the kingdom of God only occupies a secondary place in their affections. They wish to attend to their everlasting concerns ;

but they cannot spare time. Now, we can commonly spare time for that which we love best. The sensualist can find time for his pleasures, and the man of the world for getting money. They can think of these things when sitting in the house, or walking in the way; and every thing else is made to bend, or give way to them. The result is, this preposterous conduct mars the whole; for God and religion must be supreme, or nothing. There are certain relations, even among us, in which it is impossible to be contented with a secondary place. If a wife give her heart to another than her husband, and aims only to oblige him so far as to keep him in tolerably good humour, it is what cannot be endured: he must be first, or nothing; and such is the claim of heaven.

Secondly: It is owing to this, among other causes, that many Christians go from year to year in doubt, with respect to their interest in Christ and spiritual blessings.—It is very desirable to have clear and satisfactory views on this subject. To live in suspense on a matter of such importance, must, if we be not sunk in insensibility, be miserable. How is it that so much of this prevails among us; when, if we look into the New-testament, we shall scarcely see an instance of it among the primitive Christians? Shall we cast off all such characters as unbelievers? Some have done so, alleging that it is impossible for a person to be a believer without being conscious of it. Surely this is too much; for if the grace of God within us, whatever be its degree, must needs be self-

evident to us, why are we directed to keep his commandments as the means of *knowing that we know him*? The primitive Christians, however, had but little of this fear; and the reason of it was, they had more of that *perfect love* to Christ, to the gospel, and to the success of it, than we have, which tended to *cast out fear*. If we make our personal comfort the *first* object of our pursuit, (and many attend the means of grace as if they did,) God will make it the *last* of his: for it is a general principle in the divine administration, *He that honoureth me, I will honour; but he that despiseth me shall be lightly esteemed*. If we seek the honour of God, we shall find our own peace and comfort in it: but if we make light of him, he will make light of us, and leave us to pass our days in darkness and suspense.

Thirdly: It is owing, if I mistake not, to the same cause that various denominations of Christians, who at some periods have been greatly blessed of God, have declined as to their spiritual prosperity. Several of our religious denominations have arisen from a conscientious desire to restore Christianity to its primitive purity. From this motive acted, I believe, the greater part of the Reformers, the Puritans, the Non-conformists, and the Baptists. I do not know that any one of these denominations were censurable for the separations which they made from other professing Christians. It may be alleged, that they have torn the church of Christ into parties, and so occasioned much evil: yet some of them did not separate from the church

of Christ, but from a worldly community calling itself by that name; and those who did, pretended not to be the only people of God in the world, but considered themselves merely as *withdrawing from brethren who walked disorderly*. It is a melancholy fact, however, that no sooner have a people formed themselves into a new denomination, than they are in the utmost danger of concentrating almost all their strength, influence, zeal, prayers, and endeavours for its support; not as a part of Christ's visible kingdom, wishing all good to other parts, in so far as they follow Christ, but as though it were the whole of it, and as though all true religion were circumscribed within its hallowed pale. This is the essence of a sectarian spirit, and the bane of Christianity.

I am a Dissenter, and a Baptist. If I confine my remarks to the faults of these denominations, it is not because I consider them as greater sinners in this way than all others, but because I wish more especially to correct the evils of my own connexions.

If we wish to promote the *dissenting* interest, it must not be by expending our principal zeal in endeavouring to make men dissenters, but in making dissenters and others, Christians. The principles of dissent, however just and important, are not to be compared with the glorious gospel of the blessed God; and if inculcated at the expense of it, it is no better than tithing mint and cummin, to the omitting of the weightier matters of the law. Such endeavours will be blasted, and made to

defeat their own end. Those dissenters among whom the doctrines of the Puritans and Non-conformists have fallen into disrepute, are generally distinguished by this species of zeal; and it is principally from such quarters that complaints are heard of "the decline of the dissenting interest." Where they are believed and taught, and their progress, whether among dissenters or others, viewed with satisfaction, we hear of no such complaints. It is a curious fact, that while a certain description of dissenters are inquiring into the causes of the decline of the dissenting interest, a certain description of the established clergy are inquiring into the causes of its increase!

If we wish to see the *Baptist* denomination prosper, we must not expend our zeal so much in endeavouring to make men Baptists, as in labouring to make Baptists and others, Christians. If we lay out ourselves in the common cause of Christianity, the Lord will bless and increase us. By rejoicing in the prosperity of every other denomination, in so far as they accord with the mind of Christ, we shall promote the best interests of our own. But if we be more concerned to make proselytes to a party than converts to Christ, we shall defeat our own end; and however just our sentiments may be with respect to the subjects and mode of baptism, we shall be found symbolizing with the Pharisees, who were employed in tithing mint and cummin, to the neglect of judgment, mercy, and the love of God.

QUERIES RELATIVE TO ORDINATION.

IT having been the practice of some dissenting ministers to receive ordination but once, it became a question at a meeting lately held in the country, whether a pastor, removing to another church should be *re-ordained*? The ministers about to engage in such a service, considering ordination not as a designation *to the work of the ministry*, (of which they find no examples in the New-testament,) but as a solemn appointment to *office, in a Christian church*, were of opinion that a previous ordination had no influence on an appointment to office in another church. They allowed that re-ordination is unprecedented in the New-testament; and so also is the removal of a pastor from one church to another: if the latter were found, they supposed the former would accompany it.

Some conversation took place at the same meeting also, on the scriptural grounds, for *the laying on of hands* in ordination. In favour of this practice it was alleged—1. That it appears to have been used in all ages of the church, where persons were set apart to sacred work. Numb. xxvii. 18.—2. That though often connected with the communication of extraordinary gifts, yet it was not *always* so. It is not certain that it was for this purpose, that hands were laid upon the seven deacons of the church at Jerusalem. Acts vi. 6. and it is certain that when the church at Antioch laid hands on Saul and Barnabas, (Acts

xiii. 3.) it was not for this purpose, seeing they were possessed of extraordinary gifts already. In this case, they were ordinary persons, who laid hands upon the extraordinary.—3. That when the laying on of hands, was accompanied with the conferring of extraordinary gifts, it is doubtful whether they were not imposed, for that specific purpose only. See Acts viii. 17—19. xix. 5, 6.—4. That ordination is expressed by laying on of hands: *Lay hands suddenly on no man*, &c. But that which is used to express or describe a practice, would seem to be an important, if not an essential part of it.

ON ORDINATION.

Mr. Editor,

TWO of your correspondents have honoured me with their remarks on my few hints on ordination. If I add a few more, it is with no design to enter into any thing like contention on the subject. “Mr. Howe” was a great and good man; and while he considered ordination *as a designation to the Christian ministry*, it is no wonder he should answer as he did. But I see no evidence deducible from Acts xiv. 23. that this is the scriptural idea of it: Paul and his companions having formed these believers into Christian churches, proceeded to organize them with proper officers. These elders, or presbyters, who were ordained by the suffrage of the churches, were *officers in those churches*, and not merely

Christian ministers appointed to preach the gospel wherever a door might be opened. Your correspondent *C.* speaks of "other passages which he forbears to quote." If he can produce an instance of ordination being *a designation to the Christian ministry, as such*, his argument will be established; but not else.

Candour requires me to acknowledge, in reply to *Amicus*, that from what he has remarked on Acts xiii. 3. I suspect myself to have been under a mistake, in supposing that the laying on of hands, in that instance, was *by the church*. My reason for thinking so, was, that the exercises of *fasting* and *prayer* were not likely to be confined to the prophets and teachers, and therefore not that of laying on of hands: but upon a review of the subject, I incline to think that the latter was done by the prophets and teachers in the name of the church. The point however which was there attempted to be proved, is not affected by this mistake. This was, that the laying on of hands, was not always for the purpose of conveying extraordinary gifts: but whoever they were that laid hands on Barnabas and Saul, it could not be for this purpose, since it is pretty evident that they were possessed of them before. I may add, I do not consider this as an instance of *ordination*; but of the designation of two Christian *missionaries* to the Gentiles.

Amicus speaks of "Saul not being yet ordained an Apostle." Surely he is here greatly beside the mark. Is not an Apostle one *immediately sent of*

Christ without any human authority? Did not Saul receive ordination to that office at the time of his conversion? See Acts xxvi. 16—18. Compared with Gal. i. 1. 12—17. and 1 Cor. xi. 1.

With respect to the general question, On what grounds of the practice of ordination rests among congregational churches; and wherein the essence of it consists? I am not prepared to enter into “a complete investigation of the subject;” a close examination of the Acts, and the Epistles with this point in view, might possibly correct some of my ideas. At present, I can only offer a few brief hints.

Viewing the subject as I do, namely, as *a designation of a person to an office in a Christian church*, I find that in such cases the church made the election, and the Apostles and other elders set him apart with prayer (as I suppose) and the laying on of hands. Acts vi. 3. xiv. 23. Titus i. 5. Such is the general ground of my practice, when I engage in an ordination. In doing this, I claim not to be a successor of the Apostles, any otherwise than as every faithful pastor is such; nor pretend to constitute the party ordained a Christian minister, for this he was as being a *teacher* antecedent to his being ordained a pastor; nor to impart power or “authority to administer gospel ordinances.” It appears to me, that every approved teacher of God’s word, whether ordained the pastor of a particular church or not, is authorised to *baptize*; and with respect to the *Lord’s-supper*, though I should think it disorderly for a young

man who is only a probationer, and not an ordained pastor to administer that ordinance, yet I see nothing objectionable, if, when a church is destitute of a pastor, it were administered by a deacon or aged brother; I know of no scriptural authority for confining it to ministers. Nay, I do not recollect any mention in the scriptures of a minister being employed in it, unless we reckon our Lord one. I do not question but that the primitive pastors, whose office it was to preside in all spiritual affairs, *did* administer that ordinance, as well as receive and exclude members; but as a church when destitute of a pastor is competent to appoint a deacon or aged brother to officiate in these cases, I know of no reason to be gathered from the scriptures, why they should not be the same in the other.

The only end for which I join in an ordination is to unite with the elders of that and other churches, in *expressing my brotherly concurrence in the election, which, if it fell on what I accounted an unsound or unworthy character, I should withhold.* Though churches are so far independent of each other, as that no one has a right to interfere in the concerns of another without their consent, unless it be as we all have a right to exhort and admonish one another, yet there is a common union required to subsist between them, for the good of the whole; and so far as the ordination of a pastor affects this common or general interest, it is fit that there should be a general concurrence in it. It was on this principle, I conceive, rather

than as an exercise of authority, that the apostles, whose office was general, took the lead in the primitive ordinations. When the churches increased, they appointed such men as Timothy and Titus, to do what they would have done themselves, had they been present : and when all extraordinary officers ceased, the same *general* object would be answered by the concurrence of the elders of the surrounding churches. Though the apostles and other extraordinary officers in the church, had an *authority* which no ordinary pastor, or company of pastors possess ; yet in many things, *they did no more than what would be lawful for others to do, if they could and would do it.* If they planted churches, set them in order, and ordained elders over them, it was not because the same things would not have been *valid* if done without them, but because they would not have *been done.* Let but churches be planted, set in order, and scripturally organized ; and whether it be by apostles, evangelists, or ordinary pastors, all is good and acceptable to Christ. Paul left Timothy at Ephesus, that he might *charge some that they taught no other doctrine.* But if the Ephesian teachers had been of themselves attached to the truth, neither Paul nor Timothy would have been offended for their interference being rendered unnecessary. Titus was *left in Crete, to set in order the things that were wanting, and to ordain elders in every city :* but if things were but set in order, and proper elders ordained in the churches of Crete, it were no matter whether Paul

the apostle, Titus the evangelist, or the wisest of their own elders take the lead in it. Let them but have had wisdom and virtue enough in the island, to have accomplished these ends, and Paul would have *rejoiced in beholding their order, and the steadfastness of their faith in Christ.*

ON CHRISTIAN LOVE.

Query. AS all mankind are *alike* sinners in the eyes of God, exposed to his anger, under his control, and within the power of his grace; are they not *alike* entitled to our compassion and regard? And as all the saints are alike chosen of God, redeemed by Christ, sanctified by the spirit, &c. are they not *alike* entitled to our affection and esteem? Seeing also, that much has been said and done to diffuse the gospel, and promote a spirit of brotherly love among real Christians, of all denominations, is it not inconsistent with this general design that the various friends of Missionary Societies among Episcopalians, Independents, Baptists, &c. should appear to be so intent on promoting the particular interests of their respective societies, as not to feel an *equal* concern for the rest? One is fervently praying for the missionaries in the east, and makes their labours the topic of his conversation, while those in the south are nearly overlooked, or lightly regarded; and *vice versa*. But why not bestow a like degree of love and zeal upon the common cause?

Answer. The above statement overlooks an important truth; namely, that though all sinners are alike under God's eye, control, and anger, and within the power of his grace, yet they are not alike *within our knowledge, care, and charge.* And though all saints are alike entitled to our esteem, as chosen of God, as redeemed by Christ, as sanctified by the spirit, &c. yet they are not all *known alike to us, nor alike under our immediate watch and care.* The wall of Jerusalem considered as a whole, was an object that interested every godly Jew who had a mind to work, yet every man *repaired unto his own house,* and consequently, was more assiduous to raise that part of it than any other. If any one, indeed, had been so intent upon his piece of the wall, as to be regardless of the rest, and careless about the work as a whole, it had been criminal: but while these were properly regarded, he might be allowed to be particularly attentive to his own special work, to which he was appointed. It is wisely ordered that it should be so; for if the mind were taken up entirely in generals, by aiming at every thing, we should accomplish nothing. The Turks and Chinese, are alike sinners, and stand in need of mercy as well as the people to whom a minister preaches: but he is not equally obliged to pray for, and seek to promote their salvation as he is that of the people *over whom the Holy Spirit hath made him an overseer.* The children of heathen families are alike objects of God's knowledge, anger, &c. as those of our own; but they

are not alike known to us, nor equally objects of our parental care.

It is very possible that Episcopalians, Independents, Baptists, &c. may be each too much concerned about their own party, and too inattentive to the prosperity of others, even in those respects wherein they consider them as conforming to the mind of Christ : but perhaps the whole of this ought not to be attributed to a sinful partiality. Let one society speak of the mission to Africa and the East ; another inform us of what God is doing by a Vanderkemp, and a Kitcherer ; and another of what he is accomplishing by Carey and his companions, &c. In all this they only *build against their own houses*, and report progress to their brethren for the stimulating of the whole. Only let them bear good will one to another, and rejoice in all the goodness vouchsafed to either of them ; and the wall will rise, and in due time the work of one will meet that of another, so as to form a whole.

THE PROGRESS OF SIN.

WHEN our Saviour spake of his making men free, the Jews were offended. It hurt their pride to be represented as slaves ; yet slaves they were—and such is every sinner, however insensible of it, till Christ has made him free. And the longer he continues in this state, the more he is entangled, and the less capable he becomes of making his escape. Sin is a master that will not suffer its

slaves to rest, but is always hurrying them on from one thing to another, till having finished its operations, it bringeth forth death. The way of sin is a way in which there is no standing still; a kind of down hill road, in which every step gives an accelerated force, till you reach the bottom. Such is the import of those emphatic words of the Apostle, *Ye were servants to iniquity, unto iniquity.*

To be a servant to iniquity is descriptive of the state of every unconverted sinner. All may not be subject to the same kind of evils: one may be enslaved to drunkenness, another to uncleanness, another to covetousness, another to fashion, and another to self-righteous pride; but these are only different forms of government, suited to different tempers and constitutions: all are servants to iniquity; and all who continue such are impelled in a manner to go on in their work, *servants to iniquity, unto iniquity.* The proofs of this tendency to progression will appear in the following remarks.

First: He that yields himself a servant to sin, in any one of its forms, admits a principle which opens the door to sin in every other form. This principle is, that the authority of God is not to be regarded, when it stands in the way of our inclinations; if you admit of this principle, there is nothing to hinder you from going into any evil which your soul lusteth after. You may not, indeed, commit every bad practice; but, while such is the state of your mind, it is not the fear of

God, but a regard to man, or a concern for your own interest, safety, or reputation, that restrains you. If you indulge in theft, for instance, you would, with the same unconcern, commit adultery, robbery, or murder; provided you were tempted to such things, and could commit them with the hope of escaping punishment. It is thus that he who transgresses the law in one point, is guilty of all: for HE that forbids one sin forbids all; and a deliberate offence against Him in one particular, is as really a rejection of his authority, as in many.

Moreover, If the mind be unrestrained by the fear of God, a regard to man will have but a feeble hold of it. Sin, in various shapes, will be frequently indulged in secret; and being so indulged, it will soon break out into open vices; for it is not in the power of a man, with all its contrivances, long to conceal the ruling dispositions of his soul. When king Saul had once disregarded the divine authority in his treatment of the Amalekites, there were no bounds to the evil workings of his mind: full of jealousy, envy, and malignity, he murders a whole city of innocent men, repairs to a witch for counsel, and at last puts an end to his miserable life.

Secondly: Every sin we commit goes to destroy the principle of resistance, and it produces a kind of desperate carelessness. Purity of mind, like cleanliness of apparel, is accompanied with a desire of avoiding every thing that might defile; and even where this has no place, conscience,

aided by education and example, is a great preservative against immoral and destructive courses; but if we once plunge into the vices of the world, emulation is extinguished. The child that is accustomed to rags and filth, loses all shame, and feels no ambition to appear neat and decent.

The first time a person yields to a particular temptation, it is not without some struggles of conscience; and when it is past, his soul is usually smitten with remorse; and it may be, he thinks he shall never do the like again; but temptation returning, and the motive to resist being weakened, he becomes an easy prey to the temper. And now the clamours of conscience subside, his heart grows hard, and his mind desperate. *There is no hope*, saith he, *I have loved strangers, and after them I will go*. Under the first workings of temptation, he set bounds to himself, *Hitherto*, said he, *I will go, and no further*: but now all such promises are of no account. The insect entangled in the spider's web can do nothing; every effort it makes only winds another thread round its wings; and, after a few ineffectual struggles, it falls a prey to the destroyer.

Thirdly: Every sin we commit not only goes to destroy the principle of resistance, but produces an inordinate desire after the repetition of it; and thus, like half an army going over to the enemy, operates both ways against us, weakening our scruples, and strengthening our propensities—This is manifestly the effect in such sins as drunkenness, gaming, and fornication. It is one

of the deceits of sin, to promise that, if we will but grant its wishes in this or that particular, it will ask no more; or to persuade its deluded votaries that indulgence will assuage the torrent of desire: but though this may be the case for a short time, sin will return with redoubled violence. It rises in its demands, from every concession you make to it. He that has entered the paths of the destroyer can tell, from experience, that it is a thousand times more difficult to recede than to refrain from engaging. The thirst of the leech at the vein, and of the drunkard at his bottle, are but faint emblems of the burnings of desire in the mind in these stages of depravity.

Fourthly: If we yield to one sin, we shall find ourselves under a kind of necessity of going into other sins, in order to hide or excuse it.—This is a truth so evident, that it needs only to be stated, in order to be admitted. Examples abound, both in scripture and common life. When sin is committed, the first thing that suggests itself to the sinner, is, if possible, to conceal it; or if that cannot be, to excuse it. Adam first strove to hide himself in the trees of the garden, and when this refuge failed him, it was *the woman*, and the woman *that God gave to be with him* too, who tempted him to do as he did. Nearly the same course was pursued by David. Having outraged decorum, he first betakes himself to intrigue, in hope to cover his crime; and, when this failed him, he has recourse to murder; and this being accomplished, the horrible event is, with an air of

affected resignation, ascribed to Providence. *The sword devoureth one as well as another!* Nor is this the only instance wherein that, which has begun in a wanton look, has ended in blood. What numbers of innocent babes are murdered, and one or both of their unhappy parents executed, for that which is resorted to, merely as a cover for illicit practices!

Fifthly: Every act of sin tends to form a sinful habit; or, if already formed, to strengthen it.—Single acts of sin are as drops of water, which possess but little force; but when they become a habit, they are a mighty stream which bears down all before it. The *drunkard* had no natural thirst for strong liquors. Some worldly trouble, or the love of loose company, first brought him to make free with them; but having once contracted the habit, though he knows he is every day wasting his substance, shortening his life, and ruining his soul, yet he cannot desist. Even under the power of stupefaction, he calls for more drink: his very dreams betray his lusts. *They have smitten me*, says he, *and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not: when shall I awake? I will seek it yet again.*—The *gamester*, at the first, thought but little of doing what he now does. He fell in company, it may be, with a card-party, or had heard of a lucky adventure in the lottery, or known a person who had made his fortune by a successful speculation in the stocks. So he resolves to try a little of it himself. He succeeds. He tries again; ventures deeper, and deeper, with

various success. His circumstances become embarrassed ; yet having begun, he must go on. One more great adventure is to recover all, and free him from his difficulties. He loses ; his family is ruined ; his creditors are wronged ; and himself, it is not impossible, driven to the use of such means of support as shall bring him to an untimely end!—The *debauchee* was once, it may be, a sober man. His illicit connexions might originate in what were thought at the time very innocent familiarities. But having once invaded the laws of chastity, he sets no bounds to his desires. *His eyes are full of adultery, and he cannot cease from sin.*

Sixthly: When the sinner becomes thus besotted in the ways of sin, there are commonly a number of circumstances and considerations, besides his own attachment to it, which entangle his soul, and, if infinite mercy interpose not, prevent his escape.—He has formed connexions among men like himself. His interest will suffer His companions will reproach him The world will laugh at him. Many in such circumstances have been the subjects of strong convictions, have shed many tears, and professed great desire to return from their evil courses ; yet, when it has come to the test, they could not recede: having begun, and gone on so far, they cannot relinquish it now, whatever be the consequence.

Reader, is this, or something like it, your case? Permit a well-wisher to your soul to be free with you. Be assured you must return, or perish for ever, and that in a little time. Infidels may tel

you there is no danger; but when they come to die, that have commonly discovered that they did not believe their own words or writings. *Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth*; and before Him you must shortly give an account. Will you plunge yourself into the pit from whence there is no redemption? That tremendous punishment is represented as not prepared originally for you, but for the devil and his angels. If you go thither, you in a manner take the kingdom of darkness by force.

Let me add, It is not enough for you to return, unless in so doing you return to God.—*Ye have returned, but not unto me, saith the Lord*. If I felt only for your credit and comfort in this world, I might have contented myself with warning you to break off your outward vices, and cautioning you against the inlets of future evils. Animals, though void of reason, yet through mere instinct, fly from present danger. *In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird*. The fishes of the sea avoid the whirlpool. And shall man go with his eyes open into the net? Will he sail unconcerned into the vortex of destruction? But it is not from present danger only, or chiefly, that I would warn you to flee. My heart's desire and prayer to God for you is, that you may be saved from the wrath to come. Know then, that though you should escape the grosser immoralities of the world, yet you may be still in your sins, and exposed to eternal ruin. Your danger does not lie merely, nor mainly, in open vices. Satan may be cast out

with respect to these, and yet retire into the strong holds of proud self-satisfaction. It is not the outward spot that will kill you ; but the inward disease, whence it proceeds. *From within, even from the heart, proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies.* Every out-breaking of sin in your life is a proof of the inward corruption of your nature. If this fountain be not healed, in vain will you go about to purify the streams. I mean not to dissuade you from breaking off your sins ; but to persuade you to *break them off by righteousness.* But the only way in which this is to be done is that to which our Saviour directed in his preaching *Repent and believe the gospel.* All reformation short of this is only an exchange of vices. But if you can, guilty and unworthy as you are, renouncing all other hopes and dependancies, believe in Christ, you shall be saved. His blood was shed for sinners, even the chief of sinners. His obedience unto death was so well-pleasing to God, that any sinner, whatever has been his conduct or character, that comes to him in *his* name, pleading his righteousness, and his only, will be accepted for his sake. He has not only obeyed and died for such as you, but is now at the right hand of God, carrying into effect the great ends of his incarnation, life, and death. *Wherefore he is able to save to the uttermost all them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.*

If, reader, thou canst embrace this doctrine, it will heal thy malady. If, from thine heart, thou canst receive salvation as of mere grace, through the redemption of Jesus Christ, it is thine own. If thou canst confess thy sins upon the head of this sacrifice, *God is faithful and just to forgive thy sins, and to cleanse thee from all unrighteousness.* God makes nothing of thy reformatations, prayers, or tears, as a reason why he should accept and save thee; but every thing of what his Son has done and suffered. If thou canst be of his mind, making nothing of them in thy pleas and hopes for mercy, but every thing of Him in whom he is well-pleased, eternal life is before thee. And at what time this doctrine shall give peace to thy troubled soul, it shall purify thy heart in such a manner that all thy former ways shall become hateful unto thee, and sobriety, righteousness, and godliness shall be thy delight.

But if thy heart be still hardened in sin; if Jesus, and salvation by grace through his name contain nothing attractive, but rather offensive to thy mind Know this, *There is no other name given under heaven, among men, by which thou canst be saved;* and the remembrance of thy having once in thy life at least, been told the truth, may not a little embitter thy dying moments.

Happy are all they, who, returning in the name of Jesus Christ, to his Father and their Father, his God and their God, are made free from sin, and have their fruit unto holiness! They, too, are *progressive*, but it is in a course the opposite of

that which has been set before the reader. *The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger.* The service of God shall become more easy to him; truth shall appear more evident; the marks of his conversion shall multiply; his character shall strike its roots deeper; the hope of his perseverance shall continually renew its strength; and sorrow and joy, retirement and society, the dispensations of providence, and the ordinances of grace, shall all contribute to make him more meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

THE PROGRESS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Mr. Editor,

HAVING offered a few thoughts on the progress of sin, in your last number, the following may be considered as a counterpart. Righteousness is no less progressive than unrighteousness. As in the one case, sinners are servants to iniquity *unto iniquity*; so in the other, believers are servants to righteousness *unto holiness*.

Some, I am aware, have denied that sanctification is progressive; but this, if they understand what they say, is only a proof, I fear, that they are strangers to it. The following remarks may serve to show the tendency of true holiness to aspire after perfection, however far we may be from attaining to it.

First: The right discharge of any one duty, supposes a principle which will lead us to be

holy in all manner of conversation.—Strictly speaking, there is no duty performed, nor any thing done by a sinner, that is well-pleasing to God, till, repenting of sin, he believes in Jesus for salvation. This is the turning point which gives a new direction to his future course: all before it is worse than nothing. When, therefore, the Jews inquired of Christ *What shall we do to work the works of God?* The answer was, *This is the work of God, that ye believe in him whom he hath sent.* It is on this principle that the Apostle declares of him that *doeth righteousness, that he is righteous.* A single act of righteousness proves that the subject of it is created anew in Christ Jesus, unto good works. But where this is the case, there is that in the mind which tends to universal holiness. A few insulated services may satisfy a formalist; but he that believeth in Jesus, has his heart enlarged, and runs with delight, in the way of his commandments. It is not the inquiry of such a person, how low a degree of spirituality will consist with true religion; but how high a degree of it is attainable in this state of imperfection. The religion of a mere professor, resembles the legs of the lame, which are not equal. In the house of God, he weeps and seems to be all devotion; but if a poor man, or even a poor Christian, call at his door, his heart is shut against him. Or it may be, he prides himself in his generosity; but then he is dead to every thing spiritual and heavenly-minded. Not so the true Christian; his religion is uniform. In him,

the fear of God, produces good will to men; and his charity to men operates in harmony with zeal for truth, for righteousness, and for God. When a mere professor has once established his religious character, he will commonly sit down to rest, and leave the young people to be zealous in their turn, as he thinks he has been sufficiently in his; but love will go on to bring forth fruit *in old age*. When the Lord had given David rest round about from all his enemies, he is said to have *sat in his house*; not, however, in a state of indolence, as though he had done enough, but meditating what more he could do for God, now that new opportunities were afforded him. *See now, (said he to Nathan,) I dwell in a house of cedar; but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.* And more than twenty years afterwards, when he was old and grey-headed, and nature worn out with troubles in his family and in his kingdom, he still resolves to *go in the strength of the Lord God, and to praise him more and more.*

Secondly: Every duty rightly performed prepares the heart for the discharge of other duties.—It was a remark of the great and good Mr. Whitfield, and there is no man's lips whom it would have better fitted, "that the more a man does for God, the more he may." Gracious dispositions strengthen and increase by exercise. The chariot in full motion, surmounts hills of difficulty with much less effort than at its first outset. The truth of these remarks is most sensibly felt in exercises of self-denial, and in the influence

of private on public duties. Every act of self-denial for Christ's sake, is a victory over temptation, and every such victory doubles our strength for a future onset. Thus also, the spiritual and retired exercises of the closet, prepare the mind for those of the family, and both have a tendency to fit us for those of the house of God. A little religion, it has been said, and with much propriety, will make a man miserable; but much will make him happy. It is by following the Lord fully, like Caleb and Joshua, that we enter into the gospel rest.

Thirdly: Every degree of holiness tends to an increase of spiritual knowledge, which in return produces more holiness.—It has been a question much disputed, whether holiness leads to the knowledge of the truth, or the knowledge of the truth to holiness; but both are true: *He that doeth God's will, shall know of his doctrine; and beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.* The influence of each upon the other, is as that of capital and interest in trade. Capital is a stimulus to interest, and interest increases capital. The influence which humility has, for instance, upon a discovery of the mind of God in his word, and upon the increase of true religion in the soul, is beyond all calculation. God will *guide the meek in judgment; the meek will he teach his way.* He giveth more grace to the humble.

Fourthly: Holy acts, tend to form and strengthen holy habits, which constitute the highest degrees

of holiness.—In one sense every person who is the subject of true religion possesses a holy habit: religion with him, is not occasional, but an habitual pursuit. But the term is more properly applied to those fixed dispositions of the soul, which are the effect of repeated exercises. God has so formed the mind, that a number of acts of the same kind, whether good or evil, shall give a tone or direction to it: by this, righteousness is encouraged and sin is punished. Every exercise of repentance goes to form an habitual tenderness of conscience, and abhorrence of that which is evil; and every exercise of faith tends to a *life of faith* on Him who loved us, and gave himself for us. The more we read the holy scriptures, the more we shall imbibe their spirit, and be formed by them, as by a model. It is thus that the word of Christ dwells richly in us in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. It is worthy of notice, that the general strain of apostolic exhortation is directed to *habitual* religion. *Simplicity in giving, diligence in ruling, cheerfulness in showing mercy, love without dissimulation, abhorrence of evil, cleaving to that which is good, being kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love, in honour preferring one another; not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord: rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of the saints, given to hospitality;* are all expressive, not of one or two particular acts, but of a *life* of devotedness to God, and kindness to men. And

whatever acts the Apostles exhorted to, they were considered only as so many steps in a race, each of which contributed to its success, or to the winning of the prize.

Fifthly : Holy habits are friendly to a life of communion with God, by which the soul becomes more and more meetened for the inheritance of the saints in light.—*He that keepeth his commandments, dwelleth in God, and God in him.* The ecstasies of some, whose walk is manifestly carnal, worldly, fleshly, and even devilish, arise from a fire of their own kindling. But he whose consolations are accompanied with a close walk with God, and render him more and more watchful, diligent, and circumspect, he it is that walks in the light of God's countenance. The enjoyment he finds in the commandments of God, enlarges his heart : and his heart being enlarged, he runs with greater pleasure in the way of his commandments.

From the whole we see (1) The vast importance of *a right beginning* in religion. If we be wrong in the outset, the farther we go the farther we are off : but entering in at the door of the sheepfold, we shall go in and out, and find pasture. The reason why so many are not progressive in religion is the want of this. Having no connexion with Christ, they bring forth no fruit, and, as dead branches, are taken away : having no oil in their vessels, the lamp soon expires. (2) The importance of every act of holiness, or duty performed with an eye to the glory of God. It tells, as I may say, in the divine life. It tends to accumulate

a store of heavenly wealth, and to meeten us for employments and enjoyments in another and better world.

ON EVIL THINGS WHICH PASS UNDER SPECIOUS NAMES.

THERE is something in the nature of evil, which, if it appear in its own proper colours, will not admit of being defended or recommended to others: he, therefore, who is friendly to it, is under the necessity of disguising it, by giving it some specious name in order to render it current in society. On the other hand, there is something in the nature of good, which, if it appear in its own proper colours, cannot well be opposed: he, therefore, who wishes to run it down, is obliged first to give it an ill name, or he could not accomplish his purpose. This species of imposition, it is true, is calculated only for superficial minds, who regard words rather than things; but the number of them is so great in the world, and even in the church, that it has in all ages been found to answer the end. In the times of the prophet Isaiah, there were those who *called evil good, and good evil, who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter*: but as the woe of heaven was then denounced against the practice, it becomes us to beware of going into it, or being imposed on by it.

It is not the design of the writer to trace this abuse of language through any part of history or politics, or any other worldly department; but

merely to notice a few terms which are very current in our religious circles:—such as *moderation*, *liberality*, *charity*, &c. on the one hand; and *bigotry*, *narrowness of mind*, and *ill-nature*, on the other.

There is a spirit gone forth in the present age, which is calculated to do more harm to the church of God than the most erroneous doctrine that has been advanced since the days of the apostles. It bears a favourable aspect towards those systems of divinity which depreciate the evil of sin, the freeness of grace, the dignity of Christ, and the glory of his righteousness as the only ground of acceptance with God; so much so, that it is seldom known to oppose them. Or if, for the sake of preserving its reputation, it strikes an occasional blow at them, yet it is with so light a hand as never to hurt them. It takes no decided stand on this side or that, and thereby obtains admission among all parties. If the friends of Christ meet together, it wishes to meet with them, though it be only to oppose every measure which may bear hard upon its favourite designs, and would take it very unkind to be treated as an intruder. If his enemies be assembled, it will also be there; and if no untrusty brother be in company, will commonly manifest itself to be then most in its element.

Now, let a spirit of this kind make its appearance in any other department than religion, and observe how it will be treated. In the year 1745, for instance, when the great question in the country

was, Shall we support the reigning family, and the constitution; or shall we admit the Pretender, with popery and arbitrary power in his train? what would have been thought of a man who should have pretended to be on neither this side nor that; but, talking against war, and in favour of moderation, liberality, and charity towards the unhappy youth, who by landing on our shores had greatly endangered his life, made use of all his influence to oppose every decided measure tending to drive him from the country? ‘Sir, (they would have said,) you are on the side of the Pretender, and deserve to be taken up as a traitor.’ And had he complained of their bigotry, narrow-mindedness, and ill-nature, his remonstrance would have deserved no regard. But is the cause of God and TRUTH of less importance than the temporal prosperity of a nation? Surely not!

If, indeed, our differences consist merely in words; or though they should be things, yet if they do not affect the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, considering the imperfections which attach to the best of men, a spirit of moderation or forbearance is here in character. When we have frankly spoken our minds, we may with a good conscience leave it, and join with our brethren, notwithstanding, in the work of the Lord. But in differences which respect the principles above-mentioned, compromise would be treason against the Majesty of heaven. There were cases in which an Apostle allowed that *every one should be fully persuaded in his own mind*: but there were

cases also in which *the doctrine of Christ* was given up; and if any man came as a minister without this, Christians were directed *not to receive him into their houses, nor to bid him God speed*. Such conduct in the present times would raise a great outcry of bigotry and illiberality: a plain proof this, that what passes among us under the names of moderation and liberality is in a great degree anti-christian.

What is *moderation*? The scriptures recommend a yielding and gentle disposition in things wherein our own name or interest only are concerned.—Such is the moderation enforced by Paul: but when *the continuance of the truth of the gospel* was at issue, he refused *to give place, even for an hour*. The scriptures also recommend forbearance in Christians one towards another: but this is far from that spirit of indifference which would confound truth and error, religion and irreligion, the friends of Christ and the men of the world.

What is *liberality*? The term denotes freedom, or enlargedness of mind. It is applied in the scriptures merely to that simple, sincere, and bountiful spirit, which communicates freely to the needy, and stands opposed to a sinister, close, contracted, and covetous disposition. The application of it to sentiments may be proper, when used to describe that enlargedness of mind which arises from an intimate acquaintance with the scriptures, and an extensive knowledge of men and things. A rigid attachment to modes and opinions merely of human authority, is often seen

in persons who have read but little, and thought less. Had they seen more of the religious world, and heard more of what is to be said against the notions in which they happen to have been educated, their tenacity, we may commonly say, might be abated: in other words, they might be more liberally minded, and moderate in their censures against those who differ from them. But to attribute all attachment to principles, and even modes of worship, to illiberality of mind, is itself illiberal. If an attachment, whether it be to one or the other, be the effect of impartial research, and a firm persuasion that they are the mind of God as revealed in his word, it is so far from indicating a bigotted, contracted, or illiberal mind, that it may arise from the contrary. The more we understand of divine truth, the more our minds will be enlarged, and the more decided will be our opposition to error. To call that liberality which holds all doctrines with a loose hand, and considers it as of no importance to salvation whether we believe this or that, is a gross perversion of language. Such a spirit arises, not from enlargedness of mind, or from having read much, or thought much; but from *the vanity of wishing to have it thought that they have*. This vanity, when flattered by weak or interested men, induces the most ignorant characters to assume imperious airs, and to exercise a kind of contemptuous pity towards those who cannot treat the gospel with the same indifference as themselves. A minister who has wished for the liberty of playing fast

and loose with Christian doctrines, without being disrespected by his congregation, has been known to compliment them as an enlightened people, and to praise them for thinking for themselves; while in fact they have neither thought, nor read, nor understood, unless it were a few political pamphlets, and the doctrine of getting money.

It seems to be a criterion of this species of liberality that we think well of characters, whatever be their principles, and entertain the most favourable opinion of their final state. The writer was some time since in a company where mention was made of one who believed in the final salvation of all men, and perhaps of all devils likewise. "He is a gentleman (said one) of *liberal principles*." Such principles may, doubtless, be denominated liberal, that is, free and enlarged, in one sense;—they are free from the restraints of scripture, and enlarged as a net which contains a great multitude of fishes, good and bad; but whether this ought to recommend them is another question. What would be thought of one who should visit the felons of Newgate, and persuade them that such was the goodness of the government, that not one of them, even though condemned, would be finally executed? If *they* could be induced to believe him, they would doubtless think him a very liberal-minded man: but it is likely the government, and every friend to the public good, would think him an enemy to his country, and to the very parties whom by his glozing doctrine he had deceived.

It is usual to call that man liberal who thinks or professes to think for himself, and is willing that every other person should do the same. This, if applied to civil society, is just. Christianity will persecute no man for his religious principles, but meekly instruct him, in hope that God peradventure may give him repentance to the acknowledging of the truth. But apply the principle to religious society, and it is inadmissible. If one member of a Christian church be not accountable to another for what he believes, an infidel, in demanding the Lord's-supper from a Christian minister as a qualification for office, demands no more than the other may conscientiously and scripturally comply with. In refusing to unite with an unbeliever, or a profligate, or one who in my judgment rejects what is essential to the gospel, I do not impose my faith upon him; but merely decline having fellowship with what I consider as a work of darkness.

The writer is acquainted with several Dissenting churches at this time, which for some years past have acted upon what they call *a liberal ground*: that is, they have admitted men of all sorts of principles into their communion: and if some who once professed to be friendly to the doctrines of salvation by grace, the deity and atonement of Christ, acceptance with God through his righteousness, the necessity of the new birth, &c. become their avowed enemies, they take no notice of them; but leave them, as they say, to judge for themselves. The consequence however is, that

many of these churches have in a few years become extinct; and those which remain have become mere worldly communities, going into many of the dissipations and follies which are practised by none but people who make no pretence to serious religion. I have generally observed, that those who are thus liberal in regard of principles, are seldom far behind as to their practices. Cards, balls, plays, &c. are with them innocent amusements. Such assuredly was not the liberality of Paul. He was, however, of an enlarged mind, and wished much for Christians to be *also enlarged*. But how? By opening their doors to worldly men, and holding fellowship with all sorts of characters? Not so; but by the direct contrary. Read 2 Cor. vii. 11. to the end. *Oh, ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you; our heart is enlarged.—Ye are not straitened in us, but in your own bowels.—Be ye also enlarged.—Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.* From hence it would seem, that true enlargedness of mind is inconsistent with an indiscriminate communion with unbelievers, or worldly characters. And this accords with universal experience. Those Christian societies who are careful to preclude, or exclude the enemies of the gospel, are in a good degree of one heart, and will feel themselves at liberty to engage in every good work in their social capacity. But those communities which are open to all, will never be agreed in any thing which requires self-denial, diligence, or devotedness to Christ. One will make this

objection to the measure, and another that ; so that nothing will be effected. This is being yoked together with unbelievers : it is like yoking the sprightly horse with the tardy ass, which instead of helping, only hinders him, and may in time so break his spirit as to render him nearly as tardy as the other. In vain do we separate from national establishments of religion to corrupt ourselves. Nonconformity to the ceremonies of the church is of no account, if it be attended with conformity to the world. If the seven Asiatic churches had been originally formed on these liberal principles, how came it to pass that they were censured for having those *among them who held doctrines* inconsistent with Christianity ? On such principles, they might have excused themselves from blame, inasmuch as those individuals were only permitted to think and act for themselves.

SCRIPTURAL TREATMENT OF RICH AND POOR
CHRISTIANS.

IT is a glory pertaining to the Christian religion, that it embraces in one community all ranks and degrees of men. It admits of civil distinctions, and honours every one to whom honour is due ; but at the house of God, all this is required to be laid aside. All are brethren, and no account is made of worldly superiority.

I have been led to these reflections, Mr. Editor, by comparing the words of the apostle James,

Chap. i. 9, 10. with a passage which I have lately met with in an otherwise admired publication. *Let the brother of low degree, (says the Apostle,) rejoice in that he is exalted; but the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass, he shall pass away.* We see here that joy is the common portion of all believers, whether rich or poor: and that the highest character which either can attain, is that of a *brother*. There is, however, some difference in the considerations which are presented for the purpose of inducing joy, according to their different situations in life. The poor brother is supposed to be most in danger of inordinate dejection: and therefore as a proper antidote he must rejoice in being *exalted*. The rich, on the other hand, is most in danger of being lifted up with his situation, he must, therefore, rejoice in his being *made low*. The adaptedness of the means to the end, in the first instance, is easily conceived; but there seems to be something a little paradoxical in the last. Let us examine them.

The poor brother's part, by which he is taught to rejoice in adversity, is one in which every Christian heart will rejoice with him. A state of poverty, viewed by itself, is both chilling and cheerless. Nature revolts at it. A lowly habitation, a dry and scanty morsel, mean attire, hard labour, and the want of respect among men, are things which cannot be agreeable. If all were alike, it would be somewhat different: but the poor man is affected by the disparity between his

condition and that of others. Plenty daily passes by his door ; but he scarcely tastes it. If the fig-tree blossom, it is not for *him* ; there is no fruit on *his* vine, nor flock in *his* fold, nor herd in *his* stall. But, *Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted.* Come hither poor man, says the gospel ; art thou but withal a Christian, here is a feast for thee. **ALTHOUGH** thy fig-tree blossom not, and there be no fruit in thy vine, nor flock in thy fold, nor herd in thy stall ; yet mayest thou rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of thy salvation ! Say not, I am a dry tree ; God hath given thee an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. Art thou a servant, care not for it ; thou art the Lord's free man. To be an heir of God, a joint-heir with Christ, a son or daughter of the Lord God Almighty, a fellow-citizen with the saints, is an honour which princes might envy ! Nor is it altogether in hope. As there is a meanness in sin, which renders the character of the sinner, in spite of all his efforts and pretences, contemptible even in his own eyes ; so there is a dignity in uprightness, which ennobles the mind, whatever be its outward circumstances. This it was emboldened the prisoner, while the want of it caused his judge to tremble. Acts xxiv. 25.

That, on the other hand, which is addressed to the rich brother, is no less appropriate. He is directed to rejoice, and we should think with good reason, inasmuch as his enjoyment lies in both worlds : but this is not the ground of it. And though he is in common with his poor brother,

interested in gospel privileges, yet they are not here introduced ; but something more suited to counteract that spirit of high-mindedness, of which the rich are especially in danger. He is directed to *rejoice in that he is made low*. He must not value himself on any thing of a worldly nature, because, *as the flower of the grass he shall* (in that respect) *pass away*. Rather let him rejoice that he has been humbled, and taught like Moses to prefer affliction with the people of God, to the pleasures of sin for a season. It is true, this is rejoicing in what the world accounts a disgrace ; but such was the joy of all who gloried in the cross of Christ. Whatever the world may think, there is a solid reason for the opulent Christian to rejoice in his being made low : for it is a being led to think justly and soberly of himself as he ought to think, and enabled to withdraw his dependence from those deceitful enjoyments which will quickly *fade like the grass before the scorching sun*. It will tend also to heighten his joy, if he compare his case with that of the generality of rich men, who are put off with the present world as their only portion. *Not many* of this description *are called*. It is therefore matter of thankfulness to any who are singled out by divine grace from their companions.

Christianity is far from promoting a *levelling spirit* in one sense of the term ; but it is its professed object in another. *Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill made low*. In all that Christ and his Apostles have done to

propagate it, they have made no account of those things which men are apt to set a value upon. Had human wisdom been consulted, the first object would have been to convert those who, on account of office, rank, fortune, or talents, had the greatest influence upon others; and who, by throwing their weight into the Christian scale, would have easily caused it to preponderate. But though some of this description are to be found among the primitive Christians, yet they appear to have taken no leading part among them; nor is the success of the gospel even ascribed to their influence. But descending from their former heights, they took their place among the *brethren*, rejoicing that they were made low.

Your are ready to ask, Mr. Editor, What of this? And what is the passage you have been comparing with it? It is as follows:—"Greatly as I wish the reform of principles, and the suppression of vice, I am not sanguine in my expectations of either event, while rank and station and wealth, throw their mighty influence into the opposite scale. Then, *and not till then*, will Christianity obtain the dominion she deserves; when the makers of our manners shall submit to her authority, and THE PEOPLE OF FASHION become THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

Christianity, to be sure, will never obtain the dominion she *deserves*, while any class of society continues to set her at nought: but if its scale should be made at last to preponderate by the mighty influence of rank and station and wealth

being thrown into it, things must proceed on very different principles from what they have done. If I had no hope of Christianity obtaining the dominion "*till then*," I should have little or no hope at all: for though God is able to turn them, as well as others, to himself, yet it is not his usual way of working in order to promote his own cause. Is it not much too great a compliment to pay to men of rank and fashion, to suppose that Christianity will never prevail till it receives "*their* mighty influence?" Ought they not rather to be told, that if they decline to engage on her side, the consequence will only affect themselves? "Deliverance will arise" from another quarter, and God will cause his name to triumph without them? According to all that has hitherto appeared, and all that we are taught in the scriptures to expect, the people of fashion will be the *last* that shall enter into Christ's kingdom; and when they do enter, it will not be to take the lead, but as rejoicing that they are made low.

ON PARTY SPIRIT.

Mr. Editor,

THERE appears to be a mistaken idea, too commonly prevailing in the religious world at present, respecting what is called a *party spirit*.

Many professors, while they endeavour to promote the interests of religion in *general*, too often neglect to pay that attention which is due

to the interest and welfare of that class or denomination of Christians in *particular*, with which they are or have been connected. It is not uncommon to see one of these "*candid*" Christian professors keep at a distance from his own denomination, or party, where that denomination stands most in need of his countenance and support; while he associates with another party, which is sanctioned by numbers and worldly influence. And when the inconsistency of his conduct is hinted at, he will excuse himself by saying, in the cant phrase of the day, 'That it is his wish to promote the interests of religion in general, *and not to serve a party.*' I wish some of your correspondents would expose the conduct of such fawning professors in its true colours; and endeavour to convince them, that in vain are all pretensions to Christian *candour*, where *consistency* and *integrity* are wanting.

A BRIEF STATEMENT OF THE PRINCIPLES OF DISSENT.

FROM the first establishment of the church of England on its present basis, to this day, there have been Dissenters from it: but as all dissent is expressive, rather of what is disapproved, than of what is embraced, it is natural to suppose that the objects of disapprobation will be different in different persons. The English Dissenters are commonly distinguished into three denominations; *Presbyterians*, *Independents*, and *Baptists*: but there exists, and has existed nearly from the

beginning, a distinction of greater importance, and more descriptive of their respective grounds of dissent, by which also they are reducible to three classes :—viz.

Those who have disapproved of the *doctrine* of the national church—those who approved of its doctrine, but were dissatisfied with *the degree of its reformation*—and those who also approved of its doctrine, but disapproved not only of particular parts, but of *the very principle of its constitution*.

Of the *first* description, there were individuals from the time of the Reformation in the reign of Edward the Sixth, to the Revolution in 1688, several of whom were put to death for their principles : but till the eighteenth century their numbers appear to have been few. Whatever we may think of the doctrines which these people imbibed, no person who respects the right of private judgment, and the authority of him who reproved his own disciples when they would have called for fire from heaven upon his enemies, declaring that he *came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them*, can forbear to regret that the Reformation should at so early a period have been stained with blood.

Of the *second* description, were the greater part of the *Puritans* and *Nonconformists*. They were Presbyterians. They did not object to a national establishment of religion ; but rather wished to be comprehended in it, provided it had been framed after the model of other reformed churches, which they accounted more agreeable to the scriptures.

Hence, when they left the church, it was with reluctance, complaining of the terms of conformity, to which they could not conscientiously subscribe. The several attempts for compromising the differences, and admitting them into the national church, during the reigns of James the First, and Charles the Second, respected Dissenters of this description.

The *third*, and last class of Dissenters, differed not from the Established church in the main, as to their doctrine, though they might not approve of being sworn to the belief of every particular in a human composition, especially of so large an extent as the *Thirty-nine Articles*. But with respect to its constitution, government, and discipline, their objections were far greater than those of their brethren. Its being an ally, and as it were a branch of the state, and comprehending the body of the nation, good and bad, appeared to them utterly inconsistent with the nature of *Christ's kingdom*, which is *not of this world*; and of a Christian church, which in its own articles is said to be "a congregation of faithful men."

They had no antipathy to Churchmen, but considered many of them as persons eminent in godliness; nor to this church in distinction from others, though there might be in them different degrees of good and evil: but their grand objection was to the church *considered as national*. The temporal power of bishops, the imposition of ministers, to the exclusion of the free election of the people, the mixture of godly and manifestly

ungodly characters at the Lord's-table, the corruption of worship, the total want of discipline, and all other deviations from primitive Christianity, appeared to them to be no more than might be expected, if circumstances admitted it, to grow out of a national establishment. They, therefore, peaceably withdrew from its communion, with the view of forming churches on the plan of the New Testament. But the leaders in the establishment considering themselves as *the* true church, and all who dissented from them as guilty of schism, being jealous whereunto this might grow, and having the civil power on their side, thought good to prevent them. In the reign of the famed Elizabeth, in the year 1593, several of them were actually executed on gibbets: not for any contempt of *civil* authority, for to this they professed and yielded all due obedience; nor for any *matter of wrong, or wicked lewdness*, for their lives were unblameable: but for following what they believed to be the mind of Christ, regardless of *ecclesiastical* restraints. The rest fled to Holland for safety.

Among these exiles was Mr. John Robinson, a man who for gentleness, modesty, firmness, and solid wisdom, has been rarely excelled. He and his companions in tribulation were permitted to form a congregational church at Leyden, which is said to have consisted of *three hundred members*. About twenty-seven years after their residence in Holland, namely in 1620, about a hundred of the younger members of the church went over to North America, and formed the settlement of

New Plymouth ; and as every previous attempt to colonize that country had failed, they may properly be considered as the founders of the American empire.

Another of these exiles was the famous Mr. Henry Ainsworth, author of the *Commentary on the Pentateuch, the Psalms, and the Song of Songs*. He was a teacher of another congregational church at Amsterdam.*

To this *third* class belong the greater part of the English Dissenters, who in the present day are denominated *Independents* and *Baptists*. It is true, they have much relaxed in various points of church-government and discipline ; some, perhaps, to their honour, and some to their dishonour ; but the *principle* on which their churches are formed is congregational. The *latter* denomination have one additional reason for their dissent from the Established church above their brethren, namely, their disapprobation of infant baptism ; and in which they also dissent from *them*.

Those who separate from the Established church on this ground, cannot, consistently with their principles, *complain* of the terms of conformity as being either too narrow or too wide for them ; neither can they become *competitors* with it for worldly power. If the government should even offer to make theirs the established religion,

* Two of his Treatises, the one entitled *The Communion of Saints*, and the other *An Arrow against Idolatry*, have within a few years been reprinted at Edinburgh ; to which are prefixed some account of the life and writings of the author.

however they might be obliged to them for their kindness, they could not accept it without relinquishing their first principles relative to church government.

Neither can they, without relinquishing the first principles of the system by which they are distinguished from other Christians, *persecute* any man for his religion, whatever that religion be. They may think and speak of men according to their true character; they may refuse all religious connexion with them; they may expose their principles to just abhorrence: *but their hand must not be upon them.* They can neither call in the aid of the civil power, nor in any way deprive them of their rights: and this, not because they consider error as innocent, but as a species of guilt which is not cognizable by an earthly tribunal.

It has been remarked by American historians, that there was a manifest difference, in respect of forbearance, between the government and colony of New Plymouth, who retained the principles of their beloved Robinson, and those of Massachusetts Bay, which consisted chiefly of Dissenters of the *second* description, and who went over at different times, between the years 1624 and 1633. Other denominations had great cause to complain of the persecuting spirit of the latter, even though they themselves had fled from the persecutions of the English prelates: but of the former no such complaints were heard. Far be it from us, however, to insinuate of any one of these descriptions of Dissenters of the present age, that they are

friendly to persecution. They, and, we hope, the most respectable part of Episcopalians, have since learned that in matters of religion, *to our own master we must stand or fall.*

Once more: Dissenters of this description cannot, consistently with their original principles, be factious, turbulent, disaffected, or in any way inimical to the well-being of the *state*. It is a maxim familiar with their fathers, *Render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's, and unto God the things that are God's.* Obedience, in all civil matters, *to the powers that were*, was an essential article of their creed. In this obedience they did not, indeed, include an *approbation* of every particular measure: but neither did they so explain it away as to make it consist in a merely forced compliance with the laws, for fear of consequences; but in a voluntary, cordial, loyal, and dutiful demeanor. By how much they are impressed also with the truth, that *Christ's kingdom is not of this world*, by so much will they become dead to struggles for worldly power: leaving restless spirits to deal cabals and intrigues, they will *seek peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*

Such, as far as we understand them, are the genuine principles of congregational dissent. We do not pretend to say that all congregationalists have uniformly acted up to them. Many do not understand the principles which they profess, and others act inconsistently with them. Our object is to exhibit them, not merely for the information

of other denominations, but for the conviction of our own.

If the love of civil and religious liberty (which under God is the only security they have) has had too great a hold on some of their minds ; and, in cases where they have conceived it to be in danger, has betrayed them into language and behaviour, which in the hour of serious reflection they must condemn as unchristian ; yet it is not in the power of their worst enemies to prove that they have ever entered into any of those conspiracies which appear to have existed of late years, to overturn the government and constitution of the country. There may, indeed, have been individuals who have done this ; for bad men are known to mingle in all societies : but even of such we have scarcely heard an instance.

There are certain violent men, who appear to be galled by the wholesome restraints of the state upon their persecuting spirit, and who are no less averse to the best, most laborious, and most useful Clergymen in the nation, than they are to us, that make it their business to rake together every idle story, and to persuade their readers that Dissenters as a body are enemies to the state. From such quarters, *village preaching* has been ascribed to *political* motives ; and even *Sunday schools*, as they are called, denounced as the seminaries of sedition. To all these charges we answer by asking for *proof*. In so large a body of men we cannot undertake to say there are no bad men ; neither can our accusers say so of the Established church.

Nay, more, we cannot undertake to vindicate all the conduct of those whom we may account good men. Only let it be *proved* of any village preacher, or school-master, or catechist, that he diffuses a spirit of disaffection to government among those whom he instructs, and if he be not discarded, or at least reprov'd, by his connexions, as soon as they know it, let them bear the blame for ever.

“It may be objected, (says Justin Martyr, in his Apology,) that some Christians have been convicted as evil-doers. Well, I will grant the objection, and more; not only that some, but many, and at different times, have been thus duly convicted upon a fair trial; but then, I must tell you again, that you condemned not the persons aforesaid as criminals, but as Christians. Moreover, we confess, that as all the sects in general among the Greeks went under the common name of Philosophers, though extremely different in opinion; so truly among us the professors of this new wisdom, whether in reality or appearance only, go all by the same title, and are denominated Christians. Wherefore we pray that all those who are indicted by the name of Christian may be examined as to their actions; and that every person convicted may suffer as an evil-doer, and not as a Christian.”

Such is our prayer as Dissenters. If any man, or society of men, be guilty, let them bear their burden; but let them suffer as evil-doers, and not as Dissenters.

MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS,

&c.

FROM

THE BAPTIST MAGAZINE.

1813—1815.

ADDRESS TO THE STUDENTS OF THE STEPNEY INSTITUTION,

At Carter Lane Meeting, June 24, 1813.

But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an Evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.—2 Tim. iv. 5, 6.

BEING requested to address a word of exhortation to my younger brethren, I doubt not but I shall be heard with candour and attention; and that, not only by those immediately addressed, but by all my younger brethren in the ministry. You will not suppose either, that I mean to compare myself to an Apostle, or you to an Evangelist; but the work is in substance the same, whether it be in the hands of extraordinary or ordinary men. And as Paul argued the importance of Timothy's work from his own approaching dissolution, I may be allowed to enforce it on you from kindred considerations; namely, that many of your elder brethren are gone, and others are going the way of all the earth.

You will not expect me, my dear young men, to discourse to you on the advantages of literary acquirements. I might do so, indeed, and that from experience. I know the value of such acquirements, both by what I have been enabled to attain, and by the want of that which I have not attained: but it is more congenial with my feelings to speak of things of still greater importance. Three things in particular are suggested by the passage which I have read, and these I shall recommend to your serious attention; namely, The work itself to which you are devoted—the duties inculcated as necessary to the discharge of it—and the considerations by which it is enforced.

The *work itself* to which you are devoted, is called a *ministry*. The word signifies, as you are aware, *service*. The leading character of a minister is that of a servant. This is an idea that you must ever bear in mind. It is a service, however, of a special kind. Every Christian is a servant of Christ, but every Christian is not a minister of the gospel. A deacon is a servant, as the word also signifies; but his service respects temporal things; yours is that on account of which the office of deacon was appointed, that you should *give yourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word*. It is that which Jethro assigned to Moses, *Be thou for the people to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the causes unto God*. Your living under the gospel dispensation renders this a pleasant work: it must, if you enter into the

spirit of it, be pleasant to study and impart the gladdening doctrine of salvation.

I have observed two extremes relative to this work ; one on the part of ministers themselves, and the other on the part of the people. That on the part of ministers has been an abuse of their office of *ruling*, a fondness for power, aspiring to the exercise of dominion over their brethren. It has always grated in my ears to hear such language as this :—*My church, my deacons, &c.* as if churches were made for them, rather than they for churches. Do not emulate this empty swell. True greatness will revolt at it. *He that will be great, let him be the servant of all.* Think of the woe denounced against the idol shepherd, *The sword shall be upon his arm, and his right eye shall be darkened.* Think especially of him who said, *I have been among you as one that serveth.*

The extreme on the part of the people is this : from the idea of ministers being servants, some of them seem to have imagined that *they* are their masters. It is true that they have a Master, and to whom they must give an account ; but it is not to the people of their charge. As Christians, they are accountable to one another, the same as other Christians ; but as ministers, to Christ only. In serving the church of God you will act as a faithful steward towards his lord's family ; who renders service to them all, but is accountable to his lord only. Serve the church of Christ for his sake.

Let me next direct your attention to *the duties inculcated as necessary to the discharge of the ministry*. These will be found to consist in four things.—First: VIGILANCE. *Watch thou in all things*. This is a general quality that is required to run through all our work. If any of you enter the ministry as furnishing you with a genteel post in society, you will be at best a drone, and had better be any thing than a preacher. You are watchmen, and must be awake when others are asleep. Secondly: PATIENCE. *Endure afflictions*. If you cannot bear these, you had better let the ministry alone. If you be good ministers of Jesus Christ, you will not only be afflicted in common with others, but the afflictions of others will become yours. *Who is offended and I burn not?* You must care for all, and expect on some occasions, when you have done, to receive evil for good. Thirdly: ACTIVITY in the great work of evangelizing men. *Do the work of an Evangelist*. Without considering you as evangelists in the full import of the term, there is a portion of the work pertaining to that office which is common to us all as ministers. Wherever providence may station you, my dear young men, be concerned to evangelize your neighbourhood. Look at the situations of a number of the ejected ministers, and see if the effects of their evangelical labours do not remain to this day. Who can look over the churches in Cambridgeshire, without seeing in them the fruits of the labours of Oddy and Holcroft? Who can review those of Bedfordshire,

and not perceive in them the effects of the labours of Bunyan; labours for which he suffered twelve years imprisonment? The same remarks might be made respecting other parts of the kingdom. Emulate these men of God in evangelizing your respective neighbourhoods. Fourthly: FIDELITY in discharging your trust. *Make proof of thy ministry.* The word means thoroughly to accomplish that which you have undertaken. Such is the import of Col. iv. 17. *Say to Archippus, take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.* Were you to present a soldier with a sword, and bid him make full proof of it, he could not misunderstand you. Would you see an example, look at that of the great Apostle in the context, *I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.*

But here allow me to be a little more particular. If you would make full proof of your ministry, first attend to personal religion.—This is often inculcated by the Apostle. *Take heed to YOURSELVES, and to all the flock.*—*Take heed to THYSELF, and to thy doctrine, &c.* Many people will take our personal religion for granted: as though a man who teaches others must needs be religious himself: but woe unto us if we reason in this way. Tremble at the idea of being a graceless minister; a character, it is to be feared, not very unfrequent! To what is it owing that some of our churches have been prejudiced against an educated ministry? I may be told, to their ignorance; and in part it is

so ; but in part it is owing to other causes :—The lightness, the vanity, the foppery, and the irreligion of some young men, have produced not only this effect, but an abhorrence of the very worship of God as by them administered. Who were ever known to be prejudiced against a Pearce, a Francis, or a Beddome, on account of their education? If there be individuals of this description, let them be disregarded as ignorant, and let them be told that vicious characters are found among the uneducated, as well as the educated. But be it your concern, my dear young men, to shun these evils. The instructions which you receive, if consecrated to Christ, will be a blessing to you ; but if your object be to shine before men, they will be a curse.

Secondly: Let the time allotted you for education be employed in acquiring a habit of useful study.—To make full proof of your ministry, you must give yourselves continually to prayer and the ministry of the word. *Meditate on these things, and give yourselves wholly to them*; and this to the end of your lives. Let no one imagine that he will leave his present situation fully qualified for the work. If by prayer and a diligent application to study, you acquire such a habit of close thinking, as that on entering the work it shall be your delight to prosecute it, this is all that will be expected of you. It is for the want of this habit of study, that there are so many saunterers, and have been so many scandals among ministers.

Thirdly: In every stage of literary improvement, be concerned to have it sanctified and subordinated to God as you go on.—On this depends its utility. It were desirable that the study of languages and sciences should commence in early youth, and that religion should come after it to make the last impression, seeing it is this that ordinarily stamps the character. Could we be certain that the faith of Christ, and the gifts suited to the ministry, would follow an early education, this would be our course: but as this cannot be, our dread of an unconverted ministry makes us require religion as the first qualification. Only pursue learning, that you may be better able to serve the Lord, and all will be well. It is thus that our brethren in India, though their attainments were not made in the earliest stages of life, have retained their spirituality, and increased in usefulness.

Let us conclude by noticing the consideration with which these exhortations are enforced.—*For I am now ready to be offered up, and the time of my departure is at hand.* This language denotes an anxiety in the Apostle that the work of God might go on when he should have fallen asleep; and if we be worthy of the name of Christian ministers, we must feel a portion of the same. Dear young men, to you we look for successors in the work. It is not for me to say, how long your elder brethren may continue; but we have seen stars of no ordinary magnitude set within a few years! It seems but yesterday since they were with us, and we were the juniors among

them. Now we are obliged to take their place, and you, beloved youths, will soon have to take ours. We do not wish to hold ourselves up as your examples; but the *cause* in which we have been engaged, and in which the Lord has not frowned on our attempts, we do most earnestly recommend to your tender and solicitous regard.

Your elder brethren may be spared a little longer, and yet be able to do but little more. We feel the force of the wise man's counsel—(May you feel it too!)—*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.*

REMARKS ON THE CASE OF THE CONVERTED THIEF.

Luke xxiii. 39—43.

IT is an opinion entertained by some who imbibe what is called *rational* Christianity, that, character being formed by habits and habits by a series of actions, sudden conversions are impossible. It would seem to be in support of this hypothesis, that doubts have been suggested as to the previous character of the converted thief; as whether his crime might not consist in some affair of a political nature, which being accounted seditious, affected his life; and whether he might not, upon the whole, have been a good character notwithstanding. There is nothing however in the story that countenances such a notion. He is called a *malefactor*, or *evil-doer*; and the term here rendered a *thief*,

signifies as much as a *robber*. It is the same word that is used of Barabbas, who was a *robber and murderer*. Besides, he condemns himself; who then shall go about to justify him?

Those who imbibe this opinion could have nothing to say to a condemned malefactor, unless it were to examine him as to the reality and heinousness of his crimes, hoping to find him less guilty than was alleged. If on inquiry they find he has been a bad character, they must give him up as to any change being effected in this life. The gospel which they preach will not reach his case. He must die, therefore, in his sins, and whither the Saviour is gone he cannot go.

Some that have not carried matters to this length, have yet considered the conversion of bad characters as every thing but hopeless. They do not say it is impossible, but conceive it to be exceedingly improbable; as if the probability of a sinner's conversion depended on his previous character, and was influenced by it. Jesus, however, commissioned his disciples to preach *repentance and remission of sins, in his name, among all nations, BEGINNING AT JERUSALEM*; the crimes of whose inhabitants, in crucifying the Lord of Glory, were such, that, compared with them, those of ordinary malefactors are but little follies.

The doctrine of grace to the chief of sinners never seems to be *guarded* in the scriptures, in the manner we sometimes see it in human writings. The salvation of a great sinner is not there held

up as a *singular instance*, which we are not to expect to see repeated ; but rather as a proof that no sinner need despair on account of the magnitude of his sins.—*For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering for a PATTERN to them who should hereafter believe on him to everlasting life.*

The way in which the scriptures guard the doctrines of grace is not by limiting its operations, but by insisting upon its *effects*. They put no questions to a sinner coming to Jesus for mercy, as to the magnitude of his sins ; but they declare without reserve that *If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.* On this principle let us carefully inspect the case of the converted thief, and apply it as we go along, to cases in our own times.

First: He frankly *acknowledges his guilt, and the justice of his condemnation.*—*We, indeed, justly—we receive the due reward of our deeds.* The sinner who palliates or prevaricates as to any part of his conduct, is not a new creature, and therefore is not in Christ.

It is possible, however, that a convict may, through the fallibility of the most upright judge and jury, be condemned to die for a crime of which he is not guilty, although he has been guilty of many other crimes ; while, therefore, he acknowledges the justice of God in his condemnation, he cannot in respect of the proceedings of man say, with the dying thief, *I suffer justly.*

Such a case as this may occur, and where it does, it is doubtless right for the party to speak the truth. But before he is entitled to credit, the credibility of the evidence against him requires to be carefully and impartially considered. Truth, also, is consistent, and very rarely devoid of evidence. Before he is entitled to credit in the denial of what has been legally proved against him, it should be considered also that he may have an *interest* in trying to persuade those about him of his innocence in respect of the crime for which is condemned to suffer, as it is by this only that he can hope for an application being made on his behalf for the mitigation of his punishment. When a compassionate minister attends a convict in such circumstances, and hears him confess how great a sinner he has been in other things, though as to the crime for which he is about to suffer he is innocent, he may be induced to believe him, and this the convict will quickly perceive, and will go on by every means in his power to work up his feelings. The convict may even exaggerate his other crimes for the sake of producing a belief of his innocence of the crime for which he stands condemned. But it ought to be considered, that for the crimes which he confesses he lies under no indictment, and therefore they do not affect his life: but for the crime which he denies, he stands not only indicted but condemned:—this therefore affecting his life, he is under the strongest temptation that can be conceived to deny it. The sum is, that when a person is found guilty by a

humane judge and an impartial jury, it may be laid down as a *general* rule that he is guilty, and no professions of repentance while he continues to deny it can be sincere: and though there are *particular exceptions* to this rule, yet no convict ought to be considered as one of them on his own bare word; unaccompanied with evidence, especially when he is under the greatest possible temptation, though he were guilty, to wish to be thought innocent.

Secondly: The few things uttered by the dying thief had no bearing on his temporal interest, but were the *pure dictates of truth and righteousness*.—In condemning his own conduct, he justified his countrymen as to their treatment of *him*: yet at the same time he condemned them as to their treatment of Jesus. If by the first, he might be supposed to conciliate them, and induce them to make interest for his being taken down from the cross, the last would have a contrary effect. His words, therefore, *taken together*, must have arisen from a regard to what was true and right.

Thirdly: His repentance toward God was accompanied with *faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ*.—The prayer that he offered was that of faith, and, considering his circumstances, of great faith. A man of his habits cannot be supposed to have been much acquainted with the prophecies, or the miracles of Christ. Excepting the general notion, which may be considered as common to every Jew, that the Messiah would come, he would probably know little or nothing of religion. It is

not unlikely that till he saw Jesus in the hands of the rulers, he knew nothing of him; and now that he saw him, it was under every circumstance of weakness and disgrace: his enemies were triumphing over him, his friends had mostly forsaken him, public opinion was against him, and his very crucifixion was deemed inconsistent with his messiahship. The lowliness of his condition from the beginning was a great stumbling-block to the Jews, and the circumstances of his death must render it more, especially to one who had never seen him but in this situation. Even those who had believed in him were made to doubt by his crucifixion. Yet under all these disadvantages he had the fullest conviction of his messiahship, or he could not have offered the prayer which he did, *Lord remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!* By the request to be remembered, he must have meant as much as if he had asked to be *saved*, which implies his belief in Jesus as the Saviour. Indeed he must have believed him to be the Saviour, even of the chief of sinners, or *he* would not have hoped to be remembered by him. A self-righteous spectator would have cried shame on such a petition; and had he himself been influenced by that spirit, he might have suppressed it, as being unworthy of so great a favour. He must also have believed that this Jesus, though now expiring upon the cross, would shortly be in possession of a kingdom in the heavenly world. In this again he was before the apostles, whose notions of an earthly kingdom

blinded their minds. Finally, it would seem as if he believed that in that blessed kingdom Jesus would *make intercession for transgressors*; why else, did he ask to be remembered by him? This is certain, that if he had possessed the clearest views of the intercession of Christ, he could not have expressed himself better.

How full and appropriate was the term which his heart dictated. It is as if he said, 'Think of me when it shall be well with thee.' He might have said, *pardon me; save me; bless me*; but the words *remember me* include them all. An interest in Christ's heart will comprehend an interest in all his benefits. Nor was the term less appropriate to the *condition* of the petitioner; an outcast from society, who will remember *him*? The public would think no more of him; his friends would be glad to forget him, as having disgraced the family; but there is one with whom he ventures to lodge a petition, *Lord, remember me!*

How shall we account for so large a portion of faith and spiritual understanding in one circumstanced as he was, and in so short a time? Without divine influence it cannot be accounted for, but with it that which he saw and heard was sufficient for every purpose. When led to the place of execution, he heard the answer of Jesus to the women who lamented him. *Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children: for behold the days are coming in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which*

never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us: for if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry? He had also heard the prayer for his enemies, when they were nailing him to the cross, *Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.* To a heart which the Lord had opened, these sayings would be more than so many sermons. Nor was this all: he would gather from the very jeers of his enemies, that Jesus professed to be Christ, the Son of God, and the Saviour of men. Even the impenitent thief knew this, and joined in reproaching him for it. The superscription written over him, **THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS**, was equal to saying, **This is the Messiah**; and so contained a testimony for him, on which account the Jews wished to have it altered. He would also perceive the spirit of the sufferer and that of his persecutors. Altogether, he saw that he had *done nothing amiss*; and his mind being open to conviction, would quickly admit the consequences—He must be what he professes to be, Christ, the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world.

From this conviction proceeded his petition to be remembered by him; and considering the well-known character of Christ, it was not surprising that it should be heard and answered. He had declared in his discourses, *Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out*; and he acted up to it.—*Jesus said unto him, Verily, I say unto thee, To-day shall thou be with me in paradise.* Of the

reproaches that were cast upon him by his enemies he took no notice; but the prayer of the contrite and believing sinner arrested his attention. At a time when he was grappling with the powers of darkness, and sustaining the load of human guilt, we should have thought he might have been excused from attending to individual applications; but a sinner can never come to him in an unacceptable time. He gives him an answer of peace, and that without delay. There was a case in which he held the petitioner awhile in suspense, alleging, *It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to the dogs*; but this was an urgent case. In a very little time the spark of life would be extinguished. The word must be *nigh* him, or it will be unavailing. Had he been required to ascend to heaven, or to descend into the deep for the blessing, it had been utterly out of reach. Had it been necessary for him to possess a set of virtuous habits, each acquired by a series of virtuous acts, the way had been too circuitous for him: but the word of faith was *nigh* him, and he laid hold of it; with his heart believing unto righteousness, and with his mouth making confession unto salvation.

As the request to be remembered included much, so did the answer. To be *with Christ in paradise*, not only supposes that his soul would exist when separated from the body, but intimates the forgiveness of his sins, and all that was necessary to salvation. It exceeds all that he asked or thought: he asked to be *remembered* by him;

and is told he shall *be with him*: he asked to be remembered *at a future time*, he knew not when ; and is assured that *before the day should end*, they would be together in paradise. And lest it should seem too much to be true, Jesus prefaced the assurance with the solemn asseveration, *Verily I say unto thee*. The dying man, no doubt, believed him, and rejoiced in hope of eternal life.

But Fourthly: Though assured of being with Christ in paradise, *there is no mention of his making this a part of his confession, or telling the spectators that he was going to heaven*.—What was said on this subject was by Christ, and not by him. Is it unnatural to suppose that the circumstances under which he died, would induce him to suppress things which might have been proper in other circumstances? Had he been a martyr to the truth, he might have declared with great propriety, that though they had cast him out, God would receive him; or had he died in his bed, like other righteous men, he might have said with an Apostle, *If the earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*; but dying as a malefactor, whatever were his hopes, or joys, he would not be forward to speak of them. If in cases where men are *buffeted for their faults*, the most exemplary patience loses its *glory and thankworthiness*, much more where they are executed for their crimes. It must appear to the dying thief, and I think to any true penitent in his situation, that the expressions of a lively

hope would have *no glory*, but must rather appear incongruous and disgusting. In such circumstances, therefore, he would rather chuse to steal out of the world in silence. Duty required him to acknowledge his sin, and he did so, without prevarication or reserve. Let the world think ill of his conduct; the more they do this, the better: but, as to their thinking well of his future state, he discovered no concern about it.

Besides, except his acknowledgment of the justice of his sentence, he had no claim to the credence of the spectators for the sincerity of his repentance. Unless his life had been prolonged, he could give no *proof* of it: what right then had he to expect to be credited as to his future happiness? The testimony of a single witness was not admitted in certain cases under the Mosaic law: whatever, therefore, such a witness might know, he would not be forward to utter, and still less to claim credit for the truth of that of which he could produce no legal proof: so the truly penitent convict, knowing that he has no such means of proving his sincerity as he would have if his life were prolonged, will not be eager in proclaiming it.

The above remarks are submitted to the serious consideration of those ministers or private Christians, who are called to attend persons under sentence of death. Let the case of the dying thief have all its weight in encouraging us to use means for their conversion; but let us not hastily flatter ourselves, and still less the unhappy convict,

that we have succeeded. If his supposed penitence be attended with an eagerness to proclaim his own sincerity, and his certain expectation of future happiness, it should be strongly suspected; and if, with a denial of what has been clearly proved against him, or a disposition to palliate or prevaricate, utterly discredited.

The boasting language so common among convicts who profess to repent and believe the gospel, in our times, has caused some to ask 'whether the gallows was not the surest way to heaven?'

There certainly are principles, apart from religion, which account for much, that in such circumstances passes for conversion. Besides what has been observed under the first remark, of men being induced to profess repentance for their other sins, while they deny that for which they are to suffer, in hope of saving their lives, there may be *strong feelings* respecting a future state, while yet there is no true repentance. When a man has received the sentence of death, and knows he must shortly stand before his Maker, is it surprising that *his heart fails him*? And if, when his character and condition are faithfully stated to him, *he weeps*, is it any wonder? I add, if when the hope of salvation by Jesus Christ is held up to him, he catches at it with eagerness, as his only refuge against terror; and if a gleam of hope be thus kindled in his mind, and he be encouraged to think well of his state, it does not require the supernatural influences of the Holy

Spirit to cause him to *weep for joy*. And this in the account of a good minister, whose desires are ardently drawn forth for his salvation, will render him a object of *hope*. But after all, should the convict be pardoned, the minister, if he be wise as well as good, will have many painful apprehensions lest the event that terminates his terrors should also terminate his religion !

If only one in ten of those for whom hope is entertained in the hour of terror, should, on their lives being prolonged, prove truly religious characters, it is sufficient to encourage the utmost efforts for the conversion of such unhappy men, but not to justify our pronouncing on every one, who dies with apparent contrition, that he is gone to heaven.



ON DISSENT.



THE longer a Christian lives, and the more he observes of what is passing before him, the more reason he will see for preferring a candid and impartial judgment of men and things. All parties in their turn declaim against prejudice and party zeal, but it is not from declamation that we must form our judgment. If we wish to know the truth, we must read those who think differently from us, who, whether they be impartial towards us or not, will be much more likely to detect our faults than we are to detect them ourselves.

These remarks have been occasioned by reading a critique on *The History of Dissenters* by Messrs. Bogue and Bennett, and some other kindred pieces, in *The Quarterly Review* for October 1813. This article, though manifestly written by one who is no more a friend to the Puritans and Non-conformists than he is to the present race of Dissenters; and probably no more friendly to evangelical religion in the church than out of it, yet contains a considerable portion of impartiality towards individuals, and even his censures are often worthy of our attention. From reading this review, as well as from perusing the volumes reviewed, there is one truth of which I am fully convinced; which is, that both eulogy and censure are commonly bestowed with too little discrimination, and often applied to communities where they ought to be confined to individuals. If a few men excel in a community, such is the vanity of human nature, that the whole must arrogate to themselves the praise; or if a few be guilty of impropriety, such is the invidiousness of party-zeal, that the whole must be censured on their account. Could we be more discriminate, both in our praises and censures, we should be much nearer the truth, and what we write would be far more likely to do good. We can consent for every man to have his due, and to bear his own burden; but are disgusted with those who are continually eulogizing their fathers that they may exalt themselves, and stigmatizing other men's fathers that they may depreciate their neighbours.

In reading the lives of the Puritans and Non-conformists, I read the lives of men of whom, with all their faults, the world was not worthy : but if I be impartial, I shall find many of the excellent of the earth who did not rank with either of them ; and among those who did, I shall find many whose principles and conduct it will not be in my power to vindicate. Hardly as the Puritans were treated, if I had been one of them, and had held those intolerant principles which many of them avowed and carried with them into the New World, I do not perceive how I could have expected different treatment from others who were in power. I might have been treated more rigorously than I should have treated them, had I been in their place and they in mine ; but the principle of intolerance is the same. That for which I should have suffered might also have been truth, while that for which I would have caused others to suffer might be pernicious error : but in a question of this nature, I should have had no right to take this for granted, seeing it would have been judging in my own cause. My rule ought rather to have been, to *do unto others as I would that they should do unto me.*

I am not able to vindicate Messrs. Bogue and Bennett, whose praises and censures are both, as it appears to me, much too indiscriminate ; but I can perceive that their reviewer, while chastising them, is continually exposing himself to censure for the same things.

He seldom detects a fault in his authors without endeavouring to fix it upon the whole body, by

ascribing it to their *dissent*. Speaking of divisions and separations among Dissenters, he says, "This evil grows out of the principle of dissent. The minister of an establishment has no temptation from vanity, or the love of singularity, or any mere worldly motive, to labour in insignificant distinctions: but amongst Dissenters the right of private judgment is so injudiciously inculcated, that the men who are trained amongst them learn not unfrequently to despise all judgment except their own." To say nothing of the temptations which the minister of an establishment *has*, though he may not have these, it is sufficient to reply, If unlovely separations arise from an injudicious inculcation of the right of private judgment, let them be traced to that cause, and not to dissent; let them be ascribed to the *abuse* of the right of private judgment, but not to the principle itself, or to any necessary step in order to obtain it. An advocate for despotic government might object to the disorders of our popular elections, and to the violence of our parliamentary debates, and might tell us that in certain countries there is no temptation to such disorder and such violence: but we should readily answer, They have temptations as bad, or worse, of another kind, and the right of choosing our representatives, and that of free parliamentary debate, are of such importance to the well-being of the nation, that the evils which they occasion are as nothing when compared with it. The right of private judgment in matters of religion is of that account that we cannot part with it without *making shipwreck of faith and of*

a good conscience. As to the abuses of it, whoever is guilty of them, let him bear his own burden. The "schism which took place in the Evangelical Magazine," should not have been lugged in by this writer for an example, without having first made himself acquainted with the *true* cause of it.

If I dissent from antipathy to a particular clergyman, or for the sake of gratifying my own will, or to feed my own vanity, I am what this reviewer considers me—a *sectarian*; but if I dissent for the sake of obtaining liberty to follow what I verily believe to be the mind of Christ, I am not a sectarian in the ill sense of the term, nor in any sense except that in which Paul avowed himself to be one. By this writer's own account, if I continue in the Established Church, I must make no "profession." That is, I must not profess to repent of my sins, and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation; if I do, he will construe it into "a profession of being better than my neighbours," which he tells me is inconsistent with "Christian humility," and insinuates that the whole is "pharisaical hypocrisy." This is certainly speaking out; and standing as it does, in direct opposition to the divine command of *coming out from among unbelievers, and being separate from them*, renders it easy to determine the path of duty.

The writer censures Messrs. Bogue and Bennett for ascribing almost every thing vicious and persecuting to Churchmen; yet he himself ascribes almost every thing sour, litigious, and splenetic to

Dissenters. He represents the intolerance of the Puritans as if it were universal, and as if all that settled in America were of the same spirit. But, (to say nothing of Roger Williams, whom he himself not only acquits, but applauds, as "the man whose name, if all men had their due, would stand as high as that of William Penn, as having begun the first civil government upon earth that gave equal liberty of conscience) there was a broad line of distinction between those Puritans who founded the colony of *New Plymouth* in 1620, and those who a few years after founded that of *Massachusetts Bay*. The former were the members of Mr. John Robinson, who had peaceably separated from the Church of England, and with his friends retired to Holland, for the sake of liberty of conscience: but the Massachusetts's people had never relinquished the principle of national churches, and the authority of the magistrate in matters of faith and worship. And it was among these people, and owing to this principle, that the persecutions in America were carried on. Of this there is a full account given in *Backus's History of the American Baptists*, Vol. I. and as the Baptists bore a large part of those persecutions, they may well be supposed to know who were their persecutors, and what were their avowed principles.

The work of Messrs. Bogue and Bennett is considered by this writer as a fair specimen of Dissenting principles in the present day, or as "representing the general temper of those to whom it is addressed." But so far as I have had the

means of judging, it is considered among Dissenters in a very different light. Some few may admire it; but all that I have heard speak of it, consider it as deeply tinged with party-zeal and revolutionary politics, and as being rather an eulogy on their own denomination, than a *History of Dissenters*. I am not aware that the French revolution has promoted the cause of dissent; and if it were so, an increase on such principles is of no value. Men may leave the national church, not on account of what is wrong in it, but of what is right, in which case dissent itself must be wicked. Dissent is not a *cause* for a Christian to rejoice in, any further than as it includes the³ cause of Christ. It is ground on which may be erected a temple of God, or a synagogue of Satan.

That there are many among Dissenters who feel that "moral expatriation" which the reviewer laments, is admitted; but the same is true of Churchmen. The numbers, however, of both, have of late years considerably diminished.—Dissenters must ever be friends to civil and religious liberty, as it is their only security: but they may be this without turbulence, or envy, or spleen; or any of those unamiable qualities which this writer attaches to dissent. I believe it will be found, that from the beginning, those Dissenters who have separated from the Church of England for the purpose of forming churches according to what they consider as the mind of Christ, have been of a much more pacific spirit than those, who, retaining the principles of national churches

and the authority of the magistrates in matters of faith and worship, were always lingering after a comprehension in the establishment, and finding fault with particular ceremonies and forms that kept them out of it. That this was the case among the first settlers in America has been already noticed: and so far as my observation extends, it is the case to this day. Those who dissent for the sake of being at liberty to follow up their convictions in promoting the kingdom of Christ, will not be averse to the *civil* institutions of their country; and as to the *ecclesiastical*, unless called to defend themselves against the charge of schism, and such others as are heaped upon them, they would cherish no hostility. Being allowed to follow the dictates of their own consciences, they are willing that others should do the same. They dissent, not so much from antipathy to what they desert, as from love to what they embrace; and they love and pray for the government that protects them in the enjoyment of it.

They cannot approve of making the political prosperity of their country the *supreme* object of their pursuit, nor consent that the religion of Christ should be rendered *subservient* to it; and this, in the esteem of those who are otherwise minded, will often be ascribed to the want of patriotism: but a wise and good government will know how to distinguish a contumelious behaviour towards them, from a conscientious obedience to God; and while they properly resent the former, will not fail to respect the latter.

MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS,

&c.

CIRCULAR LETTERS,

Addressed to the Churches of the Northamptonshire Association.

1782—1815.

THE EXCELLENCY AND UTILITY OF THE GRACE OF HOPE.

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of
the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Dear Brethren,

ON this delightful subject, we feel great pleasure in addressing you. We congratulate you amidst all your sorrows, on your possessing such a *hope*; a hope which has foundations the most solid, and objects the most substantial. God has not put this jewel into your hands to be made light of. He would have you to understand it in order to prize it. His bestowing upon you a spiritual illumination is to this very end. He does not open your eyes to present you with mere spectacles of misery, nor call you by his grace as having nothing to bestow upon you: no, blessed be his name, *the eyes of your understandings are enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.*

To assisting your meditations on this cheering subject, by showing its *excellency* and pointing out its great *utility*, we devote this epistle.

We trust that what we have already communicated to you on various important subjects, has not been received in vain. We would not wish to trifle with you, brethren, and we trust our letters to you have not been trifled with. Having therefore confidence in your readiness to examine and receive what we communicate, *we are willing to impart unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye are dear unto us!*

HOPE, or *an expectation of future good*;* is of so extensive an influence, that whether true or false, well or ill founded, it is one of the principal springs that keep all mankind in motion. It is vigorous, bold, and enterprising. It causes men to encounter dangers, endure hardships, and

* Hope, as its objects are *future*, is distinguished from *enjoyment*. Herein the portion of the saints is unlike that of the worldling, and even that of saints in glory. Also from *love*, the objects of which are past and present as well as future, whereas hope is confined to the last. As they are *good* it is opposed to *fear*, which is the dread of evil. As they are both *future* and *good*, and merely so, it is distinct from *faith*. We may be said to believe things past, as that the worlds were made; and things evil, as the wrath to come; but cannot be said to hope in either. As it is an *expectation*, it is distinguished from *desire*. We may be said to desire what it is not possible we should ever enjoy; but we cannot hope unless there appear at least a possibility, and generally speaking some probability of our possessing the object hoped for; and in proportion as this probability appears to the mind great or small, hope or expectation is strong or weak.

surmount difficulties innumerable, in order to accomplish the desired end. In religion it is of no less consequence. It is claimed by almost all ranks and parties of men. It makes a considerable part of the religion of those that truly fear God: for though in all true religion there is and must be a love to God and divine things for their own excellency; yet God, who knows our frame, and draws us with the *cords of a man*, condescends also to excite us with the promise of gracious rewards, and to allure us with the prospect of a crown of glory.

We wish you, brethren, seeing God has given you everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace, to consider well the GOODNESS or EXCELLENCY of that divine gift. On this account it excels every other hope as much as a pearl excels a pebble. A great part of its excellency consists in its being so *well founded*. Though our hope should aspire to the highest heavens, and could grasp in all the bliss of an eternal world, alas, what would it avail us if ill founded? The hope that is ill founded, is said to *make ashamed*, and so terminates in disappointment. It is to be feared that many, (O that there may be none of us!) who are now towering high in expectation, will one day be *ashamed and confounded because they thus had hoped*.

The grand FOUNDATION of all good hope is *the Lord Jesus Christ, God's revealed Mediator, embraced by faith*. On this rock the people of God in all ages have built their hope, whatever

other foundations sinners have devised. Of old God laid this in Zion. This was the subject of apostolic ministrations; they held forth none other than him *whom God had set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.*

That the mediation of Christ is the primary ground of all good hope, will appear evident if we do but recollect (and O, let us never forget!) the hopeless condition in which sin involved us. By our breach of covenant with God, the very idea of future good for us was totally annihilated. Nothing but eternal tribulation and anguish, as the reward of evil doers, was now to be expected. The image of God being totally effaced in us, his favour towards us was absolutely forfeited. Hence the least idea of hope from any other ground than the mediation of Christ is not only declarative of opposition to God's way of salvation, but is altogether a wild chimera. By the state of the fallen angels we may learn what ground is left for hope where no mediator is provided; and what must have been our state had we been left in their condition? These, void of all hope whatever, *are reserved in everlasting chains under darkness, unto the judgment of the great day.*

We are not unacquainted with the many false grounds on which sinners rest their hopes, but we as well know who has said, *Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* We doubt not, brethren, but you have perceived the vanity of a multitude of those things which buoy up the hopes of a great part of

mankind. Yourself, it may be, were once the subjects of those delusory dreams whereof we trust ye are now ashamed. It yields us great pain to see such numbers of our fellow-sinners standing on such *slippery places* ! The mere mercy of God to the exclusion of Christ's mediation, not being so bad as some others, common honesty and civility between man and man, descent from pious parents, a place and a name among the godly, suffering much affliction in his life, legal convictions, superior knowledge, superstitious zeal ; these are some of the dangerous foundations, on which vast numbers of deluded mortals build their eternal ALL ! But ye, brethren, have not so learned Christ. Be it your and our resolution, with holy Paul, to *know nothing* in this matter *but Christ and him crucified* !

You will remember, dear brethren, it was necessary that this glorious Mediator should be *revealed* ere he could become a ground of hope. The amazing design of mercy was first laid in the eternal council ; hence the blood of Christ is termed the blood of the covenant through which prisoners in the pit become prisoners of hope : but whatever *design* of mercy might exist in the *mind* of God, that could not become a ground of hope till revealed by the *word* of God. Hence the *promise* of the woman's seed afforded the first and only dawn of hope to a lost world. Hence also the *word of God* is frequently represented in scripture as that whereon our hope resteth.

Equally necessary is it that the mediation of Christ should be *embraced by faith*. We trust you need not be told that though this mediation be the sole *meritorious* ground of our hope, yet a special work of the Spirit of God must take place in us, before we can reasonably put in our claim for eternal bliss. The work of Christ gives to the elect sinner a *title* to its possession; the work of the Spirit gives a *meetness* for its enjoyment. If we experience the latter, we may lay claim to a personal interest in the former. These God has joined together, and let no man dare to put them asunder. Christ must be *in* us, ere he can be to us the hope of glory. The hope that maketh not ashamed is wrought by *experience*. The graces of the Spirit, however, become a ground of hope, not through any inherent *merit*, but in virtue of the *promise* of God; or rather they are the evidence of our interest in the promise. In numerous passages of holy writ, God has promised eternal life to all such as bear certain characters: namely, to those that are of a broken and contrite spirit, that mourn for sin, believe in Christ, love him in sincerity, deny themselves, take up their cross, follow him, &c. &c. Hence, all who through grace are the subjects of these spiritual dispositions, enjoy a right, founded on such promises, to hope for eternal bliss: and this is another reason, why the *word of God* is frequently represented in scripture, as that whereon our hope resteth.

It is to be feared that many split upon this rock. We cautioned you against those who *professedly*

build on other foundations than Jesus Christ ; but these are not the only self-deceivers. There is a more refined sort, as to their professed principles, who build their hope on something more specious in appearance, but not a whit better in reality. These, brethren, you have more reason to be guarded against, since they are more frequent in your assemblies, and some of them less discernible, though not less dangerous than the former. These will frequently abound with supercilious treatment towards those who profess to build upon their own works—will abundantly exclaim against legal books and legal preaching; which, by the way, is the name they give, not only to those performances wherein men are taught to expect eternal life as the fruit of their own doings, but as well to all those wherein practical godliness is pressed home. These much value themselves for their supposed orthodoxy, or soundness in the doctrines of grace; nay, so valiant are they, many of them, for the TRUTH, that they will contend for it even at the tavern or upon the ale bench! but they seem to have forgotten that part of sound doctrine, that *faith without works is dead, being alone*.*

* Besides, it would be no great difficulty to prove that these people, with all their boasted soundness, are unbelievers in the very *essentials* of the gospel. That is an essential of the gospel, without which it would not be the gospel. Now what constitutes it gospel is its being *good news*; but whatever faith such people may have in it as a piece of *news*, they have none in the *goodness* of it, which is a most essential thing in it, and without which it would not be the gospel.

These talk loudly of building their hopes on Christ alone; but forget that he must be, as one says, a Christ believed in, loved, and obeyed, and not merely a Christ talked of. These are frequently heard boasting how strong their hopes are, of their being delivered from slavish fear, of their certainty of going to heaven, die when they may, with many such presumptuous things; but they forget surely what the Judge of all the earth has said, *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven.* These, whatever their professions may be, build not upon the rock of ages; but upon a *concealed part of self*. There is no such great difference between them and professed legalists, against whom they so bitterly inveigh: those think to gain heaven by *doing*, and these by *knowing*, which they think to be *believing*. Their hope is but the hope of the hypocrite, which will in the end prove no better than the spider's web. Nor do they draw their *evidences* for glory, from such things as the scriptures speak of as characterizing the godly, but from their supposed orthodoxy or soundness in religious principles, with, perhaps, some *texts of scripture* which may have occurred to their minds with a certain impulse, tending mightily to lift them up with joy, but not to fill them with holy mourning, or self-loathing, or with a desire and endeavour to walk humbly with God. Real religion has no worse enemies than these. By approaching near unto it, and being

accounted its votaries, they are capable of doing it much more injury than its professed foes. While, Joab-like, they embrace it with a dissimulating kiss, by their works they stab it as under its *fifth rib!*

We do not mean to suggest but that the holy scriptures are often of great consolation to the godly; nor yet to deny that some passages of it may be more consolatory to the godly than others; and the same passages at one time which are not at another: these are things which we freely acknowledge and happily experience. For the truth or duty contained in any passage of scripture to be, by the Spirit of God, opened to the mind, and impressed upon the heart, and afford strong consolation to the person, is a part of experience which we can set seal to, as both reasonable and desirable. It is *through patience and comfort of the scriptures that we have hope*. But when impressions have no tendency to humble, sanctify, and lead the soul to God, we affirm, and are ready to give proof that they are no better than *lying vanities*, though they lie at the bottom of some mighty fabrics. Our having certain passages of scripture impressed upon our minds, is in itself no evidence for glory at all, either to ourselves or others; no, not though those passages should be promises of heaven itself: but if by this we are humbled and sanctified; if a spirit of holy mourning, self-loathing, watchfulness, love to Christ and holiness, as well as joy, be hereby wrought in us, *that* is an evidence for glory.

Many persons are the subjects of scripture impressions, and to the great scandal of religion, are *hence* supposed to have God's good work begun in them, when it appears evident by their spirit and conduct that they are utter strangers to real Christianity. Balaam could have produced plenty of such evidence as this. All those things of his speaking are recorded as a part, and an excellent part of holy scripture, and were suggested to him even by God himself. *The Lord*, we are told, *put a word in Balaam's mouth*. But as none of these things had any tendency to sanctify his heart, they left him but where they found him! Besides, we have no reason to think but that Satan can and does suggest many things in the words of scripture. We know he did thus to Christ himself; and if to him why not to us? He has ends to answer in so doing; namely, to deceive poor souls with such airy dreams, to draw them away from resting their hopes on scriptural grounds, and to substitute these illusory foundations in their room.—On the other hand, whatever be the means, whether hearing the word preached, reading, conversation, prayer, or meditation; and whether, in so meditating, any part of the word be *suddenly* brought to our mind, and impressed upon our heart, or whether it be more *gradually*; whether we have never thought of the passage before, or whether we have read it a thousand times over it matters not.* If it tend to produce

* See *Help to Zion's Travellers*, a piece published at the request of the Association by our brother Hall, p. 139—141.

a spirit of pure love to Christ, lowliness, and holiness, *that* affords us a ground for hope, and a reason for thankfulness. God has plentifully promised salvation to all who are the subjects of these spiritual dispositions.

Should an enemy to your holy religion, after all require of you a reason for the hope that is in you; should he demand what grounds you have to conclude that the things you hope for have a *real existence*; we trust you would not be at a loss for a reply. There is not one of all those solid arguments which prove the divinity of the sacred oracles, (which for brevity's sake we forbear to enumerate,) but would furnish you with sufficient reason to give an answer substantial in its nature, though in its manner *with meekness and fear*.

The glorious OBJECTS with which your hope is conversant next demand your attention, brethren; as they much, very much contribute to its excellency, and your felicity.—You may be assured they are something *good*. Hope of every kind has to do with nothing but what in the view of the mind appears such, and this hope has to do with nothing but what is really such. That which we hope for is not merely an apparent, but a real good; and not only a good, but a substantial good; and not only a substantial, but a suitable, a great, yea, an everlasting good!

The hope of worldlings terminates on trifles; on things which, when enjoyed, do but cloy, and cannot satisfy.—Let a man in pursuit of happiness knock at the door of every created good, every

created good must answer, *It is not in me!* Riches make themselves wings and fly away; honour is empty as the wind; mirth, what is it but madness? Crowns of earthly glory commonly prove crowns of thorns to them that wear them; all are lying vanities, promising what they cannot perform. O, brethren, let the resolve of the church made wise by affliction be our resolve, *The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him.*

Here we find what the wisest of men well termed *substance*.—Only a taste thereof affords substantial bliss. O, to enjoy God! To enjoy God in Christ! To enjoy him with the society of the blessed! To enjoy him with soul and body, the latter raised, and re-united to the former! To enjoy him to all eternity! To enjoy him and be changed into the same image! These, brethren, these are the things on which our hope centres: nor is it a matter of small consolation, that God himself has pledged his faithfulness for their bestowment on all his faithful followers. However desirable these things might be, we should have little reason to rejoice therein, if he on whose word it rested, were either false or fickle; but blessed be his name, we live *in hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began!*

Nor let it seem the less glorious that it is a *future good*.—In the view of infinite wisdom, *it is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.* It seems good to him to place the blessings he

means to bestow upon us at a distance ; so at a distance that they must be hoped in, and waited for, ere they are enjoyed. Doubtless, God could have bestowed all his blessings on us as quickly as he did paradise on the converted thief ; but he has not seen fit in common so to do. Certainly, by his suspending for a time our enjoyment of promised favours, and at length bestowing them, he glorifies his faithfulness in the end, as well as that in the mean time he exercises our faithfulness, patience, and resignation to his will. But this is not all : they are the more welcome when they do come. If the object hoped for prove less in value than we expected, then indeed its having been suspended only sinks it the more in our esteem ; but if it surpass all expectation, if it exceed desire itself when it makes its appearance, then its having been so long in coming only makes it the more welcome when come. *Hope deferred, maketh the heart sick for a time ; but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life !* Let us not think much at waiting a little while ; no, not though during that time exposed to great tribulations ; since our dwelling before the throne will by this be rendered the more blissful, and our *weight of glory* by this increased. With what sacred pleasure did the patriarch Jacob resign his life, having *waited* for God's salvation ! With what unspeakable joy did good old Simeon embrace the *long-looked-for* blessing ! With what raptures of bliss will the Lord again be welcomed on an approaching period, when all who love his appearing will

unite, saying, *Lo, this is our God, we have WAITED for him!*

Nay, it seems to be a glory in some sense peculiar to religion *to reserve the best till last.*—That you may enjoy strong consolation, brethren, in your passage through life, God has placed his favours in a glorious ascending gradation. The inviting language of every one of them is, *Press forward.* The pleasures of the world and sin, if they speak truth, can afford no such encouragement to their admirers: no, Ezekiel's roll is descriptive of their utmost prospects; that roll which had written within and without, *lamentations, mourning, and woe.* But religion presents a train of rising glories: he that enters it aright will find it like the waters of the sanctuary; first to his ancles, then to his knees, then to his loins, and at last a river to swim in!—The different stages of the church maintain the same idea; the Mosaic dispensation contained greater discoveries than the patriarchal; the gospel contains greater than the Mosaic; latter-day glory will outshine this; and ultimate bliss will exceed them all. *Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?*

Give us your attention, bretheren, while we next attempt to point out the UTILITY of this heavenly grace throughout the Christian life.—Truly this is beyond expression. If hope in general is of so much use among men, as to stimulate them in all their labours, support them in their sorrows, and extricate them from a thousand labyrinths in life;

if by it they brave dangers, encounter hardships, and endure difficulties; if, in short, it be that by which as a mean, even God himself as it were bears up the pillars of the world; then what must be the use of that hope which as we have already seen, so much surpasses this in excellence? As far as the objects of Christian hope exceed in value, and its grounds in solidity, those of natural; so far does the use of the one exceed that of the other. Its special use will, however, be best ascertained by taking a view of some of those exercises, cases, and circumstances, wherein you are concerned in your passage through life.—Particularly,

You have known its value from the time when you were first *converted* unto God, when in that time of need it presented before you an all-sufficient refuge.—You remember, dear brethren, it may be some of you particularly, *the wormwood and the gall* in that great work, which is commonly begun with a painful conviction of sin. You remember when a sense of the nature and demerit of sin, of *your* sin, was such that your souls had almost dwelt in silence! Ah, you remember when the glorious character of God appeared, though excellent, yet terrible, approaching judgment unavoidable, and the Judge at the door! And have you forgotten the *door of hope* which then was opened to you? Have you forgotten the sound of the great trumpet which invited you to come when you were ready to perish? No, surely. While many, like Cain and Judas, despair of mercy, and so *die in the pit*, you have reason to

bless God for having enabled you to *turn to the strong-hold as prisoners of hope!* Moreover,

As *servants* of God you have a great work to do.— Though the meritorious part of your salvation has been long since finished, yet there is a salvation for you still to work out. By prayer, by patience, by watchfulness, and holy strife, you have to overcome the world, mortify sin, and run the race set before you. Hope is of excellent use in this great work. It is well denominated a *lively* hope. Its tendency is not to lull the soul asleep, but to rouse it to action. We trust, dear brethren, that the hope of which you are partakers will more and more animate your breasts with generous purposes, and prompt your souls to noble pursuits. For this you have the greatest encouragements surely that a God can give! God will employ none in his service without making it their inestimable privilege. They that plow for him shall plow in hope. Mansions of bliss stand ready to receive you; and crowns of unfading glory to reward you: therefore, beloved brethren, *be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*—Again,

You are attended with *indwelling sin*: a *body* of sin, which in the account of every one that loves and longs for purity, is a *body of death*; yea, worse than death itself!—You wish to think spiritually, pray fervently, hear profitably, and in a word, grow in grace; but this proves a dead weight to all: *the good that ye would, that ye do not!*—You wish

to hate and avoid evil, and all its detestable appearances; but you find it in ten thousand forms, haunting, surprising, and drawing you aside, so that too often, *the evil that ye would not, that ye do!* We doubt not, dear brethren, but that in secret you frequently groan with the Apostle, *O wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death!* Now we ask, what can afford relief in this case, but a good hope through grace of being freed at the hour of death? This proves an helmet in your spiritual warfare. This will inspire you with courage in every conflict: nothing invigorates the soldier like the hope of conquering at last. With this you will tread down strength, and in prospect of approaching victory, sing with the Apostle, I THANK GOD, THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST!

Again: You are subject to many *fears* and *despondings* of mind ere you reach your desired haven.—Too often, through an unwatchful, unholy conduct, the Spirit of God is grieved. His presence once withdrawn, darkness will overspread the mind, and evidences for glory seem blotted out. Satan is often permitted at such seasons to stand as at your right hand, accusing you of your filthy garments; suggesting that such a one cannot be *a brand plucked out of the burning*. Under these exercises the mind is apt to be depressed beyond measure; the soul, afraid of acting presumptuously in laying hold of consolation, is ready, strangely ready to sink beneath the waves of dark despair. If any offer consolation, like Rachel on the loss of her children, he *refuseth to be*

comforted. The spirit, at some such seasons, is so dejected, it is as if all must be given up. The painful language of the heart is, *The Lord hath forsaken me, and he whom I once thought my God, hath forgotten me! My hope is dried up, and I am cut off for my part!* Ah, farewell hope! farewell heaven! farewell Christ!—No,—no,—nor Christ, nor heaven, nor hope will suffer this! Let deep call to deep, let waves, let billows overflow, deliverance shall arise, hope will not fail, but will afford relief. It will prove an anchor to your soul, sure and stedfast. Yes, it will cheer your heart, and enable you to sing, *Why art thou cast down, O my soul; and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God!* Again,

You are subject to various *trying providences* in your passage through life.—Enjoyments in this life are very precarious. While we are feathering our nests, and promising ourselves that we shall die therein unmolested, how soon are we disappointed; yea, how many have been nearly stripped of their earthly all! These, being deprived of almost every comfort of this life, have then tasted the sweetness of hope in another. These look to their Maker, and their eyes have respect to the HOLY ONE of Israel for the reparation of their losses. Thus sang the church in affliction, stripped, and bound in Babel's yoke, *The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him!*

Some of you are *poor* in this world, and are subject to numerous hardships.—You are often

entangled in mazes of difficulty; you have a thousand fears that you shall never get honourably through life. Especially at times, God seems to have set you in *dark places*: your hopes confounded, your fears come upon you, and your prospects at an end! Yes, say you, *Surely against me is he turned; he turneth his hand against me all the day. He hath builded against me, and compassed me with gall and travel. He hath enclosed my ways with hewn stone. He hath hedged me about that I cannot get out; he hath made my chain heavy!* Poor people, we feel for you! wherewith shall we comfort you? Shall we recommend and exercise benevolence towards you in our respective churches? Shall we exhort you *to trust in the Lord, and do good*; and assure you in God's name, that *so shall ye dwell in the land, and verily ye shall be fed*? Or shall we hold up before you a kingdom to which ye are heirs; a period when *every tear shall be wiped away*? O, brethren, the hope of the gospel furnishes you with these strong consolations! Again,

You are *members of Christian society*; and though by your letters it appears you enjoy peace in general, yet you are not unacquainted with many things of a grieving tendency.—In this state of imperfection, offences will come. Unhappy feuds will sometimes arise, and grievous scandals will take place. When church-members become self-sufficient, and cease to be afraid of entering into temptation; when carnal ease is substituted in the room of gospel peace; when love grows

cold, and complaisance takes its place; when we are so watchful over one another as to forget ourselves; when godly jealousy is exchanged for an uncharitable temper *more cruel than the grave*; when, instead of *submitting to one another in the fear of God*, each one becomes headstrong and resolved to have his own way; when superior gifts are envied, and inferior ones despised; when zeal for the truth degenerates into vain jangling; when we are very apt to take an offence, but not to forgive one; when tale-bearers are encouraged, and a spirit of animosity cherished; then, brethren, then expect *confusion, and every evil work*. We are happy that we can say, (and blessed be God for it!) that such a spirit is far from generally prevailing among you; yet so far as it does prevail, (which the all-seeing God knows is too far,) it dishonours the great Head of the church, and wounds every upright member! However, this should be far from discouraging religious society *itself*; not to mention that these are things that must always be expected more or less in this state of trial, and that they always existed even in the purest ages; we can affirm, and ye are our witnesses, that it has pleasures which abundantly outweigh all these unhappinesses. Nor is this all: hope holds up a period, even within the limits of time, a heaven compared with the present state of things, when *HOLINESS TO THE LORD shall be written as upon the bells of the horses*, and Sion shall become a *quiet habitation*! But this, say you, is a period that we have but little hope of living to see.

Perhaps so: still, you live in prospect of a better. Blessed society, where purity and amity for ever reign! Yes, brethren, immediately on entering members of the church triumphant, you will *enter into peace*, and *each one of you walk for ever in his uprightness!* Moreover,

You are members of *civil society*.—You wish well to your country, and must have been the subjects of grief to see what you have of late years seen—its glory eclipsed by unhappy wars and dissensions; to see it conspired against by surrounding nations and divided by domestic feuds, forsaken by its friends, and derided by its enemies. It may be, at times, fear has been ready to seize you, and tempted you to ask what will be the end of these things? The sounds of *Nineveh is fallen*, *Babylon is fallen*, yea, of *JUDAH is fallen*, have been long since heard in the world; and what, say you, are we better than they? Under these exercises, brethren, we trust you have found, and will yet find, hope of excellent use to you. Great have been the deliverances your God has wrought in former ages, which afford a ground of hope to us. He can defend our coasts, and still preserve our country; yes, he can, and blessed be his name for any encouragement afforded us. Let us then hope and pray: *It may be the Lord God of hosts will be gracious to the remnant of his people.* Or should he refuse that, should a consumption be decreed to overflow, in righteousness, still he can preserve his faithful followers as he did *Baruch*, and those who *sighed and cried* in the day of

Jerusalem's ruin. Nay, suppose him to refuse that; suppose that not only your country must sink, but you must sink with it, and perish in the general wreck! Still all is not lost. Did your portion lie in this world, then, indeed, like the owner of a vessel whose all is on board, you might dread its sinking; but seeing your inheritance is far beyond the reach of these vicissitudes, there is reason for you to mingle joy with trembling. Yes, brethren, we trust, there is reason for you to unite with holy David, *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble—therefore will we not fear, though the earth be moved, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea!*

Once more: You and we all, by some means, must shortly *die*.—Be it so, that no untimely end befall us, the hour cometh when we must bid farewell to every creature comfort; when every created union must be dissolved, and we appear before the judgment-seat of Christ! Oh, then to be without hope! better had we never been born! Let the reluctance and horror of those who are *driven* away in their wickedness teach us the value of a well-grounded hope in that awful hour. Verily, words cannot describe it, nor thoughts conceive it! Here is a rock when all beside sinks under us! With this, brethren, like the priests that bare the ark of God, your feet will stand firm amidst all the swellings of Jordan! With this you can behold the ghastly spectre, yea, the horrors of the grave itself, with a cheerful countenance, and sing with holy Job, *Although after my skin worms*

destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God : whom I shall see for myself ; mine eyes shall behold, and not another, though my reins be consumed within me !

Upon the whole, permit us to advise and exhort you, dear brethren, to a few things which become persons who have expectations like yours.—While you guard against presumption, beware of *despair*. The latter, as well as the former, is dangerous to men, and offensive to God. Despair is the death of action. To despair of mercy, and so never apply for it, is to act like the wicked and slothful servant, than which nothing tends more to cast reproach on the character of God. Even a *man* of honour cannot bear to be mistrusted. While fear keeps you from presumption, let hope preserve you from despair. As condemned criminals in yourselves considered, cast yourselves on him for mercy ; as servants, serve him cheerfully and rely on his bounty ; and as suffering the loss of all things for him, trust him, like Moses, to make up your losses. Remember, *the Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy.*

Observe also, He that has this hope must *purify himself as Christ is pure*.—He must take him for his example, and aim at no less than a complete conformity to his temper and spirit. That which true hope centres in, is not only to see him as he is, but to be *like him*. Be constant, then, dear brethren, in holy exercises. We trust your hope is not of that kind, which, in proportion as it increases,

slackens the hand of diligence. Neglect neither public nor private duties ; it is at the peril of your souls' welfare if you do ! Shame may keep you to the one, but rather let the love of Christ constrain you to both. Think nothing too great to perform, too much to lose, or too hard to endure, that you may obtain so blessed an hope. O brethren, be it our daily concern and earnest endeavour to grow in every grace, to excel in every virtue. Remember he whose eyes are flames of fire, surveys our heart and life : how transporting the thought, could we conceive him addressing each of us as he did the Thyatiran church, *I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith ; and thy patience, and thy works, and the last to be more than the first !*

Finally : Use all means to cultivate this heavenly grace.—Remember, sin is its worst enemy ; beware of that. The Holy Spirit is its best friend ; see that you grieve not him. Tribulations themselves, though they may seem to destroy it, in the end cherish it. *They work patience, and patience experience, and experience hope ;* therefore be reconciled to them. Read the holy scriptures ; pray in secret as well as openly ; though sojourners on earth, let your conversation be in heaven ; learn to set light by this world ; court not its smiles, nor fear its frowns ; live in daily expectation of dying, and die daily in humble expectation of living for evermore ; realize and anticipate those enjoyments and employments to which ye are hastening : in proportion to this, your desires will

be strong and your hopes lively. Remember hope is one of those graces which must do its all within the limits of time; *be sober, therefore, and hope to the end*; aim, like Enoch, to *walk with God* till God shall take you; *let your loins be girt, and your lights burning, and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord. Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when he cometh shall find so doing!* Verily, I say unto you, said this blessed Lord of yours, (O hearken, and be astonished!) *Verily, I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them!*

Dearly beloved brethren, farewell! *May our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God even our Father, who hath loved us, and given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work!*

THE PRACTICAL USES OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM.

Dear Brethren,

IN connexion with our last general Letter, and agreeably to the appointment made at the yearly meeting, we now address you, on a subject, not only of general interest, but which more immediately relates to that solemn profession which you have made of Christianity; namely, THE PRACTICAL USES OF THE ORDINANCE OF BAPTISM.

That Christian baptism is properly administered only by immersion, and to those who make a credible profession of faith in Christ, it is no part of our present design to prove. Addressing *you*, we shall take each of these particulars for granted. The only subject to which we now request your attention, is, the *influence* of this ordinance, where it produces its proper effects, in promoting piety in individuals, and purity in the church.

There is no part of true religion that is merely speculative: the whole is designed and adapted to sanctify the soul. We may presume, therefore, that if baptism be an ordinance of God, and of perpetual obligation in the church, it is of importance to Christian practice.

But it is not on presumptive evidence that we wish to rest the improvement of this institution, any more than the institution itself: neither shall we go about to connect with it acknowledged duties by imaginary alliances; but shall confine ourselves to those uses of the ordinance which are actually made, or suggested in the New Testament. We could address many things to parents, and things of importance too, on bringing up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord: we could also urge it upon the children of believers, that they were committed to God from their earliest infancy; but as we find nothing of this kind in the scriptures *connected with baptism*, however important these things would be in their place, they would be altogether irrelevant while treating on this ordinance.

Baptism is a divine institution, pertaining to the kingdom of the Messiah, or the gospel dispensation. John received it *from heaven*, and administered it to the Jews, who, on his proclaiming that *the kingdom of heaven was at hand*, confessed their sins. Jesus gave sanction to it by his example; and after his resurrection, when all power in heaven and earth was committed to him, he confirmed and extended it to believers of all nations. Whatever circumstantial differences there might be therefore, between the baptism of John and that of Christ, they were substantially the same. There were things in former ages which bore a *resemblance* to it; as, the salvation of Noah and his family in the ark, the passage of the Israelites through the sea, divers washings or bathings prescribed by the Mosaic ritual, &c. but the thing itself existed not, till it was revealed to the immediate forerunner of Christ.

The principal design of it appears to be, *A solemn and practical profession of the Christian religion*. Such was the baptism of John, who said unto the people, *that they should believe on him who should come after him; that is, on Christ Jesus*. And such was that in the times of the apostles. Paul, addressing himself to the churches in Galatia, who, after having professed to believe in Christ, cleaved to the Mosaic law as a medium of justification, thus speaks: *The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith: but after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster*. For ye

are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have PUT ON CHRIST. The allusion is to the putting on of apparel, as when one that enters into the service of a prince puts on his distinguishing attire: and the design of the sacred writer is to remind those of them who had before professed the Jewish religion, that by a solemn act of their own they had, as it were, put off Moses, and put on Christ. There is a putting on of Christ which is internal, and consists in relinquishing the former lusts, and being of the mind of Christ; but that which is here referred to appears to be an *open profession* of his name, to the renouncing of every thing that stood in competition with him. It was therefore true of *as many as had been baptized*, whether they abode in the truth or not. And even their being *the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*, seems to express what they were in profession, rather than what they were in fact. They had by their baptism disowned all dependance on the privileges of birth, and the adoption which pertained to them as the children of Abraham; and declared their acquiescence in that power, or privilege, to become the sons of God, which the gospel imparts to them that believe. The mention of this was perfectly in point, as it greatly heightened the evil of their defection. The amount is, *That as many as were baptized in the primitive ages were voluntary agents, and submitted to this ordinance for the purpose of making a solemn and practical profession of the Christian faith.* It

was their oath of allegiance to the King of Zion ; that by which they avowed the Lord to be their God. Hence a rejection of it involved *a rejection of the counsel of God*. The sin of the Pharisees and lawyers consisted, not in their refusing to submit to baptism *as unbelievers* ; but in not embracing the Messiah, and so putting on the badge of his profession. Their rejection of the sign was justly construed as a rejection of the thing signified ; as when a rebel refuses to take the oath of allegiance, it is construed as a refusal of submission and subjection to his rightful prince.

Such, brethren, is the profession we have made. We have not only declared in words, our repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ ; but have said the same things by our baptism. We have solemnly surrendered ourselves up to Christ, taking him to be our prophet, priest, and king ; engaging to receive his doctrine, to rely on his atonement, and to obey his laws. The vows of God are upon us. We have even sworn to keep his righteous judgments ; and without violating the oath of God, we cannot go back. If it be a sin not to confess the Lord Jesus, through fear or shame, it is a still greater sin, after we have confessed him to turn from the holy commandment.

The religion of Jesus consists partly of *truths* to be believed, and partly of *precepts* to be obeyed ; and the ordinance of baptism furnishes motives for a faithful adherence to both.

We have been baptized *in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit* ;

and have thus practically avowed our belief in them. It was at Jordan that the Father bore witness to his well-beloved Son, and that the Holy Spirit descended upon him: hither, therefore, in the early ages men were directed to repair, that they might learn the doctrine of the trinity. If we relinquish this doctrine, we virtually relinquish our baptism. Of this there need not be a more convincing proof than the inclination which has been discovered by those who have renounced the doctrine, to disuse the form of baptizing in the name of the Sacred Three.

We have also professed by our baptism to embrace that great salvation which is accomplished by the united influence of the Sacred Three. We have in effect declared our acquiescence in the freeness of the Father's grace, in the all-sufficient atonement of the Son, and in the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit: for these are the principal things by which, in the New Testament account of the economy of grace, each is distinguished. Nor can we renounce them, without virtually renouncing our baptism.

The immersion of the body in *water*, which is a purifying element, contains a profession of our faith in Christ, through the shedding of whose blood we are cleansed from all sin. Hence, baptism in the name of Christ is said to be *for the remission of sins*. Not that there is any such virtue in the element, whatever be the quantity; nor in the ceremony, though of divine appointment: but it contains a *sign* of the way in which we

must be saved. Sin is washed away in baptism in the same sense as Christ's flesh is eaten, and his blood drank, in the Lord's supper: the sign, when rightly used, leads to the thing signified. Remission of sins is ascribed, by Peter, not properly to baptism; but to the *name* in which the parties were to be baptized. Thus also Saul was directed to WASH AWAY HIS SINS, *calling on* THE NAME OF THE LORD. Nearly akin to this is the idea conveyed to us in the First Epistle of Peter: *The long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were* SAVED BY WATER. *The like figure whereunto baptism doth* NOW SAVE US, (*not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God*) *by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.* The salvation of Noah and his family by the ark was a *figure* of our salvation by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The ark for a time was surrounded, as it were, with waters from above, and from beneath: but it survived its trial, and those who were in it were at length brought safe to land. Christ, also, for a time sustained the deluge of wrath due to our sins; but survived the trial, rising triumphantly from the dead, and thereby saved us from everlasting death. Of this great transaction baptism is a *like figure*. It is another sign of the same thing. The resemblance of baptism by immersion, to the death and resurrection of Christ, and the suitableness of the one to signify our faith in the other, are manifest. It is thus that baptism does

now save us : not as putting away the filth of the flesh ; (for all the virtue contained in the ordinance itself is *the answer of a good conscience toward God*) but as affording a sign of our salvation by the victorious resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And, as we are taught by our baptism to adhere to the doctrine of God our Saviour, so we are furnished with motives to adorn it by a *holy conversation*. Thus it is introduced in the Epistles to the Romans and Colossians, as a sign of our being *dead* and *buried* to the principles and pursuits of the present world ; and, by faith in Christ, *raised* as into a new world. The *death* of Christ is emphatically mentioned as that into which we are baptized—*Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his DEATH ? Therefore, we are buried with him by baptism INTO DEATH ; that like as Christ died, and was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life*. Christ's dying for sin afforded a most powerful motive for our dying to it ; and the immersion of the body in baptism, being *in the likeness* of the former, furnishes an additional motive to the latter.

The leading idea suggested by a death and burial seems to be that of *separation from the world*. There is no greater line of separation than that which is drawn between the dead and the living. *The dead know not any thing ; and have no portion in all that is done under the sun*. Such is the line which is drawn by the faith of the

operation of God, between the world renewed and the world depraved, of which baptism is the appointed sign. If, after this, we are found among evil-doers, we may well be considered and shunned as a kind of apparitions, which have no proper concerns in the affairs of mortals.

The Apostle applied this reasoning against a conformity to abrogated ceremonies. *If ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances.* The same reasoning is applicable to other things. If we be dead with Christ, why, as though living, are we subject to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, which are of the world? Why are any of us conformed to this world; and not rather transformed by the renewing of our minds? If we be dead, and our life be hid with Christ in God; why are not our affections set on things above, and not on things on the earth? We cannot but express our concern, that persons professing godliness should be carried away by the course of this world, as many are; meanly imitating the ungodly, whose conduct they ought rather to reprove. Such imitation, so far as it operates, contains a virtual renunciation of our baptism. The ideas of baptism and a separation from the world, whether connected by us or not, are strongly associated in the minds of men in general. After this, we cannot unite with them in evil, without drawing upon ourselves their most pointed censures. They may labour to seduce us for the sake of comforting

themselves; and while accomplishing their purpose may suppress their private thoughts of us, and even compliment us for our liberality, but if we comply, their pretended esteem will be turned into reproach. Nor ought we to consider this as an evil; but rather as a mercy. God has hereby set a hedge about us, which tends more than a little to preserve us from temptation. If any think otherwise, and feel uneasy that they cannot act like other men, without drawing upon themselves the censures of mankind, it is a dark sign that their hearts are not right in the sight of God.

Nor is this ordinance adapted merely to separate between believers and unbelievers *individually* considered: its design is also to draw a line of distinction between *the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of Satan*. Whatever may be said of baptism as it is now generally understood and practised, and of the personal religion of those who practise it, it was *originally* appointed to be the boundary of visible Christianity. This is a principle, which, if properly acted upon, would go far to prevent the confounding of the church and the world; and which, consequently, tends more than any thing of the kind to counteract ecclesiastical degeneracy and corruption. Had the Christian church in all ages admitted none to baptism, from whomsoever descended, but those who professed to repent and believe the gospel, it is scarcely conceivable that any others would have been admitted to the Lord's supper: and if so, a stream of corruption which has actually deluged it with anti-christianism,

would have been diverted at the spring-head. The church might, indeed, have been corrupted from other causes, but these would have been merely *accidental*. Hypocrites and formalists might have imposed themselves upon it, as they did in some degree in the apostolic age; but they would have been intruders. Whatever of this kind might have existed, believers could not have been *constitutionally* yoked together with unbelievers. The carnal descendants of godly people could not have claimed a place in Christ's visible kingdom. The church could not have become national, embracing as its children all who are born in a Christianized country, without any profession of personal religion. Princes and nobles, if worthy, would have been received into its communion as brethren; but not as rulers or patrons: and if unworthy, refused; even though an exposure to persecution had been the consequence. But if persons be admitted to baptism without any profession of personal religion, or upon the profession of others on their behalf, their admission to the Lord's-supper will in most cases follow as a matter of course. Indeed it *ought* to follow: for though among evangelical dissenters these things are separated, yet from the beginning it was not so. Neither scripture nor the practice of the ancient churches affords a single example of a baptized person, unless his conduct was grossly immoral, being ineligible to communion. And if all who are now baptized, be admitted to the

supper, the line of separation will be broken; the church will be no longer *a garden enclosed*; but an open wilderness, where every beast of prey can range at pleasure. Thus, indeed, it was foretold it should be. The writer of the Apocalypse, describing the corruptions which should prevail in the *visible church* during the twelve hundred and sixty years reign of antichrist, represents it under the form of the *outer court* of the temple being *left out* of the measurement as profane, and *given to the Gentiles to be trodden under-foot*, in like manner as the holy place and holy city had been trodden down by the heathen, in the time of Antiochus.

As the principle of believers' baptism, properly acted upon, would prevent the admission of all unconverted characters, except hypocrites and self-deceivers, so it would have its influence in repelling *them*. The habits of some hypocritical characters, it is true, would render it an easy thing to overleap this boundary; but it is equally true, that to others it would be an effectual bar. There are not a few in the religious world who would like well to be members of a Christian church, especially where the pastor is a man of respectability, provided they could be admitted without drawing upon themselves the laugh of the irreligious. There is reason to believe that many persons of genteel connexions, who wish to be thought religious, and whose consciences approve of believers' baptism, are withheld by this kind of shame from offering themselves to our churches. An ordinance which thus operates, possesses a mark of its pertaining

to that kingdom which is *not of this world*, and into which it is *hard for a rich man to enter*.

As the leading idea suggested by a death and burial is that of *separation* from the world, so the principal thing denoted by a resurrection is an entrance into a *new* state of being. Such is that *newness of life*, of which the emersion of the body from the waters of baptism is a sign, and to which it furnishes an important motive. The religion of Jesus does not consist in mere negatives. It is not enough that we be dead to the world : we must be alive to God. With real Christians, old things are passed away, and all things are become new. Unless our baptism, therefore, be merely a sign, or an unmeaning ceremony, our hopes, fears, sorrows, joys, companions, principles, and pursuits are opposite to those of this world. Even a partial return to it is inconsistent with our baptismal vows. If those who profess to be dead to the world cannot walk in the course of it, without being considered and shunned as a kind of apparitions ; those who are alive from the dead cannot return, without resembling a living character who should take up his abode in a sepulchre.

A few general reflections will conclude this epistle.

The baptism of a number of serious Christians is an interesting and impressive spectacle. Often on such solemn occasions, have we witnessed the falling tear ; not only from the parties baptized, and others immediately connected with them, but from indifferent spectators. We could appeal to

the consciences of many serious Christians, whether they did not receive their first convictions of the reality of religion at such opportunities? We could appeal to all of you who have been in the habit of attending the administration of this ordinance, whether it has not frequently furnished you with the most solemn and tender reflections? Has not the sight of a number of young Christians, offering themselves willingly to the Lord, touched the secret springs of holy sensibility? Yes; you have been reminded by it of your own solemn engagements, and led to inquire in what manner they have been fulfilled. You have remembered the days of your espousals, when you first went after your Saviour as in the wilderness, and have been sweetly impelled to renew the solemn surrender. Nor have your reflections been confined to yourselves: you have considered these new accessions to the church of God as supplying the place of others that were taken away, and as fulfilling the promise, *Instead of thy fathers, shall be thy children*. When a number of dear friends and useful characters, have, one after another, been removed by death, you have been ready to ask, Who shall fill up their place; and by whom shall Jacob arise? But when others of promising gifts and graces have come forward, and yielded up themselves to the Lord in baptism, they have seemed in a manner to be *baptized for the dead*. Thus, when the ranks of an army in a besieged city are thinned by repeated engagements, and the hearts of survivors are ready to faint, a reinforcement arrives: a body of new

companions throw themselves in to its relief, and inspire them with new vigour.

Further: If the foregoing remarks be just, the *importance* of believers' baptism must appear in a very different light, from that in which some have represented it. If the ordinary acknowledgments of many who live in the neglect of this ordinance, and disapprove of the zeal of others who submit to it, may be considered as expressive of their principles, their conduct is not owing to a solid conviction, arising from impartial inquiry accompanied with prayer, that it is unscriptural, or that they have already been baptized according to the institution of Christ; but to a notion that it is of *little or no account*. If it be of little or no account to bind ourselves to the Lord, *in the way of his own prescribing*; to confess his name before men; to avow our being dead to the world, and alive to him; to preserve the church from being constitutionally corrupted, and yoked together with unbelievers; to obey his commandments who saith, *Repent, and be baptized EVERY ONE OF YOU*; and to follow his example who yielded obedience to this institute, saying, *Thus it BECOMETH us to fulfil all righteousness*—then may this excuse be admitted. But if these things be important, then is believers' baptism important; and all attempts to depreciate it are offensive in the sight of Him who is the Lord and lawgiver in Zion.

Finally, brethren: It becomes us to beware, lest that which is good in itself should, through the corruption of our nature, become an occasion of

evil. There is, perhaps, no temptation more common among religious people, than to think too highly of themselves on account of their advantages. Where such a spirit is cherished, baptism may become an idol, and the table of the Lord itself a snare. It is more than possible that some may so value themselves on account of their baptism, as to make it a substitute for a life of holiness and universal righteousness. It appears that some among the Corinthians approached too near, at least, to this spirit. They had been baptized they had eaten and drank at the table of the Lord yet they trifled with idolatry, and worldly lusts. *I would not that ye should be ignorant, (said Paul,) how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud, and in the sea; and did all eat the same spiritual meat; and did all drink the same spiritual drink: (for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them: and that rock was Christ.) But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples.—Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall!* As if he had said, ‘Are you members of a community which has the promised presence of Christ? Our fathers also were *under the cloud*. Has God interposed in your favour? They *passed through the sea*, as on dry land. Have you been baptized? So were they. They *descended* in a body into the sea; were *buried*, as it were, by the cloud above

them, and the waters on each hand of them ; and afterwards *ascended* on the other side. Have you been admitted to the holy supper? They also ate of that food, and drank of that stream, the spiritual intent of which was much the same. Yet all this afforded them no security, when they provoked the divine jealousy. Notwithstanding these privileges they fell, and were destroyed of the destroyer. These things are recorded for *our* admonition.'—Of what account then will our baptism be to us, if instead of being dead to the world and alive to God, we be the reverse? Will baptism save us? No: it will bear witness against us!

And though we may not fall into so fatal an error, as to substitute baptism in the place of holiness, righteousness, and godliness ; yet if we cherish a fond conceit of ourselves, magnifying our advantages, to the neglect of a spirit of humble watchfulness ; our baptism, instead of aiding us, will become a snare. We do not always act up to our advantages. It is very possible that Christians who are behind us in this particular, may notwithstanding be before us in their general character. It were vain and foolish to imagine, that our possessing the truth in one instance, will secure us from error in every other ; or that our fulfilling this command of Christ, however important, will insure a course of universal obedience.

Let us never forget, that however adapted this or that ordinance, form, or mode of church government, may be to promote our spiritual interests, yet if we rest in the means, they will deceive us

or rather, we shall deceive ourselves. It is the presence of Christ only that keep us alive, either as individuals, or as churches. While, therefore, we recommend the means which he has prescribed, we devoutly add, with the Apostle, *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all!* Amen.

THE PASTOR'S ADDRESS TO HIS CHRISTIAN HEARERS,
ENTREATING THEIR ASSISTANCE IN PROMOTING
THE INTEREST OF CHRIST.

Beloved Brethren,

THE ministry to which God by your election has called us, forms a distinguished part of the gospel dispensation. Divine instruction was communicated under the Old Testament, and an order of men appointed of God for the purpose: but their work can scarcely be denominated *preaching*. They foretold the good news: but it is for us to *proclaim* it. The poor having the gospel preached to them is alleged in proof that the Messiah was come, and that they were not to look for another.

The very existence of Christian churches is in subserviency to the preaching of the gospel; or they would not have been described as *golden candlesticks*, the use of which is to impart light to those around them. We speak not thus, brethren, to magnify ourselves. There is an important difference between Christian ministers, and the Christian ministry. The former, we are ready to

acknowledge, exists for your sakes. *Whether Paul, Apollos, or Cephas—all are yours; but the latter, as being the chosen mean of extending the Redeemer's kingdom, is that for which both we and you exist. Ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's.*

These considerations will enable us to account for the joy which the Apostle expressed in *Christ's being preached*, even though it were from *envy*; and may teach us to rejoice in the same thing, though it be in the most corrupt communities, or even from the most suspicious motives. But though God may cause his truth to triumph wherever, and by whomsoever it is taught; yet it should be our concern to publish it willingly, and to the best advantage.

The primitive churches were not mere assemblies of men who agreed to meet together once or twice a week, and to subscribe for the support of an accomplished man who should on those occasions deliver lectures on religion. They were men gathered out of the world by the preaching of the cross, and formed into society for the promotion of Christ's kingdom, in their own souls, and in the world around them. It was not the concern of the ministers or elders only: the body of the people were interested in all that was done, and according to their several abilities and stations took part in it. Neither were they assemblies of heady, high-minded, contentious people, meeting together to argue on points of doctrine or discipline, and converting the worship of God into

scenes of strife. They spake the truth; but it was in love: they observed discipline; but, like an army of chosen men, it was that they might attack the kingdom of Satan to greater advantage. Happy were it for our churches if we could come to a closer imitation of this model!

We trust it is our sincere desire as ministers to be more intent upon our work: but allow us to ask for YOUR ASSISTANCE. Nehemiah, zealous as he was, could not have built the wall if the people had not had a mind to work. Nor could Ezra have reformed the abuses among the people if nobody had stood with him. But in this case the elders, when convinced of the necessity of the measure, offered themselves willingly to assist him. *Arise, (said they,) for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage and do it.* Such is the assistance, brethren, which we solicit at your hands.

We might enumerate the different ways in which your assistance in promoting the interest of Christ is needed. We might ask for your prayers, your early attendance, your counsels, your contributions, and your example: but what we have to offer will arise from a review of the different branches of our own labours.

In the discharge of our work we have to do with four descriptions of people, and in dealing with each we stand in need of your assistance: namely, serious and humble Christians—disorderly walkers—persons under concern about salvation—and persons manifestly unconverted.

First: It may be supposed that in every church of Christ there will be a considerable proportion of *serious and humble Christians*.—Our work in respect of them is to feed them with the wholesome doctrine of the word, and to teach them the mind of Christ in all things. The assistance which we ask of you, brethren, in this part of our ministry is, that you would not only pray for us, but be free to impart to us the state of your minds, and whether our labours be edifying to you or not. It is not so much by a systematical statement and defence of Christian doctrines that believers are edified, as by those doctrines being applied to their respective cases. This is the way in which they are ordinarily introduced in the scriptures, and in which they become *words in due season*. But we cannot well preach to the cases of people unless we know them. Add to this, the *interest* which you discover in the things of God has a more than ordinary influence on our minds in the delivery of them. You cannot conceive the difference between addressing a people full of tender and affectionate attention, whose souls appear in their eyes, and answer, as it were, to the word of God; and preaching to those who are either half asleep, or their thoughts manifestly occupied by other things. By looking at the one, our hearts have expanded like the flowers before the morning sun: thoughts have occurred, and sensations have been kindled, which the labours of the study could never have furnished. But by observing the other, our spirits

are contracted like the flowers by the damps of the evening; and thoughts which were interesting when alone have seemed to die as they proceeded from our lips.

It will tend not a little to increase your interest in hearing, if you exercise yourselves on other occasions to reading and reflection. If you attend to the things of God only or chiefly while hearing us, we shall preach to you under great disadvantage. The Apostle complained of many things being hard to be uttered, owing to the Hebrews being dull of hearing; and that for the time when they ought to have been teachers, they had need that one should teach them again which were the first principles of the oracles of God. Thinking hearers give a facility to preaching, even upon the most difficult subjects; while those whose minds are seldom occupied at other times can scarcely understand the most easy and familiar truths.

Secondly: In every church we must expect a greater or less proportion of *disorderly walkers*.—Our work in respect of them is to warn, admonish, and if possible to reclaim them; or if that cannot be, to separate them, lest the little leaven should leaven the whole lump. But in these cases, more than in many others, we stand in need of your assistance. It is not ministers only, but all *who are spiritual*, that the Apostle addresses on this subject; and spiritual characters may always expect employment in restoring others in the spirit of meekness. It is of great importance to

the well-being of a church, that men are not wanting who will watch over one another in love, observe and counteract the first symptoms of declension, heal differences at an early period, and nip disturbances in the bud. By such means there will be but few things of a disagreeable nature, which will require either the censures of the church, or the interference of the pastor.

There will be instances, however, in which both the pastor and the church must interfere; and here it is of the utmost consequence that they each preserve a right spirit, and act in concert. There are two errors in particular, into which individuals have frequently fallen in these matters. One is, a harsh and unfeeling conduct towards the offender, tending only to provoke his resentment, or to drive him to despair; the other is, that of siding with him, apologizing for him, and carrying it so familiarly towards him in private as to induce him to think others who reprove him his enemies. Beware, brethren, of both these extremes, which, instead of assisting us in our work, would be doing the utmost to counteract us. We may almost as well abandon discipline as not to act in concert. It was on this principle that the Apostle enjoined it on the Corinthians not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one, *no not to eat*.

Your assistance is particularly necessary to resist and overcome those unlovely *partialities* which

are too often found in individuals towards their relations, or favourites. We have seen and heard of disorderly walkers, whose connexions in a church have been so extensive, that when they should have been censured or admonished, either a strong opposition was raised in their favour, or at least a considerable number have chosen to stand neuter, and so to leave the officers of the church to act in a manner alone. It is glorious to see a people in such cases acting in the spirit of Levi, who *did not acknowledge his brethren, nor know his own children; but observed God's word, and kept his covenant!*

It is often extremely difficult for a pastor to go through with such matters without injury to his character and ministry. He being, by his office, obliged to take the lead, becomes the principal object of resentment; and every idle story is raked up by the party and their adherents which may wound his reputation, and impute his conduct to suspicious motives. If, in such circumstances, his brethren stand by him, he will disregard the slander of his enemies: but if they be indifferent, it will be death to him. Should such a conduct issue in his removal, it is no more than might be expected.

Thirdly: In every church of Christ we may hope to find some persons *inquiring after the way of salvation*.—This may be the case much more at some periods than at others; but we may presume, from the promise of God to be with his servants, that the word of truth shall not be any

length of time without effect. Our work in this case is to cherish conviction, and to direct the mind to the gospel remedy. But if, when men are inquiring the way to Zion, there be none but the minister to give them information, things must be low indeed. It might be expected that there should be as many persons capable of giving direction on this subject as there are serious Christians; for who that has obtained mercy by believing in Jesus, should be at a loss to recommend him to another? It is matter of fact, however, that though, as in cases of bodily disease, advisers are seldom wanting; yet, either for want of being interested in the matter, or sufficiently skilful in the word of righteousness, there are but few, comparatively, whose advice is of any value. And this we apprehend to be one great cause of declension in many churches. Were we writing on ministerial defects, we should not scruple to acknowledge that much of the preaching of the present day is subject to the same censure: but in the present instance we must be allowed to suppose ourselves employed in teaching the good and the right way, and to solicit your assistance in the work. When the Apostle tells the Hebrews, that considering the time, *they ought to have been teachers*, he does not mean that they ought all to have been ministers; but able to instruct any inquirer in the great principles of the gospel.

It has been already intimated, that to give advice to a person under concern about salvation, it is necessary, in the first place, that we be *interested*

on his behalf, and treat him in a free and affectionate manner. Some members of churches act as if they thought such things did not concern them, and as if their whole duty consisted in sending the party to the minister. A church composed of such characters may be opulent and respectable; but they possess nothing inviting or winning to an awakened mind. To cherish conviction, and give a right direction to such a mind, we must be free and affectionate. When a sinner begins to think of his condition, such questions as the following will often cross his mind: 'Was there ever such a case as mine before? Are there any people in the world who have been what I am, and who are now in the way to eternal life? If there be, who are they? Where are they?' But if, while he is thinking what he must do to be saved, he neither sees nor hears any thing among you which renders it probable that such was ever your concern;—if, as soon as a sermon is ended, he sees merely an exchange of civilities, and on leaving the place observes that all the congregation immediately fall into conversation about worldly things; what he can think? Either that there is nothing in religion, or if there be, that he must seek elsewhere for it. The voice of a Christian church to those who attend upon their ministry should be that of Moses to Hobab: *We are journeying to the place of which the Lord hath said, I will give it you. Come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.*

It is of great consequence to the well-being of a church, that there be persons in particular in it who are accessible to characters of this description, and who would take a pleasure in introducing themselves to them. Barnabas, who, by a tender and affectionate spirit, was peculiarly fitted for this employment, was acquainted with Saul while the other disciples were afraid of him. It was he that introduced him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

Affection, however, is not the only qualification for this work : it requires that you be *skilful in the word of righteousness*; else you will administer false consolation, and may be instrumental in destroying, instead of saving souls. Not that it requires any extraordinary talents to give advice in such cases: the danger arises principally from inattention, and erroneous views of the gospel.

If, brethren, you would assist us in this delightful work, allow us to caution you against one prevailing error, and to recommend one important rule. The *error* to which we allude is, **TAKING IT FOR GRANTED THAT THE PARTY HAS NO DOUBTS AS TO THE GOSPEL WAY OF SALVATION, AND NO UNWILLINGNESS TO BE SAVED BY IT, PROVIDED GOD WERE BUT WILLING TO SAVE HIM.** Such are probably his thoughts of himself; and the only question with him is, whether he have an *interest* in Christ and spiritual blessings. Hence he is employed in searching for something

in his religious experience which may amount to an evidence of his conversion; and in talking with you he expects you to assist him in the search. But do not take this account of things as being the true one: it is founded in self-deception. If he understood and believed the gospel way of salvation, he would know that God was willing to save any sinner who is willing to be saved by it. A willingness to relinquish every false confidence, every claim of preference before the most ungodly character, and every ground of hope save that which God has laid in the gospel, is all that is wanting. If he have this, there is nothing in heaven or in earth in the way of his salvation. In conversing with such a character we should impress this truth upon him, assuring him that if he be straitened, it is not in God, but in his own bowels; that the doubts which he entertains of the willingness of God, especially on account of his sinfulness and unworthiness, are no other than the workings of a self-righteous opposition to the gospel, (as they imply an opinion that if he were less sinful and more worthy, God might be induced to save him) and that if he be not saved, it will be owing to his thus continuing to stumble at the stumbling stone. Instead of allowing that he believes the gospel, and is willing to be saved in the gospel way, while yet his very moans betray the contrary; we should labour to persuade him that he does not yet understand the deceit of his own heart; that if he were willing to come to Christ for life, there is no doubt of his being

accepted; in short, that whenever he is brought to be of this mind, he will not only ask after the good way, but walk in it, and will assuredly find rest unto his soul.

The *rule* we recommend is this: **POINT THEM DIRECTLY TO THE SAVIOUR.** It may be thought that no Christian can misunderstand or misapply this important direction, which is every where taught in the New Testament. Yet if you steer not clear of the above *error*, you will be unable to keep to it. So long as you admit the obstruction to believing in Christ to consist in something distinct from disaffection to the gospel way of salvation, it will be next to impossible for you to exhort a sinner to it in the language of the New Testament. For how can you exhort a man to that which you think he desires with all his heart to comply with, but cannot? You must feel that such exhortations would be tantalizing and insulting him. You may, indeed, conceive of him as ignorant, and as such labour to instruct him; but your feelings will not suffer you to exhort him to any thing in which he is involuntary. Hence, you will content yourselves with directing him to wait at the pool of ordinances, and it may be to pray for grace to enable him to repent and believe, encouraging him to hope for a happy issue in God's due time. But *this is not pointing the sinner directly to Christ.* On the contrary, it is furnishing him with a resting-place short of him, and giving him to imagine that duties performed while in unbelief are pleasing to God.

If you point the awakened sinner directly to the Saviour, after the manner of the New Testament, you will not be employed in assisting him to analyse the distresses of his mind, and administering consolation to him from the hope that they may contain some of the ingredients of true conversion, or at least the signs that he will be converted. Neither will you consider distress as ascertaining a happy issue, any otherwise than as it leads to Christ. If the question were, Do I believe in Jesus for salvation? Then, indeed, you must inquire what effects have been produced. But it is very different where the inquiry is, What shall we do; or what shall I do to be saved? The murderers of Christ were distressed; but Peter did not attempt to comfort them by alleging that this was a hopeful sign of their conversion, or by any way directing their attention to what was within them. On the contrary, he exhibited the Saviour, and exhorted them to repent and be baptized in his name. The same may be said of the Philippian jailor. He was in great distress; yet no comfort was administered to him from this quarter, nor any other, except the salvation of Christ. Him Paul and Silas exhibited, and in him directly exhorted him to believe. The promise of rest is not made to the weary and heavy laden, but to those who *come to Christ* under their burdens.

Once more: If you keep to this *rule*, though you will labour to make the sinner sensible of his sin, (as till this is the case he will never come to

the Saviour ;) yet you will be far from holding up this his sensibility as affording any warrant, qualification, or title to believe in him, which he did not possess before. The gospel itself is the warrant, and not any thing in the state of the mind ; though till the mind is made sensible of the evil of sin, it will never comply with the gospel.

Fourthly: There is in all congregations and neighbourhoods a considerable number of people who are *living in their sins*, and in a state of *unconcernedness about salvation*.—Our work in respect of them is, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, to declare unto them their true character, to exhibit the Saviour as the only refuge, and to warn them to flee to him from the wrath to come. In this also there are various ways in which you may greatly assist us. If, as heads of families, you were to inquire of your children and servants what they have heard and noticed on the Lord's-day, you would often find occasion to second the impressions made by our labours. It is also of great consequence to be endued with that wisdom from above, which dictates a word in season to men, in our ordinary concerns with them. Far be it from us to recommend the fulsome practice of some professors, who are so full of what they call religion as to introduce it on all occasions, and that in a most offensive manner. Yet there is a way of dropping a hint to a good purpose. It is admirable to observe the easy and inoffensive manner in which a patriarch introduced some of the most important truths to a heathen

prince, merely in answer to the question, How old art thou? *The days of the years of my pilgrimage* (said he) *are an hundred and thirty: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage.* This was insinuating to Pharaoh that he and his fathers before him were strangers and pilgrims upon the earth—that their portion was not in this world, but in another—that the life of man, though it extended to an hundred and thirty years, was but a few days—and that those few days were mixed with evil: all which, if the king reflected on it, would teach him to set light by the earthly glory with which he was loaded, and to seek a crown which fadeth not away.

You are acquainted with many who do not attend the preaching of the word. If by inviting them to go with you, an individual only should be caught, as we say, in the gospel net, you would save a soul from death. Such examples have frequently occurred. It is an established law in the divine administration, that men, both in good and evil, should in a very great degree draw and be drawn by each other. The ordinary way in which the knowledge of God is spread in the world is, by every man saying to his neighbour and to his brother, Know the Lord. It is a character of gospel times, that *Many nations shall come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his*

paths : for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. Add to this, by visiting your neighbours under affliction you would be furnished with many an opportunity of conversing with them to advantage. Men's consciences are commonly awake at such seasons, whatever they have been at others. It is as the month to the wild ass, in which they that seek her may find her.

Finally : Enable us to use strong language when recommending the gospel by its holy and happy effects.—Unbelievers constantly object to the doctrine of grace as licentious ; and if they can refer to your unworthy conduct, they will be confirmed, and we shall find it impossible to vindicate the truth of God without disowning such conduct, and it may be you on account of it : but if we can appeal to the upright, the temperate, the peaceable, the benevolent, the holy lives, of those among whom we labour, it will be of more weight than a volume of reasonings, and have a greater influence on the consciences of men. A congregation composed of kind and generous masters, diligent and faithful servants, affectionate husbands, obedient wives, tender parents, dutiful children, and loyal subjects, will be to a minister what children of the youth are said to be to a parent : *As arrows in the hand of a mighty man.*—*Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them : they shall not be ashamed, but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.*

These, brethren, are some of the principal ways in which we affectionately solicit your assistance in promoting the interest of Christ. In doing this, we virtually pledge ourselves to be ready on all occasions to engage in it. We feel the weight of this implication. Let each have the other's prayers, that we may both be assisted from above, without which all the assistance we can render each other will be unavailing. Should this address fall into the hands of one who is yet in his sins, let him consider that the object of it is his salvation; let him reflect on the case of a man whom many are endeavouring to save, but he himself with hardened unconcern is pressing forward to destruction; and finally, should he bethink himself, and desire to escape the wrath to come, let him beware of false refuges, and flee to Jesus, the hope set before him in the gospel.

ON MORAL AND POSITIVE OBEDIENCE.

Dear Brethren,

IN addressing these our Annual Letters to you, it is our desire to lead you on in the divine life, that, not contented with a superficial acquaintance with religion, you may clearly understand its most discriminating principles. The winds of doctrine which abound, by which many, like children, are tossed to and fro and carried away, require that you grow up into Him in all things, who is the head, even Christ.

Concerning the subject of our present address, namely, *Moral and Positive Obedience*, suffice it to say, we think we perceive some serious evils growing up in certain parts of the Christian world for want of distinct ideas concerning it, and wish to arm your minds against them. All we shall attempt will be to give a clear statement of the distinction, and to point out the use of it in the Christian religion.

An unreserved obedience to the revealed will of God, in whatever form it is delivered, is the scriptural test of faith and love. You have professed to believe in Christ for salvation, and have been baptized in his name; but this is not all: the same commission which requires this, directs also that the disciples should be instructed in the whole mind of Christ; *Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you*. As the commandments of Christ, however, are not all of the same kind, so neither is our obedience required to be yielded in all respects on the same principles.

The distinction of obedience into *moral* and *positive* is far from being novel. It has been made by the ablest writers, of various denominations, and must be made if we would understand the scriptures. Without it, we should confound the eternal standard of right and wrong given to Israel at Sinai, (the sum of which is love to God and our neighbour,) with the body of *carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation*. We should also confound those

precepts and examples of the New Testament which arise from the relations we stand in to God and to one another, with positive institutions which arise merely from the sovereign will of the Lawgiver, and could never have been known had he not expressly enjoined them. Concerning the former, an inspired writer does not scruple to refer the primitive Christians to that sense of right and wrong which is implanted in the minds of men in general; saying, *Whatsoever things are TRUE, whatsoever things are HONEST, whatsoever things are JUST, whatsoever things are PURE, whatsoever things are LOVELY, whatsoever things are of GOOD REPORT; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.* But concerning the latter, he directs their whole attention to Christ, and to those who acted under his authority. *Be ye followers of me as I also am of Christ.—Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ORDINANCES as I delivered them to you.* The one is commanded because it is right; the other is right because it is commanded. The great principles of the first are of perpetual obligation, and know no other variety than that which arises from the varying of relations and conditions: but those of the last may be binding at one period of time, and utterly abolished at another.

We can clearly perceive that it were inconsistent with the perfections of God not to have required us to love him and one another, or to have allowed of the contrary. Children also must needs be

required to *obey their parents*; for *this* IS RIGHT. But it is not thus in positive institutions. Whatever wisdom there may be in them, and whatever discernment in us, we could not have known them had they not been expressly revealed; nor are they ever enforced as being *right* in themselves, but merely as being of divine appointment. Of them we may say, Had it pleased God, he might in various instances have enjoined the opposites: but of the other we are not allowed to suppose it possible, or consistent with righteousness, to require any thing different from that which is required.

The design of moral obligation is to preserve order in the creation; that of positive institutions, among other things, to prove us, whether, like Abraham in offering up his son, we will yield implicit obedience to God's commandments, or whether we will hesitate till we perceive the reason of them. The obligation of man to love and obey his Creator was coeval with his existence: but it was not till God had planted a garden in Eden, and there put the man whom he had formed, and expressly prohibited the fruit of one of the trees on pain of death, that he came under a positive law. The former would approve itself to his conscience as according with the nature of things: the latter as being commanded by his Creator.

Having briefly stated our views of the subject, we proceed to point out the uses to which it is applicable in the exercise of Christian obedience.

Far be it from us to amuse the churches we represent with useless distinctions, or speculations which apply not to the great purposes of practical godliness. If we mistake not, brethren, a clear view of the subject as stated above, will furnish you with much important instruction.

We need only remind you of the use of this distinction in reducing to a narrow compass the *baptismal* controversy. Your ablest writers have shown from hence the fallacy of all reasonings in favour of infant baptism from the Abrahamic covenant, from circumcision, or from any ground of mere *analogy*: and not your writers only; for the principle is conceded by a considerable number of our most learned opponents.* In instituted worship, we have only to understand the will of our divine Lawgiver *in relation to the subject in question*, and to obey it.

But this is not the sole, nor perhaps the principal use to be made of the distinction. We are not only taught by it to look for express precept or example, in things positive, but *not to look for them in things moral*. In obedience of the latter description there is not that need of minute rules or examples, as in the former; but merely of general principles, which naturally lead to all the particulars comprehended in them. To require express precept or example, or to adhere in all cases to the literal sense of those precepts which are given us, in things of a moral nature, would

* See Booth's *Pædobaptism Examined*, Vol. I. Chap. I.

lead to very injurious consequences. We may, by a disregard of that for which there is no express precept or precedent, omit what is manifestly right; and by an adherence to the letter of scriptural precepts, overlook the spirit of them, and do that which is manifestly wrong.

If we do nothing without express precept or precedent, we must build no places for Christian worship, form no societies for visiting and relieving the afflicted poor, establish no schools, endow no hospitals, nor contribute any thing towards them, nor any thing towards printing or circulating the Holy Scriptures. Whether any person pretending to serious religion would deny these things to be the duty of Christians, we cannot tell: some, however, on no better ground, have thought themselves at liberty to lay aside *family-worship, and the sanctification of the Lord's-day*. There is no express precept or precedent for either, that we recollect, in the New Testament. But the worship of God, being of moral obligation, extends to the various relations and situations in life. In duties of this description, it is not God's usual, at least not his universal method, to furnish us with minute precepts, but rather with general principles which will naturally lead us to the practice of them. We have no account of any particular injunction given to Abraham respecting the order of his family. God had said to him in general, *Walk before me, and be thou perfect*; and this was sufficient. *I know Abraham, said the Lord, that HE WILL command his children, and his household*

after him, that they shall keep the way of the Lord, and do justice and judgment. And with respect to the sanctification of the Lord's-day, so far as it relates to its being the day appointed for Christian worship, rather than the seventh, that is to say, so far as it is positive; though we have no express precept for it, yet there are not wanting precedents, which amount to the same thing. As to the keeping of the day *holy to the Lord*, this is moral, and not positive, and is therefore left to be inferred from general principles. If God be publicly worshipped, there must be a time for it; and that time requires to be devoted to him. Whatever was moral in the setting apart of the seventh day for divine worship (and that something was so, may be presumed from its being one of the ten commandments) applies to *any* day that shall be appointed for the like purpose. Positive institutions have all something moral pertaining to them, as it respects the holy manner in which they are to be observed. It was on this principle that Paul censured as immoral the manner in which the Corinthians attended to a positive institute. His reasoning on that subject applies to the Lord's-day. He argued from the ordinance of breaking bread being *the Lord's* supper, that eating *their own* supper while attending to it was rendering it null and void. And by a parity of reasoning, it follows, from the first day of the week being *the Lord's* day, that to do *our own* work, find *our own* pleasure, or speak *our own* words on that day, is to render it null and void. Of the first the Apostle

declared, **THIS IS NOT TO EAT THE LORD'S SUPPER**; and of the last he would, on the same principle, have declared, **THIS IS NOT TO KEEP THE LORD'S-DAY**. After all, it is surprising if any who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity can feel this to be a burden. *Why, even of your own selves, judge ye not what is right!*

If, on the other hand, we do every thing according to the letter of moral precepts, we shall often overlook the true intent of them, and do that which is manifestly wrong. Our Lord's precepts, in his sermon on the mount, if so understood, would contain a prohibition of all *public* prayers, and *public* contributions, and require such an acquiescence in injuries as he himself, when smitten before Pilate, did not exemplify. The right hand, in certain cases, must be cut off, and the right eye plucked out. If God prosper our lawful undertakings, we must not only avoid all increase of property, but must retain no part of what we have. No beggar, or borrower that asks assistance, whether he need it or not, must, on any consideration, be refused.

We believe self-love will be a sufficient preservative against such expositions being reduced to practice: but if the principle be retained, it will be at work in some other form, diverting the attention from weightier matters, and reducing religion to ceremony and litigious trifling.

It was not our Lord's design, in these precepts, to regulate external actions so much as motives. Many of his precepts, it is true, mention the act,

and the act only ; but their aim is at the principle. It was the spirit of *ostentation* in prayer and almsgiving, of *selfish resentment*, in cases of injury, and of *the love of the world* in cases of accumulating and retaining property, that he meant to censure.

Neither is it by attending to a ceremony which the country and climate ordinarily render unnecessary, that we comply with our Lord's precepts, *Ye ought to wash one another's feet ; but by love serving one another*. We may wash the saints' feet, and neglect to dry their clothes, or administer necessary comfort to them when cold and weary. We may give a disciple a cup of cold water, and keep back what is more valuable for our own use. If we be taught of God to love one another, we shall find little difficulty in understanding and practising these precepts.

By confounding moral and positive obedience, some have reasoned thus : " You agree to take your children to family and public worship, teach them to read the Bible with seriousness and attention, instruct them in catechisms, &c. and *why do you not take them to the Lord's supper?*" We answer, The former are moral obligations ; but the latter is not. Those are binding on all mankind, and therefore ought to be inculcated from the earliest dawn of knowledge, even though we had never been told to *bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord* ; but this is the immediate duty of believers only. Others, on the same principle, have argued thus, or to this effect : " You withhold the unconverted from

joining at the Lord's table, and *why not also from joining in family and public prayer?*' Our answer is the same. The Lord's supper is the immediate duty of believers only; but prayer is binding on men in general, however far they may be from performing it in an acceptable manner. To join with unbelievers in what is not their immediate duty, is to become partakers of their sin; but to allow them to join with us in what is the duty of every one, is not so. We ought to pray for such things as both we and they stand in need of, and if they unite with us in desire, it is well for them; if not, the guilt remains with themselves, and not with us.

If we be not greatly mistaken, many fierce disputes which have divided Christians on the *form, order, and government of the church of Christ*, might, at least, have been considerably diminished by a proper attention to this subject. While one party contends for an Erastian latitude, or that no divine directions are left us on these subjects, and that the church must be modelled and governed according to circumstances; the other seems to have considered the whole as a system of positive institutions, requiring in all things the most literal and punctilious observance. The truth lies, we apprehend, between these extremes; and the way to find it is, to ascertain *on what principles* the apostles proceeded in forming and organizing Christian churches; POSITIVE or MORAL? If the former, they must have been furnished with an exact model, or pattern, like

that which was given to Moses in the Mount, and have done all things according to it: but if the latter, they would only be furnished with *general principles*, comprehending, but not specifying, a great variety of particulars.

That the framing of the tabernacle was positive, there can be no doubt; and that a part of the religion of the New Testament is so, is equally evident. Concerning this, the injunctions of the Apostle are minute and very express. *Be ye followers (imitators) of me, as I also am of Christ.—In this I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ORDINANCES as I delivered them to you.—For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you.* But were we to attempt to draw up a formula of church government, worship, and discipline, which should include any thing more than *general outlines*, and to establish it upon express New-testament authorities, we should attempt what is impracticable.

We doubt not but the apostles acted under divine direction; but in things of a moral nature that direction consisted, not in providing them with a model, or pattern, in the manner of that given to Moses, but in furnishing them with general principles, and enduing them with holy wisdom to apply them as occasions required.

We learn from the Acts and the Epistles, that the first churches were congregations of faithful men, voluntarily united together for the stated ministration of the word, the administration of

Christian ordinances, and the mutually assisting each other in promoting the cause of Christ; that they were governed by bishops and deacons; that a bishop was an overseer, not of other ministers, but of the flock of God; that the government and discipline of each church was within itself; that the gifts of the different members were so employed as to conduce to the welfare of the body; and that in cases of disorder, all proper means were used to vindicate the honour of Christ, and reclaim the party.

These, and others which might be named, we call *general principles*. They are sometimes illustrated by the incidental occurrence of examples, and which, in all *similar cases*, are binding; but it is not always so. That a variety of cases occur in our times in which we have nothing more than general principles to direct us, is manifest to every person of experience and reflection. We know that churches were formed, elders ordained, and prayer and praise conducted with *the understanding*, or so as to be understood by others; but in what particular manner they proceeded in each, we are not told. We have no account of the formation of a single church, no ordination service, nor any such thing as a formula of worship. If we look for express precept or example for the removal of a pastor from one situation to another, we shall find none. We are taught, however, that for the church to grow unto an holy temple in the Lord, it requires to be *fitly framed together*. The want of *fitness* in a connexion, therefore, especially

if it impede the growth of the spiritual temple, may justify a removal. Or if there be no want of fitness, yet if the material be adapted to occupy a more important station, a removal of it may be very proper. Such a principle may be misapplied to ambitious and interested purposes; but if the increase of the temple be kept in view, it is lawful, and in some cases attended with great and good effects.

This instance may suffice instead of a hundred, and goes to show that the forms and orders of the New-testament church, much more than of the Old, are founded on the reason of things. They appear to be no more than what men who were possessed of the wisdom from above, would, as it were instinctively, adopt, even though no specific directions should be given.

But to place the matter beyond all doubt, let us refer to the professions and practices of the apostles themselves. The principles on which they *professed* to act, and which they inculcated on others, were these: *Let all things be done to edifying.—Let all things be done decently, and in order.* Whatever measures had a tendency to build up the church of God and individuals, in their most holy faith, these they pursued. Whatever measures approved themselves to minds endued with holy wisdom as fit and lovely, and as tending, like good discipline in an army, to the enlargement of Christ's kingdom, these they followed, and inculcated on the churches. And however worldly minds may have abused the principle, by introducing vain

customs under the pretence of *decency*, it is that which, understood in its simple and original sense, must still be the test of good order and Christian discipline.

The way in which the apostles actually proceeded in the forming and organizing of churches, corresponds with this statement of things. When a number of Christians were assembled together in the days of Pentecost, they were considered as a Christian church. But at first they had no deacons, and probably no pastors, except the apostles. And if the *reason* of things had not required it, they might have continued to have none. But in the course of things *new service* rose upon their hands, therefore they must have *new servants** to perform it; for, said the apostles, *It is not REASON that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. WHEREFORE, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost, and of wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.* In this process we perceive nothing of the air of a ceremony, nothing like that of punctilious attention to forms, which marks obedience to a positive institute; but merely the conduct of men endued with the wisdom from above; servants appointed when service required it, and the number of the one regulated by the quantity of the other. All things are done *decently and in order*; all things are done *to edifying*.

* A *deacon*, as well as a *minister*, signifies a *servant*.

It is not difficult to perceive the wisdom of God in thus varying the two dispensations. The Jewish church was an army of soldiers, who had to go through a variety of forms in learning their discipline: the Christian church is an army going forth to battle. The members of the first were taught punctilious obedience, and led with great formality through a variety of religious evolutions: but those of the last (though they also must keep their ranks, and act in obedience to command whenever it is given,) are not required to be so attentive to the mechanical as to the mental, not so much to the minute observance of forms as to the spirit and design of them. The order of the one would almost seem to have been appointed for order's sake: but in that of the other the utility of every thing is apparent. The obedience of the former was that of children: the latter that of sons arrived at maturer age.

As our Saviour abolished the Jewish law of divorce, and reduced marriage to its original simplicity; so, having abolished the form and order of the church as appointed by Moses, he reduced it to what, as to its first principles, it was from the beginning, and to what must have corresponded with the desires of believers in every age. It was natural for *the sons of God*, in the days of Seth, to assemble together, and to *call upon the name of the Lord*; and their unnatural fellowship with unbelievers brought on the deluge. And even under the Jewish dispensation, wicked men, though descended from Abraham, were not

considered as Israelites indeed, or true citizens of Zion. The friends of God were then *the companions of those that feared him*. They *spake often one to another*, and assembled for mutual edification. What then is gospel church-fellowship, but godliness ramified, or the principle of holy love reduced to action? There is scarcely a precept on the subject of church discipline, but what may, in substance, be found in the Proverbs of Solomon.

Nor does it follow that all forms of worship and church-government are indifferent, and left to be accommodated to times, places, and circumstances. The principles, or general outlines of things, are marked out, and we are not at liberty to deviate from them; nor are they to be filled up by worldly policy, but by a pure desire of carrying them into effect according to their true intent.

It does follow, however, that scripture precedent, important as it is, is not binding on Christians in a *moral* nature, unless the *reason* of the thing be the same in the case to be proved as in the case adduced. The first Christians met in an *upper room*; for they had no proper places of worship. But it does not follow that we who have more convenient houses should do so. The first Christians were exhorted to *salute one another with an HOLY KISS*. The reason was, it was the custom in the east for men in general in this manner to express their affection; and all that the Apostle did was, to direct that this common mode of affectionate salutation should be used in a religious way. In

places where it is a common practice, it may still be used to express the strength of Christian affection: but in a country where the practice is nearly confined to the expression of affection between the sexes, it is certainly much more liable to misconstruction and abuse. And as it was never a divine institution, but merely a human custom applied to a religious use, where this custom has ceased, though the spirit of the precept remains, yet the form of it may lawfully be dispensed with, and Christian affection expressed in the ordinary modes of salutation.

Again: The Corinthian men were forbidden to pray or prophesy with their heads covered. The reason was, the head being uncovered was then the sign of authority, and its being covered, of subjection. But in our age and country each is a sign of the contrary. If, therefore, we be obliged to wear any sign of the one or the other, in our religious assemblies, it requires to be reversed.

It also follows that, in attending to *positive institutions*, neither express precept nor precedent are necessary in what respects the *holy manner* of performing them, nor binding in regard of mere *accidental circumstances*, which do not properly belong to them. It required neither express precept nor precedent to make it the duty of the Corinthians when they met to celebrate the Lord's supper, to do it soberly, and in the fear of God, nor to render the contrary a sin. There are also *circumstances* which may on some occasions accompany a positive institution, and not on

others; and which being therefore no part of it, are not binding. It is a fact, that the Lord's supper was first celebrated with *unleavened bread*; for no leaven was found at the time in all the Jewish habitations: but no mention being made of it, either in the institution, or in the repetition of it by the Apostle, we conclude it was a mere accidental circumstance, no more belonging to the ordinance than its having been in a *large upper room*. It is a fact too, that our Lord and his disciples sat *in a reclining posture* at the supper, after the manner of sitting at their ordinary meals: yet none imagine this to be binding upon us. It is also a fact, with regard to the *time*, that our Saviour first sat down with his disciples on the evening of the *fifth day* of the week, *the night in which he was betrayed*: but though that was a memorable night, and worthy to be noticed as a circumstance tending to show the strength of his love, yet seeing the words of the institution decide not *how often* it shall be attended to, and no mention is made of its being afterwards a rule, but, on the contrary, of the church at Troas meeting for the purpose on another day, no one imagines it to be a rule of conduct to us.

The same might be said of *females* being admitted to communion, a subject on which a great deal has been written of late years in the baptismal controversy. Whether there be express precept or precedent for it, or not, is of no consequence: for the distinction of sex is a mere *circumstance*, in nowise affecting the qualifications required, and

therefore not belonging to the institution. It is of just as much account as whether a believer be a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free man; that is, it is of no account at all.—*For there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free, male nor female; but all are one in Christ Jesus.* Express precept or precedent might as well be demanded for the parties being tall or low, black or white, sickly or healthy, as for their being male or female. If the difference between a professed believer and an unconscious infant with respect to baptism, were no greater than this is with respect to the supper, we would allow it to be lawful to baptize the latter, though neither express precept nor precedent be found for the practice.

It follows, lastly, that many disputes on which Christians have divided and crumbled into parties, might well have been spared, and that without any disadvantage to the cause of pure religion. Whatever necessity there may be for withdrawing from those who walk disorderly, we have no warrant to consider those things as the standard of order, and to censure our brethren for deviating from them, which belong not to the laws of Christ, but either to a mere difference of opinion respecting their application, or to some accidental circumstance which may or may not attend them.

Finally, brethren: While you guard against the extremes of certain disciplinarians on the one hand, avoid those of anti-disciplinarians on the other. Allow us to repeat what was observed at the beginning, that *an unreserved obedience to the revealed*

will of God, in whatever form it is delivered, is the scriptural test of faith and love. Prove what that good, perfect, and acceptable will of the Lord is. Do all things without murmurings and disputings. Remember that the wisdom which is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. Dearly beloved, farewell. The God of love and peace be with you.

THE PROMISE OF THE SPIRIT THE GRAND ENCOURAGEMENT IN PROMOTING THE GOSPEL.

Dear Brethren,

IN our last public Letter, we addressed you on the work of the Holy Spirit : in this we would direct your attention to *the promise of the Spirit as the grand encouragement in promoting the spread of the Gospel.*

We take for granted that the spread of the gospel is the great object of your desire. Without this it will be hard to prove that you are Christian churches. An agreement in a few favourite opinions, or on one side of a disputed subject, or even a disagreement with others, will often induce men to form themselves into religious societies, and to expend much zeal, and much property, in accomplishing their objects ; but this is not Christianity. We may be of what is called a sect, but we must not be of a sectarian spirit, seeking only the promotion of a party. The true churches of Jesus Christ travail in birth for the

salvation of men. They are the armies of the Lamb, the grand object of whose existence is to extend the Redeemer's kingdom.

About eighteen years ago, God put it into the hearts of a number of your ministers and members to do something for his name among the heathen; the effect of which has been to give an impulse to those labours for the attainment of the same object in our several stations at home. The success which has followed is sufficient to induce us to press forward in the work, and to search after every direction and every consideration that may aid our progress.

The influence of the Holy Spirit is by some disowned, by others abused; and even those who are the subjects of it, from various causes, enjoy much less of it than might be expected.

Those who *disown* it, apply all that is said in the scriptures on the subject to the communication of miraculous and extraordinary gifts, as though the Lord had long since forsaken the earth, and men were now to be converted by the mere influence of moral suasion. It is on this principle that writers, according to the leaning which they have felt towards the opinions of this or that political party, have represented the work of converting the heathen as either extremely easy, or absolutely impossible. It is not for us to acquiesce in either; but, while we despair of success from mere human efforts, to trust in Him, who, when sending forth his servants to teach all nations, promised to be with them *to the end of the world*.

There are those, on the other hand, who *abuse* the doctrine, by converting it into an argument for sloth and avarice. God can convert sinners, say they, when he pleases, and without any exertions or contributions of ours. Yes, he can; and probably he will. Deliverance will arise from other quarters, and they who continue in this spirit will be destroyed!

Even those in whom the Spirit of God is, *enjoy much less of it than might be expected*; and this principally for want of the things which were stated in our letter of last year; namely, setting a proper value upon it, seeking it with fervent prayer, placing an entire dependance upon it, and maintaining a deportment suitable to it. In proving, therefore, that the promise of the Holy Spirit is the grand encouragement in promoting the spread of the gospel, we have not merely to oppose the adversaries of the doctrine, but to instruct and impress the minds of its friends. With these ends in view, let us recommend to your consideration the following remarks.

First: The success of God's cause under the Old Testament was considered by believers in those days as depending entirely upon God.—God had a cause in the world from the earliest ages, and this it was which interested the hearts of his servants. It was for the setting up of his spiritual kingdom in the world that he blessed the seed of Abraham, and formed them into a people. This was the *work* that he carried on from generation to generation among them. When, therefore,

sentence was passed on the people who came up out of Egypt, that they should die in the wilderness, Moses, who on that occasion seems to have written the *Ninetieth Psalm*, was deeply concerned, lest, in addition to temporal judgments, the Lord should withdraw from them his Holy Spirit. *Let thy work* (said he) *appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children; and let the beauty of Jehovah our God be upon us; and establish thou the work of our hands upon us: the work of our hands establish thou it.* It is worthy of notice, that this prayer was answered. Though the first generation fell in the wilderness, yet the labours of Moses and his companions were blessed to the second. These were the most devoted to God of any generation that Israel ever saw. It was of them that the Lord said, *I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first-fruits of his increase.* It was them that Balaam could not curse, but though desirous of the wages of unrighteousness, was compelled to forego them, and his curse turned into a blessing. We are taught by this case, amidst temporal calamities and judgments, in which our earthly hopes may be in a manner extinguished, to seek to have the loss repaired by spiritual blessings. If God's work does but appear to us and our posterity after us, we need not be dismayed at the evils which afflict the earth.

Similar remarks might be made on the state of the church at the captivity. When the temple was burnt, and the people reduced to slavery in a foreign land, it must seem as if the cause of God in the world would go to ruin. Hence the prayer of Habakkuk, *O Lord, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid. O Lord, revive, or preserve alive THY WORK in the midst of the years: in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.* This prayer also was answered. The work of God did not suffer, but was promoted by the captivity. The church was purified, and the world, beholding the divine interposition, acknowledged, *The Lord hath done great things for them.*

After the return of the captives, they went about to rebuild the temple; but they had many adversaries, and no military force to protect them. On this occasion the prophet Zechariah, (who with Haggai stood to strengthen the builders,) had a vision. He saw and behold *a candlestick, all of gold, with a bowl upon the top of it; and his seven lamps thereon; and seven pipes to the seven lamps; and two olive trees on each side of the bowl, which through the golden pipes emptied the golden oil out of themselves.* On inquiry of the Angel, what these meant, he was answered, *This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but BY MY SPIRIT, saith the Lord of Hosts.* As if he had said, This vision contains a message of encouragement to Zerubbabel, the purport of which is, Not

by army or by power, &c. For like as the candlestick is supplied without the hand of man, so God will prosper his cause, not by worldly power or armies, but by his gracious influence and superintending providence. Here also, a lesson is taught us, not to wait for legal protection, or even toleration, before we endeavour to introduce the gospel into a country ; but to engage in the work, trusting in God, not only to succeed our labours, but, while acting on Christian principles, either to give us favour in the eyes of those with whom we have to do, or strength to endure the contrary.

Farther : The success of the gospel in the times of the Apostles is ascribed to the influence of the Holy Spirit, as its first or primary cause. That the truth of the doctrine, and even the manner in which it was delivered, contributed as second causes to its success, is allowed. Such appears to be the meaning of Acts xiv. 1. *They so spake that a great multitude believed.* But if we look to either of these as the first cause, we shall be unable to account for the little success of our Lord's preaching when compared with that of his Apostles. He spake as never man spake ; yet compared with them he laboured in vain, and spent his strength for nought and in vain. It is the Holy Spirit to which the difference is ascribed. They did greater works than he, because, as he said, *I go to the Father.*

In promising to be with his disciples to the end of the world, he could refer to no other than his

spiritual presence; to this, therefore, he taught them to look for encouragement. To this cause the success of the Apostles is uniformly ascribed. *The HAND of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord.*—GOD ALWAYS CAUSETH US to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.—THE LORD OPENED THE HEART OF LYDIA, and she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul —*The weapons of our warfare are mighty THROUGH GOD, to the pulling down of strong holds.*

The great success which prophecy gives us to expect in the latter days is ascribed to the same cause. Upon the land of my people shall be thorns and briers—*until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high.* Then the wilderness would be a fruitful field, and that which had been hitherto considered as a fruitful field would be counted a forest.

If the success of the gospel were owing to the pliability of the people, or to any preparedness, natural or acquired, for receiving it, we might have expected it to prevail most in those places which were the most distinguished by their morality, and most cultivated in their minds and manners. But the fact was, that in Corinth, a sink of debauchery, God had *much people*; whereas in Athens, the seat of polite literature, there were only a few individuals who embraced the truth. Nor was this the greatest display of the freeness of the Spirit: Jerusalem, which had not only

withstood the preaching and miracles of the Lord, but had actually put him to death—Jerusalem bows at the pouring out of his Spirit; and not merely the common people, but *a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.*

To the above may be added, the *experience* of those whose ministry has been most blessed to the turning of sinners to God.—Men of light and speculative minds, whose preaching produces scarcely any fruit, will go about to account for the renewal of the mind by the established laws of nature: but they who see most of this change among their hearers, see most of God in it, and have been always ready to subscribe to the truth of our Lord's words to Peter, *Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven.*

From this brief statement of the evidence of the doctrine, we shall only add a few remarks to enforce *the prayer of faith* in your endeavours to propagate the gospel both at home and abroad.—This is the natural consequence of the doctrine. If all our help be in God, to him it becomes us to look for success. It was from a prayer-meeting held in a upper room, that the first Christians descended, and commenced that notable attack on Satan's kingdom in which three thousand fell before them. When Peter was imprisoned, prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. When liberated by the angel in the dead of night, he found his brethren engaged in this exercise. It was in prayer that the late

undertakings for spreading the gospel among the heathen originated. We have seen success enough attend them to encourage us to go forward ; and probably if we had been more sensible of our dependance on the Holy Spirit, and more importunate in our prayers, we should have seen much more. The prayer of faith falls not to the ground. *If we have not, it is because we ask not; or if we ask and receive not, it is because we ask amiss.* Joash smote thrice upon the ground and stayed, by which he cut short his victories. Something analagous to this may be the cause of our having no more success than we have.

Consider, brethren, the dispensation under which we live.—We are under the kingdom of the Messiah, fitly called *the ministration of the Spirit*, because the richest effusions of the Holy Spirit are reserved for his reign, and great accessions to the church from among the Gentiles ordained to grace his triumphs. It was fit that the death of Christ should be followed by the out-pouring of the Spirit, that it might appear to be what it was, its proper effect ; and that which was seen in the days of Pentecost was but an earnest of what is yet to come. To pray under such a dispensation is coming to God in a good time. In asking for the success of the gospel, we ask that of the Father of heaven and earth in which his soul delighteth, and to which he has pledged his every perfection ; namely, to glorify his Son.

Finally : Compare the current language of prophecy with the state of things in the world,

and in the church.—In whatever obscurity the minutiae of future events may be involved, the events themselves are plainly revealed. We have seen the four monarchies, or preponderating powers, described by Daniel, as successively ruling the world; namely, the Babylonian, the Persian, the Macedonian, and the Roman. We have seen the last subdivided into ten kingdoms, and the little Papal horn growing up among them. We have seen the saints of the Most High *worn out* for more than a thousand years by his persecutions. We have seen his rise, his reign, and, in a considerable degree, his downfall. *The judgment is set, and they have begun to take away his dominion; and will go on to consume and to destroy it unto the end.* And when this is accomplished, *the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Most High.* It is not improbable that *the days of the voice of the seventh angel when he shall begin to sound*, have already commenced; which voice, while it ushers in the vials or seven last plagues upon the Anti-christian powers, is to the church a signal of prosperity: for the seventh angel having sounded, voices are heard in heaven, saying, *The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.* The glorious things spoken of the church are not all confined to the days of the millenium: many of them will go before it, in like manner as the victorious days of David went before the *rest*,

or pacific reign of Solomon, and prepared its way. Previous to the fall of Babylon, an angel is seen flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to them that dwell on the earth; and before that terrible conflict in which the beast and the false prophet are taken, the Son of God is described as riding forth on a white horse, and the armies of heaven as following him. The final ruin of the Antichristian cause will be brought upon itself by its opposition to the progress of the gospel.

The sum is, that the time for the promulgation of the gospel is come; and if attended to in a full dependance on the promise of the Spirit, it will, no doubt, be successful.—The rough places in its way are smoothing, that all flesh may see the salvation of God. The greatest events pertaining to the kingdom of heaven have occurred in such a way as to escape the observation of the unbelieving world, and it may be of some believers. It was so at the coming of our Lord, and probably will be so in much that is before us. If we look at events only with respect to instruments, second causes, and political bearings, we shall be filled with vexation and disquietude, and shall come within the sweep of that awful threatening, *Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands, he will destroy them and not build them up.* But if we keep our eye on the kingdom of God, whatever become of the kingdoms of this world, we shall reap advantage from every thing that passes before us. God in our times

is shaking the heavens and the earth: but there are things which cannot be shaken. *Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.*

THE SITUATION OF THE WIDOWS AND ORPHANS OF
CHRISTIAN MINISTERS, &c.

Dear Brethren,

THE subject to which we this year invite your attention is, *The Situation of the Widows and Orphans of Christian Ministers, and of Ministers themselves who, by age or permanent affliction, are laid aside from their work.**

We have not been used to address you on subjects relating to our own temporal interests; nor is this the case at present: for the far greater part of those who have been most active in forming the institution for which we plead, have no expectation of deriving any advantage from it; but feeling for many of their brethren, are desirous of alleviating their condition.

Mercy is a distinguishing character of the religion of the Bible, especially to the *fatherless and the widow*. The great God claims to be their protector and avenger. *A father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widow, is God in his holy habitation.*

* This Letter was the last paper the Author prepared for the press; and before it was read at the Association, his own wife was a widow, and his children orphans.

Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry.—And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword: and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless. Mercy to the fatherless and the widow is introduced as a test of true religion. *Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep ourselves unspotted from the world.* The affliction of the fatherless and the widow is a subject taken for granted. From the day of their bereavement, dejection takes possession of their dwelling, and imprints its image on every object around them. And when to this is added, that from that time their sources of the necessaries of life are in a great measure dried up, a full cup of affliction must needs be their portion. At first many feel for them, and weep with them: but time and a number of similar cases wear away these impressions; and being unprotected, it is well if they be not exposed to oppression: and even where there is no particular want of kindness towards them, yet, their cases being but little known, are often but little regarded.

The widows and fatherless children of *ministers* have peculiar claims on the benevolence of the churches. The ministerial profession, like that of arms, requires the subjects of it, if possible, not to *entangle themselves with the affairs of this life, that they may please him who has chosen them to be soldiers.* On this ground, a large proportion of

ministers, living entirely on the contributions of their hearers, have no opportunity of providing for their families after their decease. You, brethren, by the blessing of God on your diligent attention to business, are generally enabled to meet this difficulty. You have business in which to bring up your children from their early years, but they seldom have; and when you have taught them an honourable calling you can spare something to set them up in trade, but it is rarely so with them.

Yet the post occupied by your ministers is honourable and important. Regardless of the sneers of the irreligious, they feel it to be so. To be chosen and approved by a Christian congregation, next to the choice and approbation of Christ, is their highest ambition. This honour, however, involves them in circumstances which require your consideration. You expect them to maintain a respectable appearance, both in their persons and families: but to do this, and at the same time to pay every one his due, often renders it impossible to provide for futurity.

Our churches, when in want of ministers, are solicitous to obtain men of talent. There may be an excess in this desire, especially where personal godliness is overlooked; and it is certain that great talents are far from being common. But view Christian ministers as a body, and we may appeal to you whether they be not possessed of talents, which, if employed in business, would, with the blessing of God ordinarily bestowed on honest industry, have rendered both them and their

families equally comfortable with you and yours. And shall their having relinquished these temporal advantages to serve the cause of Christ, and to promote your spiritual welfare, be at the expense of the comfort of their widows and children when they have finished their course?

In the persecuting times which preceded the Revolution of 1688, our Protestant dissenting forefathers had but little encouragement to provide for futurity, as the fruits of their industry were taken from them: but it is not so with us; our property is secure; and we are therefore able to contribute to those benevolent objects which tend to the good of mankind.

It was an object that attracted the attention of our fathers early in the last century, to provide for the widows of their ministers; and a noble fund it is which was then established in London for the widows of the three denominations. Besides this, a liberal plan has been pursued within the last two and twenty years to increase the sum, by an addition from the profits of a magazine. It is not to supercede these benevolent means of relief, but to add to them according to the exigencies of the times, and to include not only widows, but superannuated ministers and orphans, that societies like ours have of late been formed in various counties and religious connexions.

The case of superannuated ministers, or ministers who by affliction are permanently laid aside from their work, has a serious influence on the well-being of the churches. Where no provision of

this kind is made, every humane and Christian feeling revolts at the idea of dismissing an aged and honourable man, even though his work is done. Yet if the congregation continue to support him, they may be unable to support another. The consequence is, in a few years the congregation is dwindled almost to nothing. To meet these cases, along with those of the fatherless and the widow, is the object of this institution.

Brethren, We feel it an honour to be supported by the free contributions of those whom we serve in the gospel of Christ. To receive our support as an expression of love renders it doubly valuable. And if you view things in a right light, you will esteem it a privilege on your part. If your places of worship were ready built for you, your ministers supported, and their families provided for, would it be better? Would you feel equally interested in them? Would you not feel as David did when Araunah the Jebusite offered his threshing-floor, his oxen, and his wood? *Nay, but I will not offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing!*

Should any object, that ministers ought to set an example of trust in their Heavenly Father, who knoweth what things they need, and of leaving their widows and fatherless children with him; we answer, when all is done that can be done to alleviate their wants, their will be abundant occasion for these graces. The trust that we are called to place in our Heavenly Father does not however preclude the exercise of prudent foresight,

either in ourselves, or in the friends of Christ towards us for his sake.

It is one of the most lovely features of our mission in the East, that while our brethren are disinterestedly giving up all their temporal acquirements to the cause in which they are engaged, they have provided an asylum for their widows and orphans; so that when a Missionary dies, he has no painful anxiety what is to become of them. They have a home, which some have preferred to their native country. Is it any distrust of the Lord's goodness to be thus tender of those who are flesh of their flesh, and bone of their bone, and who have helped to bear the burden of their cares? Say rather, Is it not a truly Christian conduct? But if so, why should we not go and do likewise?

It is one of the most endearing traits in the character of our Lord Jesus Christ, that while the salvation of the world was pending, he did not neglect to provide for his aged mother. Joseph is thought to have been dead for some years, and Mary seems to have followed Jesus, who, while upon earth, discharged every branch of filial duty and affection towards her. But now that he is going to his Father, who shall provide for her? Looking down from the cross on her, and on his beloved disciple, he saith to the one, *Behold thy son!* and to the other, *Behold thy mother!* What exquisite sensibility do these words convey. To her it was saying, Consider me as living in my beloved disciple; and to him, Consider my mother

as your own. It is no wonder that *from that time that disciple took her to his own home.*

We live in times very eventful; and it cannot have escaped your observation that the success of the gospel has kept pace with the mighty changes which have agitated the world. Never, perhaps, were there such great calls on your liberality as of late years, and never were more honourable exertions made. Yet God that giveth us all things richly to enjoy, has not suffered us to want, and has promised to supply all our need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS,

&c.

TRACTS.

ORATION DELIVERED AT THE GRAVE OF THE
REV. ROBERT HALL, OF ARNSBY.

March 1791.

Dear Friends,

YOU have often assembled with pleasure, in company with your beloved friend and faithful pastor; but that pleasure is over, and you are now met together with very different feelings, to take your last farewell of his remains!

What can I say to you, or wherewith shall I comfort you? The dissolving of the union between near relations, and the breaking up of long and intimate connexions, are matters that must needs affect us. That providence which at one stroke separates a husband from his wife, a father from his children, a pastor from his people, and a great and greatly beloved man of God from all his connexions, cannot do other than make us feel. Indeed we are allowed to feel on such occasions, in moderation; at the grave of his friend Lazarus, *Jesus wept.*

But should we exceed the bounds of moderation, should our mourning under the hand of God border upon murmuring against it, or thinking hard of it, there are many considerations that might be urged to alleviate our grief; so many, indeed, that under the heaviest afflictions of the present state we may well weep as though we wept not.

In this instance, we may not only comfort ourselves with the consideration that it is the common lot of men, the greatest and the best as well as others, and therefore no more than might be expected; but with what affords infinitely greater satisfaction, that this lot is a real and substantial advantage to our deceased brother. There is a pleasure even in the very pain that we feel for those who die in the Lord. Our Redeemer has walked the road before us; and by so doing has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light. Where the sting of death is extracted, there is little else but the name, the shadow of death, to encounter; and the prospect of a glorious resurrection to eternal life, more than annihilates even that. Your husband, your father, your pastor is not dead, but sleepeth; and his Redeemer will come ere long that he may awake him.

Nor is this all; he lives already among the spirits of the just made perfect. Though the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, yet the inhabitant is not turned out, as it were, naked and destitute; but has a house not made with

hands, eternal in the heavens. It was that which reduced the Apostle to *a strait betwixt two*, having a desire on the one hand to be profitable to the church of God, and on the other to depart and be with Christ, which so far as concerned himself, was far better. Could we but be governed by faith instead of sense, we should rejoice even while we mourned. What our Lord said to his apostles, might be said by his faithful followers to their surviving friends, *If ye loved me ye would rejoice, because I said I go to the Father*; and the reason which he alleged, *for my Father is greater than I*—that is, the glory and happiness which my Father possesses, and which I go to possess with him, is greater than any thing I can here enjoy—would also apply to them. To be with our Father above, is much greater and better than to be here.

Such considerations as these may moderate our grief, and reconcile us to the will of God: but this is not all, there are other things that require our attention. As the aged and the honourable are called off the stage, there is the more to be done by us who are left behind. God has said to this his servant, as he said to the prophet Daniel, *Go thou thy way*; let another, as if he had said, come and take thy place, and acquit himself as well as thou has done! Our venerable deceased father had embarked for life, and so have we; he has finished his course, but we have yet to finish ours. We are apt to feel discouraged at the loss of eminent men, and to think the interests of religion, in their particular connexions, must needs suffer,

and it may be so ; but it may be of use to consider that when Moses died the Israelites were not to stand still, but were commanded to go forward ; and it is no small consolation that God's cause is still in his own hands, *The government is upon his shoulder.*

One thing more deserves our serious attention—Though the relations before-mentioned are now extinct, yet what has taken place *in* those relations is not. A great part of the actions of the present life are either those of parents to their children, or children to their parents, of husbands to their wives, or wives to their husbands, of pastors to their people, or people to their pastors ; and these are matters that must all come over again. In this point of view, relationship, though of but a few years duration, is of the utmost importance ; it sows as I may say, the seeds of eternity, and stamps an impression that will never be effaced !

Consider, dear friends, the events of that relationship which is now dissolved. The various labours of your worthy pastor will not be lost, not even his more private instructions, prayers, and counsels in your families, or his own ; they will not return void, but accomplish the end whereunto they were sent. The great question with you is, Does that end include your salvation ? Can you look back and bless God for the life which is now finished, as having been a blessing to you ? Can you remember the sermon, the visit, the reproof, the warning, the counsel, the free conversation, from whence you began to cry, *My*

Father, thou art the guide of my youth? Or has this valuable life, which thousands have acknowledged as a public blessing, been nothing to you? You have heard him, and have talked with him, and have witnessed the general tenor of his life, how holily, how justly, and how unblameably he behaved himself among you; and is all of no account? Is the harvest past, and the summer ended, and are you not saved? Alas! if this should be the case with any of you in this congregation, (and it is well if it is not,) you may never have such opportunities again; and if you should perish at last, the loss of your souls will be greater, and attended with more aggravating circumstances, than that of many others. Those of Bethsaida and Chorazin, who rejected or neglected the gospel, were in a worse situation than even the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. When the *books* come to be opened at the great day, they will contain a long and dark list of slighted opportunities, abused mercies, despised counsels, and forgotten warnings!

Dear friends, call to remembrance the labours of your minister, and pray to the Lord that none of these things may come upon you. If any of you have been deaf to the various calls of God during his life, yet hear this one which is addressed to you by his death! If the seed which this dear servant of God has been sowing for nearly forty years among you, should yet spring up; if to a future and happy pastor of this church, it should be said in the language of Christ to his apostles,

Another has laboured, and you have entered into his labours; it would afford us no small pleasure, pleasure that would serve to counterbalance the painful providence with which at this time we are afflicted.

TO THE MEMORY OF MY DEAR AND VENERABLE FRIEND,

THE REV. ROBERT HALL,

Who died in the 63d year of his age, on March 13, 1791.

AND is my much-respected friend no more?
How painful are the tidings to my heart!
And is that light extinguish'd which so long
Has burn'd with brightest lustre, and diffus'd
Through all his lov'd connexions round about,
Pure rays of evangelic light and joy?

Is all that stock of true substantial worth
Become as water spilt upon the ground?—
That *universal knowledge*, which embrac'd
A compass wide and large, of men and things?—
That well-known solid *wisdom*, which, improv'd
By long experience, made his face to shine?—
That *uprightness of character*, by which
He liv'd down slander, and of foes made friends?—
That ardent and *affectionate concern*
For truth, for righteousness, for Zion's good,
Which, with a *social kindness*, long endear'd
His name, and renders him a public loss?—
That *grace* that rul'd and season'd all his soul,
And as with sacred unction fill'd his lips,
In which as life declin'd he ripened fast,
And shone still more and more to perfect day?—
That tender *sympathy* that often sooth'd
The sorrowing heart, and wip'd the mourner's tear?—

That sweet *humility*, and *self abasement*,
With which we heard him oft invoke his God ;
Which ne'er assum'd, though first in counsel skill'd,
The lordly look, or proud dictator's chair ?—
That guiltless *pleasantry* that brighten'd up
Each countenance, and cheer'd the social hour ?—
(If he were there, it seem'd that all were there ;
If he were missing, none could fill his place.)
That *store of excellence*, in short, to which
(As to a ship well fraught) one might repair,
And be enrich'd with treasures new and old ?—
Is ALL, as by a kind of fatal wreck,
Destroy'd, and sunk at once to rise no more ?

Dear friend ! (for still I fain would talk to thee)
Shall I discern thy cheering face no more ?
And must thy glad'ning voice no more be heard ?
And when I visit thy much-lov'd abode,
Shall I not find thee there as heretofore ?
Nor sit, nor walk, as erst with pleasure wont,
Nor mingle souls beneath the friendly bow'r ?
No . . . this is past . . . nor ought seems left for me,
Except to walk, and sigh upon thy stone !

Dear friend ! I saw thee burden'd years ago,
With heavy loads of complicated grief ;
And grief more complicate, tho' less intense,
I'm told thou didst in earlier days endure ;
But tribulation patience in thee wrought,
And such a stock of rich experience *this*,
That few like thee could reach the mourner's case,
Or ease the burdens of the lab'ring heart. *

We saw thee ripen in thy later years,
As when rich-laden autumn droops her head :
That theme on which thy thoughts of late were penn'd,*
None knew like thee, nor could have touch'd so well ;
It seem'd thy element, the native air
Thy holy soul had long been us'd to breathe.

* *Communion with God*, the subject of the Circular Letter for 1739, which was Mr. Hall's last printed performance.

Such things we saw with sacred pleasure ; yet
'Twas pleasure ting'd with painful fear, lest these
(As fruit when ripe is quickly gather'd in)
Should only prove portentous of thy end.

O thou great Arbiter of life and death !
Thy ways are just, and true, and wise, and good ;
Tho' clouds and darkness compass thee around,
Justice and judgment still support thy throne.
Had it been left to us, he still had liv'd,
And liv'd for years to come, and bless'd us still ;
But thus 'tis not ; thy thoughts are not as ours.
Had poor short-sighted mortals had their will,
The great Redeemer had not bled, or died.
Teach us to say, " Thy will, not ours be done,"
To drink the cup thou givest us to drink.

Dear relatives and friends, his special charge !
Bereav'd at once of him whose life was spent
In unremitted labours for your good,
We must not call on you to mourn, but try
To stem the tide, or wipe th' overflowing tear.
'Tis true his course is finish'd, and your ears
Shall hear no more the long-accustom'd sound ;
But 'tis as he desir'd, when late we heard
Drop from his lips, what seem'd his last farewell.*
'The prize for which he counted life not dear,
Is fully gain'd ; his course *with joy* he clos'd.

What aid I say ? the ship was wreck'd and lost ?
No, it is not ; 'tis safe arriv'd in port,
And all the precious cargo too is safe ;
His knowledge, wisdom, love, and every grace,
Are not extinct, but gloriously matur'd,
Beyond what'er he grasp'd in this frail state.
A fit companion *now* for purer minds ;
For patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, and for those

* It has been observed, that Mr. Hall's last *public* sermon, in his own connexion, was preached at Olney Association, June 2. 1790: from Acts xx. 24. *Neither count I my life dear,—that I may finish my course with joy*, &c.

Whom once he knew, and lov'd, who went before ;
For HIM whose name was dear to him on earth,
And whose sweet presence now creates his heav'n.

Nor is all lost to those who yet survive :
Though he is gone, his mantle's left behind.—
Kind *memory* may recal his words, and deeds,
And prayers, and counsels ; and conviction aid,
Or cheer the heart, or guide the doubtful feet,
Or prompt to imitate his holy life.
Nor memory alone, the *faithful page*
Is charg'd with some remains, in which the man
And his communications yet are seen ;
In these, though he be dead, he speaketh still.*

Yes, here's Elijah's mantle : may there too
A double portion of his spirit rest
Upon us all ; and might I be indulg'd
In one more special wish, that wish should be,
That he who fills his father's sacred trust,
Might share the blessings of his father's God,
And tread his steps ; that all may see and say,
"Elijah's spirit on Elisha rests."

SKETCH OF A SERMON TO YOUNG PEOPLE.

Psalm xc. 14.

O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be
glad all our days.

THE season is returned, my dear young people,
in which you expect I should address you on
your eternal interests. I hope what I have

* Mr. Hall wrote many of the *Circular Letters* to the churches of the Northamptonshire and Leicestershire Association, most of which have been noticed already, as well as his *Help to Zion's Travellers*. He also printed, *A Charge to Mr. Moreton*, delivered at his ordination at Kettering, 1771. And a *Funeral Sermon for Mrs. Evans, of Foxton*, 1775.

heretofore said to you, not only on these occasions, but in the ordinary course of my labours, has not been altogether in vain. Some of you, I hope, have already set your faces Sion-ward. Happy should I be to see many more follow their example !

The words which I have read to you express the desire of Moses, the man of God, in behalf of Israel, and especially of the rising generation. That generation of men which came out of Egypt with Moses, were most of them very wicked. Though God divided the sea to save them, and caused manna to fall from heaven to feed them, with many other wonderful works ; yet they did little else than provoke him by their repeated transgressions. Ten times they tempted him in the wilderness ; and, to complete their crimes, they despised the good land, and disbelieved His promises who had engaged to put them in possession of it. The consequence was, Jehovah swore in his wrath, *They shall not enter into my rest*. So they were all, except Joshua and Caleb, doomed to die in the wilderness. On occasion of this melancholy sentence, (the account of which you will find in the fourteenth chapter of Numbers,) it is supposed that Moses, the man of God, wrote this plaintive psalm ; in which he laments over the mortality of man, and supplicates divine mercy to mitigate the doom. And the doom, as it respected Israel, was mitigated, or at least mingled with much mercy. Though the fathers were sentenced to perish in the wilderness, yet the

promise was accomplished in the rising generation. *Your little ones*, said the Lord, *which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised.* This younger generation, from that time, became the grand object of hope to Moses, and his companions. Their great business in the wilderness, for thirty-eight years was to teach them the good knowledge of God, and to form their spirit and manners for his service. How earnestly did Moses pray for the Lord's blessing upon these their labours, towards the close of this psalm. *Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children; and let the beauty of Jehovah our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.* To the same purpose is the petition which I first read. *O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.* These petitions, too, were graciously answered. God's work did appear to Moses and his associates, and his glory to their children, and that at an early period. His spirit was richly poured forth upon the Israelitish youth. The beauty of the Lord their God was upon them, and the work of their hands was established. It was this amiable generation that extorted the admiration of Balaam himself: *How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!* It was of them that the Lord declared, that *Israel then was holiness to the Lord, and the first fruits of his increase.*

I hope I need not say, that this prayer of Moses on behalf of the Israelitish youth is expressive of the desires of your minister and of your parents : you know it is so. O that it may also express your own !

There are two things pertaining to this subject, which require particular notice ; namely, *the object desired*, which is an early participation of divine mercy ; and *the influence of such a participation of mercy on the happiness of future life*.

I. Let us notice *the object desired*.—This is *mercy*, a being *satisfied* with mercy, and a being *early* satisfied with mercy. Pay attention, young people, to each of these particulars.

1. The grand object that you need is *mercy*, the mercy of God against whom you have sinned.—Holy angels worship God ; but this prayer would not fit their lips. They are guilty and undone sinners to whom the voice of mercy is addressed ; and such are you, and therefore it becomes you to sue for this all-important good. Mercy is of two kinds, *common* and *special*. Every good we enjoy is mercy ; but they are not common mercies only, nor chiefly, that are here desired. They would not have satisfied Moses, nor will they satisfy us. That which he sought on behalf of the Israelitish youth, and what we seek on behalf of you, is saving mercy, renewing mercy, forgiving mercy ; that which Saul the persecutor obtained, having sinned in ignorance and unbelief.

2. The blessing here sought is not only mercy, but a being *satisfied* with mercy.—If the

rising generation among the Israelites obtained mercy. Moses and Aaron, and all their godly associates would feel satisfied on a review of their labours; and if you, young people, obtain a similar blessing, we shall feel the same. Nor shall we be satisfied with any thing short of it. We are glad to see you sober, intelligent, ingenious, and industrious; we rejoice in your temporal prosperity; but this will not satisfy us. How should it? To care for the less and not for the greater, were cruel beyond expression. Nor will any thing short of saving mercy satisfy *you*. You may think that pleasure will, but it will not; nor fame, nor riches, nor aught else under the sun. Immortal minds can be satisfied with nothing short of an immortal good. Read, and carefully consider, the first three verses of the 55th chapter of Isaiah. But in order to be satisfied with mercy, you must possess a thirst after it. Nothing satisfies but that which corresponds with our desires. Have you such desire? Do you call upon the Lord for mercy? and that with your whole heart? How many heathens are there in a Christian country, who live without prayer! and how many who pray in form, without any earnest or sincere desire after those things for which they pray! Such will never be satisfied. But if mercy be the one thing desired, you need not fear being satisfied with it, for there is enough in God, enough in Christ, to assuage all your thirst. *With the Lord there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption.—Open your mouth wide, and he will*

fill it. The Spirit, in the invitations of the word, says, Come; the bride, or church of Christ, says, Come; and whosoever will, let him come, and take of the water of life freely.

3. The blessing to be sought is, not only a being satisfied, but satisfied *early* with divine mercy.—Moses desired that his prayer might be speedily answered; and if genuine piety appeared in the young people at an early period of life, this his desire would be accomplished. Piety is a beautiful flower at any age, but most so in early life. How amiable did it appear in these young people. It is called *the love of their espousals*, which the Lord afterwards remembered for the sake of their posterity. How amiable did it appear in Isaac, in Joseph, in Samuel, in David, in Abijah, in Josiah, and in many others. But let us proceed to observe—

II. The influence which a participation of divine mercy, and especially an early one, will have on the happiness of your future life—this good obtained, you will *rejoice and be glad all your days*.—It is a notion imbibed by many who are strangers to true religion, that it makes people melancholy and miserable. But this is false. The contrary is the truth. Every one that has known it has spoken well of it. The reproaches of those who know it not, are unworthy of notice. To render this evident, let me request your attention to a few remarks.

1. To have participated of mercy *is to have all your sins forgiven*; and is not this a source of joy

and gladness? You may think but little of these things in the hour of health and thoughtless dissipation; but whenever you reflect, whether it be under a sermon, or on a bed of affliction, or on any other occasion, you will feel the force of such truths as these: *Blessed is the man whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sin is covered!—Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee!* I cannot perceive what grounds there can be for joy or gladness, while your sins are unforgiven. To rise every morning, and to retire every evening, with the curse of the Almighty on your heads, must needs be a dreadful thing; and if you be not shockingly hardened in unbelief and stupidity, it must render your life far from happy. You may rejoice and be glad in many things, but it is only while you forget your true condition. One thought on this subject dissolves the charm, and sinks you in melancholy. O, my dear young people, drink but at this fountain, and it will prove the water of life! It will banish suspense and dread; and will take away all that is terrible from these most terrible of all words—DEATH, JUDGMENT, and ETERNITY.

2. The partaking of divine mercy *will furnish you with great sources of enjoyment in the study of truth.*—While blinded by your own carnality, the things of God will appear uninteresting, if not foolishness; but having known the gift of God, you will ask, and he will give you more and more of this living water. Knowledge of any kind is food to an ingenious mind; but mere science has

not that rich and interesting quality which attends evangelical truth. Astronomy may amuse you, and even delight you, by showing you the wonderful works of God, but the gospel gives you an interest in all. If you are Christians, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours. The study of nature is a source of pleasure; but the gospel, of joy. It has with great propriety been called, "The wisdom that speaks to the heart." Such was the decision of the Earl of Rochester in his wisest days. Joy, and especially the joy of the gospel, possesses much of that charming perturbation of spirit, which is not excited but by great, interesting, and transporting objects. Happiness may cause a smile, but joy will add to that smile a tear, and perhaps a flood of tears. What a delicious enjoyment! Thus may you *rejoice and be glad all your days*.

3. By a participation of divine mercy, *all your duties will be converted into pleasures*.—Without this, every duty will be a task: Praying, reading, and hearing, Sabbaths, and all other religious opportunities, will either be disregarded, or if through custom you attend to them, yet your heart will not be in them. They will appear as lost time; and such, indeed, they will prove. Time so spent will to you be lost, and worse than lost. But true religion will inspire your hearts with love; and this will render every religious duty a delight.

4. A participation of the mercy or grace of God *will shed a lustre on all your natural enjoyments.*—To have only natural enjoyments is to have a slender, short-lived, and uncertain portion. To have to reflect in the midst of your pleasures, ‘Now I am receiving my good things, and these, for aught that appears, are to be my all,’ is sufficient to spread a damp over every thing: but to have earthly good with a blessing, with the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush, must give them a tenfold sweetness. Art thou but a Christian; *Eat thy bread with gladness, and drink thy wine with a cheerful heart, for God now accepteth thy labour.*

5. A participation of divine mercy *will support your hearts under the heaviest afflictions, and enable you to rejoice and be glad, while others are sinking under their burdens.*—You are young, but you must lay your accounts with those ills which are common to men. Some of you who may be engaged in trade, may sustain heavy losses; but this will bear you up. If you have Christ, you will never have lost your all. When poor Moab was wasted, she had nothing left. Well, therefore, might Jeremiah bewail her condition. (Chap. xlviii. 36.) But when Judah was gone into captivity, she could yet say, *The Lord is my portion, saith my soul, therefore will I hope in him.* Others of you may pass through life in poverty. *Hardly bestead and hungry,* you have little to lose; and, if destitute of religion, may be tempted to *curse your king and your God, and*

look upward. But the hope of the gospel will cause you to rejoice, even in this situation. Though no fruit appear on your vine, nor flock in your fold, nor herd in your stall; yet you will rejoice in the Lord, and be glad in the God of your salvation.

6. A participation of God's special mercy affords an assurance, that *all the blessings before mentioned are but the beginnings of joy, the earnest of everlasting bliss.*—Here we are at a loss. *Now are we the sons of God, but it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but this we know, that we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.* O happy people! Well are they exhorted to rejoice always, and again to rejoice—to sing aloud upon their beds—to count it all joy, even when they fall into divers trials, knowing that these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work for them *a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*

To all this may be added, *the earlier you obtain these blessings, the greater will be your enjoyment.*—Early piety will save you from much wickedness. The conversion of a soul, especially at this period, hides a multitude of sins; and renders life much more happy as well as useful. Evil habits are broken with difficulty. Those who return to God in old age, seldom do much for him, or enjoy much from him. Manasseh, though he obtained mercy, yet did but little towards undoing the mischief which he had wrought in Israel. He could lead his people and his family into

wickedness while he was wicked; but he could not lead them back again when he returned. Amon, his successor, imitated Manasseh the idolater, not Manasseh the penitent. And as to himself, though he cast the idols out of the temple, and out of the city, yet the far greater part of the work of reformation was left for his grandson Josiah. That amiable young prince began, in the sixteenth year of his age, to seek after the Lord God of his fathers; and in the twentieth he set about a thorough work of reformation; and God was with him, and blessed him, and he, like his ancestor Abraham, became a blessing.

O. young people, a thousand arguments and examples might be adduced to show the force and propriety of the petition! If you have a spark of ingenuousness towards God in your hearts, you would not desire to put him off with the refuse of a life spent in the service of sin. You would offer him the first fruits of your days; the best of your time, strength, talents, and influence. And this is not all. Time flies. Years roll over in quick succession. Death sweeps away the young as well as the aged. Out of the burials that we have had this year in our congregation, five out of six have been young people; some of them under twenty years of age, and others of them but little past that period. None of them seem to have thought much of dying, yet they are gone from the land of the living! Hark! from their tombs I hear the language of warning and solemn counsel! *Whatsoever thy hand findeth*

thee to do, do it with thy might ; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge in the grave, whither thou goest. Join with your pastor, join with your parents, join with all that seek your welfare, in praying, O satisfy us early with thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

What shall I say more? Will you, my dear young people, will you drink and be satisfied at the fountain of mercy; a fountain that is wide open, and flows freely through our Lord Jesus Christ? You cannot plead the want of sufficient inducements. Ministers, parents, Christians, angels, the faltering voice of death, the solemn assurance of a judgment to come, and above all, the sounding of the bowels of Jesus Christ, all say, Come. But if, like those who refused the waters of Siloah, you prefer the follies and pursuits of the present life to the joys of immortality, our souls shall weep in secret places for you. Tribulation and anguish will overtake you even in this life; and under it, instead of the consolations and hopes of the gospel, you will have to reflect, 'This I have brought upon myself; and these are but the beginnings of sorrows!'

TO THE AFFLICTED.

THOSE whose Christian compassion induces them frequently to visit the sick, see and hear things of which others can scarcely form any

conception. They see affliction, not merely in easy circumstances, wherein it is alleviated as far as possible by the comforts of life, but as it exists in the poor man's dwelling, aggravated by privations and hardships, many of which would seem intolerable to some, even in a time of health. They sympathize with you, and as far as they are able, it is presumed, administer to your relief.

But there is one thing which has particularly struck the writer of this address; namely, *the different manner in which affliction is borne by religious, and by irreligious people*. He wishes to be understood as speaking *generally*, rather than *universally*. Some who are thought to be religious, are not so; and some that are truly religious, are the subjects of morbid nervous sensibility; while others who are not so, have much constitutional patience and equanimity. But other things being equal, he has perceived a wide difference in favour of religion. In visiting the dwellings of Christian people in times of affliction, his heart has been cheered by their cheerfulness. Their troubles have seemed to be more than balanced by their enjoyments. Hope has glistened in their very tears, and submission to the will of God has brightened their emaciated countenances. But on entering the abodes of the irreligious, such discontent, despondency, and misery have appeared, that he has come away quite dejected. The smile of hope, and the tear of joy, were there alike unknown: all was darkness, and the prospect of thicker darkness.

Let us try to find out the causes and the cure of this state of mind, which adds so much to the miseries of life. If every one could tell his tale, and would tell the truth, we might hear some such accounts as these:—

‘My heart was set upon certain things, and I seemed almost to have gained them, when unexpectedly I was seized with this heavy affliction. And now all my plans are broken; I seem likely to die disappointed; and what is worse, I have thought nothing, or next to nothing, of a hereafter.’

‘I have lived,’ says another, ‘a thoughtless and careless life, putting the evil day far from me. I began by entertaining a dislike to the worship of God, and so forsook it, and turned the Sabbath into a day of sports. I kept bad company, and soon began to doubt the truth of the Bible. I drank, swore, and when in company laughed at religion; though a secret persuasion that it would prove true, sometimes made me very unhappy when alone. I laid my account with living as long as my neighbours; but I am afraid now I shall not recover, and that my soul is lost. Oh, how little did I think a few weeks ago that I should be so soon arrested in my course! What have I done? What can I do?’

‘I have lived a sober life,’ says a third, ‘and have not been used to doubt but that through the merits of Christ, this would answer every purpose: but since I have been laid aside, I have been thinking, in case I should die, whether this

ground will bear me ; and the more I think of it, the more it seems to sink under me. I am a sinner, and know not how my sins are to be forgiven.'

'I have been brought up in a Christian family,' says a fourth, 'and have heard the gospel from my childhood ; yet my conscience tells me that I am not a Christian. I heard the truth, but never received it in the love of it, that I might be saved. I conformed to family worship, but my heart was never in it. So much was it against the grain of my inclination, that I longed to get from under the yoke. At length my father died, and I had what I wished for, my liberty. Since then I have been very wicked. And now I am brought down to death's door. I know not what will be the end.' The Lord have mercy upon me !'

If any of these cases be yours, or nearly so, allow me to remind you that a time of affliction is a time when God calls you to a serious inquiry into the state of your soul. *In the day of adversity consider.* It is the only time, it may be, in which the voice of religion and conscience can be heard. You may have been *as the wild ass used to the wilderness*, neither to be turned nor restrained ; all those who have sought to reclaim you have but wearied themselves : but as in her month she was to be found, so are you in yours. Consider then that God has laid his hand upon you, that he may cause you to feel what he could do, and induce you to hearken while he reasons with you. He has awakened you also to some sense of

your danger, that you may feel your need of the salvation of Christ, ere it is for ever hid from your eyes. I dare not comfort you on the consideration of your distress of mind, as though it were a hopeful sign of salvation. If it lead you to the Saviour, you will be saved; but if not, it may be to you but the beginning of sorrows. Your sins are much more numerous and heinous than you are aware of; it is an evil and bitter thing to have departed from the living God, and to have spent so large a part of the life he gave you without his fear being in you. God might justly cut you off, and cast you into perdition.

But consider the faithful saying, *Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, even the chief of sinners.* You have doubtless heard of this, but perhaps have never considered its import. If Jesus came into the world on such an errand, he must be the Messiah foretold by the prophets, the Son of God, and the Saviour of men. If he came into the world to save sinners, the world must have been in a lost and hopeless condition. If any thing could have been done by man towards saving himself, it would doubtless have been left to him: God would not unnecessarily have interfered, especially to send his Son to be made a sacrifice for us. It does not comport with the wisdom of God to send his Son to suffer and die, to accomplish that which might have been accomplished without him. Moreover, if Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, he must have come *with a design*, which is what no

mere creature ever did. Whatever design there may be *concerning* our coming into the world, we are not the subjects of it: but Christ was the subject of design. *He took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and this from a state of mind that we are called upon to imitate.* Phil. ii. 7. His coming into the world was nothing less than *the Word being made flesh, and dwelling among men; or, that eternal life that was with the Father being manifested to us.* But if all this be true, sin must be indeed an evil and bitter thing, and salvation from it a matter of the greatest importance. And shall we so pursue our farms and merchandize as to make light of it? *Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.* It is sufficient to warrant our coming to him, that such are we. Finally, if he came to save the chief of sinners, whatever our sins have been, they can furnish no reason for despair. Even the sin against the Holy Ghost is not unpardonable, as being too great for the mercy of God, or for the atonement of Christ; but as precluding that which is necessary to an interest in both—*repentance.* Heb. vi. 6. If therefore our sins be lamented, and we have faith in Christ, however numerous or heinous they have been, we shall find mercy. If a ship founders at sea, and while her company are some floating on pieces of wreck, and others swimming for their lives, a friendly vessel bears down and throws out a rope to every one of them, would it be for any one to hesitate as to his taking hold of it?

Many in the day of adversity have, like the prodigal, been brought to a right mind; but many are not so. Some are unaffected, and even hardened under their afflictions. Nothing is heard but murmurings and complainings; and nothing seen but sullen discontent, depression, and despondency. Others, being deeply entrenched in the persuasion that they have lived a good life, all that is said to them respecting the gospel makes no impression on their minds. Others are secure in consequence of having imbibed some false scheme of religion; and others, who are tender at the time, and appear to believe the gospel are no sooner restored to health, than they lose their impressions, and return to their former courses.

Let us review these cases. If affliction has been the means of humbling you, and bringing you to a right mind, you have reason, not only to be reconciled to it, but to consider it among your greatest mercies. It has been good for you to bear the yoke of adversity; and this should teach you to be resigned to the will of God as to your future lot. 'It was by affliction,' said a good man, 'that I was first brought into the way, and by affliction that I have been kept in it.' *Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I have learned thy word.*

But if the visitations of God have tended only to *harden* you, and to provoke you to *sullenness and discontent*, you have reason to fear lest you should be given up to such a state of mind. *Why*

should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more.—Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone!

If you be full of *self-righteous confidence*, flattering yourself that your life has been good, and that you have nothing to fear, consider whether you be not in the very condition of those whom our Saviour describes as *whole*, and so *needing no physician*. You appear to have no wants; and therefore none of the blessings of the gospel are interesting to you. A very interesting narrative was published a few years since of such a case as this. A worthy minister, on visiting a dying man, was told by him with great self-complacency, that ‘he had never been guilty of any particular sins, and was not therefore uneasy on that score.’ “To every thing I said,” (says the minister,) “he gave that unlimited assent, which, when coming from an unenlightened person, has always appeared to me peculiarly embarrassing. To every truth I stated, his monotonous reply was, ‘Yes, sir,’—‘To be sure, sir,’—‘Certainly, sir,’ and the like. I now felt (as I have often done under similar circumstances) discouraged, perplexed, and grieved; and could not but deeply lament the mental darkness under which the poor man appeared to be enveloped. After a short pause, I frankly confessed that I knew not what to say to him; observing that he appeared to have *no wants*—that the blessings of the gospel were for the poor, the wretched, and the lost—that if he were lamenting his sins, crying for mercy, and

inquiring the way of salvation, I thought I should know how to address him; but that with his present views, the gospel must necessarily appear to him of very little value." This faithful remonstrance, together with a charge of having neglected his own salvation for the sake of worldly advantage, which charge the minister was enabled to bring home to his conscience, appears to have been the means of awakening him to a sense of his danger. 'What,' said he, 'and is it too late? Is all lost? Is my poor soul abandoned? Have I lived in the neglect of all these things? And is it come to this? O what, what shall I do? O my sins! O my poor soul! O my God, my God! Shall I be cast off for ever? What must I do to be saved? Is there no way open for me? O what, what must I do to be saved?'—The way of salvation being pointed out to him, he appeared with great sincerity to embrace it, and died very happily. But many have died in the very spirit of the Jews, seeking after acceptance with God, without attaining it. And wherefore? *Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law: for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone.*

But your security may be in consequence of your having imbibed *some false species of religion*, which influences your mind like an opiate, divesting you of all painful reflection, and filling you with dreams of future happiness. A confidence of this sort is more difficult to be shaken than self-righteous hope itself. Those who have

not made much pretence to religion, have not so great sacrifices to make in embracing the gospel as those who have. You account your darkness light: but *if the light which is in us be darkness, how great is that darkness!* There is an intoxicating quality in false religion, and in the false joys excited by it: like strong drink, it produces a kind of happiness at the time, and a vehement desire of repeating the delicious draught; but its end is bitter. Prov. xxiii. 29—35. We have no mind to dispute with you, but wish to declare unto you the gospel of God, and leave it. *If the faithful saying* above referred to, be received, it will issue in your salvation; if not, we can only deliver our own souls!

Finally: Though your mind may have undergone a change during your affliction, yet, recollect that sick-bed repentances are often, though not always, like what is said of the goodness of Ephraim: *As a morning cloud, and as the early dew, it goeth away.* If you abound in vows and promises as to your future life, it is rather a sign that you know but little of yourself, than of a real change for the better. An immediate apprehension of death is capable of producing great effects, which are often mistaken for a change of heart. Be confident of the truth of Christ's doctrine and promises; but be diffident of yourself. To doubt his word is unbelief; but to be jealous of yourself is one of the fruits of faith. If God should restore you to health, and you prove by your Christian conversation, that his word

has taken deep root in your mind, your fellow-Christians will rejoice over you, and join in blessing God that the day of visitation has been to you a day of salvation.

A MEDITATION.

That which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.—Eccl. i. 15.

THE wise man inquires, *What is that good for the sons of men, which they should do all the days of their life?* At the close of his inquiries he answers, *Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man.* But before he comes to this *conclusion of the matter*, as he calls it, he takes a large survey of human affairs, the result of every inquiry concerning which is, *All is vanity and vexation of spirit.* Every thing that passed under his review was either void of substantial good, or connected with some evil which embittered it.

Two of the marks of vanity inscribed on earthly things are, that a great number of them are inveterately *crooked*, or devious from the line of what is good for the sons of men; and that a still greater number are *wanting*, or defective; so that though there were nothing in them repugnant to what is good, yet they are *insufficient* to satisfy the mind.

That devious and defective things should be found in the world is not surprising; but they are

found also in the church, and our endeavours to rectify and supply them are often ineffectual. It is too much to infer from this that we are to sit down in despair, and attempt nothing; but it will be profitable to know the limited extent of our powers, so as not to waste our time and energies on that which will answer no good end.

Many have been employed during the greater part of their lives in striving to correct the errors and disorders of the church, and to supply its defects. This has certainly been a good work. What else were the labours of the Reformers, of the Puritans, of the Nonconformists, and indeed of all the servants of God in every age, but so many attempts to bend the minds of men to the mind of Christ? Nor have they laboured without effect. When we compare the present state of things with what we wish, we seem indeed to have done nothing: but when with the state of things in times past, we may say, *What hath God wrought!* Paganism has been excluded from Europe; Popery has been so diminished as to have lost its wonted energies; and Christianity, cherished under the wing of religious freedom, has of late taken a notable flight, alighting in the very heart of the Pagan world. But with all this there are many crooked things among us, and things which by human hands cannot be made straight. The spirit of infidelity has pervaded the minds of millions in Europe, whose fathers were once the decided friends of the reformation. The systems of many who would

be thought to be Christians are so tinged with it, as to become Antichristian. And among those who profess to believe the doctrines of the reformation, many content themselves with the name of orthodoxy, without the thing. There is a tendency in the human mind to deviate from divine truth. Had it not been for the illuminating influence of the Spirit of God, we should never have understood it; not because of its abstruseness, but on account of the uncongeniality of our minds: and when we do understand and believe it, there is a continual tendency in us to get wrong. It might seem that when a person has once obtained a just view of the gospel, there is no danger of his losing it; but it is not so. There is a partiality in all our views, and while we guard against error in one direction, we are in equal danger from a contrary extreme. Many, in shunning the snare of self-righteous pride, have fallen into the pit of Antinomian presumption; and many in guarding what they consider as the interests of practical religion, have ceased to teach and preach those principles from which alone it can proceed. Besides this, there are many ways by which a minister may get beside the gospel, without falling into any palpable errors. There may be nothing *crooked*, yet much *wanting*. We may deliver an ingenious discourse, containing nothing inconsistent with truth, and yet not preach that truth *in which believers stand, and by which they are saved*. We may preach *about* the gospel, and yet not preach the gospel, so as to *show unto men the*

way of salvation And if we get into a vain, carnal, and worldly frame of mind, this is almost certain to be the case. It is no breach of charity to say of hundreds of sermons that are ordinarily delivered by those who are reputedly orthodox, that they are not the gospel which Jesus commissioned his servants to preach: and if it be thus among preachers, is it marvellous that a large proportion of religious people are not strictly evangelical; but imbibe another spirit? And if the doctrine of Christ be neglected, (not to say corrupted) the effects will appear in a neglect of faithful discipline, in a worldly spirit, and in a gradual disregard of a watchful, circumspect, and holy individual conduct.

It is no breach of charity to suppose that many who profess evangelical principles are Christians only in name, and that these principles are professed merely on account of their popularity in the circles in which they move. The ways of such must be crooked. Like Saul, they know not how to go about obedience to God, but are always stumbling, or turning aside in pursuit of some carnal object.

There are few things more spoken against in the present times, than *party zeal*; but there are few things more common. To unite with those whom we consider on mature examination as being nearest the mind of Christ, and having done so to act up to our principles,—is our duty: but few things are farther from the mind of the partisan than this. Having enlisted in the cause

of a party, he sees no good but that which is within its pale, and will say and do almost any thing to keep up its reputation. *Many things have I seen in the days of my vanity!* There is a man whose heart unites with every one who loves our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and who rejoices in the work of God wherever he sees it; but not being of the right party, he is of little or no account: and there is a man who gives no other proof of his liberality than that of boasting of it; yet being of the right party, he is liberal.

Genuine candour and liberality are not to be looked for in parties, but in individuals of various parties. There are men who, while seeking the good of their immediate connexions, consider them not so much as their *party*, as an integral part of the kingdom of Christ, and who know how to rejoice in the success of truth and true religion wherever it is found: but is it thus with the bulk of any denomination, established or unestablished? I fear not. He that has lived thirty or forty years in religious society, and has not met with things that must needs have shaken his confidence in professions, must either be a very happy man, or very unobservant of what has passed before him. What shall we say then? Shall we sigh, and say, *That which is crooked cannot be made straight?* Be it so; Let us distinguish between Christianity, and the conduct of its professors; so that while we are grieved at the latter, we may not think worse of the the former. *Let God be true, and every man a liar!* Let us

also examine our own hearts, and pray that we may have grace at least to correct the deviations, and supply the defects, that are to be found in ourselves; in which case, whatever may befall others, we shall find rest for our souls.

I shall conclude with a few remarks on *misrepresentation*. Some men in the course of their lives are exposed to a large portion of this, accompanied, it may be, with much foul abuse, the correction of which often becomes an object of despair. *He that is first in his own cause, says the wise man, seemeth just, but his neighbour cometh and searcheth him.* But how, if a man should be so deluged with misrepresentations, and his hands so occupied with more important concerns, as to have neither time nor inclination to refute them? There are two ways left him.

First: He may safely treat the foulest and most unworthy of his opponents with *neglect*. Their calumnies will not do him much injury; and if he attempt to answer them, he may be in danger of imbibing a portion of their spirit. This seems to be the fool that should *not* be answered according to his folly, lest we be like unto him.

Secondly: He may give a brief statement of the truth, and leave the misrepresentation and abuse to fall of its own accord. When the Jews, after their return from Babylon, began building the temple, it caused a great sensation among their adversaries. They first offered to join them in the work, thinking, no doubt, to come in for a share, and perhaps the chief share, of the glory;

and when their offer was refused, they accused them to the Persian government, so that the work for a time was stopped. We may wonder that the Jews did not by a counter-statement correct these vile misrepresentations, and expose the insincerity of their accusers : yet they did not ; but, as appears from the history, held their peace. When the storm had blown over, encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, they renewed the work ; and when interrogated anew by their adversaries, contented themselves with a simple statement of the truth. The substance of it was this : ‘ We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth.—We are engaged in rebuilding the house that was built many years ago by a great king of Israel.—Our fathers sinned against God, and he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar, who destroyed this house, and carried the people away into Babylon.—But in the first year of Cyrus there was a decree to rebuild it, and its furniture was at the same time restored to Sheshbazzar, whom he appointed our governor.—The same Sheshbazzar began this work, which is not yet finished.’ This simple statement of truth, which leaves out all reflections on their adversaries, would bear to be repeated even by them, in their letter to Darius, and in that form was repeated, and ultimately prevailed. Ezra iv. v. vi. The crooked things were let alone, and the straight rule exhibited, and thus the end was answered.

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