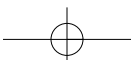
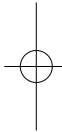
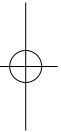


The Works of William Jay
Volume IX



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Volume IX

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OF
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WORKS OF WILLIAM JAY

THE
WORKS
OF
WILLIAM JAY,

COLLECTED AND REVISED BY HIMSELF.

VOLUME IX.

CONTAINING

SERMONS.

LONDON:

C. A. BARTLETT, PATERNOSTER ROW.

SERMONS,

BY

WILLIAM JAY.

VOLUME IX

5

“These things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

“But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentious, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.
TITUS iii. 8, 9.

LONDON:

C. A. BARTLETT PATERNOSTER ROW.

TO THE
CHURCH AND CONGREGATION
ASSEMBLING IN
ARGYLE CHAPEL, BATH,

THE FOLLOWING
SERMONS
ARE RESPECTIULLY AND
AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,
BY

William Jay.

ADVERTISEMENT.

NEAR forty years have elapsed since the following twenty-four Sermons were published in two octavo volumes.

With the exception of the single Discourse on the Mutual Duties of Husbands and Wives, they were the writer's first publication. They met with no little success, having passed through five large editions in a short time. This encouraged him to advance in his course of authorship, far beyond what he could originally have intended.

In looking over these Sermons, after so long a period, in order to comprise them in the complete series of his Works, he sees more imperfections ill them than he once saw—but he must leave them now as they are to the candour of the public, and the blessing of God.

Bath, August, 1844.

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SERMON I.

**MISTAKES CONCERNING THE
NUMBER
OF THE RIGHTEOUS.**

VOL. IX.

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SERMON I.

MISTAKES CONCERNING THE NUMBER OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

“Wot ye not what the Scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel; saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.” ROMANS xi. 2-4.

“WHO can understand his errors?” How numerous, how various, how opposite to each other, are the mistakes of mankind! The lives and the language of many seem to imply a full persuasion that there is very little evil in sin—that the difficulties of religion are by no means great—that it is an easy thing to be a Christian—that if there be a hell, few are wicked enough to be turned into it—and that the generality of our fellow-creatures are in a fair way for heaven. This persuasion is as false as it is fatal. “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, which leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: be-

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cause strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

It is possible, however, to fall into another extreme, and to draw an unwarrantable conclusion respecting the decline of religion, and the fewness of its adherents. And even wise men and good men are liable to this. “Wot ye not what the Scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to

God against Israel; saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.”

“We are going, then, to examine the opinion that reduces the number of the righteous. We shall lay open the various sources from which it proceeds; and by discovering the cause, we shall prescribe the cure.

Sometimes we draw the conclusion from the peculiar state of our own minds. By the indisposition of the body, or the depression of the animal spirits, our minds are soon affected; and we become sad, gloomy, peevish, and suspicious. In this situation our minds are unhinged, and easily receive a falling motion; we are more alive to the influence of fear than hope; the darker the intelligence, the more credible; one direction is given to every occurrence—and the invariable inference is, “all these things are against me.” And such seems to have been the condition of Elijah. His language betrays severity, petulancy, and despair.

Sometimes we are led to this reflection, by observ-

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ing multiplied instances of false profession. These are to be seen in every period of the Church. Our own age abounds with them. Some of these unhappy characters excite our surprise, as well as our sorrow. They promised fair—they did many “wonderful things”—for awhile they bore cheerfully “the reproach of the cross”—they passed us on the road, and reprov'd the sluggishness of our steps. By-and-by we met them on their return, laughing at that which once made them tremble, and loathing that which was once esteemed by them like life from the dead. Our entreaties were despised—as far as the eye could reach we watched them with

tears and alarm—sat down “discouraged because of the way,” and “said in our haste, all men are liars.” “Take ye heed everyone of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother: for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will walk with slanders.” But it was in our haste we said this—it was a rash conclusion. What! because there is counterfeit coin, is there no genuine gold? Were all the disciples false, because one of them was a devil? “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 it might be made manifest they were not all of us.” But, alas! the falling star strikes every eye, while few observe the fixed and the regular orbs. The apostacy of one pretender often excites more attention than the lives of many solid and steady Christians. They who would never mention the excellences of professors, will be forward enough to publish their disgrace. It gratifies the malignity of those who only wait for our halting, and occasions

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a triumph in the enemy’s camp—“Aha! so would we have it.”

The inference is still more frequently derived from the righteous themselves. There are five things which will be found to have their influence in producing it—the obscurity of their stations—the diffidence of their dispositions—the manner of their conversion—the diversity of their opinions—and the imperfections of their character.

I. The obscurity of the stations in which many of the righteous are placed, hides them from observation. When the rich and the honourable become pious, they are not long concealed. A thousand eyes are drawn towards the elevation. The eminence of their condition causes their virtues to shine like the reflection of the sun from the tops of high moun-

tains, seen by many and from afar. They are like a city set on a hill, which cannot be hid. But much more religion than is necessary to canonize them, would be even unobserved among the shades of poverty, and in the operations of common life. Here persons have little opportunity or ability to display their character: they are often sanctified and removed, unknown to any but a few neighbours involved in the same indigence. Their excellences are of the common, sober, unsplendid kind; or if they possess those virtues which distinguish and strike, they are rendered incapable of exercising them by their circumstances. Courage demands danger. Where there is no dignity, there can be no condescension. Where there are no distinctions to elate, humility cannot shine; and where there is nothing to give, benevolence cannot appear. God

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indeed “looketh to the heart, and where there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not.” In forming his estimate of the services of his people, he considers not only what they do, but what they wish to do. He sees many a benefactor where there is nothing given; many a martyr where there is nothing suffered. But we can only know them by “their fruits;” and their good works, as far as they are observable, are few; their principles, however well established, are checked and limited both in their effect and discovery. Such are God’s hidden ones; hidden by the obscurity of their stations, and the restraint of their circumstances. They are candles, but candles put under bushels.

The poor are too generally overlooked, whereas by Christians they should be principally regarded. The dispensation of the Gospel is peculiarly their privilege; the most extensive provinces of religion are occupied by them; and were we to open a more familiar intercourse with them, it would often rec-

tify our mistakes. All exertions to render the great religious, have hitherto proved ineffectual; and the Bible holds forth a language, sufficient to fill all those who aim at their conversion with despair. Few comparatively are called from the higher orders of society. He who was poor himself, whose kingdom is not of this world, and of whom it was asked, "Have any of the rulers believed on him?" generally selects his followers from the lower ranks of life—and there we are to seek them—"I am left alone!" But perhaps, complaining prophet, you have been only at court—walking through palaces or mansions—examining the high places of the earth. "What dost thou here, Elijah?" Who led

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thee here in search of religion? "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called." "How can ye believe who receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?" "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." The voice of Heaven calls you away from the "gold ring, and the goodly clothing." "Hearken, my beloved brethren: hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?" Follow Him. He will lead you in another direction. Go through yonder village; mingle with the poor and needy. Their necessities have compelled them to seek relief and solace in religion; and they have found them there. Enter that cottage: "The voice of rejoicing and of salvation is in the tabernacle of the righteous." "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox with hatred and strife." "A little that a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked." Enter yonder sanctuary—the common

people hear him gladly. The congregation withdraws. Observe those who approach and assemble around the table of the Lord. Ah! well says God, in the language of prophecy, "I will leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord."

II. A timid disposition conceals many. A bold mind will soon obtrude a man into notice: he will signalize himself by his forwardness on every occasion; he will be the first to speak, the first to act.

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Eager to engage in every public duty, and always talking on religious themes, many will remark him as a lively soul, and be ready to say, "Come, behold his zeal for the Lord of Hosts."

"We will not deny that this disposition may sometimes be connected with sincerity; but instances of an opposite nature are much more common, and a mind dealing in professions, and fond of publicity, is generally and deservedly to be suspected. It has been justly observed, that when of old the angels descended to earth, they assumed the form and likeness of men; but when Satan appeared, he transformed himself into an angel of light. The pretender exceeds the real character: the actor surpasses nature, and goes beyond life. "Where a man regards show only, he can afford to be more expensive and magnificent in appearances than those who are concerned for the reality. Empty vessels sound louder than the full. Religion runs along like a river, noiseless in proportion as it is deep.

True piety affects no unnecessary exposure: its voice is not heard in the street; it does not sound a trumpet before it; the left hand knows not what the right hand doeth. It rather eludes public observation, and retires from the applause of the multitude. It does not act to be seen of men, or to "make a fair show in the flesh." The Christian is more concerned

to be good than to appear so. His religion is commonly attended with diffidence and self-suspicion—he hides his feelings, and makes many anxious inquiries before he can venture to say, “Come unto me, all ye that fear God, and I will tell you what he hath done for my soul.” Baxter, speaking of Lord Chief-Justice Hale, tells us, that he had once en-

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tertained fears lest he had been too little for the experimental part of religion, such—as prayer, and meditation, and spiritual conflict: because he had seldom mentioned such subjects in relation to his own feelings. But he found afterwards that this reluctance arose from his averseness to hypocrisy, of which in his day he had seen so many instances.

It is our duty to make a profession of religion, and unite ourselves with some body of Christians, to walk in the faith and order of the Gospel. But we should do wrong to condemn all those who decline it. Many are held back for a considerable time by painful apprehensions. Jealous over their own hearts, and concerned lest they should be found deceivers at last, they dare not come forward, and venture on so serious an act, as by a public surrender to join themselves to the Church of the living God; and it is to be lamented, that in many cases this timidity is increased by the severe, unscriptural methods of admitting people to the table of the Lord. In the great day, when the secrets of all hearts are made manifest, we shall see many a secret, silent, unobserved follower of Christ exalted at the right hand; while many a noisy professor of religion will be thrust down to hell, for want of that truth and sincerity which are essentially necessary to the Christian character and to all acceptable worship.

To this we may add another apprehension. We see it exemplified in Nicodemus—who “came to

Jesus by night, for fear of the Jews." Had many seen him at the commencement of his religious course, they would have condemned him; nevertheless he gave at last the clearest proof of his attachment by coming forward, when his own disciples

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forsook him, and acknowledging a suffering Redeemer. Many may be in similar circumstances: repressed and concealed for a time by the influence of their situations and connexions. We do not praise them for this. It is their duty unquestionably "to go forth to him without the camp bearing his reproach." We only state a fact which has a bearing on our subject.

III. The manner in which some of the people of God are called by divine grace, renders them less observable. I hope I need not prove, that in order to the existence of genuine religion in the soul, there is absolutely necessary a change which will embody the various representations given of it in the Scriptures—"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." "Ye must be born again." "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, and behold all things are become new." In such awful and decisive terms do the sacred penmen speak of the renovation of our nature as essential to our happiness and our hope. And this change in all the subjects of divine grace is equally real—but it is not equally perceptible either to themselves or others. When a man is suddenly stopped in his mad career, and turned from a notorious and profligate course of life—when the drunkard becomes sober, the swearer learns to fear an oath, and the Sabbath-breaker goes with the multitude to keep holy day—all must take knowledge of him. The effect is striking; the world wonders;

and the Church exclaims, "Who hath begotten me these! these, where had they been!" But the work

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is not always so distinguishable. When the subject of it is moral; blessed with a pious education; trained up under the means of grace; the change is much less visible. He avoids the same vices as before; performs the same duties as before; only from other principles and motives, with other views and dispositions—but these fall not under our observation.

Many are prone to look for a conversion, always uniform, not only in its effects but in its operation; and also too much bordering on the miraculous. The soul must be exceedingly terrified with fear—then overwhelmed with anguish—then plunged into despair—then suddenly filled with hope, and peace, and joy; and the person must be able to determine the day on which, the sermon under which, or the providence by which, the change was wrought. But this is by no means necessarily, or generally, the case. There is a variety in the temperaments and habits of men; and in the methods employed to bring them to repentance. And we should remember that there are "differences of administration, but the same Lord"—that often he prefers to the earthquake, the wind, and the fire, the small still voice—that he can draw by the cords of love and the bands of a man—that he can work as effectually by slow, as by instantaneous exertion—and that he can change the soul in a manner so gradual and mild, as to be scarcely discernible to any but the glorious Author. And here, my brethren, we are furnished with evidence from analogy. In nature, some of God's works insensibly issue in others; and it is impossible for us to draw the line of distinction between them. "The path of the just is as a shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." But who can ascertain which ray

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begins, or which ends the dawn? If you are unable to trace the process of the divine life, judge by the result. When you perceive the effects of conversion, never question the cause. And if perplexed by a number of circumstantial inquiries, be satisfied if you are able to say, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see."

IV. The difference of opinion which prevails among Christians has frequently occasioned a diminution of their number. Indeed the readiest way in the world to thin heaven, and replenish the regions of hell, is to call in the spirit of bigotry. This will immediately arraign, and condemn, and execute all that do not bow down, and worship the image of our idolatry. Possessing exclusive prerogative, it rejects every other claim—"Stand by, I am 'sounder' than thou." "The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we!" How many of the dead has this intolerance sentenced to eternal misery, who will shine for ever as the stars in the kingdom of our Father! How many living characters does it reprobate as enemies to the cross of Christ, who are placing in it all their glory! No wonder if, under the influence of this censorious zeal, we form lessening views of the number of the saved. "I only am left." Yes; they are few indeed, if none belong to them that do not belong to your party—that do not see with your eyes—that do not believe election with you, or universal redemption with you—that do not worship under a steeple with you, or in a meeting with you—that are not dipped with you, or sprinkled with you. But hereafter we shall find that the righteous were not so circumscribed, when we shall see

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“many, coming from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south, to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.”

Do I plead for an excessive candour? The candour which regards all sentiments alike, and considers no errors as destructive, is no virtue. It is the offspring of ignorance, of insensibility, and of cold indifference. The blind do not perceive the difference of colours. The dead never dispute. Ice, as it congeals, aggregates all bodies within its reach, however heterogeneous their quality. Every virtue has certain bounds, and when it exceeds them it becomes a vice; for the last step of a virtue, and the first step of a vice, are contiguous.

But surely it is no wildness of candour that leads us to give the liberty we take; that suffers a man to think for himself, unawed; and that concludes he may be a follower of God, though “he follow not with us.” Why should we hesitate to consider a man a Christian, when we see him abhorring and forsaking sin; hungering and thirsting after righteousness; diligent in approaching unto God; walking “in newness of life,” and discovering a spirituality of temper, a disposition for devotion, a deadness to the world, a benevolence, a liberality, such as we seldom find in those high-toned doctrinalists who regard themselves as the only advocates for free grace? And by the way, it is not a system of notions, however good, or a judgment in divine things, however clear, that will constitute a Christian. It is a transformation by the renewing of the mind. It is a “putting off the old man with his deeds, and putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” It is “walking even as he walked.” “If

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any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.”

And to pass to the opposite side: we should also remember, that men do not always live according to the natural tendency and consequences of their creed. Some hold sentiments very injurious to holiness who are not wicked men: their hearts are better than their opinions; their principles give their consciences a liberty to sin which they refuse to take; and their practice is adorned with good works, which their system by no means requires. No one can imagine—that I mention this with a view to countenance or palliate the adoption of such sentiments. They blaspheme every line in the Bible; and are always injurious in a degree: but where they happen to fall in with a love of sin, the effect is dreadful. Where such a poisonous infusion is imbibed, and not counteracted by a singular potency of constitution, the consequence is certain death.

V. Many are excluded from the number of the righteous by practical imperfections. There is a blemish in every duty; a deficiency in every grace; a mixture in every character: and if none are to be considered as the people of God, who are not free from infirmity, you will easily be induced to take up the language—"I am left alone." For who can say, "I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin:" "I have attained, I am already perfect?" The best of men are but men at the best. "I am left alone!" Nay, Elijah, in this sense even you are not left. Even you are "a man of like passions as we are." With all your miraculous endowments and religious attainments, you discovered the same natural

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feelings, the same moral defects. You feared Jezebel—fled dismayed from your work—impatiently demanded to die—and drew a very erroneous and unworthy conclusion respecting the true worshippers of God. Yea, there never was one left: for to which of the saints will you turn? To Abraham? he denies

his wife in Egypt and in Gerar. To Moses? he spake “unadvisedly with his lips.” To Job? he curses the day of his birth. To Peter? he abjures his Lord. I know I tread on dangerous ground. The Antinomian drunkard may call in Noah as his example; and the unclean, who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness, may plead the adultery of David. They may hope where they should fear; take for encouragement what was only given for caution; and resemble those in their fall, whose repentance they will never imitate. And “thinkest thou, O man, who doest such things, to escape the judgment of God?” Instead of raising thee up like these restored penitents as a monument of mercy to future generations, he will harden thee into a pillar of salt.

God forbid we should plead for sin; but let us not shun to declare a truth for fear of a possible abuse of it. Severe in judging ourselves, let us endeavour to judge favourably of others, and place before our minds every consideration tending to aid that charity which “thinketh no evil, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things”—That we are to learn of One who will not break a bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax, till he bring forth judgment unto victory—That there is a day of small things, which we are not to despise—That grace corrects, but does not eradicate nature; subdues, but

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does not extinguish the passions; forms us Christians, but leaves us men—That there are inequalities among the righteous; that the good ground yielded in varied proportions, some a hundred fold, some sixty, some thirty—That a prevailingly holy disposition may fail in a particular instance, and that a single action is not to be pleaded against a long-continued practice—That persons who would abandon an unlawful pursuit the moment they are convinced of its impropriety, may continue in it for a time, for want

of knowledge or reflection—That as we entertain a confidence in our own salvation, though conscious of numberless imperfections, we should not require perfection in others—That our failures, though not as gross, may be as guilty as those of our brethren—and, that we may sometimes entertain a hope which we are afraid to publish; and believe that some are in the way to heaven, whose safe arrival there, we trust, will never be known in this world.

My brethren, in our application of this subject, let us first remark the use the Apostle makes of it. “Even so then, at this present time also, there is a remnant according to the election of grace.” God never leaves himself without witness. He has always instruments to carry on his cause, and a people to show forth his praise. These are the pillars of a state to keep it from falling—the salt of the earth to preserve it from corruption—the light of the world to secure it from darkness: and as Esaias said before, “Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom, and been made like unto Gomorrah.” Relinquish diminishing ideas of the Divine goodness; “his mercies are over all his works.” Look back to Calvary, and see Jesus bearing the

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sins of many; see him rising from the dead to receive “the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.” “The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.” “He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.” Look forward, and behold “a great multitude which no man can number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues.” Behold even now “the Captain of your salvation” “bringing many sons unto glory,”—and no longer imagine that there is any danger of your being “left alone.” Rejoice, ye friends and followers of the Lamb; you belong to no small family—you do not approach the throne of grace alone—you are not alone in your hopes and in

your pleasures—you are not alone in your struggles, groans, and tears. Far more than you have apprehended, are on “the Lord’s side,” attached to the same Saviour, travelling the same road, heirs of the same “grace of life.”

Secondly. Are you of the number? It is of little importance for you to know that many will enter in, if you are excluded. “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.” As you all hope to escape this dreadful doom, it behoves you to examine whether your confidence be well founded, and whether, living as you live, the Scripture justifies your hope of heaven when you die. Who then, you ask, will be saved? Those who live in the world, and are not like it. Those who “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” Those who are “a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” It is the character here given them:

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“I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.” And this was the reigning sin. The court, the city, the country, all followed Baal; his worship was universal. My brethren, the best evidence you can give of your integrity, is freedom from the prevailing, fashionable vices and follies of the times and places in which you live. A dead fish can swim with the stream, but a live one only can swim against it.

The influence of one man over another is truly wonderful. The individual is upright; his connexions give him all his wrong bias. Alone, he forms good resolutions; when he enters the world they are broken. It is not ignorance, but a cowardly shame that keeps many in a state of indecision, “halting between two opinions.” They know what is right, and would gladly partake of the believer’s safety; but they have not fortitude enough to encounter the

reproach, which, in one form or another, always attends an adherence to the cause of Christ. Others, who had made some pleasing progress, have been easily deprived by a name, a laugh, a sneer, of all their religion. Not to “bow the knee to Baal,” when all adore him—to step forth with our family behind us, and say to our neighbours and our relations, “Choose you this day whom ye will serve, but as for me and my house we will serve the Lord”—to withstand in a pious cause the influence of example—to keep our way when we see an adverse multitude approaching us—to pass through the midst, unshrinking while we feel the scourge of the tongue—this is no easy thing. This is principle in triumph. And this Christian heroism is not only commendable, but necessary. Do not say therefore, if we do this, we

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shall be singular. If you are Christians, you must be singular: it is the grand design, the unavoidable consequence of the Gospel. Read the character of its followers: “Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” Examine its commands: “Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Weigh the condition of its dignities and privileges: “Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” My dear hearers, the language is too plain to be misunderstood; the meaning is too awful to be trifled with. Decide; and decide immediately. “Withdraw yourselves from these men” before a common perdition involves you all. If with them you will sin, with them you must suffer. They who followed the multitude rather than Noah, were drowned in the Flood. They who followed the multitude rather than Lot, were destroyed in the cities of the plain. They who followed the multitude rather than Joshua and Caleb, perished

in the wilderness! And as it was then, so it is now—“As for such as turn aside to their crooked ways, the Lord will lead them forth with the workers of iniquity.”

Thirdly. Let those who have been “reserved,” consider the Author and the End of their distinction.

Remember by whom you have been secured. God is the Author—hence he says, “I have reserved.” “For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?” Had you been left to yourselves, and “given up to your own counsel,” you would have been carried along by

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the same depraved tendency, “according to the course of this world.” But his grace, equally free and powerful, interposed in your favour; it gave to ordinances their efficacy, and to the dispensations of Providence their sanctifying influence, in turning the mind and restraining the life from sin: and, boasting excluded, you are indulging yourselves in language used by all the redeemed before you—“Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy Name be glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth’s sake.” “By the grace of God I am what I am: not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”

Remember also for whom you have been secured. God is the end—hence he says, “I have reserved unto myself. They are to be representatives on earth, to wear my image, to maintain my cause, to be employed in my service. This people have I formed for myself, they shall show forth my praise. They shall be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified. The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself.” Christians—it is a high, an awful destiny. It sheds a sacredness over the whole character, which you should always feel. It hallows you. It consecrates your persons, and your possessions. All you have, all you are, is his—all is for him. This end determines, and

simplifies your work. To this you are to make every thing subordinate, and subservient. “Whether, therefore, ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself: for whether we live, we live unto the Lord, or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether therefore we live or die, we are the Lord’s.”

SERMON II.

THE NATURE OF GENUINE RELIGION.

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“I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”
EZEKIEL xi. 19, 20.

“THE works of the Lord are great, sought out or all them that have pleasure therein.” It is pleasing to observe Him as the God of nature, “renewing the face of the earth;” “crowning the year with his goodness;” “opening his hand, and satisfying the

desire of every living thing." It is edifying to trace Him as the God of Providence, "fixing the bounds of our habitation;" assigning every man his station; qualifying individuals for the sphere in which they move; and sometimes "raising up the poor out of the dust, and lifting the needy out of the dunghill, that He may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people." But it is much more pleasing and edifying to contemplate Him as the God of all grace. Here "He excelleth in glory." Here "He

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spares not his own Son, but delivers him up for us all." Here "He saves us by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he sheds on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour." Here we behold Him, from the ruins of the Fall, making the sinner "an eternal excellency, the joy of many generations."

All this "purpose and grace" He has given us in a way of promise. And of all the promises with which the Scripture abounds, no one is more important than the words which we have read—"I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God."

Behold a full representation of a subject which deserves all your regard! See genuine religion developed in four essential articles:—I. Its Author. II. The disposition it produces. III. The obedience it demands. IV. The blessedness it ensures.

I. Observe, my brethren, how expressly God appropriates this work to himself. "I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you;

and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh." Real religion is of a divine original: it never would have had an existence in the world without the revelation of God; and it will never have an existence in the soul without the operation of God. There is indeed some difficulty attending the discussion of this subject. The more spiritual any work of God is, the more

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remote will it necessarily be found from human comprehension. Our Saviour compares this influence to the agency of the wind; which, of all the phenomena of nature, is the least apprehensible in its essence, and the most sensible in its effects. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is born of the Spirit." The doctrine has also been much abused. It has often been so managed as to make the sinner, while in his natural state, to appear unfortunate rather than criminal; and to render the use of means and exertions needless. The sacred writers do not inform us where precisely diligence and dependence unite, or how they blend through the whole course of the Christian life; but they assure us of the reality and the constancy of their union: they inform us that there is no inconsistency between the command and the promise; that it is our duty, as well as privilege, to "be filled with the Spirit;" and that we are to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure."

This being premised, we proceed to establish the doctrine we have advanced. And the proof is by no means difficult. It is as simple and obvious as it is convincing. For if "all things are of God," is religion to be excluded? and to form the only exception? Does "the river of the water of life" spring from a source on this side "the throne of God and of the

Lamb?" If in Him we live, and move, "and have our" natural "being;" do we derive from an inferior principle our spiritual life?—a life sublimely called "the life of God?" If the discoveries which furnish

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us with the accommodations and conveniences of human life—if the skill of the husbandman, and the wisdom of the mechanic—be in Scripture ascribed to His influence; who gives us the genius to live divinely, and to have "our conversation in heaven?"

The expressions, "to be born again;" to be made "a new creature;" to be "raised from the dead," applied to the subjects of divine grace, are allowed to be metaphorical; but they are designed to convey a truth; and to teach us, not only the greatness of the change, but also the Author of it. If religion were a human production, it would wear the resemblance of man; it would not be the reverse of all he now is. After what the Scripture has said respecting the total depravity of human nature, and which, from experience and observation, we see every day to be true in fact; nothing can be more wonderful than to find any of the children of men possessing true holiness. The question then is, how it came there? It could not spring from themselves; for "who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" No effect can exceed its cause; and an inadequate cause is no cause. Whence then does it proceed? "To the law and to the testimony."—The Scripture assures us it is the work of God; and leads us to trace back the grand whole, and the separate parts; the perfection, the progress, the commencement—of religion in the soul, to a divine agency. "Who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." "He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who hath also given unto us the earnest of the Spirit." "By grace are ye saved,

through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast:

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for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

Nor is this a curious, or a useless speculation. The importance of it equals the evidence. To know things in their causes, has been deemed the highest kind of knowledge: to know salvation in its source, is indispensable. First, it is necessary to guide and to encourage the concern of awakened sinners, who are asking, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Such persons will not cheerfully and courageously enter on a course of godliness without an assurance of effectual aid. Seeing so many difficulties and dangers before them, and feeling their corruption and weakness, after a few unsuccessful struggles, they will sink down in hopeless despair: unless, under a sense of their own inability, we can exhibit that grace which is sufficient for them, and meet them with the promise, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For if ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give his holy Spirit to them that ask him!” This decides: this animates. “The grace of the promise is adequate to the duty of the command. Does the work to which I am called, look fitter for an angel, than for a man? I have more than an angel’s resources; my sufficiency is of God. Without Him I can do nothing; but through his strengthening of me I can do all things.” Secondly, the same discovery is necessary, to call forth the acknowledgments, and to regulate the praises, of those who are sanctified by divine grace. The original cause determines the final end. If their recovery commence

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from themselves, it may terminate in themselves; and being the authors of the cure, they may lawfully appropriate the glory arising from it. But the Gospel assures us, that God has completely excluded boasting: that He has arranged the whole economy of our salvation, with the express view “that no flesh should glory in his presence.” And an experience of divine truth delivers a man from that ignorance and pride, which once led him to think of being his own saviour: he feels, that “by the grace of God, he is what he is:” and thus he is reduced again to the proper condition of a creature—lives a life of dependence and of praise—and acknowledges his obligations to “Him, of whom, and through whom, and to whom are all things.” We have seen the origin of religion. Behold,

II. The disposition which it produces. It is characterized three ways. “I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh.”

First, He promises to give them one heart. This shows the sameness of religion, as to the leading views, sentiments, and pursuits of its possessors. Of the converts at Jerusalem it is said “The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul.” Feeling the same wants, and attracted to the same Source of relief, they assembled and blended together. They had many hearts before: they “followed divers lusts and pleasures;” they “turned every man to his own way.” From these various wanderings, they are called to enter, and to travel the same way—Grace produced a unity; and a unity it always will produce. But a unity of what? Of opinions?

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Of forms and ceremonies? Of dress and phraseology? No: but of something infinitely superior—a oneness of

reliance—of inclination—of taste—of hopes and fears—of joys and sorrows. Though divided and distinguished from each other by a thousand peculiarities, they all hate sin; they all “hunger and thirst after righteousness;” they “all follow hard after God;” they all feel the spiritual life to be a warfare; they all “confess themselves to be strangers and pilgrims upon earth.” Thus with circumstantial diversity we have essential identity; the substance as unalterable, as the modes are various; the dress changing with times and places; the figure, the members, the soul, always the same. “By one Spirit, we are all baptized into one body; whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” He engages also to produce,

Secondly, a new spirit. “And I will put a new spirit within you.” Not only a spirit different from that which still animates others, but distinguished from that which once influenced themselves. For it was not born with them: they were once strangers to it—but designed for a new world, new work, new pleasures, it was necessary for them to have a new spirit. Elevation will only serve to embarrass and encumber a man, unless he be suited to it. A king may advance a slave to a station of eminence: but, with a change of condition, he cannot give him a change of disposition; with his new office, he cannot bestow a new spirit. But, in this manner, the Lord qualifies his people for their situation and engagements: and thus they are at home in them; there is a suitableness productive of ease and enjoyment.

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This is the peculiar glory of the Gospel. Observe all false religions. They take man as he is; they accommodate themselves to his errors and his passions; they leave him essentially the same. They follow the man; they are formed after his likeness. Whereas here the man is changed; he is modelled after the image of his religion. The Gospel, instead

of flattering, tells him that nothing is to be done while he remains as he now is—that, in his present state, he is incapable of performing its duties and of relishing its joys—that he must be transformed, or he “cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” And what it indispensably requires, it provides for, and secures: hence all is order and harmony. For, everything in the sublime dispensation of the Gospel, and the constitution of the Christian Church, is new. We have “a new covenant.” We have a “new Jerusalem, which is the mother of us all.” “We approach God by a new and living way.” We sing “a new song.” “We are called by “a new name.” “According to his promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth. wherein dwelleth righteousness.” “He that sitteth upon the throne saith, Behold, I create all things new.” Do you wonder, therefore, my brethren, that we are required to “put off the old man with his deeds; and to put on the new man:” to “walk in newness of life;” to serve him in “newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter”—that we are assured that “neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature?”—that “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature”—that “old things are passed away, and, behold, all things are become new?”

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Thirdly, He gives “them an heart of flesh.” It was a heart of “stone” before. Take a stone—feel it—how cold! Strike it—it resists the blow. Lay upon it a burden—it feels no pressure. Apply to it a seal—it receives no impression. Such were your hearts once; thus cold, impenetrable, senseless, unyielding, and unsusceptible. What a mercy is it to have this curse removed, and to have “hearts of flesh!”—to be able to feel; to feel spiritually; to be alive to “the powers of the world to come!” to be no longer insensible to divine and heavenly things, when they come in contact with us!

And remember, Christians, this holy sensibility is evidenced not only by your pleasing emotions, but also by your distressing ones. Your tears of sorrow indicate spiritual sensation, as well as your tears of joy. Is not pain a proof of feeling?

Yes; the Christian's heart is a "heart of flesh."

Bring it to the word of God—it feels. "My heart," says David, "standeth in awe of thy word." "He trembles at His word," says Isaiah. He opens it with reverence; he bows to its authority; he often compares himself with its demands; he reads the character and doom of apostates, and turns pale; he dreads its threatenings; he longs for an interest in its promises! O how many feelings will one chapter set in motion!

Bring it to sin—it feels. A tender conscience, like the eye, is offended with a mote. A dead corpse is unaffected with the deepest wound; but the point of a needle makes the living body to writhe. While others do not groan, though charged with heinous crimes, the Christian complains even of infirmities, of wandering thoughts, of earthly affections. A look

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from his offended Lord will make him "go out and weep bitterly."

Bring it to the dispensations of Providence—it feels. "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee, and I am afraid of thy righteous judgments." Or does he prosper? He is no stranger to a fear lest "his table should become a snare, and the things ordained for his welfare prove a trap."

Bring it to the divine glory—it feels. "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because men keep not thy law."

Bring it to the concerns of others—it feels. "He weeps with them that weep. He considers them that are in adversity, as bound with them." "Who is

weak, and he is not weak? who is offended, and he burns not?"—For a tender heart is always accompanied with a tender hand, and a tender tongue. Such is the disposition which is formed in all the subjects of divine grace: and why is it produced? To enable us to observe the whole revealed will of God, in a course of cheerful and active obedience. This,

III. Brings us to observe the practice which religion demands—"That they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them." It is strange, that a system of religion should be ever advanced, which, if it comprehends obedience and good works at all, places them in a very inferior situation; seems always afraid to bring them forward; dares not hold them forth as the end and perfection of the whole to which everything else leads, and in which everything else is to terminate—nor insist on their being so essentially necessary, that without them all our

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pretensions to godliness are vain. Yet in this decisive manner does He speak of them, "who came to bear witness to the truth." "Not everyone 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." "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."

But is it not equally absurd to expect this practice where there is nothing to secure it? or to suppose that a man's life will be in perpetual contradiction to all his bias and inclinations? "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so, every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." In order, therefore, to do justice to this part of our subject, I would state two

remarks, which we hope you will always remember and unite. First, principle must precede practice. Secondly, practice must follow principle.

First. Observe the order in which these things are arranged—"I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them." Thus principle precedes practice, and prepares for it. And here we admire the plan of the Gospel. To make the fruit good, it makes the tree good: to cleanse the stream, it purifies the fountain. It renews the nature, and the life becomes holy of course. What is the religion of too many? They are like machines, impelled by force: they are influenced only by external consid-

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rations. Their hearts are not engaged. Hence, in every religious exercise they perform a task. They would love God much better if he would excuse them altogether from the hateful obligation. They put off these duties as long as possible; resort to them with reluctance; adjust the measure with a niggardly grudge; and are glad of any excuse for neglect. "While labouring at the drudgery, they entertain hard thoughts of the cruel Taskmaster, who can impose such severities upon them, and sigh inwardly, "When will the Sabbath be over?" when shall we unbend from these spiritual restraints, and feel ourselves at liberty in the world? Can this be religion? Is there anything in this, suitable to the nature of God, who is "a Spirit?" or to the demands of God, who cries, "My son, give me thine heart;" "serve the Lord with gladness, and come before his presence with singing?" Behold a man hungry—he needs no argument to induce him to eat. See that mother—she needs no motive to determine her to cherish her darling babe—nature impels. The obedience of the Christian is, in consequence of regene-

ration, natural; and hence it is pleasant and invariable: "he runs and is not weary, he walks and is not faint."

Secondly. It is equally true that practice must follow principle. The one is the necessary consequence of the other. This influence will operate: if it be fire, it will burn; if it be leaven, it will pervade and assimilate; if it be in us "a well of water," it will "spring up into everlasting life." The one is the proper evidence of the other. The cause is ascertained by the effect. It is not necessary to lay open the body of a tree, to determine, by

the grain, to what class it belongs: there is an easier and a surer mode of judging: "the tree is known by its fruits." Some, while leading very indifferent lives, tell us their hearts are good: but goodness in the heart will appear in the life; a good conscience will always be accompanied with a good conversation. Faith justifies the soul; but works justify faith. "Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works." The one is the chief recommendation of the other. It is by practice only you can show the value of principle. Your views and feelings are beyond the reach of others; your experience is invisible: but it is otherwise with your actions; these come under their observation; and they can form an estimate of your religion by the excellency of its influence. And when your lives correspond with your profession; when you are "followers of God as dear children;" when you are humble in prosperity; cheerful in adversity; ready to forgive; willing to bear one another's burdens; attentive to the duties of your stations; and unblamable in every relation—you are perpetually magnifying your religion: you "adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour;" you "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men;" you sometimes allure them, according to the instructive admo-

dition of our Saviour, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." And with what is all this connected? "They shall be my people, and I will be their God." This shows us,

IV. The blessed privilege of the righteous. For here we are to contemplate their honour and their

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happiness. Everything depends upon this relation. "Blessed are the people that are in such a case; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord."

When "God gave promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, He swore by himself:" when He would bless his people, because He could give them no greater, He gave Himself. They are all a nation of Levites; for "the Lord is their inheritance:" and it is "a goodly" one; it "gives grace and glory, and no good thing does" it "withhold from them that walk uprightly." "It is profitable unto all things; having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come."

—Consider the meaning of the language. It is more than if He said, I will be thy friend, thy helper, thy benefactor; for these are relations derived from creatures, and therefore notions of limited significance. But when He says, "I will be thy God," he takes an image from Himself, and engages to do us good according to the all-sufficiency of an infinite nature; to bestow upon us blessings which are peculiar to Deity—to do for us what Deity alone can do, and to do it divinely—to pardon, and to pardon like a God—to sanctify, and to sanctify like a God—to comfort, and to comfort like a God—to glorify, and to glorify like a God;—God appearing all along in the manner, as well as in the mercy.

Consider also the nature of the claim. He is really yours. In nothing else have you such a propriety. Your time is not your own; your riches

are not your own; your children are not your own; your bodies, and your spirits, are not your own—but God is yours by, absolute promise, and donation; and you may join with the Church of old, and say,

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“God, even our own God, shall bless us.” And He is wholly yours—all He is, all He possesses—the perfections of his nature, the dispensations of his providence, the blessings of his salvation, the treasures of his word—all are become your own: and what Benhadad said to the king of Israel, and what the father of the prodigal said to the elder brother, God says to each of you—“I am thine, and all that I have:” “Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.” And He is yours for ever; the union is indissoluble; his duration is the tenure of your bliss; as long as He lives he will be your God.

Once more: Consider the final issue of the connexion. The relation is intended to display the immensity of his benevolence, and of his munificence, towards his people. It does much for them here; and when they reflect upon their original meanness and continued unworthiness, and consider what they have received, they are filled with wonder, and exclaim, “What manner of love is this!” “what shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits towards me! “ But they “shall see greater things than these.” They have now only “the first fruits of the Spirit;” “the earnest of their inheritance.” Their alliance with God is often concealed from others, and from themselves; and the advantages it produces are circumscribed by the world in which we live, and the body of this death. It has not room in which to operate, or time in which to expand. We are therefore led to look forward; and what the apostle says with regard to the patriarchs, will apply to all his people—“wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared

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for them a city." What an intimation of his infinite goodness is here! He would be ashamed of the relation into which He has entered, if he conferred no more upon his followers than the benefits they derive from him on earth. Behold then an eternity succeeding time: a new system prepared to receive them: a happiness in reserve, of which they can now form no adequate conception! When He has exchanged their dungeon for a palace; when He has "wiped away all tears from their eyes;" when he has eased every pain, fulfilled every desire, realized every hope; when He has changed "this vile body," and fashioned it like the "glorious body" of the Saviour; when He has entirely expelled sin from their nature, and presented them, "faultless, before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy"—then the character will be fully displayed, and the relation completely justified; and all hell and heaven will acknowledge that "He has been their God."

—I divide this assembly into three classes. And, first, I address those who are careless of this blessed relation. Such were many of the Jews of old. "Israel," says God, "would have none of me." And you are of the same number. You say, by your actions, if not by your words, "depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." You are asking, "who will show us any good?" but you do not, and you know you do not, pray, "Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me." But is it a vain thing to seek God, or to serve Him? Allowing other things to be valuable, are they to be compared with God, who is the portion of his people? But they are not valuable: they cannot give satisfaction they leave a void unfilled; they

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cannot ease the anguish of a troubled conscience, sustain the soul in trouble, or subdue the fear of

death: they fail in those seasons and circumstances in which you most need their aid. And, for these, will you hazard the loss of the supreme good? Will you “follow lying vanities, and forsake your own mercies?” “Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge?” Now you know not the magnitude of your loss: you are not aware of the full meaning of the word “depart”—go from the God of life, go from the Source of all consolation, go from all mercy and grace, for ever. Now you are not abandoned to reflection: you are busied, and entertained; and though not satisfied, you are diverted. But,

“O ye gay dreamers of gay dreams,
How will you weather an eternal night,
Where such expedients fail!”

A loss is to be measured by the worth of the thing we lose—and you lose God! Other losses may be corrective, but this is destructive; other losses may befall friends, but this only befalls enemies; other losses may be retrieved, this is irreparable. Is He willing to become mine? He is; He condescends to expostulate, to invite, to press: “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.” “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.”

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Secondly, I would address those who are of a doubtful mind. For while some claim the relation, to whom it does not belong; some, to whom it belongs, are afraid to claim it. Now this is to be lamented; for if God be yours, and you know it not, you sustain a vast loss of consolation. Besides; it

is possible for you to obtain “a good hope through grace.” The promise implies a possibility of decision. “They shall call upon my Name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God.” And why cannot you say this? Have you dissolved connexioll with the world, and taken” hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, I will go with you, for I have heard that God is with you?” Can you easily make the language of his praying followers your own? and is this the essence of every desire you feel—“Remember me, O Lord, with the favour thou bearest to thy people. O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the goodness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance?” When your minds rove through the universe, finding no substitute for Him, do you come back and ask, “Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night?” After comparin communion with Him to every other conceivable good, can you say, “Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee?” When the ambassadors of a certain nation came to the Romans, offering to be their allies, and were refused, they said, If we cannot be your allies, we will be your subjects; we will not be your enemies. Can you say, Lord, I will be thine; I will not be mine own:

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if I am not received as a frienu, I will be employed as a servant: I never can be thy foe? And you are wishing to be able to “say, He is my God.” Why, you have said it. Having thus chosen Him, be assured He has chosen you. Having thus given yourselves to Him, be assured He has given himself to you. If you are his, He is yours.

Thirdly, are there none in the Divine presence who are enabled to say, as the language both of devotion and of confidence, “My Lord, and my God?”

Follow the example of the Church; publish the fame of his goodness, and animate others to join you in praising Him. "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." Plead your interest in Him, in all your dangers, troubles, and necessities. Envy none their worldly distinctions. Remember your pre-eminence: "you are the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." Do not complain because they may possess things of which you are deprived. You have a God; they are destitute: you can sustain a loss uninjured; they would be undone. If your taper be extinguished, you have a sun: but when "the candle of the wicked is put out," they are involved in darkness—"darkness that may be felt." Honour your God by living upon his fulness, and endeavouring by faith to realize in Him, everything you seek for in vain, in yourselves, or in creatures. Observe the address of Moses to the Israelites, "What nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for?" They were an inconsiderable body, confined in a wilderness: the commerce, arts

and sciences were all with their enemies. They had the same raiment they wore out of Egypt forty years before; and had no provisions beforehand for a single day. But their peculiar greatness arose from their nearness to God: in having Him, they had all. He possessed, and could immediately produce the supplies their necessities required: they had only to ask and have. When David was plundered, and stripped of all he had in Ziklag; it is said, he "encouraged himself in the Lord his God"—He was left. Thus, a Christian who has nothing, possesses all things. Creatures may abandon him; but his God will never leave nor forsake him. Friends may die; but the Lord liveth. His "heart and his flesh may

fail; but God is the strength of his heart, and his portion for ever." "The heavens may pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat; the earth and the works that are therein may be burned up"—he stands upon the ashes of a universe and exclaims, I have lost nothing! Yea, he has gained "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness!"

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SERMON III.

VOWS CALLED TO REMEMBRANCE.

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"And God said unto Jacob, Arise. go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau, thy brother. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." GENESIS xxxv. 1-3.

THE pieces of history preserved in the book of Genesis are peculiarly valuable and worthy of our regard. They possess the claim of truth, of impartiality, of remote antiquity, of individual and minute description. They are family scenes, which always charm. We feel ourselves in private life. We pursue single characters through all the vicissitudes of their pilgrimage, and observe the various workings of their minds; their imperfections and their excellences: the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit gaining a victory over the flesh. They

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are also recommended, as holding forth the dispensations of Divine Providence and Grace combined. It is painful to see a man raised up to be a Divine instrument only: girded and guided by a hand which he knows not; accomplishing designs which he never desired or approved; and then laid aside or dashed to pieces, as a vessel in which there is no pleasure: and such are often the philosophers, the politicians, and the heroes of this world. But how delightful and edifying is it to contemplate men, who were not only instruments, but favourites; who did "the will of God from the heart," and "had the testimony that they pleased Him;" who were the depositaries of the Divine counsel, and increased the treasures of Revelation; "of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came;" and with whom we hope to reside for ever: "for many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven!" The command of God also leads us back to the patriarchal age, sends us forth in search of these renowned worthies, and enjoins us "not to be slothful, but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises."

These reflections, my brethren, are intended to raise this book in your esteem, and to engage your attention to the words which I have detached from

it for your present edification. And God said unto Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau, thy brother. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change

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your garments: and let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." Let us review the transaction to which these words refer—draw forth some of the instructions implied in them—and distinguish the characters in this assembly, who are concerned in the command and the example—"Arise, and go up to Bethel." "Let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will there make an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went."

PART I. The passage before us refers to a very interesting part of the history of Jacob, which it will be necessary for us to review. To escape the fury of his brother Esau, Jacob, by the proposal of his mother, goes to Padan-Aram, to the house of his uncle Laban. On the first night of his journey he dreamed. He saw a ladder reaching from earth to heaven; angels ascending and descending upon it, and God above it in a posture of attention, "standing" and viewing a poor pilgrim below. He also spake. He assured him of the relation in which he stood to his pious ancestors; and promised to give the land of Canaan to his seed, to render his progeny illustrious and innumerable, and eventually in one of his descendants to bless all the families of the earth. To accommodate Himself still more to the exigencies of his condition, He added, "Behold, I am with thee; and will keep thee in all places whither thou

goest, and will bring thee again into this land: for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of." Deeply impressed with

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the scene and the language, Jacob arose; and before he proceeded on his journey, "vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in the way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God, and this stone which I have set for a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee." If he wished to lay God under an additional bond, it marks his infirmity: God had spoken, and Jacob should have been satisfied. But it was wise and pious to bind himself. Some have been inclined to censure Jacob, as too conditional and too selfish, on this occasion; supposing he engaged only to serve God, provided he should be indulged with the blessings he implores. This would have been censurable indeed, and utterly opposite to the faith of the patriarchs, one of whom said, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him;" and another of whom, when commanded, "obeyed, and went out, not knowing whither he went." The meaning is, that God, by these fresh instances of his favour, would furnish him with fresh motives to serve and glorify Him; and he stipulates the manner in which he would discharge the obligation he should be laid under.

After the twenty years of hard service in the house of his uncle, Jacob resolves to return. Three days after his departure, Laban pursues him. He overtakes him in Gilead, is pacified, and withdraws. Jacob moves on—crosses the ford of Jabbok—descends on its southern bank—reaches the ford of

Succoth—wrestles with the angel—passes over the river Jordan westward, and comes to Shalem. This

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was an eventful position. Here he bought a piece of ground of Hamor; here he raised an altar; and here befel him the affliction he experienced in the seduction of his daughter, and the murder of the Shechemites. Here he lingers till seven or eight years have elapsed—O Bethel, how art thou forgotten! O Jacob, where is your vow to repair thither as soon as you returned? Your God has fulfilled his engagement—He has been with you—defended you—prospered you—and you are come back in peace. Where is your altar? Where the tenth of your possessions to maintain it? We may compare one character with another. Behold David. What is he saying? “I will go into thy house with burnt offerings; I will pay thee my vows, which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble.” Hannah occurs. I see her, in the bitterness of her soul, praying and weeping sore. “And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of Hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man-child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.” He is born; and his very name shall be a remembrancer. He is weaned; and she takes him with her, and brings him into the house of God in Shiloh, and introduces him to Eli. “And she said, O my lord, as thy soul liveth, my lord, I am the Woman that stood by thee here praying unto the Lord. For this child I prayed, and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him: therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord.” O what were

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her feelings in this journey! What a contention between the mother and the saint! What a trial was here I—an only child—a child long desired, and endeared by a thousand considerations—to give him up—to resign him for ever—to see him once a year only, to renew the pain of separation! What a superior delicacy, fervour, permanency, is there in the devotion of this female! How does the patriarch vanish from a comparison of this pious woman!

—Here Jacob still lingers, and discovers no disposition to perform his vow; and it becomes necessary for God himself to address him. “And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and make thee an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: and let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.” From these words—

PART II. We may derive some instructive and useful observations.

First, we may remark how soon the influence of impressive scenes wears away, and how prone we are to lose the sense of our mercies, and all the religious feelings they produce. If a person had seen Jacob on the morning after his vision, and when he was leaving the place made sacred by his experience and engagement there; and had said to him, “God will accomplish thy desire: he will guide thee, and keep

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thee; provide for thee, and bring thee back, enriched and multiplied, to see thy native land—and thou,

wilt thou think nothing of all this? wilt thou live year after year unmindful of Bethel, and suffer thy you to lie unperformed?" The prophecy would have been incredible: he would have exclaimed, "Can I ever thus trifle with God, or become insensible to such a benefactor?" "What! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?" How were the Israelites affected when God appeared for them! "They sang his praise." They resolved to distrust him no more. They said, "All that the Lord commandeth us will we do." "But they soon forgot his works, and the wonders which He had shown them." They murmured again; rebelled again; all their mercies were written in the sand, and the first returning wave of trouble washed them out Hence David lays an embargo upon his thoughts: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits," It would be well, if we could identify and secure our feelings in certain periods and conditions of life, that we might afterwards review them, compare ourselves with them, perceive our declensions and deficiencies; and bring forward these former experiences—when we grow cold to warm us; and when we grow slothful to quicken us. A faithful recollection is of peculiar importance to the Christian: things can impress the mind no longer than they are in it; and lapses in the memory occasion failures in the life. But, alas! like a sieve, full while in the river, but, when raised up, empty and dripping; and as water, which has a natural tendency to be cold, but requires a perpetual fire to keep it warm; so treacherous are our memories in divine things; so constantly do we need

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means and helps; so necessary is it to have our "minds stirred up by way of remembrance."

Secondly, God will remind his people of forgotten duties. And he can never be at a loss for means to admonish us. He addresses us by his providence. The design of affliction is to bring our sin to re-

membrance. Sometimes the cause of affliction is not so obvious; and we say, with Job, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me." At other times, there is a wonderful correspondence between the crime and the calamity: the one is not only the consequence, but the discovery of the other, and leads back the mind instantly to it. When God brings us into new difficulties, and we apply for relief, our former deliverances and indulgences are remembered; and our ingratitude in not duly acknowledging and improving them, stares us in the face, and destroys the liberty and life of prayer. Have you succoured a fellow-creature, and is he thankful? Can you hear his praises for your petty favours, and not be reminded of your obligations to God for benefits infinitely superior? Or is he unthankful and unworthy? Here is a glass held up as you pass along, in which you may catch a glance of your own image: "How much more unthankful and unworthy have I proved to my Almighty Friend, whose goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life!" He renews recollection by means of his word. The Scripture is not only "profitable for doctrine; but reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness." It not only affords a word in season for him that is weary, but for him that is careless and lukewarm. By this the secrets of the heart are made manifest. And happy are those who

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are willing to apply this touchstone; to use this balance of the sanctuary; to take this candle of the Lord, and examine the chambers of imagery within; and who, when they have done all, will invite a severer scrutiny—"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Ministers are God's remembrancers. Their business is, not to bring strange things to your ears, to entertain you with novelties,

or to encourage in you a fondness for those speculations which bear slightly on the heart and life: but they are to recall your attention to things which, though the most simple, are the most important, and at the same time the most neglected; to remind you of things already known; to impress you with things already believed; to place your practice opposite your faith, and your lives by the side of your profession. "I will therefore put you in remembrance of these things, though ye once knew them"—here is our example. "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ"—this is our commendation. God has also an internal witness and monitor: it is conscience: and if in its natural state it has power to accuse the transgressor, how much more influence will it possess when renewed and sanctified!

Thirdly, gracious characters are alive to Divine intimations. Herein we perceive a difference between them and others. They are encompassed with infirmity; they may err; they may fall: but there is in them a principle which secures their rising again; they are open to conviction, they welcome reproof; they melt, retract, reform, and are watch-

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ful and prayerful to prevent similar miscarriages in future. A man asleep only, is very distinguishable from a person dead; the difference will appear as soon as you endeavour to awake them: the one is unsusceptible; the other stirs, inquires, springs up. A living bough may bend down to the earth under a pressure; but remove the load, and it is upright again, and points heavenward. Elihu finely describes the feelings of a pious mind under Divine correction—"Surely it is meet to be said unto God, I have borne chastisement, I will not offend any more. That which I know not, teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do no more." When our Lord looked only upon Peter, "he went out and

wept bitterly." Jacob does not argue the matter with God; does not vindicate himself; does not extenuate his fault. The Lord employs no severe language: nor is it necessary: a soft word subdues him—"It is too plain to be denied, and too bad to be excused. I have sinned: what shall be done unto thee, O thou Preserver of me! I will acknowledge my transgression. I will be sorry for my sin. I will forsake it. Duty neglected, alas! so long, shall be no longer neglected. Thy voice I hear; thy command I hasten to obey." Such was the meaning of his words, and of his practice. For he does not delay or hesitate: "Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments; and let us arise, and go up to Bethel." From hence we may observe also,

Fourthly, that holy preparations become the service of God. They are generally deemed necessary

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for ministers: it is supposed they ought to be previously alone—to fix their attention; to impress their minds; to implore the Divine assistance and blessing. But have hearers no need of this? Are they to engage in the worship of God, entirely regardless of the nature, the importance, and the influence of divine institutions? To omissions of this kind it is owing, that ordinances in our day are become as unprofitable as they are common. If before you came together you retired, and endeavoured to obtain an abstraction of mind—if, by reflection, you procured a seriousness of frame, so friendly to devotion—if, by examining yourselves, you discovered what sinful prejudice, or passion, was likely to render you partial hearers—if you formed a resolution to lay yourselves open to the influence of the word, and to rectify whatever appeared to be wrong—if you remembered that you are accountable even

for your attendance, and that the word you hear will judge you in the last day—if you came with eager desire and earnest expectation, founded on the promise of God, that he is the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and, above all, with prayer, knowing that “neither is he that planteth anything, nor he that watereth, but God who giveth the increase;” were you thus to enter on the service of the sanctuary—I ask, would there not be a natural tendency in all this to render the means of grace impressive and efficacious? and is not this the only authorized way in which you can hope for the Divine blessing? Careless entering upon duty is rarely profitable. God may meet us unawares; but where has he promised to do it? “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.” “Keep thy

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foot when thou goest to the house of God.” “Offer not the sacrifice of fools.” “Take heed how ye hear.” “Wherefore lay apart all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.” These are the commands of God; and they regulate our hope as well as our practice. And in this manner our good old forefathers worshipped. Then, public services were not so multiplied as to abridge, if not exclude the duties of the family and the closet. Then, hearing the word was not rendered a customary, common, and trifling entertainment. With them, divine worship was an awful thing: they prepared for one duty, by another; and, like wise performers, they tuned the instruments before the concert began.

Fifthly, There may be wickedness in a religious family. We find “strange gods” even in Jacob’s household. We may view iniquity in such a situation two ways. First, as a good man’s affection:—and

a dreadful affliction it will prove. It is bad to have sickness in his house, but it is worse to have sin, the plague and pestilence of the soul. How, says he, can I bear to see the destruction of my kindred!—Secondly, as a good man's fault. Could we see things as God does, and be able to trace back effects to their causes, we should soon perceive the source of the disorders and wickedness which prevail in many houses. Masters of families! have you ruled well the charge which God has given you? Have you behaved towards your servants, as remembering you have a Master in heaven? Have you shown them a kind and a pious attention? Have you had your children in subjection? Have you trained them up

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in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Have you instructed them only in particular dogmas; or impregnated them with the spirit of Christianity, and endeavoured to render its duties lovely and practicable? Have you not provoked them to wrath till they are discouraged? Or has not your indulgence become connivance; so that you have resembled Eli, whose" sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not?"—or David, "who had never displeased Adonijah at any time, in saying, Why hast thou done so?" Have you maintained order; or lived in a confusion favourable to every evil work? Has daily devotion been seriously performed? Have you enforced all by your own walk and conversation? Have you set no evil thing before your eyes? While you have preached meekness in words, have you not recommended passion by example? While you have taught them humility by precept, have you not enforced pride by practice? And are you surprised to find irregularities in your family? Wonder, if you please;—but wonder at your own folly in seeking by the way-side to "gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles." Complain, if you please;—but complain of yourselves. Are you so unreasonable as to expect

to “reap where you have not sown, and to gather where you have not strewed?”

Again, we remark, That our religious concern should not be confined to ourselves only: we are to engage our families to accompany us in the exercises of devotion. Thus Jacob would not go alone, but calls upon his household, and all that are with him: each must prepare, and each must attend. And of Abraham says God, “I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him; and

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he shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.” In the same disposition was Joshua, who said “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” We may add the centurion: He feared “God with all his house.” In your own families you possess authority and influence: “a father has honour, a master fear.” Servants and children naturally obey. This authority and influence you are to employ for religious, as well as civil purposes; and to vary the exercise of them according to the condition of those who are in family connexion with you—using command with some, persuasion with others, means with all. As the head of a family, you are to mind the souls of those who are under your care, as well as their bodies. They are not designed to live here only, or principally; they are hastening into eternity. And you are not to live here always: you will soon be called “to give an account of your stewardship;” and you will be judged, not only as an individual, but as the owner of a household: after the man has been tried, the master will be summoned. o that you may” give up your account with joy, and not with grief!” Even here you have the advantage of domestic religion: “the voice of salvation and of rejoicing is in the tabernacles of the righteous.” Such households only are safe and happy. How pleasing is it to see all the members of a family wor-

shipping God together daily in their own house! How lovely to observe them coming forth in the morning of the Sabbath, all going to the house of God in company! Ministers are encouraged, while they see in such households the nurseries of their churches, and address with pleasure a hopeful as-

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sembly, formed by the union of a number of amiable, orderly, serious families. But they are pained to see you disjoined, and coming in alone; the father without the son, the mother without the daughter. Shall I intimate here the propriety not only of your engaging your families in religious duties, but of taking them along with you, as far as circumstances will allow, to the same place of worship? Thus you will be certain of their attendance; they will be under your eye; they will be preserved from that fastidiousness and vagrancy of mind, so much cherished by loose and various hearing.

Once more, we may observe, That deliverance claims service—that prayer answered is to become praise. Jacob resolves to distinguish himself for God, who had appeared so wonderfully for him; and to make the place of mercy, the place of duty—“There will I make an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.” I see him travelling slowly on with his family—at length he approaches Bethel. To revisit a place we have not seen for twenty-eight years is always affecting. Many reflections will naturally arise in a contemplative mind. “Since I last viewed this spot, what unexpected connexions have I formed! What changes have I experienced! I have been led by a way which I knew not—Lover and friend hast Thou put far from me, and my acquaintance into darkness. How much of life is gone, to return no more! it has passed away like a dream. How little is there, in looking back, upon which the mind can fix with satisfaction! How

often have I been deceived in my hopes! How varied does the world now appear! How much

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more of its vanity do I see, and of its vexation do I feel! It is time to seek a better country. So teach me to number my days, that I may apply my heart unto wisdom." Jacob is now arrived—he looks around—he descries, partially covered with moss, the stone which he had set up for a pillar—he embraces it—and calling to his family—"Twenty-eight years ago this very stone was my pillow. Here, destitute of accommodations, I was compelled to sleep: here I passed—my staff all my store;—and hither He has returned me." What mingled emotions does he feel!—what shame! what joy! what condemnation of himself! what praise to the God of Bethel!

Christians, you have no journey to take, no material altar to raise, no animal sacrifice to immolate. "Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High. Whoso offereth me praise, glorifieth me; and to him that ordereth his conversation aright, will I show the salvation of God." What say you, Christians? Have you had no "day of distress, in which He answered" you? Has there been no "way in which He has been with" you, as your guide and your protector? Has He not disappointed your fears, and far exceeded your hopes? "But Hezekiah rendered not according to the benefits which had been done unto him." "Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?" "Go up," says God, "to Bethel, and dwell there." May you answer, with Jacob, "Let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and there will I make an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went." To whom,

PART III. Does this apply? and who in this as-

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sembly is concerned in the command and the example?

First, Have none of you been advanced in worldly possessions?—Wealth is not always hereditary: Providence sometimes “raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the needy out of the dunghill.” Many know what it is to be “abased,” as well as what it is to “abound.” Look back to a period when you had “none inheritance; no, not so much as to set your foot on.” Remember your feelings when beginning the world. You formed your plans, and endeavoured to secure His assistance, whose “blessing maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow. Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. It is in vain to rise up early, to sit up late, and to eat the bread of sorrows. O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity! With such opportunities and capacities, I will promote thy cause, and relieve thy poor. The streams shall remind me of the Fountain. Praise waiteth for thee, O God; and unto thee shall the vow be performed.” And He has more than realized your expectations. The staff has long since disappeared, and we behold your two bands: we see abundance, or shall I say extravagance? But where are your altars, and your offerings? Where are your promised thankfulness and zeal? What have you rendered? What have you done? What are you doing? He calls upon you to follow this example; and to say—“Let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.”

Secondly, Have none of you been led back from “the valley of the shadow of death?” To think of

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dying, was awful and affecting. To take a final leave of earth; to drop schemes unfinished; to bid

farewell to friends; to see weeping relations; to feel pain of body, and remorse of conscience; to contemplate an opening eternity; and to find the Judge standing before the door—all made you say, “O remember that my life is wind; mine eye shall no more see good. The eye of him that hath seen me, shall see me no more: Thine eyes are upon me, and I am not.” “Return, O Lord; deliver my soul: O save me, for thy mercies’ sake: for in death there is no remembrance of thee; in the grave who shall give thee thanks?” You assumed an air of penitence: you promised to render life, if spared, sacred to religion. He heard your prayer, saw your fears, removed the stroke of his heavy hand, renewed your strength, recoloured your cheeks, and placed you in the circle of usefulness and friendship again. But the scene, as it removed to a distance, ceased to impress: your views of this world as you stood on the confines of another, were soon changed: your resolutions are now forgotten, or you blush to recall them: you are ashamed to think that any should have witnessed such instances of “weakness.” To remove every notion of your having been serious in them, you plunge deeper in dissipation than before: when these vows occur, you endeavour, by company or pleasure, to banish them. You cried, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!” you asked for serious Christians, and pious ministers, and said, “Pray for us.” These you now shun: you know them not: they would give an edge to memory, and a sting to conscience. And “is it thus you requite the Lord, O foolish people and un-

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wise?” Look back to the hour of affliction, and of danger—remember thy fears, thy groans, thy prayers, and thy professions. Go, and acknowledge the Lord that healed thee. Let the physician who prescribed for thee, and those friends who soothed thee on the bed of languishing, have their share of praise: but

“the Lord killeth, and maketh alive; He bringeth down to the grave, and raiseth up.” Say, with David, “I was brought low, and He helped me: what shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits towards me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord; I will pay my vows unto the Lord, now in the presence of all his people.” Say, with Hezekiah, “The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth. The Lord was ready to save me: therefore we will sing my song to the stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of the Lord.” Imitate Jacob—“Let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will build there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.”

Thirdly, Are there no backsliders here? When you had fallen by your iniquity, did not anguish and horror take hold upon you? Reflecting upon your sin, aggravated by knowledge, and by obligations the most tender and most awful, were you not ready to conclude your case was hopeless? And when at length you were encouraged to approach, and to address the God you had provoked, was not this your language? “Lord, take away all iniquity; receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips. Ashur shall not save us: we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the

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work of our hands, ye are our gods: for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.” Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy Holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with thy free Spirit: then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee. Open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.” Fulfil your engagements; follow the Patriarch—“Let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will build there an altar unto God, who an-

swered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went.”

Fourthly, What were your feelings, O Christians, when, convinced of sin, you were first led to seek salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ? Ah! return, ye affecting moments, and remind us of an experience which has long been fled. O what strivings against sin! O what indifference to the world! o what engagements to serve God! You were willing to follow wherever He should lead; you gloried in the reproach of his cross; “having food and raiment,” you were “therewith content.” One thing was needful, one concern engrossed you—“Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.” You succeeded; and you have a good hope through grace. But to what is all this blessed experience reduced? To this dulness in hearing; to this deadness in prayer; to this murmuring and complaining under trials; to this fear of man which bringeth a snare; to this eagerness for the things of the world: “Go, and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the Lord, 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

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to the Lord, and the first-fruits of his increase.” “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love: remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first words.” “Arise, and go up to Bethel, and dwell there; and build an altar unto God, who answered you in the day of your distress, and was with you in the way which you went.”

Christians, ye who are always strangers and pilgrims upon earth, look forward to a heavenly country. “When you have reached home; when you have escaped all the dangers to which you are now exposed; when you are possessed of all the goodness promised you in the word of truth—then no forget-

fulness—then no need of memorials. All your mercies will arise in view. You will perceive innumerable instances of the Divine goodness, which you are now unable to discover, and will be seen with their enhancing qualities and circumstances. You will bless Him for all the dispensations of his Providence: for the dark, which now perplex; for the painful, which now distress; for the alarming, which now terrify. “God of all grace, and Father of mercy, thou hast answered me in every day of distress. Thou hast been with me in every way I have travelled. Thou hast suffered me to want no good thing. And here I raise an altar, such as I could not rear in yonder world, where I was encompassed with infinities. Now I shall serve thee day and night in thy temple, without imperfection, and without end. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house; they will be still praising thee.” Amen.

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SERMON IV.

THE TRIUMPHS OF PATIENCE.

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SERMON IV.

THE TRIUMPHS OF PATIENCE.

“Here is the patience of the Saints.” REVELATION xiv. 12.

DID you ever observe, my brethren, the exclamation of David—"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace?" A religious character is an object truly wonderful and interesting: there is something in him worthy of peculiar notice and regard. David indeed fixes the mind on one article only, and calls upon us to consider his "end." But his way is as remarkable as his end; his life is as deserving of attention as his death; and it is pleasing and useful to observe him in every relation, to pursue him through every condition, and to admire those excellences which unfold themselves, and operate as proofs of his origin, and as pledges of the "glory, and honour, and immortality," to which he tends.

Hence we endeavour to excite you to contemplate successively his various features. Sometimes we have placed him before you as convinced of sin. At

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other times, as exercising faith on our Lord Jesus Christ. You have seen him "rejoicing in the hope of his calling." This morning he appears among his "brethren and companions in tribulation," distinguished by the possession and triumphs of patience—"Here is the patience of the saints." We shall, I. Delineate the character of saints. II. Explain the connexion there is between saints and patience. III. And specify some cases in which their patience is to be rendered illustrious.

PART I. God has always a people for his name; he owns them to be saints; and they are often found where we should little expect to find them. Thus we read of saints at Corinth, of saints at Ephesus, of saints at Rome, and of saints even "in Cesar's household."

The title is applied to persons, because they are holy ones. And such are all real Christians, though encompassed with infirmities; as a child full of weak-

ness is human, having the nature, though not the stature of a man. They are called holy for two reasons.

The first is taken from their dedication to God. Thus the temple was holy; the vessels of the sanctuary were holy; the first-fruits were holy; the sacrifices were holy. Hence Christians are called the temple of God—vessels of honour—the first-fruits of every creature—“a sacrifice holy and acceptable.” “The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself.” He is sacred to the Divine service and honour: and if he takes his talents and uses them for any other purpose, he is guilty of sacrilege.

The second is derived from their personal renovation. The instruments under the law were only holy by appropriation. No change passed upon them—no change was necessary. It is otherwise with us: for since God finds us in a state wholly unsuited to his service, we must be “made meet for the” great “Master’s use.” Hence regeneration is necessary, by which we are “renewed in the spirit of our minds, and made partakers of the Divine nature.” God may call an angel into his presence and immediately employ him, without a change: he will love the comllland, and be equal to the work. But does he determine to employ in his service an unregenerate sinner? He is unqualified. He has neither ability, nor inclination. He is destitute of the spirituality which the work of God requires. Hence the promise, “A new heart also 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 an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.” And with this agrees the declaration of the Apostle: “W e are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good

works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them." View him then as he comes from the hands of his New-creator. There is nothing by which he is so much distinguished as an unconquerable concern for holiness. What does he love? "I delight in the law of God, after the inner man." What is his grief? "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death!" What is his prayer? "Create in me a clean heart, God, and renew a right spirit within me." What

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is his hope? That he "shall be like Him, and see him as he is. And having this hope in him, he purifieth himself even as He is pure." Holiness is the Gospel embodied. The saint exhibits it alive. The Gospel is holy; its Author holy; its maxims and its commands holy; its promises, ordinances, designs, holy; and there is nothing by which it is so much distinguished and glorified, as by the holiness which pervades it. My brethren, contemplate the subject in this light more frequently, and do not include everything, rather than holiness, in your notion of the Gospel. Do not imagine, with some, that it was designed to furnish a substitute for holiness; and that it will excuse your being holy, provided you are orthodox. It bringeth salvation, and is intended to teach you, "that, denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, you should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." And remember this important truth—That Christians are called by the Gospel to be saints; that you are Christians only in proportion as you are saints; and that you are no further saints than you are "holy in all manner of conversation and godliness." We proceed to reflect,

PART II. On the connexion there is between saints and patience.

And first, Saints only have patience. "The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." In his estimation, principle and motive are essential to the goodness of action. A thing may be materially good, when it is not morally so. A man may give "all his goods to feed the poor, and not have charity:" while a poor widow is held up as an example of be-

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nevolence, though she casts into the treasury but two mites. If a law were enacted against luxury and extravagance, a covetous man would be very obedient: but let his avarice, and not the law, have the honour of his obedience. Apply this to the case before us. A man may endure, and not be patient; there may be no religious principle or motive to influence him: it may be a careless indolence; a stupid insensibility; a kind of mechanical or constitutional fortitude; a daring stoutness of spirit resulting from fatalism, philosophy, or pride. Christian patience is another thing: it is derived from a Divine agency; it is nourished by heavenly truth; it is guided by Scriptural rules. Such is the patience of which we are speaking: and as this is only to be found in the subjects of true holiness, so we may observe,

Secondly, That every saint possesses patience. They do not indeed possess it in equal degrees; "for one star differeth from another star in glory," but all are stars. All are endued with this virtue. It is one of the fruits of the Spirit; it is an essential part of the Divine image restored in man. The work of God in the soul is not like a piece of statuary, where one part is finished while the rest remains in the block; but it is a creation; and, imperceptible as the beginning may be, there are found all the parts which, increased and developed, produce and display the maturity; all is advanced together, and all is perfect as far as the operation proceeds. A Christian may be defective in his organs of vision; but who would

draw him without eyes? Who would describe a saint without patience? I wish this to be remembered the more, because there are so many evangelical professors in our day awfully deficient in this instance:

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their religion has very little to do with their dispositions. They think it necessary for the judgment to be informed, and the practice to be moral; but from one of these to the other religion is to pass without touching the temper which lies between. If they are converted, it seems to be from that which is human to that which is diabolical—they are accusers of the brethren, proud, self willed, fierce, revengeful. Every trifle makes them explode. If they are saints in the house of God, they are demons at home. How the religion of the meek and lowly Jesus can dwell in such bosoms, it is impossible to determine.

Thirdly, It highly becomes saints to cultivate patience. “The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price.” It ennobles the possessor. Some have obtained honour by doing mischief. It has been said by a modern prelate. “One murder makes a villain, a thousand a hero.” The Christian conqueror draws his glory, not from the sufferings of others, but from his own; and nothing renders his character more impressive and useful. It recommends his religion. It carries along with it a peculiar conviction. When a Christian has met with an affliction, that has secluded him from the duties of his calling, deprived him of opportunities of exertion, and confined him to the house of grief; little has he supposed, that he was approaching the most,useful period of his life. But this has often been the case: and he has rendered more service to religion by suffering, than ever he did by doing. a what a theatre of usefulness is even a “bed of languishing!” “We are a spectacle to angels,” as well

as "to the world and to men." The sufferer lies open to their view; and the sight of him—sustained

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—enduring—glorying in tribulation, draws forth fresh acclamations of praise to that God, whose grace can produce effects so wonderful. "Here is the patience of the saints." But all his fellow-creatures are not excluded; there is generally a circle of relations, friends, neighbours, who are witnesses of the scene, I appeal to their feelings. "When you have seen a Christian suffering, in character, with all the composure and majesty of submission—when you have heard him softly saying, "Though I mourn, I do not murmur; why should a living man complain?" "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good;" "His ways are judgment;" "He hath done all things well;" "I behold a little of his perfection, and I believe far more"—has not a voice addressed you—

"Now see the man immortal; him I mean
Who lives as such; whose heart, full bent on heaven,
Leans all that way; his bias to the stars,
The world's dark shades in contrast set shall raise
His lustre more; though bright, without a foil.
Observe his awful portrait, and admire:
Nor stop at wonder—imitate and live."—

Have you not turned aside, and exclaimed, What an efficacy, what an excellency in the religion of Jesus!—"Here is the patience of the saints!" This brings us,

PART III. To specify some cases in which the patience of the saints is to be rendered illustrious and striking. We shall mention three. The first concerns provocation—the second, affliction—the third, delay. Here patience is necessary; and here we behold its triumphs.

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First, it is to be displayed in bearing provocation. "It must needs be that offences will come." Our opinions, reputations, connexions, offices, businesses, render us widely vulnerable. The characters of men are various; their pursuits and their interests perpetually clash. Some try us by their ignorance, some by their folly, some by their perverseness, some by their malice. There are to be found persons made up of everything disagreeable and mischievous; born only to vex; a burden to themselves, and a torment to all around them. Here is an opportunity for the triumph of patience; here is a field in which a man may exhibit his character, and appear a fretful, waspish reptile, or a placid, pardoning god. We are very susceptible of irritation: anger is eloquent; revenge is sweet: but to stand calm and collected—to suspend the blow, which passion was urgent to strike—to drive the reasons of clemency as far as they will go—to bring forward fairly in view the circumstances of mitigation—to distinguish between surprise and deliberation, infirmity and crime—or, if an infliction be deemed necessary, to leave God to be both the judge and the executioner—this is an excellency in which a Christian should labour to excel.

His peace requires it. People love to sting the passionate. They who are easily provoked, commit their repose to the keeping of their enemies; they lie down at their feet and invite them to strike. The man of temper places himself beyond vexatious interruption and insult. "He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down and without walls," into which enter, over the ruins, toads, serpents, vagrants, thieves, enemies—while the man, who in patience possesses his soul, has the com-

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mand of himself, places a defence all around him, and forbids the entrance of such unwelcome company to offend or discompose.

His wisdom requires it. "He that is slow to anger is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly. Anger resteth in the bosom of fools." "Wisdom gives us large, various, comprehensive views of things; the very exercise operates as a diversion, affords the mind time to cool, and furnishes numberless circumstances tending to" soften severity. We read of the meekness of wisdom. There is a candour which springs from knowledge.

His dignity requires it. "It is the glory of a man to pass by a transgression." "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." The man provoked to revenge is conquered, and loses the glory of the struggle; while he who forbears, comes off a victor, and is crowned with no common laurels: for "he that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city." A flood assails a rock, and rolls off, unable to make an impression; while straws and boughs are borne off in triumph, carried down the stream, "driven with the wind, and tossed."

It is also required by examples the most worthy of our imitation. "What provocations had Joseph received from his brethren! but he scarcely mentions the crime, so eager is he to announce the pardon:—"I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life." Hear David: "They rewarded me evil for good, to the spoiling of

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my soul. But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with

fasting, and my prayer returned into my own bosom. I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother!" View Stephen, dying under a shower of stones. He more than pardons; he prays. He is more concerned for his enemies, than for himself: in praying for himself, he stood; in praying for his enemies, he kneeled: he kneeled and said, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." A greater than Joseph, a greater than David, a greater than Stephen, is here—He endured every kind of insult; but "when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously." Go to the foot of the cross, and behold him suffering for us, "leaving us an example that we should follow his steps." Everything conspired to render the provocation heinous: the nature of the offence, the meanness and obligations of the offenders, the righteousness of his cause, the grandeur of his person—all these seemed to call for vengeance. The creatures were eager to punish. Peter drew his sword. The sun resolved to shine on such criminals no longer. The rocks asked leave to crush them. The earth trembled under the sinful load. The very dead could not remain in their graves. He suffers them all to testify their sympathy, but forbids their revenge: and lest the Judge of all should pour forth his fury, he instantly cries, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." "Here is the patience of"—a God.

Secondly, Patience is to be displayed in suffering affliction. "Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly

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upward;" and so far are the saints from being exempted, that we are informed "many are the afflictions of the righteous." We shall not describe them: we have only to inquire after the temper with which they are to be borne. It is not necessary to be insensible. There is no virtue in bearing what we do

not feel. Grace takes away the heart of stone, and patience does not bring it back. You may desire deliverance: but these desires will not be rash, insisting, unconditional; but always closed with—"Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." You may employ means to obtain freedom; but these means will be lawful ones. A suffering Christian may see several ways of release, but he seeks only God's way. "He who confined me shall bring me forth: here will I stand to see the salvation of the Lord, which he will show me." He would rather endure the greatest calamity, than commit the least sin: and while the affliction remains, there is no rebellious carriage, no foaming expressions, no hard thoughts of God, no charging him foolishly. He calmly acquiesces in a condition, of the disadantages of which he is fully sensible: his patience keeps him in the medium between presumption and despair; between despising "the chastening of the Lord, and fainting when rebuked of him;" between feeling too little, and too much.

Here then is another field, in which patience may gather glory. Affliction comes to exercise and illustrate our patience. "The trial of your faith worketh patience." It does so in consequence of the Divine blessing, and by the natural operation of things: for use makes perfect; the yoke is rendered easy by being worn; and those parts of the body which are

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most in action, are the most strong and solid. And therefore, you are not to excuse improper dispositions under affliction by saying, "It was so trying, who could help it?" This is to justify impatience by the very means which God employs on purpose to make you patient. Be assured the fault is not in the condition, but in the temper. Labour therefore to display this grace in whatever state you are, and

however afflicted you may be. Impatience turns the rod into a scorpion. Till you wipe your eyes from this suffusion of tears, you cannot see what God is doing; and while the noisy passions are so clamorous, his address cannot be heard. Suppose you were lying on a bed of pain, or walking in the field under some heavy affliction; suppose you were alone there, and heard a voice which you knew to be the voice of God—"Do not imagine your case is singular. There has been sorrow like unto thy sorrow. Take the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. You have heard of the patience of Job. He was stripped of all—yet he said, The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord. What! shall we receive good at the Lord's hands, and shall we not receive evil? Consider the unparalleled sufferings of thy Saviour. But he said, The cup which my Father giveth me to drink, shall I not drink it?—Do not imagine these trials are fruits of my displeasure: as many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. I design thy welfare; and I know how to advance it. You have often been mistaken; and sometimes you have been led to deprecate events, which you now see to have been your peculiar mercies. Trust me in this dispensation: reasons forbid

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my explaining things fully at present: what I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter. In the mean time, be assured, I do not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. These troubles are as necessary for thy soul, as medicine for the body, as the furnace for gold, as the knife for the vine. Be not afraid of the affliction; I have it completely under my management; when the end is answered I will remove it. I know how to deliver. Till then, fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will keep thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right

hand of my righteousness." O could I hear this; this would hush each rebellious sigh, this would check every murmuring thought. Is this then supposition? Has not God said all this? Does he not say all this in his word?

Thirdly, Patience is to be exercised under delays. We as naturally pursue a desired good, as we shun an apprehended evil: the want of such a good is as grievous as the pressure of such an evil; and an ability to bear the one, is as needful a qualification as the fortitude by which we endure the other. It therefore as much belongs to patience to wait, as to suffer. We read of "the patience of hope:" for patience will be rendered necessary according to the degree of hope. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick." It is the office of patience to prevent this fainting; and God is perpetually calling for the exercise of it. He does not always immediately indulge you with an answer to prayer. He hears indeed as soon as you knock, but he does not instantly open the door: and to stand there, resolved not to go without a blessing, requires patience; and patience

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cries, "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage; and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord." He does not appear to deliver us according to the time of our expectation; and in woe we number days and hours. The language of desire is, "O when wilt thou come unto me?" and of impatience, "Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" but patience whispers, "It is good that a man should both hope, and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." To long for pardon, and to feel only an increased sense of guilt; to implore relief, and to be able only to say, "Without are fightings, and within are fears;" to journey in a weary land, and see the way stretching out immeasurably before us, lengthening as we go: to pursue blessings which seem to recede as we advance, or to spring from our grasp

as we are seizing them—all this requires “patient continuance in well-doing.” “We have also need of patience, that, after we have done the will of God, we may receive the promises.” See the Christian waiting composedly year after year in a vale of tears for an infinite happiness! See the heir of such an inheritance resigned to abide so long in indigence! Surely it is trying to be detained so many months at anchor off the fair haven, the end of his voyage in view; to have all the glory of the unseen world laid open to the eye of faith; the trials of this life to urge, and the blessings of another to draw; to have earnestness to ensure, and foretastes to endear—surely, there is enough to make him dissatisfied to tarry here. And it seems proper for the Christian to be more than willing to go. Should an Israelite fix on this side the promised land? Is he not commanded to arise and depart hence? Can he love God, un-

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he wishes to be with Him? Does not the new nature tend towards its perfection? What wonder, therefore, if we should hear the believer sighing, “O that I had wings like a dove! for then would I flee away, and be at rest. I would hasten my escape from the stormy wind and tempest. Oh! when shall I come and appear before God? When shall I leave the dregs of society, and join the general assembly above? When will my dear connexions, gone before, receive me into everlasting habitations? O how I envy them! O the glories of yonder world! I seem indistinctly to see the shining prize. I seem to hear a little of their melody—O how does that perfume, blown across the river, revive my spirits, and call me away!” But a voice cries, “Be patient, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman: he waiteth for the precious fruits of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the former and the latter rain.” And the resigned saint answers, “I pray not that He should

take me out of the world, but keep me from the evil. I am willing to remain, while He has a station for me to fill, a duty for me to perform, a trial for me to bear. All the days of my appointed time will I wait, until my change come.”—“Here is the patience of the saints.”

Let us learn then, my brethren, how necessary it is for us to possess this temper of mind. It is of perpetual and universal use. All of you need it, and will need it always. You do not all need genius; learning, wealth—but what will you do in a world like this without patience? How can you be prepared for a succession of encounters, unless you “take to yourselves the whole armour of God?”

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How can you pass through a wilderness of thorns and briars, unless “your feet be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace?” Who can say, “My mountain stands so strong, I shall never be moved?” “If a man live many years, and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many: all that cometh is vanity.” How undesirable is a squeamish appetite, that incessantly requires delicacies: a puny body, that can bear no hardships: a tender frame, that must not be exposed to the variations of the weather: but how much worse is it to have a soft, enervated, pampered constitution of mind, that must be stroked or rocked like a child; that can with extreme difficulty be pleased; that must have everything according to its fancy. In a state, where so little is left to choice and convenience, and where we are liable to trials and changes every day, we should seek after a general preparation for our passage, and strengthen and invigorate the soul by—patience.

—Labour strenuously, not only to acquire this grace, but to excel in it. Seek higher degrees of it. Exercise it not in one thing—but in everything, and in everything—to the end. “Let patience have its

perfect work; that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing." There is a God of patience, who giveth more grace. Approach him with enlarged desire, that you may abound in this grace also, "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness."

—And remember, you will not always be called to the exercise of patience. Your "warfare will soon be accomplished." "Yet a little while, and

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He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." A little more patience, and the wicked shall cease from troubling, and the weary be at rest. A little more patience, and farewell provocation, affliction, and anxious delays. Patience, having conducted you safe, and being no longer necessary, shall return for more; but it will leave you in a state where all shall be peace, all shall be quietness, all shall be assurance for ever. O bless our God, ye people,—and make the voice of his praise to be heard—for thou, O God, hast proved us; thou hast tried us, as silver is tried: we went through fire and through water, but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.

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SERMON V.

THE SUFFERINGS OF OUR SAVIOUR NECESSARY.

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SERMON V.

THE SUFFERINGS OF OUR SAVIOUR NECESSARY.

“For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” HEBREWS ii. 10.

“MY thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” These words, my brethren, contain a reflection always seasonable, always useful, always necessary, when we would “regard the work of the Lord, or consider the operation of his hand.” It may be exemplified in numberless instances, but in none so easily and so fully as in the redemption of the world by means of a Mediator, “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” The sun never beheld such a scene. History records no such transaction. The scheme would never have entered the mind of any finite intelligence—“It is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.” “It is the wisdom of God in a mystery;” and the more we are

enlightened from above to examine its sublime contents, the more of their perfection shall we discover, the more worthy of God will they appear. “For it became Him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”

I. Behold the character of the Supreme Being: “For whom are all things, and by whom are all things;” the original Cause, the final End, of the whole universe of being, material or spiritual; “in heaven or on earth; visible or invisible; whether they be thrones or dominions, principalities or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him.” Nothing is more common for speakers and writers, when they wish to mention esteemed persons, than to describe, rather than to name them. By seizing in our representation something which has endeared or distinguished them; by availing ourselves of some qualities or actions, which have given them peculiar and superior claims; we can bestow deserved honour, and aid the impression we desire to make on the minds of those we address. The admirers of poetry understand me, when I say—“The Author of the ‘Task.’” My countrymen feel when I utter—“The Hero of the Nile.” The ingenious youth yields, when I beseech him by the tears of her “who bare him.” “We cannot describe God by what he is in himself, but by what he is in his relations and in his works; by what he does as our Creator and Governor; as one who owns us, and may dispose of us as he pleases; on whom we entirely depend, and to whom we are universally accountable.”

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But who can tell how far this “all things” extends? Who can imagine the dimensions of his empire—the diversity of his subjects—the infinite number of his productions, each of which is an expression of his wisdom, power, and goodness, and a source of revenue from which his glory is derived?

And why this magnificence of description? To fill the mind with reverence. To raise our expectation. To remind us of the End and Author of our salvation. To show us the principle from which he acts: that it is not necessity, but kindness; that he

cannot stand in need of us, or our services, being “exalted above all blessing and praise”—It is, by a display of his majesty, to draw forth our admiration of his mercy. “The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like unto the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high: who humbleth himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in the earth? He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth the needy out of the dunghill, that he may set him with princes, even with the princes of his people.” Contemplate then a Being whose goodness equals his grandeur. Behold him seeking his glory in our welfare. See him, regardless of all our unworthiness, and, before we had expressed any desire, devising means to rescue us from our ignorance, vice, infamy, and misery; and forming a scheme of pure compassion, designed to raise us to a state of happiness, superior to the condition in which man was originally placed. For,

II. Observe the end which the God of all Grace keeps in view—It is to “bring many sons unto glory.” When of old He detached from the nations of the

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earth a people for his name, he destined them to possess the land of Canaan. This promised country into which he engaged to bring them, excited the departure of the Israelites from Egypt, and encouraged them in all their wanderings in the wilderness. It was a state in which they expected rest, peace, abundance—“A land flowing with milk and honey; a land wherein there was no scarceness; a land on which the Lord’s eye was from the beginning even to the end of the year.” But this was only a shadow of good things to come; an emblem of that “better,” that “heavenly country,” towards which “the seed of Abraham by faith” are travelling—where “remains a rest for the people of God”—where “they shall enter into peace”—where they

shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat; for the Lamb, that is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

This future blessedness of the righteous is very commonly in the Scriptures expressed by "glory." It is a state of perfection, of magnificence, of splendour, of honour. It will contain every kind of excellency, and every kind of excellency displayed. The place will be glorious; the company will be glorious; our bodies will be glorious; glorious will be our work, our pleasures, our reward, our praise. We shall have fellowship with the dignified Redeemer; "we shall be glorified together—when He who is our life shall appear, we shall also appear with him in glory."

We are reminded of the character under which we

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shall obtain this happiness: it is for "sons,"—not enemies, not strangers. Such the people of God naturally are; but, by regeneration and adoption, he gives them the quality and the claims of children; and on this relation the inheritance depends—"If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ."

Nor will the possessors of it be few in number. The heavenly inheritance is not like the earthly Canaan, confined to the Jews only: Gentiles also participate. The middle wall of partition is broken down, and the Gospel reveals a common salvation, and opens a passage to heaven from all the diversities of human condition—"many sons" are on their way "to glory." Do not diminish their number by uncharitable exclusions, or reduce it by gloomy suspicions—"Wot ye not what the Scripture saith of Elias, how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets,

and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life? But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal." He has always his hidden ones. Many more than you are aware of, know his name, and love his salvation: and though his followers may appear a small flock, if viewed in comparison with the ungodly who surround them—when they shall "come from the east, and from the west," and shall be gathered together from "all nations, and kindred, and people, and tongues;" they will be found "a great multitude, which no man can number." Such is the purpose of grace which he is accomplishing; and,

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III. Observe the means by which he executes his design—He constitutes Jesus Christ "the Captain of their salvation." God does nothing immediately with man. He carries on all his transactions with us through a Mediator. The restoration of his people, including their redemption, conversion, perseverance, and future glory, is committed to Him; and with Him we have immediately to do in all the concerns of faith, holiness, and consolation.

When God would bring the Israelites into the land of promise, he placed them under the guidance of Joshua: when he would bring innumerable myriads of perishing sinners to glory, he puts them under the conduct of the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence they are so often said to be given to him by the Father. They are given to him, not that he may receive benefit from them, but that they may receive benefit from him. As so many captives, they are given him to ransom as their Redeemer; as so many sheep, for him to feed as their Shepherd; as so many scholars, for him to educate as their Teacher; as so many soldiers, for him to lead along to victory and triumph, as "the Captain of their salvation."

For the term by which he is here held forth carries with it an implication that there are difficulties to be encountered in the way to glory, and obstacles to be overcome—that the Christian life is a warfare—and that as soon as we turn our faces Zion-ward,” we must expect to fight. With this accord the language of the Scripture, and the experience of every good man. And, my dear hearers, if you think otherwise, you are deceived. You may go asleep to hell, but you cannot go asleep to heaven. It is exertion, opposition, contention, every step of the way.

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Did they who have gone before you find religion an easy thing? What was their language? “Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! Many there be that rise up against me: many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God.” “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” There are some here this morning who are compelled to use the same language. Yes, “without are fightings, and within are fears.” Your enemies are numerous and powerful; and, compared with them, you feel yourselves to be nothing. But you are not without encouragement. Your “Redeemer is mighty”—Jesus is “the Captain of your salvation.” “He teaches” your “hands to war,” and your “fingers to fight.” He arrays you in “the whole armour of God.” He issues orders, and regulates all your motions. He goes before, and animates you by his own example. He replenishes your strength; treads down your enemies before you; makes you more than conquerors; and gives you a crown of life. Whence, “a worm Jacob,” are you so courageous? How can you “thresh the mountains?” The way is distressing; the country through which you travel is formidable—How will you be able to reach the land that is to be

given you, a very far off?—"Jesus Christ is everything I need: he is given for a leader, and a commander to the people. I place myself under his care. He will go where I go; and engage the foes I engage. He will leave me in no situation: his skill is infinite, his power is almighty. He has led thousands, not one failing. On him I lean: because

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he lives, I shall live also. If I have not struck a blow, I may strike with confidence; or if I have fallen through a blow received, I can say, Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: though I fall, I shall arise; though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light unto me."

"A Friend and Helper so divine
Does my weak courage raise;
He makes the glorious victory mine,
And his shall be the praise."

The Jews always expected that the Messiah would be "the Captain of their salvation:" they looked for him in no other character. But, mistaking the nature of this salvation, they grossly erred with regard to the nature of his work. They conceived of him as a temporal prince, who would rush forth with his "sword upon his thigh, conquering and to conquer;" subduing the nations of the earth, and giving "his people the heritage of the Heathen." To their carnal minds, the manner of his victory was a paradox. They could not conceive how he could overcome by dying, or by a cross reach a throne: "We have heard out of the law that Cluist abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, then, the Son of man must be lifted up?"—But in this way he was "to be crowned with glory and honour." His sufferings were not opposed to his exaltation; they led to it; and the Apostle,

IV. Reminds us of the manner in which he obtains his distinction, and is prepared for the discharge of his office—he “is made perfect through sufferings.” The sufferings of the Saviour are described in the Gospels with simplicity and grandeur

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combined. Nothing can add to the solemnity and force of the exhibition; and if we are not affected with the relation, it shows that our hearts are harder than the rocks, which could not retain their insensibility when “the Lord of life and glory” expired. The subject has often come under your review. Sometimes we have called upon you to consider his sufferings as peculiar and unparalleled; and you have heard a plaintive Saviour saying, “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me; wherewith the Lord hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.” We have sometimes considered his sufferings as foreknown, and led you to imagine what were his feelings while reading the prophecies, or foretelling, himself, the circumstances of his passion. From your eye futurity is kindly concealed. Could some of you be immediately informed of the troubles through which perhaps one year only will require you to wade, you would be overwhelmed in the prospect. But He saw the end from the beginning, and advanced, with Judas, and the high-priest, and the nails, and the cross, full in view. You have seen that his sufferings were not the sufferings of an hour or a day; they were perpetual: from Bethlehem to Calvary, “he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” You have seen him suffering in his condition, in his character, in his body, in his soul. You are now led to another view of the same interesting subject—the accomplishment which our Saviour derived from them: he was “made perfect through sufferings.” It may be

exemplified in two respects: first, by way of discovery; secondly by way of qualification.

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In perusing history, what characters principally engage, and improve us? Those who have struggled through trying and awful scenes. Read the Scriptures: fix your eyes on Job, and Joseph—on David, and Daniel, and Paul. Were they not all “made perfect through sufferings?” The picture would have no beauty or effect without shades. It is on the rainy cloud the heavenly bow spreads its variegated tints. The character of the hero is formed, and his laurels are gathered, only in the hostile field, among “the confused noise of warriors, and garments rolled in blood.” Never was the glory of a prince, however illustrious, rendered complete, without some sudden reverse of fortune, which tried him; some heavy calamity, under which he had an opportunity to discover his internal resources. That nobility is the truest, which a man derives, not from his pedigree, but from himself: that excellency is the greatest which is personal: that glory is the most estimable which is fixed in our intellectual and moral attributes—not that which a man locks up with his cash, or puts by with his ribbon: all these are extrinsic: they are no parts of the man; they are appendages; and additions suppose deficiencies—he is the most perfect who needs them not. Suppose our Saviour had passed through the world smoothly, attended with all the littleness of riches, and the insignificance of pomp; how limited would have been his example! how insipid the narrative of his life! how uninteresting his character! If there had been anything of the beautiful, there would have been nothing of the sublime. How does he appear “Christ, the wisdom of God, and the power of God?” As “crucified.” Where did he spoil “principalities and powers,

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making a show of them openly, and triumphing over them?" On the "Cross." To what period does he refer, when he says, "Now is the judgment of this world; now shall the prince of this world be cast out?" The hour of his death. This he viewed as the season in which he was to be magnified and adored—"The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified." This was the consummation of his unexampled career of excellence: "I must do wonders to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I must be perfected." Here is the finish; and the wonders and miracles which attended his sufferings were not to be compared with the principles and graces which he displayed in enduring them. Of what in his history did Moses and Elias speak, when they appeared in the Transfiguration? "They spake of the decease which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem." In what does every Christian rejoice? "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." What is the theme of every minister? "I determined to know nothing, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." What is the language of the glorified above? "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." Thus the sufferings of the Saviour were the means of displaying the glories of his character, and of procuring for him unbounded and everlasting honours.

We are also to consider him relatively: for he interposed on our behalf; and having engaged for a particular purpose, whatever qualified him for the execution of it, tended to make him perfect. Hence a body was prepared him. Hence the miseries he endured. "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise

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took part of the same: that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the

Devil; and deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren; that he might be a merciful and faithful high-priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." We shall see more of this,

V. By examining the reasonableness and expediency of such a dispensation—"It became him." In proportion to the greatness of a character, will be his conviction of the importance of order; and the more necessary will it be for him to observe it; because of the number of his relations, the diversity of his connexions, and the influence of his example. Order is essential to virtue and to happiness in creatures; and God himself is the pattern of it. There is nothing in him like tyranny: he is influenced by reason. Though independent, he is governed by rules; though sovereign, he submits to laws; and only does what "becomes him."

But we are never more liable to presumption and mistake, than when we take upon us to decide what the Supreme Being ought to do; or when, having laid down a particular system, we suppose he must conform to it, or forfeit his character in the eyes of the universe. Such daring language we have sometimes heard—but, O ye judges of the Almighty, "who hath known the mind of the Lord, or, being his counsellor, hath taught him? To whom will ye

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liken me, or shall I be equal, saith the Holy One? His way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known."

There is a period approaching, in which our capacity for examination will be enlarged, the prejudices which bias our minds will be done away, and

the plan of Divine Providence and Grace will be accomplished and explained: then the reasons of his proceedings will be as satisfactory to us, as they will prove honourable to him; then all that is now dark Will be enlightened, all that is now disorderly will be arranged, all that is now detached and scattered will be united in one beautiful whole; and we shall see that nothing was defective, nothing superfluous, nothing insignificant: that everything was necessary—nothing could be added to it—nothing could be taken from it. But it may be asked, Is there no satisfaction to be obtained before this illustrious period arrives? There is. For if we can ascertain that God has pursued any particular mode of action, we may immediately infer the rectitude of it from the acknowledged perfection of the Divine character; and there is no medium between this, and “charging him foolishly.” He does not use means uncertainly, or to try their success: at one view he sees unerringly his end, and his way to it. But again. If He has told us himself that such a step became him, we are bound to believe him, however strange and exceptionable it may appear to us. And if, in addition to this, He has condescended to shed some light upon the subject, we are thankfully to avail ourselves of it.

My brethren, we may apply all this to the subject before us. We know He did “make the Captain

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of our salvation perfect through sufferings,” and “his ways are judgment.” He has expressly assured us, in his word, that it became him to do so; and as he is not mistaken, so he cannot deceive. He has also discovered enough of his motives to satisfy every humble inquirer, and to draw forth our admiration: “O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” But all this is too general. Let us specify a few particular reasons which he has enabled us to assign, from which the

expediency of the sufferings of our Saviour will appear.

The first is derived from the necessity of experience in our Guide. For how desirable was it that he who was appointed to lead us to glory, should himself be personally acquainted with the dangers, difficulties, and trials, to which his followers are exposed in their way thither! Nothing would so powerfully engage the confidence which we are to place in him. Experience in every case encourages application and dependence. But see the afflicted. It is not to the gay and prosperous, but to those who have been in misery themselves, that they approach with pleasure, and with a conviction that they shall not be heard in vain, when they cry, "Pity me, pity me, O ye my friends; for the hand of God hath touched me." Sympathy is produced and cherished by experience. If you have endured the sorrow under which you behold a fellow-creature labouring, you can enter into his views, feel his sensations, and weep with him. "Who are the most kind and humane? Those who have been much in the school of affliction. There the social and tender affections are nurtured. "Be kind to strangers," says God to Israel: why?

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"for ye know the heart of a stranger, for ye were strangers in a strange land." The high-priest under the law was "taken from among men, that he might have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way, for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity." All this is grandly applicable to our Lord and Saviour; "for in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." Though his state is changed, his nature is the same; "for we have not an High-Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." This opens a source of exquisite consolation; and we feel the pleasing

motive—"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." He "knows your sorrows." Are you poor? He knows your indigence; not like some of your wealthy neighbours, who may accidentally hear of it by report, while they are indulging only in luxury—He was poor: "foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man had not where to lay his head." Do you suffer reproach; and are things laid to your charge which you know not? He sees you, who was once deemed "a glutton and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners, a Samaritan, one who had a devil, a stirrer up of the people." Do you feel evil suggestions? The enemy approached him:

"He knows what sore temptations mean,
For he has felt the same."

Are you looking forward to the hour of death? Your fellow Christians, and your ministers, endea-

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your to sustain and to soothe you: but all this comes from persons who have no experience—they know not what it is to die—but One will be near, "to comfort you upon your bed of languishing," who has passed through the trying scene; who knows the feelings of human nature in the separation of soul and body: in leaving beloved friends and relations—

A second reason is to be derived from his example. It was necessary for him to show us the influence of holiness in a state of suffering. Afflictions are unavoidable; they occupy a large proportion of life, and of godliness; many parts of religion relate entirely to suffering, and every part receives a lustre from it. The Christian is more formed from his trials, than from his enjoyments. But we are like bullocks unaccustomed to the yoke; we are unskilled

in the science of passive obedience; even after the experience of years of sorrow, we know little of the holy mystery “of suffering affliction and of patience.” We need instruction:—“How am I to carry the cross? How can I render it one of my chief blessings? “What dispositions am I to exercise towards God, who is the Author of this trouble? or towards men, who are the instruments of it? How must I regulate my thoughts, words, and carriage? Am I forbidden to feel, as well as to murmur? Must I indulge no desire, use no means of relief?” Go, anxious inquirer, and contemplate him who “suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps.” See him enduring every indignity—but “when he was reviled, he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously.” Hear his prayer for his murderers—“Father, forgive

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them, for they know not what they do.” Mark his language in the garden—“Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” In all this he does not so much dazzle as guide. Here are none of those rhapsodical expressions, which proud philosophy has often placed in the mouths of its heroes. He affects no insensibility of pain; no indifference to suffering. We see humanity with all its natural feelings—only these feelings held under the empire of reason and of grace. “Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”

A third reason is to be found in the demonstration which his sufferings gave us of the Divine benevolence. Awakened souls find it no easy thing to believe in God. Conscious of the wrong their sins have done him, and judging of the Supreme Being by themselves, it is hard to persuade their guilty minds that God is ready “to be pacified towards them for all their abominations;” and that, after such

provocations, he is willing to “receive them graciously, and love them freely.” Now I cannot love God, till he appears lovely. I shall never approach him, till I hope in him. Hidden among the trees of the garden, whither my fears have driven me, it is only the voice of mercy that can call me forth. It is confidence alone that can bring me back to God: this is the simple principle of our restoration; till this be gained, nothing can be effected. To place himself before us in this encouraging view; to show us in himself an accessible refuge, as soon as ever we feel our danger and our misery; to keep us from turning again to folly by the desperate conclusion. “there is no hope;” to scatter all our misgiving

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fears, and to allure us into his presence—he was pleased to sacrifice his own Son. The inference is easily drawn:—“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not with him also freely give us all things?” We behold indeed the love of God in his incarnation, but much more in his sufferings: these suppose the former, and add to it. If he will take one so dear to him, one so worthy, one who always did the things which pleased him, and bring him through such a depth of suffering rather than we should perish, we are convinced that he will not refuse pardon and grace to returning sinners. And to this, the sacred writers call our attention, when they would magnify the goodness of God: “Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and gave his Son to be a propitiation for our sins. God hath commended his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled unto God by the death of his Son; much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

Behold a fourth reason. As Divine Goodness acts in harmony with every other perfection of his nature, the sufferings of our Saviour were designed to display the glory of God, as the moral ruler of the universe. There is no governing without laws; laws are nothing without sanctions. If the penalty attached to the law of God be founded in equity—and were it otherwise, how could he have annexed it?—does not the same principle which led him to propose it, constrain him to maintain it? Suppose a governor, when he establishes a new system of legislation, were

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to issue a proclamation, that whoever transgressed it should be pardoned upon his repentance and reformation—would not this disarm the law of all its terrors, and rather encourage than repress the violation of it? Is the Gospel such an enemy to the law? “Do we by faith make void the law? Yea, we establish the law.” We do not however on this subject go all the lengths into which some advance. We would not “limit the Holy One of Israel.” It does not become us to affirm that he could not have pardoned sin without an atonement. Let us remember, the Supreme Majesty is accountable to none; let us not try to fix the bounds of absolute prerogative. Our Saviour in the garden does indeed intimate that the cup could not pass from him: but he resolves this impossibility into the will of God. It is sufficient for us to know that in this way God chose to glorify his perfections, and that to us no other way appears, in which we could have had an equal display of the Divine attributes. Justice could have seized the transgressor, or mercy could have spared him; but, in the case before us, both justice and mercy are blended in their exercise: we see the one in requiring this mediation, the other in providing it. The law is secured, and the offender too. Sin is condemned, and the sinner pardoned; and God neither beholds the iniquity, nor the misery of man. These

we conceive to be a few of the reasons why "it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

We close the subject with two reflections.

First, Let not Christians think it "strange" if

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they should be called to suffer. Let them learn "how to be abased, as well as how to abound:" let them determine to pass "through evil report, as well as good report;" and be willing to deny themselves, and take up their cross, and follow him. The Gospel does not deceive us: it informs us only of one way by which we can reach the crown. In this we see all our brethren walking, and our elder Brother going before them. But we are looking for a smoother passage. We would be children, and not chastised; gold, and not tried; soldiers, and not "endure hardness;" Christians, and not like Christ. Are the members to have no sympathy with the suffering Head? Are you not chosen to "be conformed to his image?" Observe his likeness: see his sorrowful features; how "his visage is marred more than any man's, and his form than the sons of men." Can you resemble him, and not suffer? Is it not an honour to have fellowship with him in his sufferings? Would you wish for the friendship of that world, whose malice he continually bore? Would you only have ease, where he only had trouble? or nothing but honour, where he had nothing but disgrace? Would you reign with him, and not suffer with him? Can the common soldier complain, when he sees the commander enduring the same privations with himself? "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord: it is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord." But, ah! what are your sufferings compared with his? Are you oppressed? Look before you, and

see him carrying a cross infinitely heavier; carrying it for you; carrying it without a groan! “Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners

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against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”

Secondly, if the sufferings of Christ were so variously useful and necessary, and of such high importance in the view of God—can ministers dwell too much upon them in their preaching? Can Christians estimate them too highly, or make too much of them in their meditations, and in the exercises of their faith and of their devotion? And if an ordinance be established in the Church as a memorial of his sufferings, should they not thankfully embrace every opportunity of attending it?

Such, Christians, is the institution of the Lord’s Supper, of which you are going to partake. Approach, and in lively memorials behold” Jesus Christ evidently set forth, crucified among you.” “For as oft as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord’s death till he shall come.” Draw near, and looking on him who was pierced by you, and for you, mourn and rejoice. Draw near, and exercise faith, aided even by the medium of sense; and of the best Object take the best view it is in your power to enjoy—till “you shall see him as he is;” and joining a nobler assembly, shall sing the song which you are loving and learning now—“Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”

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SERMON VI.

THE YOUNG ADMONISHED.

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SERMON VI.

THE YOUNG ADMONISHED.

"I fear the Lord from my youth." 1 KINGS xviii. 12.

THESE are the words of Obadiah. From his situation and office, he appears to have been a person of some distinction, for "he was the governor of Ahab's house." But what we admire in him, is—The piety that marked his character. "He feared the Lord greatly;" and gave evidence of it in a season of extreme danger: "For he took an hundred prophets, and hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water." And as his religion was superior in its degree, so it was early in its commencement. For, says he, in his address to Elijah, "I fear the Lord from my youth." And herein, my young friends, we propose him this evening as your example. In your imitation of him, many are concerned, though none are so deeply interested as yourselves.

The preacher who addresses you is concerned. He longs "after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ." Indeed, if ministers desire to be useful, they cannot be indifferent to you. You would prove

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their best helpers; you would rouse the careless; you would reproach those of riper years; you would decide the wavering minds of those who are of the same age with yourselves. It is in your power to build up our churches, and to change the moral face of our neighbourhood. "The wilderness and the solitary

place shall be made glad" for you, "and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose."

—Behold standing near your preacher, your friends, your relations, your parents. hearing for you with trembling, and prayers, and tears. Thy father is saying, "My son, if thou be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine." The woman who bare thee is saying, "What, my son, and what the son of my womb, and what the son of my vows!"

—Behold too your fellow-citizens, your countrymen. I imagine all those assembled here this evening, with whom you are to have any future connexions, by friendship, by alliance, by business; whose kindred you are to espouse, whose offices you are to fill—these I ask—Is it a matter of indifference, whether the rising generation be infidel and immoral, or influenced by conscience, and governed by the fear of God? Where is the person, who has any regard for the welfare of the nation, for social order, for relative life, for personal happiness, who would not immediately exclaim, "Rid me and deliver me from the hand of strange children; whose mouth speaketh vanity, and their right hand is a right hand of falsehood: that our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; and that our daughters may be as cornerstones, polished after the similitude of a palace."

—Behold the blessed God looking down from heaven, advancing his claims, and urging the language of

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command, and of promise: "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. They that seek me early, shall find me."

—These are parties concerned in the success of this endeavour. But, my young friends, there are characters here more deeply interested than all these—They are yourselves. To be pious in early years, is to be "wise for yourselves:" it is your privilege, shall I say, more than your duty? Yes, the gain will be principally your own. How shall I convince

you of this? How shall I make you feel the importance of it? Let me take three views of the subject. "We shall consider youth, as the most favourable season in which to commence a religious course—show the beneficial influence of early piety over your future life—and examine, in this awful concern, the consequences of procrastination.

PART I. If, unhappily, the wickedness of any of our more aged hearers should have rendered infidelity necessary, and they should have abandoned a system hostile only to sin; "we are persuaded," my young friends, "better things of you." We presume that you are all ready to acknowledge the importance of religion, and that if any of you were asked whether you had resolved never to pursue it, but to live and die in the neglect of it, you would be shocked at the question. Since then you believe godliness to be the one thing needful, and determine on a religious course, I would propose youth as the most favourable season in which to commence it.

It is, first, a period which presents the fewest obstacles. It is far from my design to hold forth real religion as an easy thing at any period of life. I

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believe the doctrine of human depravity; I know the images the sacred writers employ, to describe the arduous nature of the spiritual life; I hear our Saviour saying, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." But if there be difficulties, these difficulties will increase with our years; and the season of youth will be found to contain the fewest obstacles, whether we consider your external circumstances, your natural powers, or your moral habits. Now, you are most free from those troubles which will embitter, from those cares which will perplex, from those schemes which will engross, from those engagements which will hinder you, in more advanced and connected life.

Now the body possesses health and strength; the memory is receptive and tenacious; the fancy glows; the mind is lively and vigorous. Now the understanding is more docile; it is not crowded with notions; it has not, by continued attention to one class of objects, received a direction from which it is unable to turn, to contemplate anything else, without violence: the brain is not impervious; all the avenues to the inner man are not blocked up. To cure a dead man, and to teach an old one, says a heathen philosopher, are tasks equally hopeless. Now, the soul is capable of deeper and more abiding impressions; the affections are more easily touched and moved; we are more accessible to the influence of joy and sorrow, hope and fear: we engage in an enterprise with more expectation, and ardour, and zeal. Evil dispositions also grow with time and are confirmed by exercise. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." A man

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wishes to eradicate—but is his task likely to become easier by suffering the shrub to grow year after year till it becomes a tree, and is so deep-rooted as to defy even a storm? A disorder has seized the body—but common sense says, Take it in time; send immediately for aid: by continuance, it becomes inveterate, and baffles the skill and the force of medicine. An enemy has declared war—but is he a friend who advises you, instead of advancing forward, and seizing the most advantageous positions, to remain inactive, till the adversary, striding on, gains pass after pass, and fortifies for himself what he has taken from you—till he spreads over your territory, and subsists at your expense, or with impoverished resources compels you to risk everything on the issue of one desperate encounter? Who is the person intended by all these representations of folly? You, O young

man, who by your delays are increasing an hundred fold all the obstacles of a religious life.

Secondly, the days of youth are of all others the most honourable period in which to begin a course of godliness. Under the legal economy, the first were to be chosen for God—the first-born of man; the first-born of beasts; the first-fruits of the field. It was an honour becoming the God they worshipped. to serve him first. This duty, my young friends, you, and you alone, can spiritualize and fulfil, by giving Him, who deserves all your lives, the first-born of your days, and the first-fruits of your reason, and the prime of your affections. And never will you have such an opportunity to prove the goodness of your motives, as you now possess—"Now," says God, "I know that thou fearest me." But see an old man: what does he offer? His riches?—but he can use

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them no more. His pleasures?—but he can enjoy them no longer. His honour?—but it is withered on his brow. His authority?—but it has dropped from his feeble hand. He leaves his sins; but it is because they will no longer bear him company. He flies from the world; but it is because he is driven out. He enters the temple; but it is as a sanctuary: it is only to take hold of the horns of the altar: it is a refuge, not a place of devotion, he seeks:—and need we wonder if he should hear a voice from the most excellent glory—"Ye have brought that which was tom, and the lame, and the sick: thus ye brought an offering: Should I accept this of your hands? saith the Lord of hosts. But cursed be the deceiver, who hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen." But you who consecrate to him your youth—you do not profanely tell him to suspend his claims till the rest are served; and till you have satisfied the world and the flesh,

his degrading rivals. You do not send him forth to gather among stubble the gleanings of life, after the enemy has secured the harvest. You are not like those who, if they reach Immanuel's land, are forced thither by shipwreck. You sailed thither by intention: when you weighed anchor, you thought of it; it was "the desired haven." You do not shun the world after a long experience of its vanity and vexation; but you have the honour of believing the testimony of God concerning it, and of deciding without a trial. You do not yield to God when every other solicitor is gone: but you adore him while you are admired by others; and, guarding your passions and

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senses, you press through a thousand allurements, saying, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." Religion is always an ornament: it does not refuse age, but it looks exquisitely attractive and suitable when worn by youth. In the old, it is alone; it is a whole: it decorates wrinkles and ruins. In the young, it is a connexion and a finish: it unites with bloom, it adds to every accomplishment, gives a lustre to every excellency, and a charm to every grace. And as our early years furnish a season, in which to commence a religious life, attended with the fewest difficulties, and productive of the highest honour; so it is,

Thirdly, the most profitable; and at no other period can we begin so advantageously. It requires no laboured reasoning to prove this. Only admit that there are innumerable benefits inseparable from religion; that "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace"—that "godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come"—and the sooner it is embraced, the longer will the privilege be enjoyed. Every hour of neglect, is an hour of loss. Can you be happy too soon? Is it desirable to "feed" another day "upon ashes," while "angels' food" is placed within

your view, and within your reach? If there be innumerable evils inseparable from sin; if “the way of transgressors be hard;” if there be “no peace to the wicked;” if “the gall of bitterness” be connected with “the bonds of iniquity;” if “the wages of sin be death;” and “these are the true sayings of God”—then the earlier the deliverance, the greater the privilege. Those who approached our Saviour in the days of his flesh, desired an immediate relief from their op-

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pressing maladies. Bartimeus did not say, “Lord, that I may receive my sight”—but not yet. The leper did not say, “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean:” and I hope at some future season I shall be healed; but I cannot resign my disease at present. In another case, a poor wanderer, who has missed his way in a journey of importance, would deem it an advantage to be set right speedily. But you wish first to go far astray: though you must retreat every step, exhausting your strength and your time by your return, and be in danger of seeing the day end, before you have reached the road in which your journey is to begin. Such losses and injuries are occasioned by delay; and where the soul is saved, and sin is pardoned, in how many instances are late converts “made to possess the iniquities of their youth!” This brings us,

PART II. To consider the beneficial influence of early piety over the remainder of your days. Youth is the spring of life: and by this will be determined the glory of summer, the abundance of autumn, the provision of winter. It is the morning of life, and if the Sun of Righteousness do not dispel the moral mists and fogs before noon, the whole day generally remains overspread and gloomy. It is the seed-time; and “what a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

Everything of importance is effected by religion in this period of life.

Piety in youth will have a good influence over your bodies. It will preserve them from disease and deformity. Sin variously tends to the injury of health; and often by intemperance the constitution is so impaired, that late religion is unable to restore what

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early religion would have prevented. The unpleasantness which you see in many faces is more the effect of evil tempers brooding within, while the features are forming and maturing, than of any natural defect. After such disagreeable traits are established, religion comes too late to alter the physiognomy of the countenance; and thus it is obliged, however lovely in itself, to wear through life a face, corroded with envy, malignant with revenge, scowling with suspicion and distrust, or haughty with scorn and contempt.

Early piety will have a good influence over your secular concerns. Nothing is so likely to raise a man in the world. It produces a fair character; it procures confidence and esteem; it promotes diligence, frugality, and charity; it attracts the blessing of Heaven, which "maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it." For, says God, "them that honour me, I will honour." "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the first-fruits of all thy increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall gush out with new wine." "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

Early piety will have a good influence to secure you from all those dangers to which you are exposed in a season of life the most perilous. Conceive of a youth entering a world like this, destitute of the presiding, governing care of religion—his passions high, his prudence weak—impatient, rash, confident—without experience—a thousand avenues of seduc-

tion opening around him, and a syren voice singing at the entrance of each—pleased with appearances, and embracing them for realities—joined by evil

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company—ensnared by erroneous publications!—the hazards, my young friends, exceed all the alarm I can give. You may flatter yourselves that your own good sense and moral feelings will secure you; but “he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.” The power of temptation, the force of example, the influence of circumstances, in new and untried situations, are inconceivable; they baffle the clearest conviction and the firmest resolution, and often render us an astonishment to ourselves. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not to thine own understanding: in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.” Follow him, and “thou shalt walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble.” His grace, and his providence, will be thy guard and thy conductor. And “wilt thou not from this time cry unto” Him, “My Father, thou art the guide of my youth?”

Early piety will have a beneficial influence in forming your connexions, and establishing your plans for life—you will ask counsel of the Lord, and arrange all your schemes under the superintendency of Scripture, which contains the wisdom of God. Those changes which a person is obliged to make, who becomes religious in manhood, are always very embarrassing. With what difficulty do some good men establish family worship. after living, in the view of children and servants, so long in the neglect of it! But this would have been avoided, had they early followed the example of Joshua—“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” How hard is it to disentangle ourselves from associates, with whom

we have been long familiar, and who have proved a snare to our souls!—but we should never have linked

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ourselves with them, had we early listened to the voice of truth—"My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise, and a companion of fools shall be destroyed." Some evils are remediless. Persons have formed alliances which they cannot dissolve: but they did not walk by the rule, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." They are now wedded to misery all their days; and repentance, instead of visiting them like a faithful friend, to chide them when they do wrong, and withdraw, is quartered upon them for life.

We may view the influence of youthful piety, as connected with your spiritual progress and pleasure. In every science, profession, and business, early application is deemed necessary to future excellency. He is not likely to surpass others, who began long after them. As soon as the grand purpose of a man is fixed, he has something always to regulate him, always to engage him; he secures much action, which would otherwise be dispersed and useless; he avails himself of all accidental assistance, and turns every stream into this swelling channel. An early dedication also renders a religious life more easy and pleasant. Use facilitates: a repetition of action produces habits; and habits formed, yield delight in those exercises which formed them. What was irksome at first becomes by custom agreeable, and we even refuse a change. And this is peculiarly the case here: for religion will bear examination; it improves on intimacy; fresh excellences are perpetually discovered; fresh succours are daily afforded; and every new victory inspires new hope, and produces new energy.

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Your piety, my young friends, will be of unspeakable advantage in the calamities of life. These you cannot reasonably expect to escape. "Man is born to trouble." Whatever affords us pleasure, has power to give us pain. Possessions are precarious. Friends die. When his gourds wither, what becomes of the wretch who has no other shade? But "to the upright there ariseth light in the darkness." Though Divine grace does not ensure exemption from calamity, it turns the curse into a blessing: it enters the house of mourning, and soothes the troubled mind: it prepares us for all, sustains us in all, sanctifies us by all, delivers us from all.

Early piety will bless old age. When the "evil days come, and the years draw near, in which you will say, we have no pleasure"—when "the clouds return after the rain"—when "those that look out of the windows are darkened"—when "the grasshopper is a burden, and desire fails," and you are approaching your "long home"—you will not be destitute of consolation. Your "hoary hairs are a crown of glory," for "they are found in the way of righteousness." You enjoy the esteem and assistance of those who have witnessed your worth, and have been blessed by your example. God views you as an "old disciple," and "remembers the kindness of your youth." With humble confidence you may address Him—"O God! thou hast taught me from my youth; and hitherto have I declared thy wondrous works: now also, when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not." And what saith the answer of God? "Even to your old age I am he, and even to hoary hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will

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deliver you." You can look back with pleasure on some instances of usefulness: to some poor traveller

you have been a refreshing stream; some deluded wanderer you guided into "the path of peace." You review with satisfaction some peculiar places of devotion; some "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord;" some "holy days" in which, "with the voice of joy and gladness," you accompanied "the multitude to his house." You look forward, and see the God who has guided you "with his counsel," ready to "receive you to glory." "My salvation is nearer than when I believed: the night is far spent, the day is at hand. I know that my Redeemer liveth. I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand: I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." Such is the beneficial influence of early piety. It affects our bodies, our circumstances, our preservation, our connexions, our progress and pleasure in the ways of godliness, the troubles of life, and the burdens of age. But if all these advantages do not allure you to an immediate attention to religion, and you resolve to suspend your concern till a future period, it will be necessary,

PART III. To take a more awful view of the subject, and to examine the consequences of procrastination: We can only make two suppositions. The one is, that after all your delay you will obtain repentance. The other, and which is much more probable, is, that you will not.

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First, we shall conclude that you will obtain repentance. This is what you hope for; but allowing your hope to be well-founded, nothing can be more unreasonable than your delay. For would you indulge yourselves in a course of sin, because you

hope to be able hereafter to repent of it? Can anything exceed this extravagance of folly? Would any man in his senses continue in a business, because he hoped that at last it would fill him with painful regret and self-abhorrence; because he hoped before his death to condemn himself for engaging in it, as having acted a part the most foolish, base, and injurious? Real repentance is always an awful thing: it leads the subject of it to feel that his "iniquities are a burden too heavy for him to bear;" it causes him to "loathe himself for all" his "abominations;" it fills him with "shame, and confusion of face;" it renders him "speechless." This it does at all times. But in a late repentance, in a repentance after so many criminal delays, there are four peculiar circumstances of aggravation. The first is drawn from your singular abuse of the Divine goodness. For what encourages you to refuse so long the obedience which God demands? You hope he will at last show mercy: were it not for this confidence, you could not venture to delay. What then, when you go to God, will be the language of your negligence? "Lord, I have been evil, because thou wast good! It was not because I considered thee a hard master, that I did not serve thee, but because I believed thee to be a kind one. Persuaded of thy compassion, and readiness to pardon, I have peaceably sinned against thee for sixty years. If thou hadst not been so infinitely worthy of my affection and devotion, I had long ago loved and obeyed thee." A second arises from the multitude

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of evil to be reviewed. It is distressing enough to examine a week, or a month, stained with the vileness of sin. But, oh! to look back upon years! multiplied years! to see sins rushing out of every relation, every condition in which we have been found! So many opportunities lost! so many talents misemployed! so many privileges abused! a life barren of goodness! a whole life of guilt! A third is taken

from injury done to others. If God has forgiven him, how can he forgive himself! By his errors, his vices, his example, and his influence, he has led others into sins, from which he cannot reclaim them: he sees them advancing in the way of destruction, and knows that he instructed and encouraged them to enter it. Happy is the youth, who, by an early conversion, is preserved from being a "corrupter," and who is harmless, if not "useful in his passage through life." To charge ourselves with the loss of one soul, is sufficient, not only to embitter repentance, but, if it were possible, to produce even anguish in heaven. The fourth is to be found in the uncertainty which necessarily attends such deferred repentance. For how can he be assured of the truth of it? How can he know that he has not only abandoned sin, but is mortified to it? How can he know that he is not only reformed, but renewed? Principles are to be ascertained by their operations and effects; but what opportunity has he to exemplify them? How can he know that his concern is anything more than fear awakened, or tears extorted, by the approach of death and judgment? Men may change their work, and not their master. We have seen men in circumstances of sickness, giving all the evidence we could desire of a genuine repentance, whose

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health and whose wickedness returned together. How will you decide whether your repentance be superior to this? "What reason will you have for cruel suspicion! How dreadful to be in a state of perplexity, when, above all things, you need a good hope through grace! To suspend salvation on a venture! Perhaps, I am on the confines of heaven; perhaps, I am on the verge of hell!

Our reasoning has thus far proceeded on a supposition that you will obtain repentance hereafter,

though you are resolved to live neglectful of God now. But there is another supposition—you may not obtain it; and this, we contend, is much more probable than the former. For who has told you that you shall live to repent? Have you made a covenant with death? Are you secure from the jeopardy of diseases and accidents? You expect the Master in the evening—who assures you that he will not come in the morning? Stand forth, ye young and ye healthy—did you never hear of one dying at your age, and in your circumstances? A wise writer has told you that “Sixteen is mortal as fourscore;” and an inspired one, “Man also knoweth not his time. As the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.”

Or who has assured you that you shall have grace to repent? For to grace only can you look for the effect; and this grace must be little less than miraculous. View a man who has reached the period of your procrastination. His strength is labour and sorrow—the infirmities of the body weigh down the soul—the senses are impaired—the faculties are be-

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numbed—he is incapable of attention—every trifle disconcerts him—he is more than half dead before he begins to think of living—he is preparing to “run the race set before him” when he is unable any longer to breathe. Conscience calling so long in vain, is now silent. Objects so long familiar to the mind, are become unimpressive. He has passed by threatenings so often, that they cease to terrify him. The present Bible has done nothing, and no new one is to be expected. He has not been led to repentance by “Moses and the prophets, neither would he be persuaded though one rose from the dead.” “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for “an old sinner” to enter into the kingdom

of heaven;" "with men it is impossible; but with God all things are possible"—On this hinge turns his hope—all is reduced to this—the repentance of such a man must depend upon grace. Let us see then what reason you have to conclude that God will grant you this repentance. God waits to be gracious; and of this grace we cannot speak too highly: but such views of it as encourage presumption and countenance sin are unquestionably erroneous ones. He is gracious—but his grace lives in communion with his holiness and his wisdom. He is gracious—but the very notion supposes the exercise of it to be free, and that he may dispense it as he pleases. Though nothing can deserve his goodness, many things may provoke it: and what reason have you to expect, that after you can sin no longer, he will in an extraordinary way extend the grace you have so long despised. and save you from a ruin the consequence of your Own choice? And what view have you of God, if you suppose that he cannot righteously deny it?

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When you have rendered yourselves most unworthy of it as a gift, do you exact it as a right? Has he not told you that his "Spirit shall not always strive with men?" Is his mercy to have no limits, or his patience no end? If "sentence against an evil work be not executed speedily," is it never to be executed? Were it common for God to call sinners by his grace at such a period, would it not have the most unfavourable effect, and encourage a hope which all the Bible is levelled to destroy? God designs to be honoured by his people in this world. He saves them—that they may serve him: he converts them—not to die, but to live. And therefore we find few, very few, becoming religious in advanced years: and observation abundantly proves that irreligious youth is almost constantly followed with wickedness in manhood, and indifference in old age; and that as men live, so they die.

Ah! how often do I think, as I ascend these stairs, and look round on this assembly, how easy would it be to determine my hearers to a religious course, if the old did not fatally promise themselves weeks; the middle-aged, months; and the young, years to come! It is not absolute denial that destroys so many souls, but tampering delay. Of all the numbers who continually drop into perdition, is there one, who did not intend at some future period to "work out his salvation?" But before this other passion was fully indulged, and this other scheme was accomplished, while he was slumbering in negligence, or awaked by a midnight cry, he sprang up to find his lamp;—the "Bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage, and the door was shut." Eternal God! "so teach us to number our

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days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." Interpose in favour of the youth who are before Thee; and suffer not procrastination, that "thief of time," that "child of the devil," that "enemy of all righteousness," to deceive and to destroy the rising hopes of our families, our churches, and our country. "Pour down thy Spirit upon our seed, and thy blessing upon our offspring." "May one say, I am the Lord's; and another call himself by the name of Jacob; and another subscribe with his own hand, and surname himself by the name of Israel."

To realize this pleasing prospect, let ministers, let tutors, let all unite their endeavours. But, O ye parents, a peculiar obligation devolves upon you. Awaken all your tenderness and anxiety, and give them a spiritual direction. You wish your children to be sober, submissive, dutiful—but piety is the only sure foundation of morality. You would not have your love for your children to be suspected—but wretched are those children who share only in a solicitude, which asks, "what shall they eat, or what shall they drink, or wherewithal shall they be clothed?"

What is the body to the soul? What is time to eternity? "What is it to dispose of them advantageously in life, and leave them unprepared for death, unprovided for a new, a never-ending, period of existence? Are you the barbarous instruments of bringing these hapless beings into life, only to sacrifice them? Such parents are more cruel than Herod. He slew the children of others—these slay their own. He only destroyed the body—these destroy the soul. His victims died innocent, and were doubtless saved—these parents will not suffer their offspring to die innocent: by their unkind care, they guard them

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till the season of safety is elapsed; till they are become accountable, and criminal; and expose them, when they know their death will be attended with their damnation. Men and brethren, escape this dreadful censure—distinguish yourselves not only from an openly wicked world, but from those modern professors of religion, who are always found in public, hearing sermons, but can leave their families in disorder, and take no pains in the pious education of their children. Fear God yourselves, and teach your offspring to fear him. Recommend instruction by example, and crown all with prayer—prayer for them, and with them. Thus you will "train them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord;" thus you will rejoice here "to see them walking in the truth," and hereafter will lead them to the Throne of Glory; saying, "Behold, here am I, and the children thou hast given me."

But it is with you, my hearers in early life, I wish to close this address. I see some in this assembly who are distinguished by the fear of God in their youth: some Isaacs, who prefer an evening-walk in the field, to meditate, to the crowded avenues of dissipation: some Josephs, whose image is "a fruitful bough by a well:" some Davids, who love the harps of Zion, and have no ear for "the song of the

drunkard," or "the mirth of fools:" some Timothies, who "from children have known the Scripture, which is able to make them wise unto salvation:" and I hail you on your early escape from "the paths of the destroyer," on your early separation from a world which attracts only to show its emptiness, and elevates only to depress; on your early union with the wise and good. Go forth, and in all "the beau-

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ties of holiness" honour God, and serve your generation according to his will. Religiously occupy the stations which you are to ennoble, and form the connexions which you are to bless. "Adorn the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things." Earnestly pursue the glorious course which you have begun; be not weary in well-doing; grow in grace, as you advance in years; "abound more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment;" "approve things that are excellent;" and "be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ."

And what hinders any of you, my young friends, from joining yourselves to the Lord? Weigh the reasonings which you have heard. Suspend for a while the influence of your passions, and endeavour to feel the force of the motives which have been adduced. Deliberate, or rather decide; for there is no time for hesitation—"now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation." The language of the Redeemer is, "To-day;" and will you say, with Pharaoh, "To-morrow?" Every delay will leave you more remote from the God you have to seek—every delay will place more barriers between you and heaven—every delay will increase your crimes, your passions, your aversions—every day will diminish the efficacy of means, the period of Divine patience, the time of your probation. While you hesitate, you die; while you promise yourselves years, perhaps you have not days—perhaps the shuttle has passed the loom that wove thy winding-sheet—perhaps in yon-

der shop lies rolled up, and ready to be severed off, the piece of cloth destined to be thy shroud; perhaps “the feet of them that have buried thy” companion, are at the door, “to carry thee out!”

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“When Felix trembled, instead of cherishing his concern, he proposed a “more convenient season,” which—never came. It was the unhappy state of Agrippa to be “almost, but not altogether persuaded to be a Christian.” And there are young people—how shall I describe them? They had be-times convictions and impressions—their early days were the time of their visitation—they asked for God their Maker; they often retired to pray; they loved the Sabbath; they heard the Gospel with sensibility—but, alas! “their goodness was as a morning cloud and early dew, which passeth away.” But “was it not better with you then than now?”—Ah! had you still “hearkened to His commandments, then had your peace been as a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea.” Will this discourse revive your former feelings, and cause you to return? Or will it only hold you up as a warning, to guard others against trifling with conscience, and falling away after the same example?

On some of you, I fear, the address has been more than useless. I could wish you had saved yourselves the mortification of hearing a discourse, in which there was nothing agreeable to your taste, and which you determined from the beginning to disregard; I could wish you had withdrawn yourselves from an assembly, which will one day furnish only witnesses against you. By an unsanctified use of the means of grace, you aggravate your sin, you increase your misery, and you render your conversion more difficult, In endeavouring to be your friends, your ministers become your enemies; in trying to save, they condemn: though ordained to be “the savour of life unto life,” your corruption

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renders them “the savour of death unto death;” and those affectionate importunities and faithful warnings, which, if they had been regarded, would have secured your happiness, will surround your minds when you come to die, and render your recollection painful, and your prospect intolerable—For you will “mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me! I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly.”

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SERMON VII.

THE CONDEMNATION OF

SELF-WILL.

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SERMON VII.

THE CONDEMNATION OF

SELF-WILL.

“Should it be according to thy mind?” JOB xxxiv. 33.

“O THAT I were made judge in the land; that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto

me, and I would do him justice!" Such was the language of Absalom, when labouring to promote and to justify a measure, the design of which was to exclude David from the throne, and to establish a usurper. It is the common eloquence of faction, which always knows how much easier it is to censure than to reform; which loves to talk of the facility of government, and to hide the difficulties; which is sure to fix on evils that are often unavoidable, and to disregard advantages, in the procuring of which human prudence has some share; and which is ever making comparisons between long-established institutions, the sober value of which cannot strike with the freshness of novelty, and the charming scenes to be found in the paradise of speculation.

Who is not ready to condemn Absalom? or Young

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man, while the king is employed in the cares and perplexities of empire, it is an easy thing for you to sit in the gate, and deal forth your reflections and your promises. Are you not a subject? Are you not a son? Are you not, in experience, and every other qualification, inferior to your father and your sovereign?"

I go further—If a person were to rise up in this assembly, and endeavour to draw away disciples after him; if, holding the same language with regard to God which Absalom used with regard to David, he should say, "O that I were made governor in the world! Things should not be as they now are. The ways of the Lord are not equal: the Almighty perverts judgment"—I am persuaded you would be ready to drive him from the sanctuary, and to stone him with stones, saying, "Thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, when wilt thou cease to pervert the right ways of God?" But what, my hearers, if there should be found here, of such a description, not one character only, but many? what

if, in condemning this supposed blasphemer, you have pronounced judgment on yourselves? “Why, the sentiment, in various degrees, prevails in all mankind. If they do not avow it, they indulge it; if they do not express it in words, it is to be derived by fair inference from their actions. For are they not displeased with the Divine proceedings? Do they not murmur at those events which, under His administration, are perpetually occurring? Are they not always suggesting arrangements which they deem preferable to those which the Governor of the world has planned?

This is the subject which is to engage your atten-

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tion at this hour: and it is a subject of superior importance, and will be found to possess a commanding influence over your duty and your happiness. Observe the words which we have read as the foundation of this exercise—“Should it be according to thy mind?” The speaker is Elihu; a personage which the sacred historian introduces in a manner so extraordinary, that commentators know not what to make of him. Some have taken him for the Son of God; others, for a prophet; all, for a wise and good man. The meaning of the question is obvious—“Shall the Supreme Being do nothing without thy consent? Should he ask counsel of thee? Ought he to regulate his dispensations according to thy views and desires? Should it be according to thy mind? “He does not specify any particular case; which makes the inquiry the more striking and useful, and justifies an application of it the most general and comprehensive. Elihu, like the other friends of Job, said some things harsh, and improper; but when he asked, “Should it be according to thy mind?” Job should instantly have answered, No. And were your preacher to address the same question individually to this assembly, you should all immediately answer, No. To bring you to this temper, we shall enlarge on

the desire of having things “according to our mind.” I. As common. II. As unreasonable. III. As criminal. IV. As dangerous. V. As impracticable. “Consider what I say, and the Lord give you understanding in all things.”

I. To have things “according to our mind” is a very common wish. Man is naturally self-willed. The disposition appears very early in our children.

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All sin is a contention against the will of God. It began in paradise. Adam disobeyed the prohibition to “touch of the tree of knowledge of good and evil,” and all his posterity have, unhappily, followed his example. What God forbids, we desire and pursue; what he enjoins, we dislike and oppose. Yea, “the carnal mind is enmity against God: it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.”

Enter the world of grace. Behold the revelation which God has given us—One deems it unnecessary—for a second, it is too simple—for a third, it is too mysterious. See Jesus Christ crucified—He is “to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness.” God has “set” his “King upon his holy hill of Zion,” and has sworn, “that to him every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess”—the language of those who hear this determination is, “We will not have this man to reign over us.” When we begin to think of returning to God, it is not by the way which “He has consecrated for us,” but by a way of our own devising. We labour, not despairing of our own strength. while prophets and apostles teach us to implore help, and to place all our dependence on Him, whose “grace” alone “is sufficient for” us. We seek to be justified by our own works, while the Gospel assures us we must be justified by “the faith of Christ”—and many a proud Naaman exclaims, “Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may

I not wash in them, and be clean?" So he turns and goes away in "a rage."

And the same is to be seen in the world of Providence. Who is "content with such things as" he has? Who does not covet what is denied him?

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Who does not envy the superior condition of his neighbour? Who does not long to be at his own disposal? If he draw off his eyes from others, and look inwardly, every man will find a "Pope in his own bosom"—he would have everything according to his own mind—he would have his own mind the measure of all he does towards God, and of all God does towards him.

Acknowledged—But is not this disposition crushed in conversion, and are not the Lord's "people made willing in the day of his power?" See Saul of Tarsus on his knees: "Behold, he prayeth"—"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" David wraps himself up in the stillness of patience and submission: "I was dumb; I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." There stands old Eli: he has received the most distressing intelligence, and piously exclaims, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth him good." A gracious woman, in deep affliction, was once heard to say. "I mourn, but I do not murmur." We have read of one, who, when informed that her two sons, her only children, were drowned, said, in all the majesty of grief, and with an heavenly composure, "I see God is resolved to have all my heart, and I am resolved He shall have it."—Ah! here you behold the saints in their choicest moments, and in their best frames—for their sanctification is imperfect in all its parts—too much of this self-will remains even in them—they are most gratified when they find the Divine proceedings falling into the direction which they had prescribed—they are too much elated when their schemes succeed, and too

much depressed when their hopes are frustrated. They do indeed love the will of God; and we are

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far from saying that they would have nothing done according to His mind; but they are often solicitous to have too many things done according to their own.

II. The desire is unreasonable. This will easily appear—for we are wholly unqualified to govern; while God is every way adequate to the work in which he is engaged. Therefore nothing can be more absurd than to labour to displease him, and substitute ourselves as the creators of destiny, the regulators of events. For, to throw open this thought—his power is almighty; his resources are boundless: “his understanding is infinite.” He sees all things, in their origin, in their connexions, in their dependences, in their remote effects. He is “wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.” This is the Being you wish to set aside—and who is to be his successor in empire? You, a worm of the earth; you, whose “foundation is in the dust;” you, who are “crushed before the moth;” you, who are of “yesterday, and know nothing;” you, who “know not what a day may bring forth.”

Placed in an obscure corner of the universe, where only a small proportion of God’s works passes under his review; fixed in a valley, whose surrounding hills intercept his prospects: a prisoner even there, looking only through grates and bars; his very dungeon enveloped in mists and fogs; his eyes also dim by reason of weakness—such is man! and this “vain man would be wise;” this is the candidate, who deems himself, by his proposal, capable of governing, and wishes to arrange things according to his mind.

My brethren, have you not often found yourselves mistaken, where you thought yourselves most sure?

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Have you not frequently erred in judging yourselves, and generally erred in judging others? Do you not blame those who condemn any of your proceedings before they understand them, especially when the objects on which they decide fall not within the sphere of their knowledge or observation? What would you think of a subject, who, scarcely competent to guide the petty concerns of his own household, would rush forth to assume the direction of the affairs of an enlarged empire, after censuring measures which he does not comprehend, cannot comprehend; whose labyrinths he cannot trace, whose extensive bearings he cannot reach, whose distant consequences he cannot calculate? All this imagery is weak when applied to “the man who striveth with his Maker,” and “asks, what dost Thou?” For whatever differences subsist between man and man, all are partakers of the same nature, and all are liable to err—But “in God there is no darkness at all.” “Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid: how then could God judge the world?”

If we know not the peculiarities of the disease, how can we judge properly of the remedy which the physician prescribes? If we know not the station which the son is destined to occupy, how can we judge of the wisdom of the father in the education he is giving him? And how can we decide on the means which the Supreme Being employs, while we are ignorant of the reasons which move him, and the plan which he holds in view? A providence occurs; it strikes us; we endeavour to explain it—but are we certain that we have seized the true meaning? Perhaps what we take as an end, may be only the way; what we take as the whole, may be only a

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part; what we deprecate may be a blessing, and what we implore may be a curse; what appears confusion, may be the tendencies of order; and what looks like the disaster of Providence, may be the preparation of its triumph. "Canst thou, by searching, find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? Such knowledge is too wonderful for us: it is high; we cannot attain unto it. O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways are past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?" Do not misunderstand the inference we would draw from these premises—There is nothing shameful in the limitation of our powers, nor should we be miserable because we possess only a degree of intelligence: but let us not forget our ignorance; let us not "darken counsel, by words without knowledge;" let us not summon to our tribunal "the only wise God," and condemn all that accords not with our contracted notions. Before we begin to reform, let us be satisfied an amendment is necessary; and before we censure, let us understand.

III. The desire of having things "according to our mind" is criminal—The sources are bad. "Men do not gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles."

It argues ingratitude. It is infinite condescension in God to be "mindful of us;" to be willing to manage our concerns; and to allow us to cast all our care upon him, with an assurance that "he careth for us," and will make "all things work together for our good." For all this he surely deserves our thankful acknowledgments—and we insult him with

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murmuring complaints! What can be more vile, than for a poor dependent creature, who holds his

very being by the good pleasure of his Maker, and possesses nothing underived from the bounty of his Benefactor, to overlook so many expressions of his goodness, because he complies not with every fond desire! What can be baser than our repining, when the very same kindness which urges Providence to give, determines it also to refuse!

It springs from discontent. It shows that we are displeased with his dealings; for if we were not dissatisfied, why do we desire a change? This was the sin of the Israelites in wishing a king. It did not consist in desiring a monarchy: they would have sinned equally in demanding any other form of government. But they were under the immediate empire of God: He had not pleased them; they would set him right; they “charged him foolishly;”—they would be like “the rest of the nations,” when it was his pleasure that they should be a peculiar people—“The people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.”

It betrays earthly-mindedness. The soul feels it when “cleaving to the dust.” According to our attachments, will be, all through life, our afflictions and our perplexities. When you find yourselves in prosperous circumstances, surrounded with affluence and friends, enjoying health and peace, the providence of God is not only agreeable, but intelligible. We never hear you exclaim, as you “join house to house, and add field to field,” “Oh, how mysterious the dealings of God are!” But when the scene is reversed—then, not only hard thoughts of God are entertained, but all is embarrassment; “His way

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is in the sea, and his path in the deep waters. and his footsteps are not known.” What! does not God still continue to govern? Has he less wisdom in a cloudy day than in a fine one? Does every dispensation of Providence become intricate as soon as it affects you? Are you so innocent as to render

it doubtful whether you can be lawfully touched? Are you such attentive scholars as to render a stroke of the rod a mystery? Is God, in blessing his people, confined to one class of means only? Do not “these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory?” So much more attached are we to our fleshly interests than to our spiritual concerns; so much more are we influenced by “things seen and temporal, than by those things which are unseen and eternal.”

It is the produce of impatience. This will suffer no delay. It can bear no denial. It struggles to be free from all control, and cries, “Let us break” his “bands asunder, and cast away” these “cords from us.”

It is the offspring of pride and independence—the cursed disposition which expelled angels from heaven, and Adam from paradise. In a word, it is a presumptuous invasion of the authority and prerogative of God. Your place is the footstool, not the throne: you are to follow, not to lead; to obey, not to dictate. Suppose a stranger, or a neighbour, should come into your family, and begin to new-place the ornaments and utensils of your rooms; to order your children, to command your servants, to rule your house—on what principle would you blame him? This is not his office; this is not his province; he is an intruder. Maintain your distance here,

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and do not encroach on the Divine rights. You did not create the universe; it does not depend on your care; the world is not yours, nor the fulness thereof—no, nor even yourselves: ye are not your own—but there is One to whom the whole belongs; “He is Lord of all.” God cannot have an equal, and he will not have a rival. A prince may be pleased, if his subjects endeavour to imitate him in his mercy, his goodness, his truth, or in any of those virtues which are common to persons in all

situations—hereby they honour him—but if they imitate him in his regalia—in those attributes and actions which are peculiar to him as a king; if, like him, they aspire to wear a crown, to enact laws, to declare peace and war, to levy contributions, to new-model the state; they are guilty of high-treason.

IV. The desire of having things “according to our mind” is dangerous. If it were accomplished, all parties would suffer—God—our fellow-creatures—and ourselves.

First, The honour of God would suffer. Nothing now occurs by chance; everything falls under the regulation of Divine Providence; and as affairs are now managed, they all subserve the purpose of Heaven, they all advance the glory of God; even “the wrath of man praises him, and the remainder of it he restrains.” Would this be the sure result. if you had the direction of the whole? Would you make the honour of God invariably your guide? Would you bend every claim and every occurrence to this sublime end? You may imagine you would—and nothing is more common than to hear people making costly promises, the execution of which only

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requires enlarged opportunities and capacities—But “the heart is deceitful above all things.” No man has reason to conclude that he would glorify God with greater powers, who does not employ for him the abilities which he already possesses. We may see this exemplified with regard to property. Many professors of religion whose wealth has increased, do less in proportion, and I fear in some cases less in fact, for the cause of God, than while in more limited circumstances, and when their prospects were not flattering enough to render it worth while for them to become covetous.

Secondly, The welfare of our fellow-creatures would suffer. The principle of selfishness is com-

mon to depraved nature. For who loves his neighbour as himself? Who, in forming his plans, would consider the conveniences and advantages of others, as well as his own? The traveller would have the weather to accommodate his journey, regardless of the parched fields of the husbandman. That enemy would be disappointed and crushed. That favourite would be indulged to ruin. Selfish individuality would everywhere predominate, and public utility would be sacrificed on the altar of private interest.

To come nearer—Your own “happiness would, thirdly, suffer; and you would prove the greatest enemies to yourselves. You would be too eager to choose well: you would not have firmness to refuse a present gratification for the sake of a future good. You would be too carnal to choose well: nature would speak before grace; the pleasing would be preferred to the profitable; imaginary wants would be more numerous than real ones. The Israelites were clamorous for “flesh;” but it was not to relieve

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their necessities: “they asked meat for their lusts;” and “He gave them their hearts’ desire, but sent leanness into their souls.” As, in nature, the most beautiful plants are not always the most wholesome or innocent, so it is in human life: a thing is not beneficial because it is gratifying, or good because our passions and appetites may pronounce it so. “Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan.” It was a sensual choice; faith had no influence in this determination: it was made, regardless of the welfare of his soul, the salvation of his family, and the honour of religion. And in what embarrassments, dangers, and calamities, did this preference involve him! The next time we hear of him, he is taken captive by the five kings—then “his righteous soul is vexed daily by the filthy conversation of the ungodly”—then he is

burnt out, with the loss of all his substance—some of his relations perish in the overthrow—his wife, attached to the place, looks back, and becomes a pillar of salt—his two daughters, made shameless by the manners of the inhabitants, render their father incestuous—and his “grey hairs are brought down with sorrow to the grave.”

In a word, you would be too ignorant to choose well. Did you ever observe the question of the inspired preacher—“Who knoweth what is good for man in this life; all the days of this vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?” The answer is, No one knows. Look around you, and you will see men eager to change their conditions, but proving, by their behaviour in the new stations they occupy, that they are no nearer satisfaction than before.

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They rush forth, assured of finding a paradise, but thorns and briars soon convince them that they are entangled in a wilderness. The man of business and the man of leisure envy each other; they exchange, and go on complaining. The poor imagine that wealth would free them from care: they obtain it; but, “in the fulness of their sufficiency they are in straits.” The retired long for stations of eminence; but, beside the trouble and danger of climbing the steep ascent of honour, they are compelled to leave their enjoyments in the vale below; often from the brow of the hill surveying them; often desiring them—but they cannot get down again.

In order to determine what will promote our happiness, it is necessary for us to know the things themselves from among which we are to make our choice: how far it is in their power to yield pleasure; whether their natural tendency may not be counteracted; what are their ordinary effects. Nor is it less needful to understand ourselves. For a man must

be adapted to his condition, or he will never be happy in it; that which suits another, may not suit me; what may wear easy on him, may be an incumbrance to me. Now to know whether a condition would accord with us, and be to our advantage, we must know ourselves better than we do: our strength and our weakness; our natural peculiarities and our acquired propensities; our intellectual abilities and our moral qualifications. And here another difficulty occurs. It is impossible for us to judge of ourselves in untried connexions and situations; and the reason is obvious. We go forward to these scenes in imagination only, with our present sentiments and inclinations, not remembering that our characters are

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formed and unfolded by circumstances—that we change with events—that the friction of new objects elicits new feelings, quickens dormant guilt, and calls forth improbable corruption. The water is clear till the muddy sediment is disturbed. In private life, Hazael abhorred the thought of inhumanity. When the man of God viewed him with tears, and predicted the cruelties of his future reign, he was filled with horror, and exclaimed. “Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this thing?” But he went forward—arrived at the foot of the throne—exchanged the man for the tyrant—and became the monster which he had execrated.

We are not only liable to err on the side of our hopes, but also of our fears. What in distant prospect filled us with anxiety and dread, as it approached more near, was found the beginning of a train of friends and blessings, all hastening along to do us good. Had Joseph remained under the wing of his fond father, he would have lived and died an insignificant individual; but from the pit and the prison he steps into the second chariot of Egypt, and becomes the saviour of surrounding countries. Ah! if things had been arranged according to your mind, what afflictions would some of you have escaped, and what

benefits would you have lost! For though no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous, nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby." And should we not principally value that which is morally good for us; that which influences and secures our eternal welfare; that by which the safety of the soul is least endangered, and the sanctification of the soul is most promoted? Upon this principle, I am persuaded, many of you are ready to

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add your testimony to the confessions of former sufferers, and to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." "Disease," says one, "commissioned from above, sought me out, found me in a crowd, detached me from the multitude, led me into a chamber of solitude, stretched me upon a bed of languishing, and drew up eternity close to my view—I never prayed before." Says another, "My life was bound up in a beloved relation: I saw my gourd smitten, and beginning to wither; I trembled; I watched the process of a danger which doomed all my happiness to the grave—in that moment of bereavement, the world, which had enamoured, was deprived of all its attractions; I broke from the arms of sympathising friends, saying, Where is God my Maker that giveth songs in the night? I entered my closet, and said, Now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in thee." "Into what miseries," says a third, "should I have fallen, if He had given me up in such an enterprise to my own counsel! I should have advanced till I had fallen from a dangerous precipice, if He had not hedged up my way with thorns: at first, I murmured at the check; but when I looked over, and saw the abyss, I kneeled, and said, Lord, I am thine; save me, in every future peril." Thus, by experience, He has been convincing you, that "the way of man is not in himself," and that "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps;" and

having seen the hazards to which you would be exposed in managing for yourselves, you are now on your knees, saying, "He shall choose our inheritance for us. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned from his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child."

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We have one more view to take of the subject. The desire of having things "according to our mind," is impracticable.

Observe only two things. First, the desires of mankind, in ten thousand instances, are opposite to each other—hence they cannot be all accomplished. Secondly, the plan of Divine government is already fixed—the machine is in motion—it is rolling by, and we can neither arrest its progress, nor give it a new direction. "He is in one mind, and who can turn Him? and what his soul desireth, even that He doeth; for He performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him. Our God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he pleased: declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." How useless therefore is your anxiety! "Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit to his stature." You may repine; but you fret and rage in vain. God will not yield up the reins into your hands. "He teareth himself in his anger: shall the earth be forsaken for thee? and shall the rock be removed out of his place?" "Should it be according to thy mind? He will recompense it, whether thou refuse, or whether thou choose." Having established a general principle, it will be necessary to make such an application as will preclude the abuse of it, and render it useful to promote resignation, to encourage our faith, and to animate our hope.

First, Let not the conscientious Christian suppose himself guilty of the disposition we censure, when he only indulges allowed desire. You may ask of

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God any temporal blessing conditionally, and with submission to the pleasure of the Almighty. Are you in trouble? Afflictions are not immutable dispensations; and your praying for their removal will not be striving with Providence, if you are willing to refer the case ultimately to the determination of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness, and to acquiesce in the decision. Thus did our Saviour; "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." To offer a humble petition differs widely from making a demand, or proposing a condition. When our desires are rash, unqualified, impetuous, enforcing, they are not only offensive to God, but they injure the soul, and they injure our cause. If, to use the expression, when we insist upon an object, we are gratified, the indulgence is dreadful—it is a curse. Thus God punished the sinful importunity of the Jews: "He gave them a king in his anger, and took him away in his wrath." But if he loves you, in such a case he will be sure to deny you; he will teach you, by his refusal, that he has a right to withhold, and that you have no claims upon the Giver: he will bring you to supplicate what before you seemed to demand. He sees that while you are thus passionately eager, he cannot with safety indulge you with the object; you would make too much of it. He is a God of judgment, and he waits a cooler and more sober frame of mind; when you can receive it properly, and not be so lost in the gift, as to disregard the Giver. The best way for a Christian to gain any temporal good, is to seek after a holy indifference. The moment it ceases to be dangerous, He will be ready to gratify you, for "He taketh pleasure in the prosperity of his servants."

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Secondly, The subject preaches submission. It powerfully urges you to leave yourselves to the disposal of Divine Providence—to lie as clay in the hands of the potter; willing to receive any shape he chooses to give you, or to take any impression he is pleased to impose—to keep your eye towards the fiery cloudy pillar, and to be ready to move as it moves, turn as it turns, pause as it pauses. And is not all this implied in your profession, resolutions, and vows? Do you not remember a time when you gave your God what you had too long withheld from him—your heart? And have you not often since renewed this engagement? Are there no seasons in your experience, no spots in your walks, made sacred in your recollection by fresh dedications of yourselves to Him? When the will is in unison with the will of God, which is perfect rectitude, it is ennobled. To be like-minded with God, is the highest honour we can ever possess: to surrender ourselves to his pleasure, is the purest act of obedience we can ever perform. It is the essence of holiness, to do what God loves, and to love what God does. And as nothing can be more pious, so nothing can be more wise than such a resignation. If your will corresponds with the will of God, you may be always sure of its accomplishment: “Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.” This is the only way to be happy in a miserable world: on this all your satisfaction depends. He knows what things you have need of, and what will be for your advantage. Depend on Him. Follow Him. Secure His favour. Refer all to Him, and leave all with Him. “It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so he giveth his beloved

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sleep.” “Be careful for nothing; but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let

your requests be made known unto God—and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Thirdly, Let the subject inspire you with consolation. Make use of the question to repress all the uneasiness which you would otherwise feel when you contemplate the diversity of human affairs. Remember it when you think of the world, and your imagination is busied in schemes of revolution and reformation. Remember it when you think of the state of the nation, and deplore many things which appear deplorable, and desire many things which appear desirable. Remember it when you think of the condition of the Church; when you ask, “Why such diversities of opinion among its leaders? Why such frequent persecution of its members? Why are they generally so poor and afflicted? Why are they all the day long plagued, and chastened every morning; while their ungodly neighbours abound in affluence and indulgence? Should the sinner live within, clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day; while the saint lies at his gate, a beggar full of sores?” Remember it, when you think of the circumstances of the family; when, driven in from a troublesome world, and hoping to find an asylum there, you are forced as you enter to sigh, with David, “My house is not so with God.” Remember it when you think of your respective cases as individuals: of perplexities and fears; of losses and vexations; of pain of body; of imperfections of mind; of continuance in this world—“Should it be according to thy mind? or according to the purpose

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of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will; and who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working?”

Finally, Let all this lead you forward, and draw forth your expectation of another, and a more glorious economy. Beyond this vale of tears lies a land flow-

ing with milk and honey. You are now in a state of probation and discipline; but trials and corrections will not be always necessary. The denials and restraints, to which the heir of glory submits while he is a child, cease when he comes of age. You now walk by faith, and not by sight; soon you will walk by sight, and not by faith. What you know not now, you will know hereafter. You will then find yourselves infinitely more happy, by the Divine disposal of all your concerns, than you could have been, had you always enjoyed your own wishes. When, from the top of the holy hill of Zion, you shall look down upon the winding path of Providence, by which you ascended, you will praise Him for the means as well as for the end, admire his wisdom as well as his kindness, and say, "He hath done all things well."

Some of your friends and relations are gone before you. In His light they see light. To them the whole mystery is now explained. Blessed spirits, how we envy you! We see Him through a glass darkly; and half our time cannot spy at Him at all: you see Him face to face; you know even as you are known. Well, Christians, they are waiting "to receive us into everlasting habitations;" we shall soon join them; we shall soon unite in their acknowledgments and adorations, and this will be our eternal theme: "Marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! Just and right are all thy ways, O thou King of saints."

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SERMON VIII.

THE GOSPEL DEMANDS AND DESERVES ATTENTION.

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SERMON VIII.

THE GOSPEL DEMANDS AND DESERVES ATTENTION.

"If any man have ears to hear, let him hear." MARK iv. 23.

THE sages of antiquity delivered much of their knowledge in comprehensive sentences. Each of the wise men of Greece was distinguished by some aphorism. All nations have had their peculiar proverbs. The generality of mankind are much more influenced by detached and striking phrases, than by long addresses, or laboured reasonings, which require more time and application than they are either willing or able to afford. "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails."

The good effects of preaching are commonly produced by particular expressions, which leave something for our own minds to develop or enlarge, which please the imagination, which are easily remembered, and which frequently recur. This method of instruction our Lord and Saviour adopted. We often read of "his sayings;" and there is no sentence which he so frequently repeated, as the

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words which I have read. This alone should powerfully recommend them to our regard. But they have higher claims; and we shall view them, I. As implying the authority of the Speaker. II. As suggesting the importance of the subject. III. As appealing to impartial consideration. IV. As demanding practical improvement. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

I. Here is implied the authority of the Speaker. And who can advance claims on our attention equally numerous and powerful with his? "He entered into the synagogue, and taught. And they were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the Scribes." He possessed everything from which a teacher could derive influence.

He had all the authority which is derived from knowledge. Religion was the subject he came to teach. He knew the whole, and the whole perfectly. With all the ease of intelligence, he speaks of things which would swallow us up—they were familiar to him. He speaks of God without any embarrassment—"He was in the bosom of the Father." He speaks of heaven without any emotions of wonder—it was his Father's house. He mentions the treachery of Judas without any surprise—"he knew from the beginning who would betray him." Nothing in the behaviour of his enemies, or of his friends; nothing in the denial of Peter, or dispersion of his disciples, astonished him—"he knew what was in man," He was fully acquainted with the capacities and dispositions of his hearers. He knew how much they were able to bear—when it was necessary to produce evidence, or to leave obscurity—how to touch by suit-

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able motives all the hidden springs of action; and, by appropriate illustration, to remove prejudices,

dissolve doubts, and satisfy desires concealed in the minds of the owners, who, "finding the secrets of the heart made manifest," were filled with admiration, and exclaimed, "Never man spake like this man!" Both his subject and his audience were completely under his management.

He had all the authority which is derived from unimpeachable rectitude. This gives a speaker peculiar firmness and force. A consciousness of vice, or even of imperfection, has a tendency to make him partial or timid. And where is the teacher who is sensible of no failings? who exemplifies universally those high instructions that he delivers? "In many things we offend all." He alone could say, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" No evil debased any of his actions, or mixed with any of his motives. His tempers were all heavenly; his example embodied and enlivened every doctrine he preached. In him were none of those omissions which call for the proverb, "Physician, heal thyself." He spake fearless of the reproach of his hearers, and unchecked by the reflections of his own conscience.

He had all the authority flowing from "miracles, and wonders, and signs." Think of a speaker, who could call forth the powers of heaven and earth, and establish his doctrine by their testimony—who could end his discourse, and say—"All this is true. Witness, ye winds and waves"—and they "cease from their raging." "Witness, ye blind"—and they "receive their sight." "Witness, ye dead"—and "Lazarus comes forth." "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher sent from God; for no man can do these

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miracles which thou doest, except God be with him."

Consider his uncontrollable dominion. There is no place where his voice does not reign. He causes the most insensible creatures to hear it. In the original creation, "he spake, and it was done; he com-

manded, and it stood fast. He appointeth the moon for seasons; and the sun knoweth his going down. The day is his; the night also is his: he has made summer and winter:" and when he calls for them, they never refuse to come. Even the unruly sea acquiesces in his mandate—"Hitherto shalt thou come, and no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." The earth obeys the laws which he impressed upon it. "The voice of the Lord is powerful: the voice of the Lord is full of majesty: the voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars: the voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire: the voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth." Obeyed by all creatures, he approaches you, and expects submission. Would you be the only rebels in the universe? Unlike all other beings, would you swerve from your station and renounce your allegiance? Harder than the rock, and more senseless than the dead, would you refuse to hear his voice?

Consider the dignity of his character. "Where the word of a king is, there is power; and who may say unto him, what doest thou?" The most magnificent titles are not too glorious to discriminate the Son of God. "He hath on his vesture and on his thigh a Name written—King of kings, and Lord of lords." Was Isaiah mistaken, when he said of the

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"Child born, and the Son given," "The government shall be upon his shoulder; and his Name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace?" Did he himself exceed his personal claims when he said, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending; which is, and which was, and which is to come—the Almighty?"

And does He not stand in relations the most intimate and affecting? He made you—placed you so

high in the scale of being—endued your nature with reason and immortality. He sustains you—“In Him you live, and move, and have your being.” His are all your possessions; and if there be a day, or an hour, in which he is regardless of you, you shall be allowed, for that day or hour, to be inattentive to Him. His demands are founded, in the sun which shines upon you—in the friends you enjoy—in the bread which nourishes you—and, above all, in the salvation you need. He addresses you from the garden and the cross—and shall his voice be unheard? Shall such an authority be despised? Will you stand with Pharaoh, and impiously ask, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?”—Why: “He, in whose hands thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways”—He, “who remembered” thee in thy “low estate”—He, “who gave his life a ransom” for thee—He is thy master. And shall servants disobey the orders of a master? Thy teacher—and shall disciples refuse the instructions of their teacher? Thy benefactor—and have loving-kindnesses and tender mercies no claims? Let us pass from the authority of the Speaker, to consider what is equally included in the address.

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II. The importance of the subject—“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Sometimes speakers promise their hearers more than they can perform, and excite expectations which they are unable to realize—Jesus Christ is not afraid to awaken attention; he knows that he can more than repay it; he knows we can never raise our minds to the grandeur of the subject. His instructions are unspeakably interesting and important.

But, in order to this, they must be true. And, my brethren, you cannot but acknowledge, that the reality of these things is possible—sometimes it strikes you

as probable, and much more frequently than you are willing to allow: hence your uneasiness; hence your eagerness to bring forward your opinions, to make proselytes, and to embolden your trembling faith by placing numbers around it—We affirm that these things are true. And observe where we stand when we affirm it—within view of evidences, numberless and convincing. There we appeal to a series of prophecies; and here, to a train of miracles. There, to the sublimity and holiness of the doctrine; here, to the competency and goodness of the writers. There, to the success of the Gospel, destitute of every worldly recommendation, and in the face of the most powerful opposition; here, to the blood of the best of men, and the consent of the wisest of men: for we stand not only near the fishermen of Galilee, but a multitude of pre-eminent genius and learning, when we say, “We have not followed cunningly devised fables.” With all this evidence, would you dispute the truth of these things? “Would you assure us, as some in our day have done, that there is not the shadow of truth in them? What should we think of

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the understandings of such persons?—did we not know that they must pretend all this to justify their indifference—that when a man has fallen out with his conscience, he must separate from it, for the sake of his own peace—and that “this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.”

How pleasing is truth! How satisfactory is it to find something to which the mind may adhere with pleasure, after being the dupe of ignorance and error, and, “like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed!” But though that which is important must always be true, that which is true is not always important. It is otherwise here—as the Gospel is “a faithful saying,” so it is “worthy of all accepta-

tion." Even "the angels desire to look into these things." "We nowhere read of their being naturalists or astronomers; yet they pass by moon and stars, and press around the cross. And you, my brethren, are much more concerned than angels: I may take up the language of Moses to the Israelites—"Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day; for it is not a vain thing, because it is your life." To you the Gospel is not a history of wonders only; the journey of a God from a throne down to a cross, and from a cross back to a throne: it is the interesting narrative of your salvation. Take every other kind of wisdom—how humbling its claims! They are confined to this world. "Knowledge—it shall vanish away." The greater part of it is valuable only for a few years. An acquaintance with various languages, and a thousand other things, will be useless in a future economy. The inquiry is,

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"Who has the words of eternal life?" "Who can lead us in the way everlasting?" What is a message which concerns only your property, and the health of your body? The soul is the standard of the man. Your supreme happiness must relate principally to the chief part of your nature, and the chief period of your duration. Now the Gospel fixes its residence in the soul; and there illuminates all, sanctifies all, harmonizes all—and strikes its blessed influences through eternal ages.

Contemplate the Gospel in connexion with youth and with age; observe its efficacy in the various conditions of prosperity and adversity; view its agency in the numerous relations of life—in rulers and in subjects, in parents and in children. Place Christianity in a family; spread it through a nation; diffuse it over the world—let all be influenced by its spirit, and governed by its dictates: and I would ask, ap-

pealing to infidels themselves, Would not a scene be produced, the most lovely, the most glorious, the most beneficial? Would not the language of prophecy be immediately realized—"The wilderness and the solitary place shall be made glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon: they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God?" Thus, whether we consider the Gospel with regard to man in his individual or social existence; as an inhabitant of time or an heir of eternity; it is a universal benefactor; and, as it demands, so it deserves all his attention:—"If any man have ears to hear, let him hear."

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III. It is an appeal to impartial consideration. And the demand supposes the subject to be accessible—that there is no secrecy in the case—nothing to be concealed. In heathenism, there were many mysteries, from a knowledge of which, the common people, the mass of mankind, were always excluded. Error needs disguise; hence we read of men who shall "privily bring in damnable heresies." Truth glories in exposure. And the Gospel has this character of truth. The Founder of our religion declared, "In secret have I said nothing." The Apostle of the Gentiles could affirm, "This thing was not done in a corner." These everlasting records lie open for inspection; they challenge examination. It is not necessary to conceal anything; the cause will derive advantage from publicity; it is a system of truth and evidence: and you are not only allowed, but commanded to consider its claims, and to examine its contents.

The duty our Saviour enjoins excludes force, and supposes everything to be free. All dominion over conscience is forbidden by it. Mahometanism was

enforced by the sword: soldiers were the apostles of the Koran. Popery began and was maintained by means of spiritual usurpation. They knew the danger of free inquiry, and showed their wisdom in not suffering it: they destroyed the right of private judgment, took away the Scriptures, and made ignorance the mother of devotion. The blind must depend upon a guide. And has not too much of this disposition been discovered in succeeding ages, and by persons who have come much nearer the truth? Have they not refused to others a liberty which they had nobly taken themselves? After scorning to be slaves,

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have they never wished to be tyrants? And though they would not call any man master, have they not desired to be called master? But "one is our Master, even Christ, and all we are brethren." No one has dominion over the faith of another. No coercive influence, however exercised, has the least countenance from the nature of the Gospel, or the manner in which it was established. The Bereans are commended for "searching the Scriptures daily," and comparing the preaching of Paul and Silas with the testimonies of the law and the prophets. Hear the language of a man who well knew there was no virtue in the effects of compulsion—"Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good:" "I speak as unto wise men, judge ye what I say." The Gospel persuades by informing; and even regeneration does not destroy the natural order of operation in the faculties of the mind. God enlightens in order to govern; we follow him from choice: this choice is founded in conviction; and this conviction is produced by evidence.

If you would comply with our Lord's demand, remember, it is the Gospel you have to consider, and nothing else. Separate from it whatever is adventitious and human; and during this investigation, keep the subject before you, pure and unmixed. Be careful that it is Christianity you are surveying—not

any corruptions and errors which have blended with it; not any modifications and arrangements which fallible men have made of it. Ask for a Bible, and see that no spiritual legerdemain slip on the table in the room of it,—Popery or Protestantism, Arminianism or Calvinism, or any other human creed or system. These may be true, or they may be false: they are not standards; they are to be all tried them—

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selves. Ask for the things of God, “not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but in the words the Holy Ghost teacheth.” Distinguish between Scripture, and explanations of Scripture; see with your own eyes; explore the good land for yourselves, and before you enter, suffer none to require from you a promise, that when you return, you shall think precisely with them concerning everything you may discover there. This Divine preacher calls you to come and hear him. If another should step in to prepossess you as you are going—if he should say, “Remember, this will be his meaning, though many of his words will seem to have another sense. Some things will require great qualifications. Sometimes there will be a difference between his secret, and his revealed will;” and so on: say, “I will hear him for myself. He speaks to be understood. I have understanding as well as you. What I borrow is not mine own.

But nothing is more adverse to our Saviour’s demand than dissipation. Attention is absolutely necessary; and, in order to it, we must call in our thoughts and fix them. The more finite and contracted our powers are; the more loose and roving our minds; the more averse we feel to reflection: the more intellectual and spiritual the subject, the more necessary, and the more difficult, application becomes. But labour and diligence will be amply rewarded in the pleasure of progress and the glory of success. “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 treasure: then shalt thou understand the fear

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of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord giveth wisdom; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.”

But it is of little use to apply a mind already biased. We are therefore to guard against prejudice. This will always make us partial: it will keep us from doing justice to any sentiment we dislike; while it will lead us to seize with greediness whatever is capable of giving evidence or importance to the opinions we have espoused.

No prejudices are more simple than those which are derived from—“Our fathers worshipped in this mountain.” But none are so awful as those which spring from sinful lusts and passions. These will affect practical subjects; entangle the plainest duties; and perplex every rule by which we are unwilling to walk. In this case, a man, before he weighs evidences, will examine consequences. “Why, if I own this, I must renounce the world. I must pluck out a right eye, and cut off a right hand. I must take up my cross. I must be serious, and be circumspect in my conversation.” Such inferences are arguments; and they easily prevail with unholy minds, as we see in the case of family worship, and the reception of the Lord’s Supper.

Impatience disqualifies us for religious investigation. If we review life, we shall find that many of our mistakes and errors have been occasioned by a hasty judgment. How changed have things appeared when the mind has returned to them at another time, and from a different quarter!

We shall only add, that nothing is so unfavourable to fair and successful inquiry, as pride. We should come to the Gospel, not full, but to be filled; not to

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cavil, but to learn: sensible of our ignorance, and praying for Divine direction: and receiving “the kingdom of God as a little child.” “With the lowly is wisdom.” “The meek will He guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.” Gather up all these. Here is the Gospel, unveiled and exposed. You need not be afraid to approach it. No authority can restrain you. Be sure, however, that it is the Gospel only you investigate. Banish dissipation, prejudice, impatience. and pride;—and we are neither ashamed nor afraid to say, search, examine the whole system.

Examine the character the sacred writers have given us of God. Is he not a Father, the Father of mercies, the God of all grace, the God of love? Examine the representation they have given of man—Does it not agree with actual life and daily observation? Examine the threatenings they have denounced, and the warnings they have given—Do they not accord with the judgments which God has frequently inflicted on individuals, families, and countries, and which prove a moral government in the world? Examine the promises—Are they not such as the state, and the conscience of man require? Where do they countenance sin? Examine the precepts—take only the command, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbour as thyself:” What think you of this command; or, rather, what think you of those men who wish to exclude this principle, and to destroy a book, the grand aim of which is to produce it?—But, alas! many condemn a work which they never read. Nothing is more absurd than to suppose that infidels renounce the Gospel by the force of conviction, after having fully

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and impartially examined its contents. Be assured, they never weighed the subject, though they are always bold enough to pronounce that it is "found wanting." Few ever give these things a due consideration.

—Here, however, another class of characters appears in view; for while some refuse to hear, others give these things a hearing only. Now though our Lord and Saviour intends nothing less than hearing, he requires much more—

IV. He demands a practical improvement of his word. "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." "I have delivered many things in your presence, and you have done well in hearing them. But my preaching is not to be viewed as an entertainment. My doctrine is not designed to amuse the mind, to gratify curiosity, to furnish a number of lifeless speculations. Hearing is only instrumental to something else; there is a duty of greater importance still remaining."

What is it, my brethren? What would our Saviour say, in explanation of his command? What has he said in other parts of his word? "Mix faith with it—Let not the sense leave the mind as soon as the sound leaves the ear—Remember it—Enliven it by meditation—Reduce it into feelings and actions—Fear these denunciations—Embrace these promises—Obey these commands—Walk according to this rule."

It is a lamentable reflection, that all the concern many of our hearers have with sermons, consists in hearing them. They do not consider hearing as the means of becoming religious—it is their religion.

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They conclude that their duty is over when the discourse is ended—whereas it is then only begun. In-

stead of carrying off portions of divine wisdom, to illuminate their lives, they leave behind them all the instructions they have received. They do not take the word of God along with them, to guide them in their ordinary walk; to arm them against temptation; to furnish them with the cautions of prudence; to stimulate them to universal conscientiousness. Their tempers are unsubdued, unsoftened, unsanctified: their conversation produces none of "the fruit of the Spirit; which is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." But the word of God is practical; every truth is announced to accomplish some purpose. If it reveals a refuge, it is that you may enter in and be safe. If it proclaims a remedy, it is that you may use it: it is not your hearing of it, but your applying it, that will save you from death. You say of a preacher, he ought to do, as well as to preach—and we say of a hearer, he ought to do, as well as to hear. You say, and you say truly, that mere preaching will not save us; and we say, with equal truth, mere hearing will not save you. Never will you attend the dispensation of the word aright, till you make the end which God has in view, in speaking, your end in hearing—And can you imagine that the design of the blessed God, in favouring you with his "glorious Gospel" from Sabbath to Sabbath, is answered, if, while you regularly enter his courts, you always return the same? If, after all the sermons you have applauded for twenty or forty years, you are found as malignant, as covetous, as full of the world, as before? or if your profiting appears only in some

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dead notions, very well laid out in your minds—in a capacity to weigh preachers in the nicest scales of orthodoxy; or in the useful employment of splitting hairs, and tying and untying knots? What! does the "Gospel of your salvation" intend nothing more, than to make you visionaries or triflers? Is this

teaching you, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, you should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world?"

To persons concerned for the honour of the Gospel and the salvation of mankind, the Christian world presents an affecting prospect. Never was the word of God more plentifully preached; never did so many "receive the grace of God in vain." Never was there more seed sown; never did so much fall "by the wayside on stony places, and among thorns." How little does even the good ground yield! Where is the preacher, the close of whose Sabbaths is not embittered by the review of unprofitableness? You invite us to your tables; you crowd us in our temples: but you compel us to retire from both, complaining, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? We condemn your practice: you thank us for our good sermons, and proceed. Your approbation does not hinder your sinning, nor your sinning your approbation. Where are the evidences of our success? Are they to be heard in the inquiry, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Are they to be seen in your deadness to the world, in your self-denial, in your taking up the cross, in your heavenly-mindedness, in serving your generation according to the will of God, in being examples to others?

How shall I impress you with the importance of

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this? or by what motives can I enforce upon you this practical attention to the Gospel you hear?

Shall I urge the danger of delusion, and say, with the apostle James, "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves?" Shall I remind you of "a foolish builder," who reared "his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell; and great was the fall of it?" Such, according to our Saviour, will be the

fatal disappointment of all those, who entertain a hope of safety separate from holiness; who have been lulled to sleep by an unsanctified attendance on ordinances; who hear “these sayings of his, and do them not.”

Shall I remind you of the precarious tenure of your privileges, and say, with our Saviour, “Yet a little while is the light with you; walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you?” There are no calls of mercy beyond the grave—and “what is your life? it is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” The Jews had distinguished privileges—but “the kingdom of God was taken from them, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” Where now are the churches of Asia? Your candlestick may be removed. You may be rendered incapable of hearing. The efficacy may be withholden from the means. Surely if anything can provoke the Supreme Being to take away ordinances, or to make them useless, it must be your awful abuse of them.

Shall I mention the happiness of those who receive the Gospel, “not in word only?” “And it came to pass, as he spake these things, a certain woman of

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the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee. and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.” “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.” “Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.”

Need I inform you, that these means, when unimproved, will be found injurious—that the word of God is one of those things, which, if unprofitable, becomes pernicious—if it does not soften, it will harden—if it does not justify, it will condemn?

For, remember the awful account which you will be required to give of all your hearing, when called to appear before the bar of God. Then, those sermons which you now so easily forget, will be perfectly revived in your recollection. The Bible from which you have been so often addressed, will be called forth, and you will be judged out of this book. In this judgment will rise up against you, to condemn you, the queen of the south: "for she came from the uttermost parts to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here!" In this judgment will rise up against you, to condemn you, "the men of Nineveh: for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here!" In this judgment will rise up against you, to condemn you, all your fellow worshippers, who, having the same nature and passions with yourselves, and never having heard truths more powerful than those which you have heard, "turned at His reproof; sought the Lord while he was to be

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found, and called upon him while he was near." In this judgment will rise up against you, to condemn you, those ministers who would gladly have saved not only themselves, but you who heard them:

While "the Saviour shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." And can you say, his language will be unreasonable—"Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh: when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you?" If you have never heard to purpose before, begin to-day. "To-day, if ye will hear His voice,

harden not your hearts." If you are not lost to all sense of your own welfare; if you are not resolved to sacrifice eternal life; if you have not "made a covenant with death, and with hell are not at an agreement; see that ye refuse not him that speaketh." It is the voice of friendship—it is the voice of conscience—it is the voice of reason—it is the voice of Scripture—it is "the voice of the archangel and the trump of God"—"If any man have ears to hear, let him hear."

SERMON IX.

ON PROGRESS IN RELIGION.

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ON PROGRESS IN RELIGION.

*"There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed."
JOSHUA xiii. 1.*

SUCH was the address of God to Joshua. Nor was it in vain. It stirred "up his pure mind by way of remembrance;" and having "assembled the whole congregation of the children of Israel together at Shiloh," he said unto them, "How long are ye slack to go to possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers hath given you?" They should have marched forward, advancing their arms to the ex-

tremities of the promised possession. It was all their own, by Divine grant; and they had only to seize it. When they entered, they burned with zeal; every day was distinguished by some fresh triumph; they went "from conquering to conquer." But their fervour soon cooled, their courage soon failed; and, satisfied with an imperfect acquisition, they laid down their arms, and resumed them only when they became necessary for defence.

And this, my brethren, reminds us of a two-fold

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reproach, which attaches to Christians. When our Saviour had received "all power in heaven and in earth," for the purpose of spiritual empire, he said to his disciples, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." "Go ye, and teach all nations; baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; and, lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world." Thus clear, and thus extensive, was their commission. They were to subdue a rebellious globe "to the obedience of faith." This alone was to circumscribe and to terminate their exertions. They began well. The company of the publishers flew like angels, having the everlasting Gospel to preach to the inhabitants of the earth. From Jerusalem they proceeded in all directions, like the lines of a circle from the centre. Commencing in Judea, they soon spread over all Palestine, entered the contiguous countries in Asia, visited the Isles, reached Europe. And successively the banners of the Cross were displayed, in province beyond province, and in clime beyond clime. But instead of continuing their glorious career, after a while they looked back, and were satisfied with their progress: they preferred ease to acquisition; they began to divide the spoil they had gained; they often turned their arms against each other—while the enemy, pressing upon them, frequently obliged them to contract their limits, and

to change their position. From that time their cause has not prospered; and many a judgment has been inflicted, to awaken them to a sense of their sin, and a conviction of their duty. Many a voice has been heard in vain; calling upon them to arise and go forward; reminding them that it was all purchased

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and promised country; that “the heathen” was destined to be “their inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth” were to become “their possession.” May we hope that at length the voice of God is beginning to be heard? and that his messengers spreading abroad to the east and to the west, and to the north and to the south, his “glory shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together?” May the Lord hasten it in his time!

To draw nearer the design of this discourse: Christians, God has assigned you a glorious portion. “The lines are fallen to” you “in pleasant places; yea,” you “have a goodly heritage.” Opening before you the discoveries of revelation, He said, Make all this your own; advance; leave nothing unpossessed—At first you were filled with spiritual ardour. You laid “aside every weight.” You were seen on the full stretch to reach “the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.” Had you then heard a prediction of what has since taken place in your dispositions and pursuits, it would have appeared like “an idle tale.” But, alas! you have become these incredible characters. Your love has waxen cold. You have sat down long before you have obtained a complete victory; long before you have finished your course; long before you have realized all the invaluable blessings of your inheritance: and I am come to remind you, I. That there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed. II. To call upon you to arise, and make fresh and continued progress. III. To give you some advice with regard to your future exertions.

 PART I. Yes, Christians; there remaineth yet very

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mud land to be possessed—Many cities and strongholds, many fine plains, and “springs of water;” many beautiful valleys, and very “fruitful hills:” or, to speak less in figure, much of your religion is unattained, unoccupied, unenjoyed; you are far from its boundaries. Very little of it indeed do some of you possess; you command only a small inconsiderable corner, scarcely affording you a subsistence. But I use no distinctions: I address myself even to those of you who have made the greatest progress in the Divine life. And surely it is not difficult to make you sensible of your remaining deficiencies. Draw near those illustrious characters, whose history is recorded in the Scriptures of truth. Compare yourselves with those finished likenesses of Christians, which an infallible pencil has given us in the Gospel. Observe well the sublime intention of the gracious dispensation under which you live, and which is nothing less than to make you “partakers of the Divine nature;” to enable you to live “the life of God;” and to render you “perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

Take a survey of your religion—I would examine you with regard to three articles, which have a dependence on each other, and in each of which you will be found “to come” woefully “short.”

First, Consider your knowledge. While you are men in years, are you not “children in understanding?” You have been liberally favoured with the means of information—Do you possess all you should have known; and all you could have known? After so many years of hearing, what additions have you made to your stores? Are you filled with holy prudence to ponder “the path of your feet,” to “look

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well to your goings,” and to discern snares where there is no appearance of danger? Do you “walk circumspectly; not as fools, but as wise?” Have you a sufficiency of holy wisdom to “rule well your own houses,” and to “train up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord?” Are you able to “give to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you?” Can you apply general principles to particular cases? Can you reconcile promises and providences when they seem adverse to each other? Does “the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom?” Have you clear, combining, and impressive views of any truth of the Scripture? And are there not many subjects of revelation with which you have no acquaintance? Alas! with many professors of religion, more than half the Bible is entirely useless. They confine their attention only to a few doctrines; and even these they regard not as they are delivered in the undefined grandeur of the sacred writers, but as they are reduced and modelled to stand conveniently in a human creed, or a human system. What a difference is there between the ocean of revelation and such a vessel—full of truth as any formulary of doctrine contains! But the latter has often been mistaken for the former; and, because it is easy to penetrate to the bottom of the one, many imagine they have fathomed the other. David gives us a fine idea of revelation, when he tells us “it is exceeding broad.” Of “all” other “perfection” he could see “an end;” but he viewed this as incomprehensible and boundless. Here he saw room for unceasing progress: here, he knew, fresh beauties and glories would be perpetually discovered, to reward the hum-

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ble and active inquirer. And why should we stand in this extensive country, and suffer a man, fallible like

ourselves, and with no better sources of information, to mark us off a piece only of the sacred soil; to draw around us a circle, over which we are never to step? Hear, O son of Abraham, the voice of thy God: "Go through the land in the length and the breadth of it; for to thee have I given it." Hear the language of one of his servants: "O ye Hebrews, ye are dull of hearing: for when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong drink. For everyone that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age; even those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore, leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection." He means perfection in knowledge. He would not have us confine our attention perpetually to a few particular parts; or, to use his own image, would not have us to be always "laying again the foundation," instead of going on with the superstructure. But, alas! when will the understandings of our people suffer us to extend our views? When will they rouse up their minds, and exert their faculties to take in something beyond a few commonplace reflections which they have heard times without number? Why will they always constrain us to abide near "the first principles of the oracles of God?" or, if we advance, why will they refuse to accompany us one degree beyond them?

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Secondly, Observe your holiness. For the knowledge of persons may surpass their experience; and a growth in gifts is very distinguishable from a growth in grace. Review, then, your sanctification; and suffer me to ask, Have you no remaining corruptions to subdue? Are your passions entirely under the

control of reason? Are your affections all heavenly? Are you "crucified to the world?" Have you no undue regard for it, or expectation from it? Are you properly affected with the evil of sin? do you abhor it, mourn over it, watch against it? Do you "deny yourselves, and take up your cross, and follow Jesus without the camp, gladly bearing his reproach?" Is your obedience universal, unvarying, cheerful? Have you fully imbibed the tempers of your religion? Are there no deficiencies perceivable in every grace, in every duty? Are you "strong in faith?" Do you "abound in hope?" Do you love God, and do you love him supremely? Do you love your neighbour, and do you love him as yourself? Can you "love your enemies, and bless them that curse you?" Are you "clothed with humility?" Is your worship always spiritual? Do you never "offer the sacrifice of fools?" Do you not often pray with formality, and hear in vain?—I need not press these inquiries. If you are Christians indeed, you are ready to answer them with sighs and tears: "Enter not into judgment with thy servant: my soul cleaveth to the dust: O wretched man that I am! perfect that which concerneth me; thy mercy, o Lord, endureth for ever; forsake not the work of thine own hands."

Thirdly, Think of your privileges. These are innumerable and invaluable. It is the privilege of

Christians to have "exceeding great and precious promises." It is the privilege of Christians to be "careful for nothing." It is the privilege of Christians "to enter into rest." It is the privilege of Christians' to "have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." It is the privilege of Christians to "walk all day in the light of his countenance; to rejoice in the Lord always; to rejoice

in him with joy unspeakable and full of glory." It is the privilege of Christians to "count it all joy when they fall into divers temptations; and, to glory in tribulation also." And all this has beell exemplified. Men have "received the Gospel in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: they have taken pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake:" they have "taken joyfully the spoiling of their goods;" they have approached the flames with rapture; they have loved and longed for "his appearing"—But where are you? Always in darkness and alarms; always among thorns and briers; always murmuring and complaining; having religion enough to make you miserable, but not enough to make you happy. Do you belong to the same community? Have you the same privileges with them? the same heaven with them? the same God with them? the same Comforter with them? What should we think of all the high praises of religion, if it had no more consolation and pleasure to afford than you possess? Thus, whether we examine your knowledge, or your holiness, or your privileges, it will appear that much lies still before you; much to understand; much to perform; much to enjoy—Week after week, year after year, God comes to observe your progress, and

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finds you, if not drawn back, fixed in the place you occupied before.

PART II. And whence is this? Why will you suffer all this remaining region to be unpossessed? How shall I awaken you from your negligence, and convince you of the propriety and necessity of making fresh and continual advances?

First, I would place before you the commands of God. You are forbidden to draw back; you are forbidden to be stationary. Something more is necessary than languid, partial, occasional, temporary

progression. You are required to be “steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord:” to “add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity: to walk worthy of the Lord unto all well-pleasing; being fruitful in every good work:” to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour.”—Such is the morality of the Gospel: and these are the commands of God, which you have professed to make the rule of your actions.

Secondly, I would surround you with all the images employed by the sacred writers, when they would describe the nature of a religious life. For which of them does not imply progress, and remind us of the importance of undiminished ardour and unceasing exertion? Is it “the shining light?,” This “shines more and more unto the perfect day.” Is it the growing grain? Behold, “first the blade; then the ear; after that, the full corn in the ear.” Is it

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the mustard seed? What though its beginning be small, “when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree; so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof.” Is it leaven? It pervades “the meal till the whole be leavened.” Is the Christian a scholar; and is he only to retain what he has already acquired? Is he running a race; and in the middle of his course does he sit down to rest, or step aside to gather flowers? Is he a warrior; and does he sleep, not only in the field, but even in the action?

Thirdly, I would call forth examples in your presence: they teach you the same truth. ‘Who said, “I beseech thee, show me thy glory?” A man who

had "seen God face to face." Who prayed, "Teach me thy statutes: open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law?" A man, who had "more understanding than all his teachers: a man, who understood more than the ancients"—It is needless to multiply instances. Perhaps no man ever carried religion to a higher degree—perhaps no individual had ever so much reason to be satisfied with his proficiency as the apostle Paul. But hear his language to the Philippians: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind"—And what things had he to forget? The churches he had established; the sermons he had preached; his prayers and epistles; journeys and perils; unexampled labours; the abundance of his revelations; his entering the third heaven—all this, says he, "is behind; all this I deem unworthy of recollection, compared with the future. I am reaching forth unto those things which are before; I press toward

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the mark, for the prize of my high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And have we attained; are we "already perfect?" And shall we leave off to make advances? Shall we be satisfied with our trifling acquisitions?

Fourthly, I would hold up to view the advantages of progressive religion.

A Christian should be concerned for the honour of God. He is under infinite obligations to "show forth the praises of Him, who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light:" but "herein is" our "Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit."

A Christian should be concerned for the welfare of his fellow-creatures. He should be a blessing to his family; to his country. He should be as a "dew from the Lord," fertilizing the place in which he lives. He should have a stock, not only sufficient to sustain himself, but to relieve others. He should be

a stream, at which the thirsty may drink; a shadow, under which the weary may refresh themselves. He should be the image of his Lord and Saviour, going about doing good, casting out unclean spirits, opening the eyes of the blind, binding up the broken-hearted. But the more grace he possesses, the more qualified will he be for usefulness; the more will he be disposed and enabled to do good.

A Christian should be concerned for his own prosperity. And has he to learn wherein it consists? Need he be told, that adding grace to grace, is adding "strength to strength," dignity to dignity, beauty to beauty, joy to joy? It is with the Christian as it is with the man in trade: the more he acquires, the more he is enabled to gain: every increase is not only a possession, but a capacity. "To

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him that hath, shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly; but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have." The more sin is mortified in us, the less will the "prince of this world find" to encourage his approach; the less susceptible shall we be of temptation in the scenes of danger through which we pass. There is something very attractive and pleasing in progress. It is agreeable to observe a stately edifice rising up from the deep basis, and becoming a beautiful mansion. It is entertaining to see the rough outline of a picture filled and finished. It is striking, in the garden, to behold the tree renewing signs of life; to mark the expanding foliage, the opening bud, the lovely blossom, the swelling, colouring, ripening fruit. And where is the father, where is the mother, who has not sparkled with delight, while contemplating the child growing in stature; acquiring by degrees the use of its tender limbs; beginning to totter, and then to walk more firmly; the pointing finger succeeded by the prattling tongue; curiosity awakened; reason dawning; new powers

opening; the character forming?—But nothing is to be compared with the progress of “this building of God;” these “trees of righteousness;” this “changing into His image from glory to glory;” this process of “the new creature,” from the hour of regeneration “unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.” And, oh! what is it when we are the subjects too!

The nearer we live to heaven, the more of its pure and peaceful influence we shall enjoy. The way of life, narrow at the entrance, widens as we proceed. It is the nature of habits to render their

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acts easy and delightful. There is little pleasure in religion if there be no fervency: if there be no vigour in faith, no zeal in devotion, no life in duty, religion is without a soul; it is the mere carcass of inanimate virtue. What sensations of ecstasy, what prospects of assurance, can such Christians expect? In conversion, as in the alteration of an old edifice, we first demolish; and this only furnishes us with rubbish and ruins: but afterwards we raise up an orderly beautiful building, in which we are refreshed and charmed. What happiness arises from difficulties overcome, and from labour crowned with success! What emotions can equal the joy of one, who after the painful battle “divides the spoil?” But what can resemble the satisfaction of the Christian, who, on each successful exertion, gathers fresh “glory, honour, and immortality!” The life of the active Christian is the labour of the bee; who all day long is flying from the hive to the flower, or from the flower to the hive—but all his business is confined to fragrancy, and is productive of sweets.

There are many promises made to perseverance in the divine life; and this is one: “Then shall we know if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and the former rain

unto the earth." This is the way to obtain Divine refreshments and manifestations: and the Saviour we pursue, upon every pleasing surprise we express, will say, "Thou shalt see greater things than these." Some of you are much perplexed as to your spiritual condition: the reason is obvious; little things are scarcely perceptible—let your religion be enlarged, and it will become more conspicuous. And, to close

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this part of our discourse, remember, that it is an awful proof that you have no real religion if you are satisfied with what you have. A degree of experience, however small, would stimulate; the relish would provoke the appetite; and having—"tasted that the Lord is gracious," your language would be, "evermore give us this bread." The nearer a person in any profession or science approaches to perfection, the more clearly will he perceive, and the more painfully will he feel his remaining imperfections. In nothing is this more undeniable, than in religious proficiency. This being the case, I am persuaded, Christians, you are prepared,

PART III. To receive some admonitions with regard to your future efforts. If you would advance,

First, Shake off indolence. Nothing is more injurious to our progress; and, alas! nothing is more common. It has indeed been said, that sloth is a vice the most universally natural to all mankind. They discover it as to bodily exercise; still more with regard to mental application; but it appears most of all in religious pursuits. Upon this principle, many are influenced in their choice of preachers, and in their adoption of sentiments. This makes them fonder of speculations, which bear very softly upon the heart and life, than of those truths which inculcate a holy practice. They find it is easier to hear weekly a number of sermons, than to teach their children the duties of the Gospel, and to maintain serious de-

votion in their families, and in their closets. Man loves indulgence: he needs a stimulus. to make him arise from the bed of sloth, to exert his faculties, and to employ the means of which he is possessed. And

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one would naturally conclude that in religion he would find it.—As he sits at ease, revelation draws back the veil, and shows him the most astonishing realities—an eternal world; whatever can sting with motive; whatever can alarm with fear; whatever can animate with hope. What a Being to please, on whom it depends to save or to destroy! What a state of misery is there to escape! What an infinite happiness to secure!—Survey the prize. In seeking honour, men sacrifice their peace, submit to mortifications, climb ascents the most slippery and hazardous. To gain wealth, they rise up early, sit up late, eat the bread of carefulness. And what beggarly, unsatisfying advantages are all earthly things! The rich man, “in the midst of his sufficiency, may be in straits.” The conqueror may be wrung with sorrow even on the day of his triumph. Now “they run for a corruptible crown, but we for an incorruptible.” Shall they be zealous in trifles, and we remain cold and motionless in matters of endless importance? Or do you imagine diligence is unnecessary? But does not everything valuable require labour? Do we ever highly esteem that which costs us nothing? Indolence never ploughs or sows, and therefore never reaps. It never plants or prunes, and therefore never gathers the clusters of the grapes: nothing great was ever performed by it; nothing great was ever possessed by it. “The soul of the diligent” only “shall be made fat.” “Win and wear it,” says Bishop Latimer, “is inscribed on the crown of glory which fadeth not away.” Therefore “be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”

Secondly, Beware of diversion. Discharge yourself

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as much as possible from superfluous cares. Distinguish between diligence in lawful business, and “entangling yourselves in the affairs of this life.” This sometimes arises from a multiplicity of concerns, and more frequently from the want of order and skill in the management of them. Thus you are robbed of the temper, and the attention, and the opportunities, which devotion requires. The good old men who are gone before us, lived as long again as you do in the same number of years. They redeemed their time; they rose early; they moved by rule; they planned everything; they would have leisure for religion; and if time fell short, the body and the world suffered the loss; they never robbed the soul, and trifled with eternity. To avoid diversion, you would do well to remember that religion is the grand business of life; that to this you must render everything else subordinate and subservient; that you are not to confine your pious regards and attentions to the sabbath, or the temple. You are to “walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long; and whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, you are to do all to the glory of God.” In his journey the traveller may pause for a moment to behold the beauty of the scenery around him; or, in the evening, he may “turn aside to tarry for a night;” but in the morning he goes on his way: nothing diverts him; he thinks only of the object for which he set out. If, however, a man goes forth without an end in view, or does not feel the necessity of pursuing it; if he travels extempore, and leaves the determination of his course to accident; he is liable to be caught with any pleasing prospect; he will be ready to comply with any flattering invitation; he will be driven back, or turned aside, by

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every appearance of difficulty. Fix your aim, my brethren, and establish in your minds a conviction of the importance of it. Then you will no longer live at random; then you will have a principle which will simplify all your concerns, by giving them one common tendency; then you will have a director to guide you in every perplexing uncertainty; then you will have a standard, by which to decide what you are to shun, and what you are to pursue: it will induce you to examine all with a reference to this, and to make all contribute to this. Every occurrence will furnish lessons and helps. In relation to this we shall judge of what is good or evil: this will keep us from murmuring when we feel things which, though painful, urge us forward; and from sighing for things which, though pleasing, will prove an incumbrance.

I would remark, further, that there are not only diversions from religion, but diversions in it; and of these also you are to beware. Here, finding you are unsuspecting of danger, the enemy often succeeds: for his end is frequently answered by things good in themselves. He is satisfied if he can draw off your attention from great things, and engross it with little ones; if he can make you prefer opinions to practice, and controversy to devotion; if, by consuming your zeal on the circumstantial of religion, he can render your minds cold to the essence; if he can bring you to lay more stress upon those peculiarities in which you differ, than upon those all-important points in which you agree.

Thirdly, Guard against despondency. There are indeed many things which, when viewed alone, have a tendency to discourage the mind. We know your

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weakness, and we know the difficulties and dangeril to which you are exposed. Your progress will prove

warlike; your possession, like the inheritance of the Jews, is to be conquered. But “be courageous;” nothing will so much animate you as holy confidence. To strengthen this principle, you have the promise of a faithful God. It encourages you with an assurance of eventual success, and of immediate assistance. The advantages are certain as they are great. The labour and the hope of the husbandman may be destroyed: but here are no casualties—“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.” The soldier fights uncertainly: but there is no peradventure in this warfare—“Yea, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us.” How enlivening is the persuasion that we cannot be defeated in our enterprise, or disappointed in our hope! But you want immediate help. And God has engaged that you shall not advance alone: his presence shall be with you, and his grace shall be sufficient for you. “So that you may boldly say, the Lord is my helper. I will not fear. I will go forth in the strength of the Lord.” See, however, that your confidence be scriptural, and your reliance properly placed: And,

Fourthly, Be afraid of presumption. “Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.” Our dependence upon God is absolute and universal. “In him we

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live, and move, and have our being.” His agency is—more indispensable in spiritual things than in natural: sin has rendered us peculiarly weak, helpless, and disaffected. Without him we can do nothing. Our progress in religion will be in proportion to his influences. We are “led by the Spirit of God;” “we

live in the Spirit; we walk in the Spirit." Be sensible of this, and, as a proof of it, be much in prayer. Prayer is the language of dependence. By this we call for succour: by this we obtain it. Thus, "when we are weak, then are we strong," because this sense of our insufficiency leads us to implore the power of God; and "if we seek, we shall find." Hence it follows, that if we have not more grace, it is because we pray so little. Prayer increases religion by its very exercise. It naturally promotes resignation, cherishes hope, and strengthens faith. Our intercourse with God will naturally diminish worldly impressions on the mind, and refine and elevate our powers: it will increase our resemblance of God; and we shall come forth from his presence like Moses, shining in his rays. Prayer also is rich in promise: "I never said to the seed of Jacob, seek ye me, in vain." "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all them that call upon him in truth: he will fulfil the desire of them that fear him; he will also hear their cry, and will save them." On these two principles, prayer ranks highest among those institutions which we call means of grace; and will be incessantly regarded by all those who are concerned to enjoy soul-prosperity.

Fifthly, It would be profitable for you to "call to remembrance the former days," and especially to review the beginning of your religious course. It is

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said of Jehoshaphat, that "he walked in the first ways of his father David:" it is an intimation that he was not so zealous, and so accurate in his conversation, afterwards. Our Saviour tells the church of Ephesus, "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love: remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works." Ah! Christians, do not your minds appropriate this reproach?—O how you abounded in the duties of obedience then! O how you prized ordinances! O

how you longed for the Sabbath; and how glad were you “when they said, let us go up into the house of the Lord!” How much of your time was employed in meditation, and prayer, and praise! And all was deemed a privilege! There was nothing like burden or bondage. How did the bitterness of repentance make you loathe sin; and at what an awful distance did you keep yourselves from its approach! How glorious did the Saviour appear in your deliverance; and with what vigour did you say, “Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest!”—Must I “cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, thus saith the Lord, I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, and the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown!” Alas! is it necessary to lead you back in the history of your religion, and to derive from yourselves in former years examples to excite you now? To make you blush at a change not for the better, but the worse; to cover you with confusion, by comparing the slackness of your progress with the ardours of your commencement?

Finally, It will not be less profitable for you to look forward, and survey the close if all. Christians!

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“it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is your salvation nearer than when ye believed: the night is far spent, the day is at hand.” Would you slumber on the verge of heaven? The stream increases as it approximates the sea; motion accelerates as it approaches the cente. You have beheld dying saints, and have often heard them mourn that they had been so negligent, and that they had done so little for God in their day and generation; and are you resolved to fill a dying hour with similar regrets? Did you know that “the time of” your “departure was at hand,” you instantly would arise, and have “your loins girded, and your lamps burning.” But the season will come soon, and may come immedi-

ately. Therefore “whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.”

—Yes; this is the only opportunity you will have to do good to others and to get good for yourselves. Joshua had the day protracted, to enable him to complete his victory;—but no addition will be made to yours: no sun will stand still while you finish your course. See! the shadows of the evening are closing in; and “the night cometh, wherein no man can work.” Will you always be in a condition which will render reprieve anxiously desirable? Will you be always praying, when you apprehend the summons, “O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence and be no more!” Does it require no more mortification than you now possess, submissively and cheerfully to bid farewell to the world? Does it require no more assurance of hope than you now feel, to pass fearlessly the dark” valley of the

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shadow of death?”—And what a trial awaits you beyond the grave! For there is a tribunal before which superficial tears will not be considered as repentance; a happy temper will not pass for conversion; a few sluggish endeavours will not be accepted in the room of vital godliness—nothing will be crowned but a faith that “overcomes the world;” a “hope that purifies even as He is pure;” a love that “constrains us to live not to ourselves, but to Him that died for us, and rose again;” a patience “that endureth to the end;” a perseverance that keeps us from “being weary in well-doing”—“The Lord grant that we may find mercy of the Lord in that day.”—Amen, and Amen.

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SERMON X.

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WORKS OF WILLIAM JAY

THE SECURE ALARMED.

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SERMON X.

THE SECURE ALARMED.

“Woe to them that are at ease in Zion!” AMOS vi. 1.

THERE is something very agreeable and desirable in ease. Even external ease is valuable; and we are ready to pronounce the man happy, whose connexions and affairs are all prosperous and peaceful. But what is external ease—without bodily? Pain will produce anguish, which neither riches nor palaces can relieve. An aching head, or a pained foot, will destroy all the sensations of pleasure arising from worldly things. Enter the house of affliction; observe thy neighbour; “he is chastened with pain also upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain; so that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat: his flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones, that were not seen, stick out: yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers.” Perhaps some of you have been in a similar condition; your “soul hath it still in remembrance;” you said, “I am made to possess

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months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me: when I lie down, I say, when shall I arise, and the night be gone? I am full of tossings to and fro unto the dawning of the day: my bed does not comfort me, nor my couch ease my complaint.” O how delicious is health after sickness, and ease after pain! But what is bodily ease without mental?

“The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?” Can a man be happy while corroded with care, fretted with envy, burning with malice, perplexed with doubts, tormented with fears? Think of a man who carries, lodged within him, a troubled conscience—“He eats ashes like bread, and mingles his drink with weeping;” “His life hangs in suspense before him, and he has none assurance of his life;” “He trembles at the shaking of a leaf;” “Terrors take hold on him, as waters: a tempest stealeth him away in the night;” “He is scared with dreams, and terrified with visions.” O what can be so precious as peace of mind—a calm within!

—And yet, strange as the declaration may appear, this tranquillity is too common; and to disturb it, is the design of this discourse: a design, not only justified by inspired example, and demanded by ministerial fidelity, but required even by love to your souls. For though it may wear the appearance of harshness, it is in reality the kindest expression of friendship: it is the severity of one who rushes forth, and breaks in upon your pleasing reverie, when you approach the brink of a dreadful precipice; it is the severity of one, who should knock loudly, and interrupt your repose, when he perceived your house becoming the prey of devouring flames, and saw you

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had scarcely time to escape. For your peace is a false peace. It is the friendship of Joab concealing his murderous dagger. It is the slumber of Samson in the lap of Delilah, softly depriving him of his locks. It is a sleep obtained by opium. It is the loss of feeling, the presage of death. It is the calm of the dead sea, the consequence and the evidence of a curse. Thus we have observed, that before a fall of exceedingly heavy rain, the wind has been unusually still. Thus travellers inform us, that before an earthquake the air is uncommonly serene. Whether

therefore you will hear, or whether you will forbear, I sound the alarm, and give you warning from God—"Woe to them that are at ease in Zion!"

But it will be proper to ascertain precisely the characters whose delusion we wish to destroy. "Who deserves this charge? Who is obnoxious to this curse? Some are "at ease in Zion," from selfish insensibility—some, from infidel presumption—some, from vain confidence—some, from practical indifference.

I. Some "are at ease in Zion," from selfish insensibility. Such there were in the days of Amos. "They lie," says the prophet, "on beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall: they chaunt to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David: they drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments; but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." In similar language, Isaiah upbraids the Jews: "In that day did the Lord God of Hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness,

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and to girding with sackcloth: and, behold, joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine; let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we shall die." How criminal this appeared in the eyes of Jehovah, may be inferred from the threatening: "And it was revealed in mine ears by the Lord of Hosts, surely, this iniquity shall not be purged from you till ye die, saith the Lord God of Hosts."

In this representation we discover something peculiarly applicable to many in our day. The judgments of God have been abroad in the earth, nor has our own nation escaped their influence. We have passed through a period singularly awful and trying. In no common degree have we been called upon to become serious, humble, and susceptible of instruc-

tion and impression. What instruction have we received? "That impression has been made upon our minus? What amusements have we relinquished? What correspondence of feeling with the dealings of God have we discovered? What sympathy in the necessities and woes of half-fed perishing multitudes have we expressed? What tears have we shed over the funeral of three millions of our fellow-creatures, and six hundred thousand of our fellow-countrymen, all torn from their beloved connexions, all hurried into an eternal state! Whatever occurs, these human brutes graze on. "They regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands." The cares of the world engross them: the pleasures of the world amuse them. The miseries of mankind are nothing to them. Like members severed from the body of humanity, they are dead, and devoid of feeling. "A thousand may fall at

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their side, and ten thousand at their right hand;" they are satisfied if it does "not come nigh them." An attention to their own indulgence regulates all their actions. They pass by on the other side the poor traveller wounded, bleeding, half-dead, lest their feelings should be shocked at the spectacle. If they ever give of their abundance, or distribute anything that remains after every passion and appetite is gratified to excess, they avoid every sacrifice of charity,—all expense of trouble and of feeling; they do not "visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction." The eye would affect the heart; and the heart must not be affected—it is their plan to live "at ease." And sorry am I to be compelled to say, that there are not a few florid professors of the Gospel who expose themselves to this censure—persons who are zealous for orthodox sentiments, but cold in generous affections: "having a name to live," while they "are dead" to all those fine and tender feelings, which render us social and useful; which

constitute the glory of the man, and of the Christian —“This man’s religion is vain.”

Your dispositions, my brethren. are always to correspond with the providence of God. and the purposes for which he placed you in the world. He continues the poor always with you, and encompasses you with diversified scenes of distress, to awaken your attention; to increase your benevolence; to discover your excellences: and to form you into a resemblance of Himself; that “you may be merciful, even as your Father which is in heaven is merciful.” The Stoics indeed placed all mercy in beneficence, as distinguished from sympathy and commiseration. Weeping with another, was a littleness of soul unbecoming a wise man. Their doctrine demanded this; for if they

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were to be insensible to their own afflictions, they were surely not required to feel the calamities of others. But it is obviously the design of God, that we should lay the miseries of others to heart, and that the kindness we show them should flow from compassion. And so necessary is the exercise of this tenderness to the condition of mankind, which is a state of misery and dependence, that He has bound it upon us by a natural, as well as by a moral law. Such is the very frame and organization of the body; such the motion and direction of the animal spirits on the sight of distress; that we cannot help being moved and pained: and therefore before we can be unmerciful, we must become unnatural; and before we offer a violence to morality, we must offer one to nature. And we may observe also, that the strength of the social instinct is in proportion to the importance of its exercise in human life: the degree of emotion which excites us to weep with the miserable, is stronger than the degree of sensation which urges us to rejoice with the prosperous; because the former stand more in need of our sympathy and assistance than the latter. God has clearly expressed his will

in the Scriptures. There he requires us to “mind every man also the things of others;” to be “pitiful;” to “put on bowels of mercies.” Society is placed before us, both civil and religious, as a body, where, “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it.” The Gospel, we are assured, not only illuminates, but softens: it takes away “the heart of stone,” and gives us a “heart of flesh.” This influence of Divine grace we are never suffered to overlook ill those characters which are held forth as worthy of our imitation. View David: what think you of a man who could say even of them who had “rewarded

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him evil for good, to the spoiling of his soul—As for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting: I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother; I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother.” Nehemiah, though high in office, the favourite of the king, and enjoying every personal satisfaction, is distressed because his “brethren are in affliction, and the city of his God lies waste.” Jeremiah cries, “For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt, I am black; astonishment has taken hold on me—O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people.” Paul could ask, “Who is weak, and I am not weak; who is offended, and I burn not?” Above all, contemplate Him who “went about doing good;” who, when exhausted with fatigue, suffered the moments allotted to needful repose to be invaded, without murmuring; who “in all our afflictions was afflicted;” who, by an exquisite sensibility, made the sorrows he beheld his own; who “took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses;” who, when he saw the multitude fainting, and having nothing to eat, “had compassion on them;” who wept with friends at the

grave of Lazarus, and over enemies as “he drew near Jerusalem.”

Woe to such as have no claim to the honour of classing with these men of mercy, headed by the God of love! You may perhaps be ready to congratulate yourselves: you may imagine that you escape much anguish; and that you would only increase your sufferings by sharing in the grief of others. Now, acknowledging this, yet would it not be vir-

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tuous, and peculiarly praiseworthy? would it not enable you to resemble Him, who “pleased not himself;” and who, “though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor?” But we are not going to applaud insensibility: the tenderness we recommend is accompanied with sensations far superior to any the selfish and the unfeeling ever experience. If it is a source of pain, it is also a source of pleasure. This sensibility gives another degree of life; adds a new sense; enlarges the sphere of satisfaction; and increases the relish of enjoyment.

For the unfeeling wretch conscience has no kind office to perform; it has no pleasing recollections or prospects, with which to refresh him; no delicious entertainments with which to feast him. It never caresses, but it often smites.—“Neither do they which go by say, the blessing of the Lord be upon you; we bless you, in the name of the Lord.” For him no orphan prays, no widow sings. To all the luxury of a Job he is a stranger—“When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me; because I delivered the poor when he cried, the fatherless, and him that had none to help him: the blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy.” For him the evil day comes on, charged with every horror. He has, no asylum

in the feelings of the community, the happiness of whose members he never sought. When he fails, there is none to receive him: every application is rejected; homeless and destitute, he hears from many a merciless lip, "His mischief is returned upon his own head, and his violent dealing is come down upon his own pate." Seized with affliction, he is led into

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his chamber, but hears from no inspired voice, as he enters, "The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble: the Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: he will make all his bed in his sickness." His offspring appear: he beholds "the desire of his eyes," on whose desolate hours he should have entailed mercy: but not to him belongs the promise, "His seed is blessed;" no divine Comforter says, "Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widow trust in me."—"The memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot." To a dying man there is something in the thought that he shall not be missed; that his character is more perishable than his body; that the door of life will be shut upon him, and lloited, before he is scarcely out; that sinks the wretch lower than the grave.—But "after death, the judgment;" and his rolling eyes read, inscribed on the wall, "He shall have judgment without mercy, who showed no mercy." Have you courage to pursue him further? See him at the bar of God; there to answer for crimes, which at no tribunal here are punishable: he is tried for being close-handed and hard-hearted—And what fellowship can there be between an unfeeling wretch, and a Saviour full of "tender mercy?"—"Then shall the king say unto them on his left hand, depart, ye cursed"—Why? we were not profligate, we never oppressed any—"I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me not in; naked, and ye

clothed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not”—Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison,

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and did not minister unto thee?—“Verily, I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it not to me.”

II. Some “are at ease in Zion,” from infidel presumption. If there be any truth in the Scriptures, the dispositions of the generality of mankind are very unsuitable to their state and their destiny. When we see them amused with trifles; when we view them sleeping securely; when we hear them singing, devoid of all concern; we are ready to ask, Is this a prison? Are these men under sentence of condemnation, and waiting only the hour of execution?—Such is the testimony of this Book. “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.—Upon the wicked, God shall rain down fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup. He that believeth not, is condemned already.”—Why then are they not alarmed? They do not believe. Were they persuaded of “the terror of the Lord,” it would be impossible for them to live in a state of apathy and indifference. Could they believe that “God resisteth the proud,” and be easy in their pride? Could they believe that he “abhorreth the covetous,” and be easy in their covetousness? No; did you really believe the truth of God, and were you fully convinced that all the threatenings he has denounced in his word will be infallibly accomplished, “the joints of your loins would be loosed, and your knees would smite one against another.” If you had the faith of a Noah, it would “move you with fear,”

and lead you to “build an ark.” If you had only the faith of a devil, you would “tremble.” But you

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have not even this. Thus the sacred writers have reasoned before us: “Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, God will not require it—They have belied the Lord, and said, It is not He; neither shall evil come upon us, neither shall we see sword or famine.—Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil:”—Because the gallows is not in sight when the judge pronounces the sentence, they conclude upon their security.—“Where is the promise of his coming?”—all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.—One generation passeth away, and another cometh; but the earth abideth for ever.—But, after all, what is this ease which flows from infidel persuasion?

First, It is obtained with difficulty. For before a man who designs to get rest in this way, can sit down safe and undisturbed, he has to prove that the Scripture is a falsehood; he has to reason down every species of evidence; he has to bring his mind to believe the strangest improbabilities, and the grossest contradictions; he has to explain how weak men could deliver the sublimest wisdom, and wicked men could be the most ardent friends of virtue, the most zealous promoters of holiness—he has to demonstrate that those persons who took nothing on trust, and who made every kind of proof their study, were all deceived where they professed themselves to be most certain; he has to persuade himself that he is wiser than the wisest of mankind: and though, in this case, his vanity would much aid his conviction; yet surely, taking the whole together, it can be no inconsiderable task.

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Secondly, It is partial, and liable to interruption; For there can be no perfect satisfaction, without perfect certainty. Now this, it is impossible to acquire. In spite of all his endeavours to extirpate it, some remains of truth will occasionally vex him. There is an internal witness, whose voice will sometimes be heard: when conscience cannot govern, it can censure; when it has not power enough to satisfy, it is able to torment. Sleeping convictions will sometimes be awakened, and fresh endeavours will be needful to lull them again to repose. Though they are not always "in bondage to fear," they are, as the apostle remarks, "subject to it;" and a faithful reproof, or an alarming sermon, an accident or a disease, a sudden death or an opening grave, and a thousand other things, may revive their alarm, and make them dread a futurity at which they have laboured to laugh. In these cases, their grand resource is diversion; and they rush into company and amusement, in order to erase the impressions. Yet who can always be engaged? who can always avoid thought?

But, thirdly, the less liable it is to be disturbed, the more awful; for it is penal. It shows that God has suffered them to wander very remote from the truth they deemed their enemy, and to penetrate far into the darkness they loved. There is nothing more insensible than "a spirit of slumber." It is questioned, whether it be possible for any man to be really an atheist: but is there anything too bad for a man to fall into, when abandoned of God? And is there nothing that can provoke God to withdraw his assistance from the sinner? Is He compelled to accompany him when he says, "Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways?" Is He

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unjust, because He does not force the inclinations of a man; but allows him, in compliance with his own

wishes, to go alone? If there be an atheist, we should not search for him in the heathen world, but among those “who are at ease in Zion.”—“For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.—They received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved; and for this cause, God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

Hence, fourthly, this ease is fatal. Its duration is momentary; it must end, and end in anguish and despair. The denial of anything does not falsify it. If a man has swallowed poison, his adopting an opinion that it cannot kill him, contributes nothing to his safety: and it is awful to stand and see his conviction and his death arriving together. Your denying a resurrection, will not hide you for ever in the grave. Your disbelieving a day of retribution will not keep you from appearing before God. “Their judgment,” says the apostle, “now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not:”—while they reason, it rolls on; every argument brings it one distance nearer.

The confutation set off before the infidel began the book, and it may arrive before he has finished it. Noah preached to the inhabitants of the old world—they derided him, and pursued their business and their pleasures; but “the flood came, and took them

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all away.” When Lot warned “his sons-in-law, he seemed unto them as one that mocked: but the cities were destroyed. Various things prophesied of the Jews, at a time when there was no human probability of their occurrence, were minutely accomplished. Babylon seemed secure: its walls were im-

pregnable; its provisions defied a siege: hence her confidence: "For thou hast trusted in thy wickedness—thou hast said in thine heart, I am, and there is none else beside me: therefore shall evil come upon thee, thou shalt not know from whence it riseth: and mischief shall fall upon thee, thou shalt not be able to put it off: and desolation shall come upon thee suddenly, which thou shalt not know"—And it was taken and destroyed in one night. "The Scriptures cannot be broken;" therefore thus it will be with all the threatenings of Heaven: and "when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape." Nor will they only be condemned notwithstanding their unbelief; but they will be punished for it. Men are never more offended than when their veracity is suspected; and they are instantly ready to demand satisfaction for the injurious affront—and can you "turn the truth of God into a lie," with impunity? "If there should be among you any man, who, when he heareth the words of this curse, shall bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of my heart to add drunkenness to thirst; the Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man; and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven."

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III. Some "are at ease in Zion," from vain confidence; relying on the goodness of their present state, and on the certainty of their future happiness. See one of these deluded creatures going up into the temple to pray—"The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are,—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." In this state, according to his own confession, was Paul once—"I

was alive, without the law;" cheerful and happy, full of false hope and false joy, fully satisfied of my acceptance with God, and a stranger to all apprehension of danger. Such was the Church of Laodicea—"Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Nor are these instances unusual, or singular; "for there is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet are not washed from their filthiness." There is then such a thing as spiritual self flattery; there is such a thing as a delusive dependence, in religion: yes; "there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." The unhappy conclusion is drawn from innumerable sources: from pious ancestors and distinguished privileges; from ritual observances; from formal duties in which the affections are never engaged; from virtues weighed against vices; from comparisons of ourselves with others: from partial reformations; from hearing sermons; from dreams; from sudden impulses; from the casual application of promises; from orthodoxy; from terror in the conscience; from fervour in the passions; from spiri-

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tual gifts. These are only a few articles from the inventory of delusion, by which the enemy of souls, according to the character and circumstances of mankind, excites and encourages a hope which will one day cover its possessor with shame. And it sometimes happens that the same person successively occupies many of these refuges of lies: as he is expelled by conviction from one, there is another to receive him: only the continuance of his satisfaction requires, that if his knowledge increase, every fresh deception should become more subtle and specious. Thus "the strong man armed keepeth his palace;"

and while this is the case, "his goods are in peace." There is a stillness in the conscience. The mind has no misgiving fears. Such characters are backward to self-examination; and wish not to have the good opinion they entertain of themselves shaken. If you lived with them, you would never find them walking mournfully before the Lord: you would never hear them complaining of their inward conflict, or hear them asking, "What must I do to be saved?" Nothing can be more dreadful than this state: for consider only two things.

First, this confidence keeps them from looking after salvation. Were it not for this shelter, they would be induced to flee for refuge. They are too good to be saved. Hence, says our Saviour, "publicans and harlots shall enter into the kingdom of heaven before" such. Few ever pretend to vindicate vice; and a vigorous charge on the conscience of the ungodly may succeed; but no weapon can penetrate this self-righteous armour. While the man continues wrapped up in this presumption, there is no hope of his conversion; the word has no power

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over him. Do we exhort him to believe? He congratulates himself that he is a believer. Do we urge him to repentance? He needs none: Do we press him to escape from the wrath to come? He is in no danger. He applies to himself only promises and privileges to which he has no claim, and which will only serve to render the consequences of his delusion the more painful.

For, secondly, this course will terminate in woful surprise and disappointment. The foolish builder, who did not suspect the stability of the house, will learn its weakness in the storm and the ruins: the man is past all hope before he begins to fear. His mistake is discovered when it is too late to be rectified! O what confusion! O the horrors of regret and of despair! "Strive to enter in at the strait

gate; for many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer, and say unto you, I know you not whence you are; then shall ye begin to say, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence you are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of heaven, and ye yourselves thrust out." My dear hearers, remember this awful caution; and since so many mistake, "let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." Dare you trust your state without trying it? In a business of everlasting importance, can you be satis-

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lied with equivocal or with slender evidence? In all other cases. will you think you can never be too sure, and this is the only one in which you are resolved never to doubt? O see that you possess that "grace which bringeth salvation." Go, and compare your character with the representations given of real Christians in the Scriptures. Go, and "learn what that meaneth—If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." We sometimes try to alarm you by your sin; we would alarm you, in this discourse, by your religion. The religion of many of you is likely to prove the means of your eternal ruin.

IV. Some "are at ease in Zion," from practical indifference. You would much offend persons of this class, were you to enquire whether they believed the Scripture. They read it daily: they come to God's ministers as his people come: and the preacher "is unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a

pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear his words, but they do them not." They are "like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." Nor are these persons to be charged sentimentally with Antinomianism, or any other error. They know the Gospel in theory; but they are strangers to its divine efficacy. Of all the various characters we have to deal with in our ministry, these are the most unlikely to insure success. When we endeavour to convince the ignorant, or to rouse the unthinking, we feel some hope; but as for those of you who have heard the Gospel from your infancy,

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or who have sat under it long enough to learn distinctly and familiarly all the truths it contains; who know everything we can advance; who believe everything we can prove; who can even "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints," and rest satisfied, regardless of the influence of these things in your hearts and lives—you, you are the most likely to drive ministers to despair. We preach: you acknowledge and admire—but you discover no more concern to obtain the one thing needful we propose, than if you were persuaded we called you "to follow a cunningly devised fable." You believe there is no felicity in the creature, and that satisfaction is to be found in God only. The conviction is just: but it is completely useless; for you are "forsaking the fountain of living waters, and hewing out to yourselves broken cisterns, cisterns that can hold no water." You confess there is a hell, and that its misery is extreme; but you never take one step to avoid it. We cry, "Death is rapidly approaching you; and the Judge standeth before the door." You answer, yes; and slumber on. Your life is a perpetual contradiction to your creed: you are not happy, and contrive not to be miserable.

O what a waste of means and privileges have you occasioned! Why did you not inform us from the beginning that you never intended to regard these things? Then we could have turned to others: you have robbed them of sermons which they would have heard to purpose, and which you have heard in vain. I need not say, you are not Christians—that you are wholly unlike them—that you do not “war a good warfare”—that you do not “run the race set before you:” for you are acquainted with all this:

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you do not mistake your condition; you know you are in a state of condemnation—and are still at ease!! O what a paradox are you! Nothing can be so hateful to the Supreme Being as this state of inactivity. He would you “were either cold or hot.” Since you know your Lord’s will, and do it not, you will “be beaten with many stripes.” “It will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for you.” No instance in the Scripture is recorded of the conversion of persons in your peculiar circumstances. You are sermon-proof. A Bible has poured forth all its treasures before you: it has thrown down at your feet heaven and hell—but it has excited neither hope nor fear. Surely, you have reason to apprehend that means, so long applied in vain, will be always useless: for what probability is there that the word which has done nothing already, should prove efficacious now? Will the sword of the Spirit become keener? Will the remedy acquire more virtue to heal?

This illustration of our subject leads us to suggest the following inferences:

First, If “woe be to them that are at ease in Zion;” surely they are highly criminal, who countenance and promote such a state. Of this number are ministers, who preach so as never to give offence, or excite alarm; “saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace.” “A wonderful and horrible thing is

committed in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely. and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" O how dreadful will it be in the day of judgment to hear the reproach—"There is the man that deceived me, and thereby destroyed

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me. There is the cursed watchman, who never announced my danger, till the enemy had secured his prize." Of this number also are all those characters who will never seize an opportunity to warn a fellow-creature, or a friend, of his condition; and who will suffer a soul to perish, rather than incur a reflection, or a frown, by the exercise of faithful kindness. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in anywise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him."

Secondly, If "woe be to them that are at ease in Zion," let none be troubled when they find their connexions distressed and alarmed with a sense of their sin and danger. "This sickness is not unto death." This pain is a sign of returning life. This "want" will make the prodigal think of home, where "there is bread enough and to spare." When people of the world see their friends and relations in spiritual anxiety, they fear approaching derangement or melancholy; they are eager to send them into company, or to order them to the theatre. But those who have been through this state of mind themselves, can rejoice while they sympathise: knowing that it is the common method of the Saviour to wound before he heals, to humble before he exalts; and hoping that this process is the preparation for that mercy which is never prized till we are made to feel our misery. Such was the disposition of the apostle—"Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death."

Thirdly, If “woe be to them that are at ease in Zion,” there is nothing so much to be dreaded as

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false security in religion. I know that there are many alarms which never issue in salvation. I know that many fear hell, who never fear sin. But still, these distressing convictions are hopeful: they produce movements which may receive a heavenly tendency: they look like the harbingers of religion: they are blossoms, if not fruit; and though they may be blighted or shaken off, we cannot help hailing them. Some are afraid of their trouble: we wish they were afraid of their peace. They are glad when, by company or amusement, they have freed themselves from certain painful impressions; whereas this may be rather a judgment than a mercy. They rejoice, says an old divine, to get rid of a shaking ague, though it has left them in a deep decline. There is nothing so fatal as the carelessness and indifference of a man who was never distressed about sin, or deprived of one hour's rest by saying, “What have I done!” It is terrible when a man is struck with spiritual senselessness. It is better for God to ruin your estate, to bereave you of your friends, to destroy your health, than suffer you to have a “seared conscience,” or a heart “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” It would have been well, if the foolish virgins had been roused from their sleep before the midnight cry, had it been done even by the intrusion of robbers. This induces us to be so urgent in this case; anxious if by any means to produce in you that salutary alarm which will lead you to precaution and remedy; and, by destroying the peace of sin, secure to you “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding.”

Fourthly, If “woe be to them that are at ease in Zion;” there is consolation for them that are dis-

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tressed, there. Nothing is more common than to find gracious souls filled with discouraging apprehensions and fears—and frequently “they refuse to be comforted.” We do not admire and applaud all their doubts and their dejections; but these painful scruples are easily accounted for, and they lie on the safe side. They are very distinguishable from unbelief; and arise—1. From their view of the importance of the concern: it is nothing less than the everlasting salvation of their souls. Such a thing cannot be slightly determined: they are always suspicious; they can never have sufficient certainty; they require evidence upon evidence—“This is the only opportunity to ensure my welfare—“What if I should be mistaken?” 2. From a conviction of the deceitfulness of their own hearts, which have often imposed upon them. 3. From a recollection that many live and die in their delusion—and what if they should be of the number? Thus they can hardly argue themselves into ease; and while others do not fear at all, these fear too much. “While others will not perceive the saddest evidences of sin, these will hardly discern the fairest evidences of grace. Both are blamable; but they are not equally dangerous. The one loses his peace for a time; the other loses his soul for ever. It is better to have a burdened than a benumbed conscience. It is better to be scrupulous than licentious. They are not likely to perish, who are afraid of perishing.

But, after all, Christians, your God is concerned, not only for your safety, but for your happiness; and many advantages would arise from your spiritual joy. Jesus is “appointed unto them that mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy

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for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” He has promised “another Comforter

who shall abide with you for ever." He has written this Book for your "learning; that you, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope." To his ministers he has said, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people." O that I could now execute my commission! O that I had the tongue of the learned, and could speak a word in season to him that is weary! O that I could remove all your groundless fears and distressing jealousies! O that I could place the promises within your view, and within your reach! "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." Remember, "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, God will not despise." Remember, the dawn is the pledge and the beginning of day. Remember, your desires are an evidence of something good, and an "assurance of something better." "Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work." Amen.

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SERMON XI.

THE PRIVILEGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

SERMON XI.

THE PRIVILEGES OF THE RIGHTEOUS.

“For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” PSALM lxxxiv. 11.

DAVID was remarkably distinguished by the fervency of sacred affections. He could say, with propriety, “The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up.” Hence his anxiety and resolution to establish a residence for the ark: “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, or slumber to mine eyelids; until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob.” Hence his peculiar distress, when deprived of public privileges: “When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude; I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise; with a multitude that kept holyday.” When, by the unnatural rebellion of Absalom, he is driven from his throne, he feels the loss of his palace much less than the loss of the sanctuary; and the

feelings of the king are absorbed in the concern of the worshipper for the ordinances of religion.

Infidels may indeed endeavour to explain this, by supposing that David was a man of a melancholy “turn of mind; and that, like other weak and gloomy persons, he sought relief in devotional exercises, when he should have been engaged in forming wise counsels, and adopting vigorous measures. But let us

attend to his real character. He was the hero of the age; and had immortalized his name by numerous exploits. In him were united the prowess of the soldier and the skill of the general; and a succession of the most brilliant victories had procured for him the highest confidence as well as the highest honour. He was qualified to rule as a judge, and to govern as a politician. To all these he added the charms of poetry and music; and "the harp of the son of Jesse still continues to drive away the evil spirit." Nevertheless he passes by all these distinctions: every other exercise, every other pleasure, gives place to one: in this he centers all his happiness—"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." "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts!" "Blessed are they that dwell in thine house; they will be still praising thee."—"For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand; I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." Such was the language of his decided preference. Nor was it the ebullition of enthusiasm: he speaks "the words of truth and soberness:" he gives solid reasons for his predilection. The House

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of God had afforded him multiplied advantages: there he had experienced Divine manifestations and influences; there he hoped to enjoy fresh communion, and renewed supplies; "for the Lord God is a Sun and a Shield: the Lord will give grace and glory; and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." Let us examine these words in a sense more detached and general. Let us contemplate "the Lord God" we adore in the sanctuary; let us consider what He is—"a sun and shield." What He gives—"grace and glory." "That

He withholds—"no good thing." And whom He regards—"them that walk uprightly."

PART I. If God, my brethren, speaks to man, He must condescend to employ human language, not divine. He has done so: and behold nature and art lending their combined powers to aid the weakness of our apprehension! Nature furnishes us with a sun, and art with a shield; and all that is implied in these images, and more than all, is God to his people.

He is a "Sun." Who can be ignorant of the glory and importance of this luminary in the system of nature—always the same; dispelling the horrors of darkness; making our day; gladdening, fertilizing, adorning the whole creation of God? Everything here below is changeable and perishing. "The grass withereth; the flower thereof falleth away." Man himself partakes of the general instability. How many empires has the sun beheld rising and falling! how many generations has it seen successively descending into the grave! how many new possessors have occupied yonder estate! how many fresh classes

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of labourers have toiled in yonder field—while the same sun, from the beginning, has annually called forth the produce! At this moment I feel the very sun which "beat upon the head of Jonah." While I speak, mine eye sees the very same sun which shone on "the dial of Ahaz;" and "stood still in the valley of Ajalon:" the very same sun which saw our Saviour "going about doing good;" Noah stepping forth from the ark; Adam walking in the garden of Eden! It has shone nearly six thousand years; but it is unaltered. It has been perpetually dispensing its beams. But it is undiminished: it has blessed myriads; but it is not less able to cheer us. Kindle a thousand lamps or fires, they will not enable you to discern the sun; the sun can only be

seen by his own light. As he discovers himself, so he renders everything else visible: by means of his rays, the volume charms us, we hail the smiling face of friendship, we pursue our callings, and shun the dangers to which we are exposed. "If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world." "The sun ariseth—man goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening." The illumination of the sun is progressive. The dawn is neither clear nor dark; night reluctantly resigns its sway; it struggles for a while, but by-and-by it yields: the shadows retire, the clouds disperse, the mists and fogs evaporate, before the rising orb; and the "shining light shineth more and more unto the perfect day." And "truly the light is sweet; and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." Nature smiles; the birds welcome his approach; the lark rises up, and sings as he ascends; the little lambs are sportive with the

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sympathy; children are eager to go abroad. How welcome is the return of the sun after the dreary hours of night, and the chilling weeks of winter! See those poor creatures, who lose its presence for several months at a time—see them, on its return, climbing to the tops of their frozen mountains, with longing eyes, straining to catch a greedy glance! Though the sun be so immensely remote, we feel him near: what a penetration, what a potency, is there in his rays! how he warms, enlivens, fructifies! David tells us, "there is nothing hid from the heat thereof:" Moses speaks of "the precious things put forth by the sun." For, without his influences, vain would be the labour of the ox, and the skill of the husbandman. He produces the loveliness of spring, and the abundance of autumn. He "renews the face of the earth;" he decks all nature in charms.

I imagine myself abroad in the depth of winter. I look around me. All exhibits a scene of desolation: the earth is covered with snow; the rivers are sealed up with ice; the vegetable tribes are dead, and the tuneful dumb; favourite walks and beloved gardens, like friends in adversity, are abandoned by their admirers: "He sendeth abroad his ice, like morsels; who can stand before his cold?" I rush in; and after the lapse of a very few months, I come forth, and take a fresh survey. I am filled with wonder. The ground is dressed "in living green." The woods are covered with foliage, "where the birds build their nests," and indulge their songs. "The flowers appear on the earth." What has the sun been doing? He has perfumed the rose; he has painted the tulip; he has made "the valleys to

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stand thick with corn, and the little hills to rejoice on every side;" "he has made all things new."

And who is not reminded by all this of One, "who is the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, or shadow of turning?" And He only can be known by his own discoveries. "As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, even the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man which is in him? Even so, the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God." "God is light:" he scattered "the darkness which covered the earth." "Through the tender mercy of our God, the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the way of peace." "He 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." He has opened "the eyes of our understanding;" subdued our prejudices; fixed our attention; and given us a taste capable of relishing the sublime truths of his word. He "has called us out of darkness into his marvellous light."

—His people are not strangers to happiness, and they derive it all from him. The knowledge he gives them "rejoiceth the heart." He fills them "with all joy and peace, in believing." His "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all" his "paths are peace." He lifts up "the light of his countenance

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upon" them, and this puts "gladness into their hearts, more than" the wicked experience "when their corn and wine increase." If they have seasons which may be called their night, or their winter, they are occasioned by his absence: "He hides his face, and they are troubled: then they cry, O when wilt thou come unto me!" Cold, languishing, dead, before; when He returns, he brings prosperity. "He works in us to will and to do:" he enlivens every duty, and actuates every grace. Quickened by his influences, our religion buds forth: we "blossom as the rose;" we are "filled with all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God."

—"The beauty of the Lord our God is upon us." Even here the change which Divine grace accomplishes is truly marvellous: but we shall "see greater things than these." That soul will soon be "presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." That body too shall partake of the renovation: "it is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual

body." "He will beautify the meek with salvation." Behold the sublimest image which even the imagination of David could seize; but even this falls infinitely below the subject to which it is applied. After considering the magnitude of its body, the rapidity of its light, the force of its influence, and all the wonderful things which philosophers have told us; hear our Saviour saying, "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good:" and remember, it is only one of his creatures, which he made by

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"the breath of his mouth;" which he upholds "by the word of his power;" and which he commands with infinitely more ease than you can manage the smallest lamp: it is only one ray of his glory. The insufficiency of all metaphor requires a variety of comparison; and hence David adds,

"The Lord God is a shield." This piece of defensive armour has been made of different materials. There have been shields of leather, of wood, of iron, of brass, and some even of silver and gold. Your shield, O Christian, is divine. He, to whom "belong the shields of the earth," who lends the strongest all their strength, with whom "nothing is impossible,"—He is your shield—a shield always at hand; impenetrable by any weapon; capacious, encompassing, adequate—For what part of the Christian lies uncovered, unprotected? His substance? "Has he not made an hedge about him; and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side?" His reputation? "He shall hide them in the secret of his presence from the pride of man; he shall keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues." His body? "He keepeth all his bones; not one of them is broken." His soul? "The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul." The defence of our health and of our estate

is conditional, and is decided in subserviency to our spiritual and everlasting welfare; but for the safety of the soul God has absolutely engaged: this "shall never perish." Although the enemies that conspire to destroy it are formidable and numerous, they shall all rage in vain. In the perfections, the word, the providence, the grace of God, we find ample refuge and security. O Christian! while an apprehension

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of exposure, and a consciousness of weakness, is every day pressing upon your mind, and urging you to draw very gloomy conclusions; remember the assurance of effectual assistance and defence: by faith, see God placing himself between you and danger; see Jehovah spreading himself all around for your protection; and fulfilling the promise, "As the mountains are high about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people, from henceforth even for ever." "For I," saith the Lord, "will be unto her a wall of fire round about, and I will be the glory in the midst of her." Ah! well may Wisdom say, "Whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from the fear of evil." And well may you say, and "boldly" too, "the Lord is my helper." "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident."

II. Such God is; and what does He give? "Grace and glory." The meaning, the importance, the dependence, and the union of these blessings deserve our attention.

And what is grace? It is the favourite word of Inspiration: and here, as in many other parts of Scripture, it intends Divine assistance and influence, springing from the free favour of God. It is often expressed plurally: we hear of the graces of the

Holy Spirit: and some speak of them, as if they were so many little, separate, conscious agents, respectively stationed in the soul: whereas they are one grand agency, restoring man to the image and service of

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God, and operating various ways, according to the nature of the object. When it regards truth, we call it faith; a future good, hope; trouble, patience.

And what is glory? It denotes splendour, fame, excellency displayed; and the sacred writers apply it by way of distinction to the transcendent dignity and sublime happiness reserved in heaven for the righteous. "Thou shalt guide me by thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." "When He who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory."

These blessings are absolutely essential to our welfare: this the Christian acknowledges. From the beginning of his religious course, he has been convinced of the necessity of divine grace, and his conviction grows with his days. He feels himself wholly unequal to the work he has to do, the race he has to run, the warfare he has to accomplish. Nor can he live upon the grace which he has received: "his strength" must be "renewed;" he must receive "the continual supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ." From the nature of his disposition, he desires more grace; from the nature of his condition, he needs more. He wants grace to sustain him in his troubles. He wants grace to subdue his corruptions, and to sanctify his tempers. He wants grace to preserve him "in the hour of temptation." He wants grace to quicken his languid affections, "for his soul cleaveth to the dust." He wants grace to enlarge his experience, to render him useful to others, to qualify him for the various offices and relations of life, to "hold on his way," to "endure to the end" and.

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oh! what grace does he want, to enable him to say, when he looks forward, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me!" Rejoice, O Christian! from the throne of God you shall "obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." The "God of all grace" invites you near; "ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." "My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

"The Lord will give grace:" and thus the promise provides for the believer while in this world. But he is not to live here always; this is only the beginning of his existence: before him lies an opening eternity. And here the promise meets him with "everlasting consolation," and assures him of "glory." He knows that when his wanderings are ended, "he shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven;" that, after a few more, painful struggles, he shall wear "the crown of life;" that, as soon as "the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, he shall have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Of this "glory" we can know but very little, till we shall hear the voice saying, "Come and see." But this circumstance wonderfully magnifies it; for what must be implied in a felicity which surpasses all description, all conception, and which is hidden rather than unfolded by all the grand imagery employed to express it!—But we have some intimations which serve to awaken our desires, to elevate our hopes, and to solace our minds, in all the difficulties of life. It is a pleasing thought, that "there remaineth a rest

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for the people of God;"—that "God shall wipe away all tears from our eyes;"—that "there shall be no

more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain;”—that we shall “join the general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven;”—that

“There we shall see his face,
And never, never sin;”—

that he will “show us the path of life,” and bring us into” his presence, where there is fulness of joy,” and to his” right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore.”—“It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but this we know, that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”

Again: These blessings may be considered in their order. Grace stands before glory; and though God gives both, irrespective of any meritorious worthiness in the recipients, he never gives glory till he has given grace. “We wish this to be observed, because the generality of people would pass to the enjoyment of glory without submitting to the laws of grace. But such a hope is false and absurd. Thus stands the purpose of God: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God;” “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord;” “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” And hence you perceive that it is not only forbidden, but impossible. Indeed if there were no law to exclude the unsanctified sinner from glory, he would necessarily remain miserable. His sin is his hell. His disposition would destroy all the happiness of heaven: the service and the joy would only disgust and torment the mind. God cannot make us happy with himself, till he has

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made us holy like himself. “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?”

We may also observe the connexion of these blessings. They are inseparable: where the Lord has given grace, he will certainly give glory. And there-

fore, my dear hearers, the grand question is, whether you have grace? Decide this by its influences and effects, as they are marked in the Scriptures—by loathing sin; by hungering and thirsting after righteousness; by acceding to the terms of discipleship,—denying yourselves, taking up your cross, and following the Saviour; by your love to the ordinances, the word, and the people of God; by your deadness to the world, and having your conversation in heaven. Thus ascertain the reality of your grace, and “rejoice in hope of the glory of God;” “being confident of this very thing, that he who hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” Did I say, where there is grace, there will be glory? I go further—there is glory: “the Spirit of glory resteth upon them.” They are “changed from glory to glory.” They “rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.” “He that believeth on the Son of God, hath everlasting life.” He has more than the promise—he has a part of heaven: he has “the earnest of his inheritance;” he has “the first fruits of the Spirit”—the same in kind, though not in degree, with the whole harvest. Grace is glory in the bud, and glory is grace matured. Grace is the lowest degree of glory, and glory is only the highest degree of grace. This He gives;

III. And what does He withhold? “No good

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thing.”—O how full and comprehensive is the language of promise! The Holy Ghost, in framing it, seems to anticipate all the objections of our suspicious hearts. It was much to tell us, God was “a sun and shield:” but he enlarges and adds, “The Lord will give grace and glory.” And surely this will suffice. No, my brethren; there is something still behind—the condition of “the life which we now live in the

flesh." This frequently presses upon the mind, and perplexes and troubles the people of God. They have bodies: they have families: they are commanded to "provide things honest in the sight of all men." Where is the man who never thought within himself, "If I make religion my chief concern, and sacrifice whatever it requires, shall I not injure my temporal circumstances?" Where is the man whose liberality was never checked, and whose confidence was never weakened, by slender means of subsistence? Where is the man who, with increasing demands from a numerous offspring, never with anxiety asked, "What shall they eat, and what shall they drink; and wherewithal shall they be clothed?" "He knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust;" He stoops to our weaknesses; and saves us the pain and shame of telling him our unworthy fears, by giving us promises which effectually provide against them—"Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."—Let us take three views of this extensive promise.

First, Behold in it the grandeur of his possessions.

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He who engages to withhold no good thing, must have all good things at his disposal. And, lo! "He is able to do for us exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think." "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine: thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come from thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all." "The silver and the gold are thine." "Every beast of the forest is thine, and

the cattle upon a thousand hills." "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein"—And what is this lower world? An inconsiderable province of his empire—"Lift up your eyes on high, and behold, who hath created these things; that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names, by the greatness of his might, for that he is strung in power, not one failing." His dominion is universal; his resources boundless; his possessions infinite—Can he be poor, whose Father is so rich?

Secondly, Behold in this promise the wonders of his liberality. All earthly benefactors shrink from a comparison with him. He acts by no ordinary rule of bounty, by no human standard of beneficence. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than your ways, and his thoughts than your thoughts." "O how great is the goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee, which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!"—"The same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him."—"My God shall

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supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."—"No good thing will he withhold."

Thirdly, Behold in this promise the wisdom of his dispensations. He has qualified his engagement, and regulated our hope, by the goodness of the things insured. Instead of regretting this condition, the Christian rejoices in it; it secures his happiness. Had God engaged to indulge him in all these things, whether they were good for him or evil, it would have been a threatening, not a promise. He now sees the providence of God choosing his inheritance for him, managing all his affairs, and equally designing his welfare when it gives, or when it withholds.

For there is often a great difference between what is pleasing, and what is profitable. Hence the apostle

tells us, "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby." And David could say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted." If health, if honour, if riches will be good for us, they are secured; if indigence, if obscurity, if sickness will conduce to our advantage, they will not be denied: for "no good thing" will He withhold. Of all this he is the infallible Judge. Let us then drop not only our murmuring, but our anxiety: let us "cast all our care upon Him who careth for us;" let us be satisfied that "all things work together for good to them that love God;" and ever remember the word upon which he has caused us to hope—"the young lions may lack and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." And,

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IV. Whom does God regard in all these exceeding great and precious promises?—"Them that walk uprightly." "While, by this single expression, David takes down the confidence of the presumptuous, he encourages the hope of the real Christian, who, under all the imperfections which make him groan, knows that his desire is to the Lord, "and to the remembrance of his name." For the character is not sinless: he has "not attained," he is "not already perfect"—"but this one thing" he does: "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before," he "presses toward the mark for the prize of his high calling of God in Christ Jesus." He is "an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." His sincerity may be viewed in reference to himself; to others; and to God.

He walks uprightly, with regard to himself. In all his dealings with his own soul, he guards against self-deception and flattery. He dreads a false peace; he wishes to free his mind from every bias in his

own favour, and to survey impartially his state and his character. He does not shut his eyes against the evidence of offensive truth; nor hold back, or divert his understanding from those inquiries which may issue in mortifying and painful convictions. He comes to the light. He suspects, and examines himself. He reads. and compares, and judges himself again; again he investigates himself, and kneels, and prays, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me; and lead me in the way everlasting."

He walks uprightly, with regard to God. It is an awful consideration, that "with him we have to do"

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in all our religious exercises. In singing, we profess to praise him; in prayer, we profess to seek him; in hearing his word, we profess to obey him—And "God is not mocked." He distinguishes between appearance and reality. And, in the Christian indeed, there is something more than pretence: he does not "draw nigh to God with his mouth, and honour him with his lips, while his heart is far from him." He worships God in "spirit and in truth." His external service arises from inward principle. Hence he makes conscience of private duties. He is the same in his family, as in the temple. He is the same in prosperity, as in adversity. The simple and pure regard which he has to the will and the glory of God, keeps him from partiality in religion: there is no sin which he cherishes; there is no duty which he dislikes: he esteems all the divine precepts concerning all things to be right, and he hates every false way.

He walks uprightly, with regard to men. His transactions with his fellow-creatures are distinguished by candour, openness, honesty, punctuality. His professions are the sure pledges of his designs. What he promises, he performs. He does not consider his

tongue as given him to deceive. He hates and abhors lying. He shuns adulation; he gives not flattering titles to any. He does not suffer sin upon his neighbour: "faithful are the wounds of" this "friend." He does not abound in ceremony: it is too deceitful an article for him to traffic with. He is not an actor on a stage: he is not a rotten sepulchre, over which stands a whitewashed tomb—He is what he appears to be.

Such is the character of the righteous: these are

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their privileges. "For the Lord God is a sun and shield: the Lord will give grace and glory; and no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly"—Hence we learn how exceedingly we are mistaken, if we view religion as unfriendly to our happiness. "Godliness is profitable unto all things; having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." It is the "one thing needful;" and if we make light of it, whatever be the prize we pursue, we are" observing lying vanities, and forsaking our own mercies."

Hence we expostulate. Can the service of sin, or the pursuits of the world, afford you advantages like these? Can earthly things, even in their abundance, heal a wounded conscience, sustain you under the troubles of life, take away the sting of death, and raise you above the dread of eternity? What have they done for you already? You have tried their efficacy—are you happy? Why will you refuse a fresh proposal, sanctioned by the experience of millions, and the success of all who have tried it? "Acquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace; thereby good shall come unto thee." "Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge?" "Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness." "Incline your ear,

and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.”—

We congratulate others. “All hail, ye highly favoured of the Lord.” “Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord,

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the shield of, thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.” “Blessed is the people that is in such a case! yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.”—

“We have heard, O God. that thou hast a people upon earth distinguished by innumerable and inestimable privileges. We would not be satisfied with knowing and admiring their portion. Weary of the world, which has yielded us nothing but vanity and vexation of spirit, we would seek our inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in Christ Jesus. We would take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, I will go with you, for I have heard that God is with you. I am a companion of all them that fear thee, of them that keep thy precepts. Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name. Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people; O visit me with thy salvation: that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.” May God inspire us with these sentiments! Amen.

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SERMON XII.

THE CONDITION OF CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD.

SERMON XII.

THE CONDITION OF CHRISTIANS IN THE WORLD.

*“I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world,
but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.” ST.
JOHN xvii. 15.*

THESE words were spoken by our Saviour, on a very memorable occasion—an “hour” unparalleled in the annals of time. “Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end.” While he was with them, he had withheld no proof of his kindness and care. He gave them free access to his presence, he relieved their complaints, he removed their doubts, he bore with their infirmities. Such an intercourse of sacred friendship had endeared him to their affections, and rendered the prospect of separation inexpressibly painful. When the venerable Samuel died, “all the Israelites were gathered together, and lamented him.” When the amiable friend of David fell “on his high places,” the bleeding survivor said, “I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been to me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of wo-

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men." When Elisha beheld the reformer Elijah ascending, "He cried, My father, my father! the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." The case of the disciples was more peculiarly afflictive; and "sorrow filled their hearts." Our Saviour was never deprived of self-possession: in every state, he had the full command of his powers; and even in the immediate view of his tremendous sufferings, he does not forget anyone circumstance that claims his attention. He thinks more of his disciples than of himself: he enters into their feelings—they were to remain behind, poor and despised: "as sheep among wolves;" as passengers in a vessel "tossed by the waves"—He will not leave them "comfortless." On the evening before his crucifixion, and a few moments before his agony, by the gate of the garden of Gethsemane, surrounded with his family, "he lifts up his eyes to heaven," and commends them into the hands of his "Father and our Father, his God and our God."

Do not say, my fellow Christians, this prayer was for the apostles—it was for them primarily, but not exclusively. Hear his own words: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word." Thus it extends to all the followers of our Lord in every age, in every place. He prays therefore for you, even for you; and this is his language: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."

From these words the following instructions may be derived. I. It is the province of God to take us out of the world. II. This world is a proper situation for the righteous to live in for a season. III. There is

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evil in the world, to which they are exposed, and by which they may be injured. IV. The Divine protection

is essential to their security. V. It is encouraging to remember that our Lord and Saviour prays for our preservation.

I. It is the province of God to take us out of the world.

It is the obvious design of the Scripture to bring the mind into a pious frame, by inducing us to acknowledge God in all our ways; to apprehend him in every occurrence; to adore him in the field, as well as in the temple; to hold communion with him in his works as well as in his word, in his dispensations as well as in his ordinances. While our minds are perplexed and discomposed by beholding the mass of human affairs, and the perpetual fluctuations of worldly things; this blessed book lends us a principle, which when applied reduces the confusion to order; explains the mystery; and calms the inquirer. It teaches us that nothing occurs by chance; it shows us the Supreme Being superintending the whole, "seeing the end from the beginning;" "working all things after the counsel of his own will;" advancing towards the execution of purposes worthy of himself, with steady, majestic steps; never turning aside; never too precipitate; never too slow. We see Divine Providence fixing "the bounds of our habitation," and presiding over all the circumstances of our birth, and our death. In our appointed time we appear; in the places designed for us we are fixed. When we have finished our course, and ended our work, "he says, Return, ye children of men:" and it is not in the power of enemies to accelerate, or of

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friends to retard the period of our departure. "Is there not an appointed time to man upon earth? Are not his days also like the days of an hireling?"—"His days are determined: the number of his months are with thee: thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass." "In his hand thy breath is, and

his are all thy ways.” “The righteous and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God.” Does he “number the hairs of your head,” and not the years of your pilgrimage? Does “not a sparrow fall to the ground without your heavenly Father?” and are ye not “of more value than many sparrows?”

This world, we have reason to believe, was never designed fully to accomplish the purpose of God in the original creation of man. It was to precede a nobler state; and the mode of transition from glory to glory, would have been easy and delightful. But the passage is now become rough and dismaying. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death hath passed upon all men, because all have sinned.” It is not pleasing to human nature, to think of being “taken out of” these bodies in which we have tabernacled; “out of” these houses in which we have lived; “out of” these circles in which we have moved; “out of” this “world,” in which we were born, and to which we have been so long accustomed—to be laid hold of, and detached from all we now enjoy, by the messengers of “the king of terrors;” to be divided; to lie down and putrify; to enter a new and untried world. But irksome as the consideration may be, the Christian cannot banish it from his thoughts: he endeavours, especially in particular circumstances, to render it familiar; and there are things which have a tendency

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to encourage his mind in the contemplation of it. The enemy is disarmed of his sting. While “walking through the valley of the shadow of death,” God will be with him. The event is entirely under the controlling influence of his heavenly Father. How pleasing is the reflection, “Well; my times are in his hand. On him depend the occurrences of my history, and the duration of my life. He is best qualified to judge of the scenes through which I am to pass, and of the manner in which I am to leave

this world—whether it be sudden, or lingering; by accident, or disease; alone, or surrounded with friends; in youth, or in age. It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good. Have I been bereaved of beloved relations, and useful connexions?—My soul hath it still in remembrance—but were they not his? He had a right to do what he would with his own. He came and took them away, not as a thief, but as a proprietor. He employed in the seizure not only power, but wisdom and kindness. “What I know not now, I shall know hereafter. Behold, he taketh away; who can hinder him? Who will say unto him, What doest thou? I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it. He is the rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.”

II. This World is a proper situation for the disciples of Jesus to continue in for a season.—It is probable, that if our weak reason were allowed to speculate concerning the state of the righteous, it would decide on the propriety of raising them to the high places of the earth; of delivering them from all tribulation;

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of withholding from them no joy—or rather, of calling them away from this region of sin, from this vale of tears, from this miserable exile, to “sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.” The Scripture seems to countenance this nation. It says, “Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest, because it is polluted.” It commands us “not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.” It asks, “What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?” How perfectly has the Creator arranged everything in the universe! How

wisely has he separated the day and the night, the dry land and the sea, the various classes of beasts and birds! And will he join the living and the dead? Will he mingle error and truth, virtue and vice? Will he confound the pious with the wicked? Yes; this world, so opposite to their heavenly nature, so unsuitable to their desires, so incapable of affording them happiness, while from every quarter it wounds and vexes; forcing from them many a sigh, "Woe is me, that I sojourn in Mesech!" "O that I had wings like a dove! for then I would flyaway, and be at rest; I would hasten my escape from the stormy wind and tempest"—this world is to retain them year after year; and our Saviour does not pray to take them out of it.

First, From their remaining here, the wicked derive innumerable advantages. They have instances of religion before them, which encourage while they condemn. By these they learn that godliness is practicable, and profitable. They see persons of the

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same passions, of the same age, of the same occupations with themselves, walking in the paths of righteousness; and, much oftener than we imagine, the portion of the righteous forming a contrast with their own unhappy circumstances, leads them to exclaim, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob! and thy tabernacles, O Israel! Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." It is in the very nature of religion to render Christians active in doing good. They are often the means of "saving a soul from death, and of hiding a multitude of sins." Sometimes a few individuals have changed the moral face of a whole neighbourhood; and the language of prophecy has been realized—"the wilderness and the solitary place shall be made glad for them, and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose."

The disorders which prevail in the world are great; but the state of society would be far worse, not to

say intolerable, were the righteous to be withdrawn, and the licentiousness of sinners to be no longer repressed, or counteracted by their rebuke, their example, and their influence. They "are the salt of the earth;" they are "the light of the world." They are blessings in the families, cities, countries, in which they reside. They have frequently, by their prayers, obtained deliverances for those among whom they live. They have "stood in the breach," and held back the invading judgments of the Almighty. "Except the Lord of Hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom; and we should have been like unto Gomorrah." While a father sees his children standing intermixed with his foes, he levels not his arrows: the one is preserved for the sake of the other. When God has secured his people,

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the wicked become the fair mark of his indignation; the vials of his wrath are poured down; time shall be no longer; the heavens pass away with a great noise; the earth is burned up.

Again: Some reasons are taken from Christians themselves. "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God:" and does not their situation in the world call forth every active, every suffering virtue? Can there be any grandeur of character where there are no difficulties and dangers? Can there be a triumph where there is no warfare, or a warfare where there is no enemy? When do the righteous feel motives to keep them humble? When they behold in the wicked an image of themselves. When are they urged to gratitude for distinguishing grace? When they are reminded by sinners of what they were "by nature" as well "as others." When do they display their compassion, and increase their benevolence? While feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, teaching the ignorant,

and endeavouring to rescue their fellow-creatures from perdition. Can they exercise divine patience and forgiveness? Yes, while they have an opportunity to “render good for evil.”

They can discover their holy courage, while bearing the “reproach of the cross,” and enduring “the defaming of many.” Here, by the sacrifices they are called to make, and their readiness to leave father or mother, son or daughter, lands or life, for his sake, they demonstrate the supremacy of their love to the Saviour. Here, their sincerity and resolution appear unsuspecting, by not drawing back, or turning aside, when the world would terrify by its frowns, or allure by its smiles. Here we behold the vigour of those

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principles which bear sway in the minds of the godly. In heaven we shall glorify God. But heaven is not a state of trial. There sin never enters: and what is it to live innocent where there is no temptation? But to see evil patterns, and not copy them; to breathe pestilential air, and not inhale the infection; to renounce our inclinations, and say, “Thy will be done;” to live with our conversation in heaven, when everything conspires to bind us down to earth—here the Christian honours God, and here he gathers glory in a manner the most distinguishing—and all this is peculiar to his residence in this world.

Let him therefore avail himself of the singular opportunities his situation affords; and while he remains here, let him labour to fulfil the design of Heaven in his continuance, both with regard to himself and others. Let him remember, that all rash and eager wishes for death are improper; that it may be “needful for him to abide “longer “in the flesh;” that of this expediency he must leave God to judge; that His pleasure will be discovered by the event; that he will not be detained a moment longer than is necessary to accomplish some valuable purpose; and that, instead of indulging in impatience, it becomes him to

say, with Job, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait until my change come." The man in harvest, while bearing "the burden and heat of the day," may occasionally look up to see where the sun is; and may console himself with the reflection, "The evening shades will by-and-by come on, and invite me to an honourable retreat"—but it does not become him to throw down his implements, and hasten home before he obtains such a discharge.

As Christians are to think of living for a while in

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the world, it is not unreasonable for them to be affected with its occurrences and changes. Some plead for a kind of abstracted and sublimated devotion, which the circumstances they are placed in by their Creator render equally impracticable and absurd. They are never to notice the affairs of government, or the measures of administration: war, or peace; liberty, or slavery; plenty, or scarcity—all is to be equally indifferent to them; they are to leave these carnal and worldly things to others. But have they not bodies? Have they not families? Is religion founded on the ruins of humanity? When a man becomes a Christian, does he cease to be a member of civil society? Allowing that he be not the owner of the ship, but only a passenger in it, has he nothing to awaken his concern in the voyage? If he be only a traveller towards a better country, is he to be told, that because he is at an inn which he is soon to leave, it should not excite any emotion in him, whether it be invaded by robbers, or consumed by flames before the morning? "In the peace thereof ye shall have peace:"—and are not Christians to "provide things honest in the sight of all men?" Are they to detach themselves while here from the interests of their fellow-creatures; or to "rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep?" Is not religion

variously affected by public transactions? Can a Christian, for instance, be indifferent to the cause of freedom, even on a pious principle? Does not civil liberty necessarily include religious? and is it not necessary to the exertions of ministers, and the spreading of the Gospel?

And, Christians, as the world is a station in which you are to reside for a season, religion does not re-

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quire you to withdraw from society, to relinquish secular business, to live in solitude. It more than justifies your being visible, social, active. "Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel: but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify, your Father which is in heaven." It becomes you, however, to remember,

III. That there is evil in the world, to which you are exposed, and by which you may be injured. And what is this "evil?" There is the evil of sin, and the evil of suffering. It is not the latter that our Saviour deprecates—"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross." "In the world ye shall have tribulation." "Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Indigence and affliction are generally a soil favourable to the prosperity of religion. "By the sadness of the countenance, the heart is made better." Security from sin is preferable to immunity from sorrow. It is therefore moral evil from which we should be most anxious to be preserved. And by this you are perpetually endangered while in the world.

The people of the world are enemies to religion. How pernicious are their maxims, their errors, their number, their example, their influence! How ensnaring are their smiles, and how intimidating their

frowns! How powerful are the fear of censure, and the love of praise! The things of the world are prejudicial to a life of godliness. Every station, every condition, hides innumerable temptations. It has

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been questioned, whether prosperity or adversity be the more hazardous. Affluence flatters our pride, and nourishes the passions. It has a tendency to draw off our dependence from Divine Providence. It furnishes us with substitutes for the consolations of the Gospel; and as to its duties, it multiplies diversions, excuses, and hindrances. Many a man has parted with his religion in walking from a cottage to a mansion. "They that will be rich, fall into temptation, and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

But indigence has its perils; hence the prayer of wisdom has always been, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."

Sensible things press upon the body, and the body affects the mind. The world has the advantage of neighbourhood and constant intercourse. It presents itself to the eye, the ear, the touch. It corresponds with a party within, which excites us to welcome every proposal it brings. The world does not ask us to deny, but to please ourselves; not to row against the current, but to sit down in the boat, and leave it to the stream. When the world knocks, "the spirit of the world" is ready to open: and when temptations to vanity meet with vain hearts, and temptations to folly meet with foolish hearts, the success is more than probable. In the seduction of mankind, the world has a marvellous

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diversity of means: every disposition is suited with an object. If a man be not grovelling enough to be fond of money, here is honour to allure him: if he spurn sensual gratifications, he may pursue “the knowledge which puffeth up.” And as it is said of Joab, that “he had turned after Adonijah, though he turned not after Absalom;” so a man who has vanquished one temptation may be overcome by another, more suitable to his propensity, and more aided by circumstances. O what spoils of truth, of conscience, and of devotion can the world display! In how many has it had the unhappy influence to counteract conviction, and to destroy the most promising beginnings of seriousness! Hence the apostacy of Demas—“he loved this present world”—“Felix trembled,” but “willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.”—“Herod heard John gladly, and did many wonderful things;” but the charms of a beloved Herodias obtained an order for his execution. The young man inquired after eternal life, and our Saviour “loved him;” but “he went away sorrowful, for he was very rich”—“He also that received seed among thorns is he that heareth the word; and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful.”

—And where the world does not acquire such a predominancy in the soul as to be entirely subversive of religion, it may prevail to such a degree as to be very injurious to it. A real Christian may have too keen a relish for the allowed indulgences of life. He may be too much alive to the opinion of his fellow-worms. He may be too eager to “add house to house, and to join field to field.” He may “load himself with thick clay,” and go on heavily. He may

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“touch the unclean thing,” soil “the fine linen which is the righteousness of the saints,” and wear a “garment

spotted by the flesh." He may spread earth over his affections, and damp their ardour. As the consequence of all this worldly influence, there will be little spirituality in his conversation; little life in ordinances; little pleasure in drawing near to God; a loss of inward peace; corroding care; a dread of affliction; a thorny dying pillow. He will be a stumbling-block to the weak, and a distress to the strong: nor will his religion stand forth prominently enough to be visible and striking "to them that are without."

Christians! there are two things which we wish you to remember. The one is, that your greatest danger lies in things lawful; for the proposal of anything apparently sinful would awaken your fears, and your fears would secure you. "Every creature of God is good;" but if it be not "sanctified by the word of God and prayer," the blessing may be turned into a curse, and our very "table may become a snare and a trap." We are even bound to love our connexions: but love may grow up into idolatry. Extremes are contiguous. The line of separation between lawful and unlawful is a single hair: on this the enemy takes his station, in order that, when he finds us advancing to the verge of permission, he may draw us over, and induce us to transgress.—The other is, that this evil frequently advances by slow degrees; approaches the heart by imperceptible access; and, by specious pretensions, justifies its continuance there. It assumes a thousand flexible shapes; wears various names; passes under the notion of good breeding, sociability, opportunities of useful-

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ness, "laying up for the children"—"With her much fair speech she causes him to yield; with the flattery of her lips she forces him—he goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks: till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth

not that it is for his life.”—What is the conclusion of all this? O professors of religion, “love not the world, nor the things of the world.” “Be not conformed to this world.” Consider it as an enemy. Regard it with caution. Walk as among snares. Be circumspect. Be watchful. And if you would pass through the world with safety, recollect,

IV. That the Divine protection is essential to your security. The more valuable things are, the more dependent will they be found. Sheep require more care than wolves; vines, than brambles. A garden demands more attention than a wilderness; and children are reared with far greater sollicitude than animal young. Nothing equals the dependence of the Christian: but herein lie all his spiritual resources; for when he “is weak, then he is strong.” “When in himself he can do nothing, he forms an alliance with Omnipotence, and can do all things.

—Be sensible of your inability to sustain and defend yourselves. Bring under your review all those who, possessing every advantage, have drawn back unto perdition. They advanced far, and promised well; but, like a stone urged up the side of a hill, which, when the impelling force is removed, rushes back with greater velocity, and bounds further into the plain below; so these have entered again into the world, and are more distinguished by its vices and

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follies than before. “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 than the beginning.” Mark the falls of good men themselves, who have been “recovered from the snare of the devil.” When they went forth, but not “in the strength of the Lord,” they were found un-

equal to the trial, and by bitter experience were convinced of their weakness. When our Saviour had informed the disciples, that "the Shepherd would be smitten, and the sheep scattered abroad;" Peter said, "Though all men should be offended because of thee, I will never be offended." When our Lord gave him the premonition, "Before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice;" he exclaimed, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee." He was sincere, but self-confident. And what was the consequence? His resolution failed him: he denied his Lord with "oaths and curses." Weigh well the language of One who knows what is in man, and who has said, "Without me, ye can do nothing." Compare your experience with it. And, painful as it will be, call to your remembrance the numerous variations, instabilities, declensions, backslidings of your lives.

—Be equally persuaded, also, that the Divine power is as adequate as it is necessary to your preservation. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall. But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings, as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint." It is his character, and his prerogative, that "He is able to keep you from falling, and

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to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." He preserved Abijah in the wicked family of Jeroboam. He secured "saints even in Cesar's household." Behold yonder illustrious "multitude standing before the throne, with palms in their hands." Full of weakness they passed through a world of danger: their sufficiency was of God. He enabled them "to hold on their way, and to wax stronger and stronger." He "girded them with strength, and made their way perfect." By "Him, they ran through a troop, and leaped over a wall." By Him, they "trod on the lion and adder:

the young lion and the dragon they trampled under feet." And He is the same. His "hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor his ear heavy that it cannot hear." "The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants; and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate."

As the Divine protection is necessary, and adequate to your defence, so it is attainable; and the

Last division of our subject shows us how it is to be obtained—By prayer. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." Hence the practice of the saints—"Set a watch, O Lord, upon my lips; keep the door of my mouth." "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe." "Order my steps in thy word: and let not any iniquity have dominion over me." "Uphold me, according to thy word; that I may live: and let me not be ashamed of my hope." "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Christians, however, are sensible of the imperfections of their own performances. They can scarcely

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call their weak efforts, prayer. "Like a crane, or a swallow, so did I chatter." "Could I see an inspired record of all my prayers—could I see as God does the manner in which I have always addressed him—The vain thoughts! The numberless distractions! How often I have asked amiss! Sometimes without aruour, sometimes without confidence"—Hence it is a pleasing relief to their minds, to know that their brethren pray for them; that God is daily hearing. from lips more devout than their own, "Do good, O Lord, unto those that be good, and to them that are upright in their hearts." "Let all those that seek thee, rejoice and be glad in thee: let such as love thy salvation, say continually, The Lord be magnified." Is my character here described? How pleasing is it to reflect, that I am peculiarly interested

in the daily supplications of all the people of God; and that “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much!”

But their chief consolation is derived from a higher source. “And another angel came, and stood at the altar, having a golden censer: and there was given unto him much incense; that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar, which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense which came with the prayers of the saints ascended up before God, out of the angel’s hand.” Thus Jesus perfumes and presents our services; thus he obtains for our supplications audience and acceptance. Whether the intercession of our High Priest in heaven be verbal, or mental only, it is not necessary for us to determine. We know it is real. We know that “He appears in the presence of God for us.” We know that having been “reconciled by

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his death, we shall be saved by his life.” We know that “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

It may be necessary, however, to caution you not to mistake the nature and design of his intercession. It is not to inform God, as if he were ignorant. It is not to remind him, as if he were forgetful. It is not to persuade him, as if he were unkind. The appointment is entirely his own. It sprang from his mercy, and exemplifies his wisdom. What a display have we here of the majesty and holiness of God,—that he will not suffer us to approach him without a Mediator! How powerfully does it convince us of our unworthiness and vileness! How loudly does it preach to us reverence and humility! What becomes of self-righteousness, if we can bring nothing deserving the Divine regards; if our best duties need forgiveness, rather than recompence; if “the iniquity of our most holy things” would be sufficient to de-

stroy all our confidence? But, O how it meets the fears of the returning sinner, and the discouragements of the dejected saint! “We have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him.” If this dispensation were not desiguedly typified, it is beautifully illustrated in the address of God “to Eliphaz, and his two friends”—“You have not spoken of me the thing that is right. Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks, and seven rams, and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt-offering—and my servant Job shall pray for you; for him will I accept: lest I deal with you after your folly.”

We conclude by observing, what a view this gives

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us of our Lord and Saviour. What an infinitely important station does he occupy! What an understanding must he possess, to be accurately acquainted with the diversified circumstances and necessities of all the redeemed! How unparalleled is that love, which knows no variableness; which renders him, not only in his lowest abasement, but in his highest dignity, the friend of sinners; which induces him, while surrounded by all the adorations of heaven, to listen to the complaints and petitions of each of his people upon earth; and which never suffers him for one moment to remit the kindness of his attentions!

Again: what a representation does the subject give us of the happiness of believers! Though their Saviour be “passed into the heavens,” they know that he has not dropped his concern for them: they know that they “have not an High Priest, who cannot be touched with the feeling of their infirmities.”—And what is the inference? “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” “Having such an High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near in full assurance of faith.” Let us contemplate our glorious Intercessor.

Let us remember the dignity of his nature—he “is the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person.” Let us remember the dearness of his character—“This,” says the Father, “is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” “Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” Let us remember the value of his atonement—he is more than an intercessor, he is “an advocate with the Father;” “he is the propitiation

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for our sins.” He could say, “I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou hast given me to do: and now, Father, glorify me.” “He entered heaven with his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” His sufferings and death, his obedience and righteousness, all plead our cause: he asks nothing which God had not suspended on a condition which he has already performed. And in consequence of all this, let us remember the certainty of his success—“I know that thou hearest me always.”

—Come then, Christians, and “rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.” You have a Friend in court; an elder Brother in the palace of the King of kings. In his all-prevailing name you may approach; and while blushing over your poor services, you may be assured that your prayers will be heard, that your strength shall be equal to your day, that your grace shall be crowned with glory, and that “no good thing shall be withholden from you.” While Zechariah was burning incense within, all the people were praying without. O pleasing emblem of Christians, and of “the High Priest of their profession!” While you are praying in the outer court of this world, he is “within the veil,” with “the blood of sprinkling,” and the censer. It was the happiness of the Israelites, while fighting in the plain below, to look up and see Moses pleading with God

for them on the hill.—Be not dismayed, ye seed of Jacob. “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth: who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God; who also maketh intercession for us.”—“Nay, in

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all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

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SERMON XIII.

CONCUPISCENCE PUNISHED.

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SERMON XIII.

CONCUPISCENCE PUXISHED.

“And there went forth a wind from the Lord, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day’s journey on this side, and as it were a day’s Journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth. And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves, round about the camp. And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people; and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague. And he called the name of that place Kibroth-hattaavah; because there they buried the people that lusted.” NUMBERS xi. 31–34.

IT is one design of the sacred Scriptures to make “sin appear exceeding sinful.” Sometimes they place the evil before us in its essential deformity and vileness. At other times they surround it with “the terrors of the Almighty,” drawn from those dreadful threatenings which justify all our fears. To confirm these declarations, and illustrate these motives, we have also given us numerous examples, in which we see the malignity of sin realized. “Let

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no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil; neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his lust and enticed: then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

The event which is to engage our present attention is singularly awful. “We do not wonder that God, who esteems the prayer of the wicked an abomination, should refuse their unreasonable cry. But when we see him working a miracle to gratify their wishes, and making his bounty the means of their destruction, we are compelled to exclaim, “How

unsearchable are his judgments; and his ways are past finding out!”

The Israelites had been for some time preternaturally fed with manna. At length they despise it, and, influenced by the multitude of strangers that was among them, fall a lusting. “They wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish which we did eat in Egypt freely: the cucumbers and the melons, the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: but now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all besides this manna before our eyes.” The Lord hearkened and heard. He promised to indulge them: and behold the dreadful accomplishment of his word! “And there went forth a wind from the Lord, and brought quails hom the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day’s journey on this side, and as it were a day’s journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth. And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered

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the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers; and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp. And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people; and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague. And he called the name of that place Kibroth-hattaavah; because there they buried the people that lusted.” But, alas! though the fathers were buried, their children survived; and there are many among Christians now, as well as among the Jews of old, upon whose tombs Kibroth-hattaavah may be inscribed, with a translation under, The Graves of Lusts. Let us approach these sepulchres, and receive instruction.

I. Let us remark the power and dominion of God. Every element, every creature is subject to his authority, and yields to his control. He holds "the wind in his fist:" he determines the quarter from which it blows; the time of its rising and of its falling; the degree of its influence; the quality of its effects. "Every living thing" stands before him, and ministers unto him: he says to one, "Go, and he goeth; to another, come, and he cometh." He speaks—and the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field repair to Adam for names, to Noah for shelter. Has he enemies? Where can they hide? how can they escape? Every place is a magazine of arms; every being, from an angel to a fly, becomes an executioner. Has he friends? He can never want instruments to deliver or relieve them. A fish supplies Peter with the sacred tribute. Lions refuse to touch Daniel. Ravens feed Elijah. He nods, and

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the sea divides, the rock pours out water, manna drops from the clouds. "And there went forth a wind from the Lord, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and as it were about two cubits high upon the face of the earth." The Israelites were unbelieving; they questioned his ability to supply them—they said, "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold, He smote the rock, and the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed; can he give bread also, can he provide flesh for his people?" Even Moses staggered through unbelief. "The people among whom I am, are six hundred thousand footmen; and thou hast said, I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month. Shall the flocks and herds be slain for them, to suffice them? or shall all the fish in the sea be gathered together for them to suffice them? And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord's hand waxed short?

Thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not." Christian! why dost thou limit "the Holy One of Israel?" Why does thy confidence tremble when difficulties multiply, and ordinary means of relief fail thee? "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?" Behold in Him, whose you are and whom you serve, boundless resources at the command of friendly sympathy and fatherly care. "To him belong the issues from death." "The silver and the gold are his." "His are the cattle upon a thousand hills." "The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that

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dwell therein." "O fear the Lord, ye his saints; for there is no want to them that fear him: the young lions may lack and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."

II. See how much more diligent men are in collecting the meat that perisheth, than in labouring for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life. "And the people stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp." What eagerness, what assiduity, what perseverance, what sacrifices of ease, and even of sleep, do we here discover! "This is our opportunity; this may not continue; this may never return." "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." The wants of nature are pressing, and knock till they are relieved; but spiritual necessities are either unknown, or disregarded. When the body is in danger, we are alarmed, and instantly inquire for means of safety: but, inattentive to the exposure of the soul, who asks for the "Balm of Gilead?"

for the Physician there?" We are quick-sighted in the affairs of time; but O what stupidity blinds us as to the concerns of eternity! If there be a prospect of improving our secular advantage, we need no arguments: a hint excites us; we are awake; we rise early, sit up late, eat the bread of carefulness: we form our plans; we lay hold of every accidental assistance; we compass sea and land. But when we are to obtain "the honour that cometh from God," to gain a seat "in heavenly places," to secure

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"the true riches"—we are all torpor, and forgetfulness. Here we need line upon line, precept upon precept. Sabbaths must be instituted, to impress us; ministers must be appointed, to stir up our minds by way of remembrance; conscience must be deputed, to live within us as a constant monitor—and where is our assiduity and application, after all? Who sees us "working out our salvation with fear and trembling?" "striving to enter in at the strait gate?" "pressing into the kingdom of God?" "giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure?"

III. Persons may gather and hoard up what they will never live to enjoy. See these men. They are anxious to lay in a stock for days and weeks to come. They accordingly provide it, and prepare it. But would they have been so active, so eager, so grasping, had they foreseen that they were immediately to leave their abundance. and that as soon as they tasted they were to die? But so it was—"And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people. and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague." By many considerations, my brethren, do we labour to quench your undue ardours in the chace of earthly things. We have often laid before you the Divine prohibitions. We have shown you how impossible it is "to serve God and Mammon."

We have proved that “a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesses; that nature is satisfied with little, and grace with less. And, after all this, are you torn with anxieties, and wearying yourselves in worldly pursuits? Take another view—contemplate the vanity, the brevity,

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the uncertainty of life, upon the continuance of which all depends. “Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” “And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? and he said, this will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?” “There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea, he hath neither child nor brother: yet is there no end of all his labour; neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This is also vanity.” “Surely every man walketh in a vain show; surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.” “In the fulness of his sufficiency, he shall be in straits: every hand of the wicked shall come upon him. When he is about to fill his belly, God shall cast the fury of his wrath upon him, and shall rain it upon him while he is eating.”

Have you read this in the Bible only? Is it there alone that human life is reduced to a span, a tale, a dream, a nothing? Whom have you followed down

to the grave? Who are perpetually falling around you? The aged and the infirm? Who has pro-

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mised you length of days? Who has engaged to secure you from disasters and disease, till you have reached your aim? And what is the tenure of your possession, when the envied prize is acquired? Does the honour wither as we gather it? Do we come to an estate, only to bequeath it? Do we layout so much for a mansion which hangs on one dying life, and when we know the Lord of the manor will not allow us to renew? Shall we purchase at a great price articles which death has appraised and pronounced to be injured and nearly unserviceable? As strangers and pilgrims, shall we take a world of pains to beautify and enrich an inn which accommodates us only for a night, when in the morning we are to go on our way—a way by which we shall never return? “Lord, teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

IV. It is not the refusal, but the gratification of our desires that often proves ruinous. God was provoked—And how does he show his anger and punish the offenders? By indulgence—Ah! well had it been for Israel if God had turned away his ear from their clamour, and they had never seen a quail—Poor harmless birds! you unknowingly carry along the curse of Heaven. Deluded suppliants! You hail their approach: but you are filling your laps with poison—and plague—and death! Rachel said, “Give me children, or else I die”—She had children and died. The Jews were impatient for a king—and says God, “I gave them a king in mine anger, and took him away in my wrath.” “Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?” Connexions

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passionately sought may prove “scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes.” A well-spread table may be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling-block, and a recompense. “Your prosperity” may destroy you. “They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.”

When men are intemperate in their desires after worldly things, and succeed in obtaining what Divine Providence, from a knowledge of its consequences, was willing to withhold—the displeasure of God comes along with their unhallowed successes; and it matters not in what way the curse is inflicted—whether more visibly or secretly—whether by miracle, or by the natural influence of events on their depravity.

Sometimes the things so eagerly lusted after prove injurious to health. Thus a man is enabled to resign business—but he becomes gloomy and melancholy. He lives more sumptuously, and deliciously—but diseases, to which he was once a stranger, spring from repletion and indulgence, and becloud his future days.

Sometimes satisfaction is taken out of these things, and the man is far less happy than he was before he had gained them. His wishes multiply more than his means: his successes pamper every principle unfavourable to internal repose. “He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance, with increase.” “There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men: a man, to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth

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nothing for his soul of all that he desireth; yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof.”

Things so coveted have often proved morally injurious. They have been oil, to feed the fire of those evil passions which ought to be extinguished. They have proved rain and sunshine, to call forth and ripen a thousand seeds of temptation, which were buried under ground. By these, the character has not only been developed, but formed. The man has changed with his condition; and has become the monster he once abhorred. “He gave them their hearts’ desire, but sent leanness into their souls.” And is this a matter of congratulation? Can that be a blessing which injures your chief welfare, and destroys the prosperity of the soul? Are you strangers to that spirituality of frame which you once discovered? Are you chilled in your holy affections? Are you become only formal worshippers? Are you deprived of the joy of God’s salvation? Is your conversation less in heaven? Do you mind earthly things? Are you more unwilling to leave this world, and elter a better? And are you gainers—because, with the sacrifice of all these religious advantages, you have risen in life, and increased in affluence?

Many professors of religion, not satisfied with the state in which God has placed them, greedily desire more—and upon what principle? Not their necessities; but their lusts. It is not a house they want: this they have already—but a mansion. It is not food and raiment they want: these are provided—but superfluties. It is not an ability to travel they want: they have strength and feet already—but it is a carriage. They wish to be idle, luxurious, splendid,

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superior to others. He enlarges their resources: he indulges them—indulges their indolence, their pride,

their arrogance, their carnality, their forgetfulness of God—and what is such an indulgence? what is it for Providence to feed our sin? to give us permission to go astray? and, instead of hedging up our way with thorns, to render it alluring and seducing, by scattering it all along with flowers?

Men and brethren, the reflection is no less edifying than awful.

It shows us, First, How impossible it is to determine the love or anger of God from external circumstances. Behold the rich man clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day. See Lazarus laid at his gate full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from his table. But the former is the enemy, and the latter the friend of God: long ago the one has been comforted, and the other tormented—and there were the same dispositions in God towards them when they were upon earth. There is nothing concerning which we are more liable to err, than worldly success. It depends so entirely upon God, and it is so flattering to our feelings, that we can scarcely persuade ourselves that it is ever an unfavourable omen. But this is not unfrequently the case. It is sometimes sent in anger: and we should labour to ascertain the principle from which it is given. A natural man regards only the effect, but the Christian looks to the Source. A stranger would prefer the flower of a plant to the root, but the gardener who owns it, values the root more than the flower. Oh! it is well to be able to say, “Thou hast, in love to my soul,” delivered me from the pit of corruption, formed for me such a

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union, prospered the labour of my hands, blessed my bread and my water—

“How sweet our daily comforts prove,
When they are season’d with his love!”

Secondly. This principle crushes envy. "Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased." "Fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way"—you are not certain that his condition is really desirable—would you envy a man the wine he is going to drink, if you knew that it would poison him? or the robe he is going to wear, if you knew that it would infect him with the plague? On the other hand, you may err in your pity. You say, such a friend, alas! is reduced—but he is only taken down from the hill of danger and placed in the vale of safety. You say, he groans—yes, a limb is amputating: but it is to save the whole body from mortification and death.

Thirdly. The prosperity of the wicked, and the sufferings of the righteous, are a mystery, which has often perplexed even good men—but here it is explained. He can give in wrath, and refuse in mercy. He can indulge us to destruction; and he can chasten us, that we may not be condemned with the world.

Fourthly. Here we can harmonize the character and promise of God with those denials which He sometimes gives to our petitions. He is a God hearing prayer. He has said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find." But you have implored many things which you have never obtained—This helps you to understand the Scriptures, and shows you with what conditions and qualifications God has spoken. He did not engage to gratify your

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desires, whether his indulgence would be beneficial or injurious—This would have been a threatening, not a promise. A heathen could say, "It is kind in the gods not to hear us, when we pray for things that are evil." If a man give "good things" unto his children, in answer to their reasonable and needful desires, he is a good father: and who would think of reflecting upon him, as not discharging the duties of his relation, because he does not, while

they are incapable of judging for themselves, give them a knife or a loaded pistol, or suffer them to climb a ladder, and, becoming giddy, expose themselves to instant destruction?

Let us learn, also, with what a reserve we should always pray. Let us not presume to determine beforehand that certain things are indispensably necessary, and because we think we absolutely want them, grow fretful and miserable when we are refused. This is to prescribe to God; to impeach his wisdom and his goodness: and nothing can be more improper in the unworthy who have no daims, and in the ignorant who have been so often deceived in their judgments. Let us always refer ourselves to his counsel. Let us be always his followers, not his guides. Let us trust, and not teach him: and let us learn to imitate the example of David, who, in a case the most trying, said, "Carry back the ark of God into the city: If I shall find favour in the eyes of the Lord, he will bring me again, and show me both it and its habitation—But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here I am; let him do to me as seemeth good to him." And be it remembered, this is the way to succeed. When God gives in kindness, he produces a previous tem-

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perance of desire which will allow him to indulge us with safety. A preparation for our mercies is as necessary as a preparation for our trials and our duties—who thinks of this?

Finally. The subject says to us in forcible language—Be moderate in your desires—"let your conversation be without covetousness—be content with such things as ye have." "Seekest thou great things to thyself? seek them not." Our Saviour teaches you this lesson, in your very devotion:

"Give us this day our daily bread." All Jacob stipulates for is "bread to eat and raiment to put on." And "having food and raiment," says an apostle,

“let us be therewith content.” This is the grand improvement we ought to make of the piece of history before us—“Now these things were our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.” How were quails evil things? Is not every creature of God good? The case was this—They were evil in their consequences, and also in the principle from which they were desired. These Jews craved them unnecessarily: they had a sufficiency before, from the miraculous and merciful providence of Heaven—they craved them intemperately and unsubmitively: they demanded: “they wept aloud.”—Christians, beware of such senseless and inordinate longings: beware of a roving fancy; of imaginary wants; of unsanctified wishes. “Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.”

Men and Brethren! We have forbidden you to
Beek after temporal things with too much solicitude

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—but remember, it is far otherwise with regard to divine concerns. Spiritual blessings suit the soul; afford real satisfaction; secure the friendship of God; endure for ever—these are our perfection. Here we cannot be too earnest, too ambitious, too covetous. “Open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.” “Ask and receive, that your joy may be full.” “And this I pray: that your love may abound yet more and more, in knowledge and in all judgment: that ye may approve things that are excellent: that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God.”

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SERMON XIV.

HOPE.

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SERMON XIV.

HOPE.

“And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” ROMANS v. 5.

THE Christian never finds this world to be his rest. He is called to a life of labour and difficulty; of mortification and reproach; and his afflictions are many. But he possesses one incomparable advantage: he has a hope full of immortality. This renders every duty delightful: this teaches him, in whatsoever state he is, therewith to be content: this enlightens his darkness, and alleviates his sorrow. Like a helmet of salvation, it guards his head in the day of battle. Like an anchor of the soul, it holds and secures him in the storms of adversity. Like a pleasing companion, it travels with him through all the tediousness of the wilderness, and often reminds him of his removal from this vale of tears to the rest that remains for the people of God.—He is saved by hope.—He rejoices in hope.—

Of this hope the Apostle speaks, in the words which we have read; and his language is peculiarly

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worthy of our attention. “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” Let us consider the excellency, and the evidence of this hope.—Let us, I. Show how it preserves from shame; and, II. Ascertain its connexion with the love of God.

PART I. It is not necessary to enlarge upon the nature of hope—it is a pleasing expectation of some future attainable good. But a commendation is here given it, which it will be useful for us to examine. It maketh not ashamed. “We may take three views of it. We may oppose it to the hope of the worldling; the hope of the Pharisee; and the hope of the Antinomian. Hope causes shame, by the insufficiency of its object—and this is the hope of the Worldling; by the weakness of its foundation—and this is the hope of the Pharisee; by the falseness of its warrant—and this is the hope of the Antinomian. The hope of the Christian has the noblest object—the surest foundation—the clearest warrant: and, with regard to each of these, it maketh not ashamed.

First. Hope may cause shame by the insufficiency of its object—and such is the hope of the worldling. And here we are not going to observe how frequently “the men of the world” never reach the mark and obtain the prize for which they run. We allow them to be successful; and only call upon you to witness their disappointment when their expectations are accomplished. For what have they gained, to reward their toil, and to indemnify them for the sacrifices they have made? As they examine the acquisition which they so much overvalued, see how they blush;

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hear how they exclaim, "Vanity of vanities! all is vanity and vexation of spirit!"

"In vain we seek a heaven below the sky.

The world has false, but flattering charms:

Its distant joys show big in our esteem,

But lessen still as they draw near the eye;

In our embrace, the visions die;

And when we grasp the airy forms,

We lose the pleasing dream."

Look forward, and see the worldling called to strip and die. See him laying down all his honours, all his riches on the side of the grave; bidding farewell to every scene his soul held dear, and entering the eternal world destitute. Now thought can no longer be diverted: every disguise drops off. Now he forms a true estimate of things—And what does he think of those objects for which he deprived himself of rest, and racked himself with anxieties?—for which he disregarded the calls of religion, and abandoned the prospect of endless life?—what does he think of them now they are fled, for ever fled?—and have left him without resource? What does Alexander now think of his bloody trophies? What does Herod now think of killing James, and condemning Peter, because he saw "it pleased the people?" What does Judas think of his thirty pieces of silver? They are all covered with confusion, and filled with contempt.

But let us view them in their present circumstances. Here, they are in their best estate: they have their portion in this life. Here, the crowned votaries of the world seem to be happy, and they are envied by many around them. They are envied—but it is only by the foolish and the ignorant, who know them not. They seem indeed to be happy—but pe-

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netrate through the glory which surrounds them—and look within—and you will find them harassed

with doubts; agitated with fears; a prey to evil passions; “a troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and dirt.” Could you approach them in those moments in which the delusions of imagination give place to the remonstrances of conscience and reason, you would hear them confessing—“All this is important only in the eyes of strangers. They gaze on the exhibition and admire—but we are behind the scenes, and view the naked ropes and pulleys. We are not happy; nor is it in the power of these things to satisfy our desires. In all this dissipation, we never taste a drop of pure joy. The friendship of the world is worse than nothing. “We do not follow these vanities—we are dragged after them. Our life is bondage—O that we were free indeed!—ah! ye righteous, you alone have liberty and peace. Happiness is only to be found in a deliverance from the present evil world. “We will retire: we will reform: we will seek a better, even a heavenly country.”

Yes; tell me, you who have made the world your hope, what has it done for you? In the many years you have devoutly served it, how much has it advanced your happiness? What have your pleasures and satisfactions been, compared with your regrets and dis gusts? How soon, when lulled to sleep, have your charming dreams vanished, and your waking disquietudes tormented you again! At the moment of my address—are you happy? Do you fear nothing? desire nothing? Are you not asking, in language with which you commenced your career twenty, forty years ago, Who will show me any good? Do you not shun

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solitude and retirement? Are you not afraid of reflection? Do you not flee from one company and amusement to another, to get rid of yourselves? Do you never envy the happiness of the brutes? Are you strangers to a wish that you had never been born?—And if this be the case with regard to all

your good things, what do you think of your evil ones? Having no support in the day of adversity, you must sink. Having no diversion, you cannot escape the scourge of your own mind; and conscience, free from restraints, will be able to take a dreadful blow.—Such is your present condition. You are as certain of disappointment in this world as in the world to come: and when you appear before God in judgment, you will not be heard to lament that all your enjoyments are over, that your happiness is ended and your misery begun. No. You will not say, “Our happiness is ended”—but “We never were happy: our misery is begun—we always were miserable—we found the way as well as the end of transgressors hard; and, by a wretched time, we prepared ourselves only for a more wretched eternity.”

On this dark ground we bring forward the Christian to advantage. The object of his hope is the greatest good a creature can possess; and while in everything else the expectation exceeds the reality, in this the reality infinitely surpasses the expectation. When we propose the hope of the Christian, we exclude every evil we feel or fear; every imperfection which degrades or grieves us. It is “a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;” it is “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and whose maker is God;” it is “a kingdom which cannot be shaken;” it is “a crown of glory that fadeth

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not away.” Think of the company with which he will associate—all the truly wise and good: “the innumerable company of angels;” “the Lord of all,” in whose “presence there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” Take his body: it is now vile; but it shall be changed and fashioned like the glorious body of the Saviour—Think of the body of the Son of God: a body to be worn by the Judge of all when he sits upon his throne; a body in which he will be for ever adored.

This is the model to which the Christian will be conformed. And after all, this is only the inferior part of him: this is only the dwelling—what will the inhabitant be! this is only the instrument—what will the agent be! however refined and subtilized, this is only matter—what will the spirit be! “It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but this we know, that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” Such is his hope, and it “maketh not ashamed.” His understanding does not reproach him for pursuing such a prize. He does not blush to avow his purpose to the world. He does not shrink from a comparison with philosophers, princes, heroes. He leads a sublimer life: he has taken a grander aim.—And when he has acquired this blessedness, will he be ashamed that he so highly valued it, and that to gain it he was willing to deny himself, and take up his cross? No; rather, if shame could enter heaven, he would be ashamed to think—that it made so feeble an impression upon his mind; that it engrossed so little of his attention; that, with such a happiness in prospect, he should ever have walked mournfully before the Lord; and that, with such a prize suspended before him, he

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should ever have been so sluggish in his endeavours to seize it.

Secondly. Hope may cause shame by the weakness of its foundation—and such is the hope of the self-righteous Pharisee. For on what does he place his dependence but something of his own—his own worthiness, or his own works?—And here we may observe, first, that what he relies on does not come up to the nature of genuine religion, but is something merely ritual, ceremonious, external, in which the heart has no concern. He derives his encouragement from negative qualities, from comparison of himself with others, from the number of his performances, from the balancing of duty with omissions, and

of virtue with vice. "And the Pharisee stood, and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are,—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess." Secondly, if the works he pleads were in their principles truly spiritual and holy, they would not afford a ground of dependence. They would be a part of the building, but could not be the foundation. They would furnish us with evidence, but could not give us a title. Thirdly, the indulgence of such a hope is even criminal, and highly offensive to God. While he seeks to obtain a right to eternal life by his own obedience, he is seeking salvation by the works of the law, and not by the faith of Jesus Christ: accordingly, he opposes the whole design of the Gospel dispensation; robs God of his peculiar glory; reflects upon his wisdom, as having been employed in a needless trifle; contemns his authority in commanding us to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; denies his truth in the

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record which he has given of his Son; frustrates his grace, and makes Jesus Christ to be dead in vain. He disregards the love and mercy of the Saviour, tramples under foot the blood of the Son of God, and views his righteousness and his sufferings as wholly unnecessary, or as only an addition to supply a deficiency. Therefore, fourthly, such a hope can never secure him from shame. It will be found "like a spider's web;" curiously wrought, but easily, irreparably destroyed. The basis being too weak, the superstructure falls, and crushes him as a fool and an offender—guilty in his very ruin. "Too proud," says God, "to submit to my righteousness, you shall appear before me in your own. Refusing the Gospel, you shall be tried by the Law to which you have appealed. Unable to save yourselves, I devised a method of salvation: I revealed it—but this you have despised, and have sought another—Walk in the light

of your own fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled: This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow."

—Now see the awakened, humbled sinner. He is asking, "How shall man be just with God?" "Wherewith shall I come before the Lord?" "Where can I safely rest a hope that maketh not ashamed?" These inquiries lead him to the Bible—and he soon finds the information he wants. "The Son of man is come, to seek and to save that which was lost. It hath pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell. He hath made us accepted in the Beloved. He is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth. By him, all that believe are justified freely from all things"—This is like cold water to a thirsty soul. This attracts him; this determines

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the course of his application. "In him will I trust. He is the door; by him will I enter. He is the only refuge; in him I will hide. There is no other, and I desire no other foundation; and on this will I build. I love obedience, I pray for gratitude; but I abhor the thought of tending merit. When I have done all, I am an unprofitable servant. Sin mixes with all I do. I must relinquish every other confidence: I have no medium between this reliance and despair."

Now this hope cannot deceive him: it is as firm as the truth of God and the all-sufficiency of the Saviour can make it. "Behold," says God, "I lay in Zion a stumbling-stone and rock of offence; and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." In proportion as the faith of the believer increases, he partakes of this assurance, and can say, "I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." See him advancing to the throne of God—"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died." Who can hinder his approach? He is

seen marked with “the blood of sprinkling;” he is heard making mention of His righteousness only.—

“All joy to the believer! He can speak—
Trembling, yet happy; confident, yet meek.
Since the dear hour that brought me to thy foot,
And cut up all my follies by the root,
I never trusted in an arm but thine,
Nor hop’d but in thy righteousness divine.
My prayers and alms, imperfect and defil’d,
Were but the feeble efforts of a child.
Howe’er perform’d, it was their brighter part
That they proceeded from a thankful heart:
Cleans’d in thine own all-purifying blood,
Forgive their evil, and accept their good:

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I cast them at thy feet—my only plea
Is what it was—dependence upon thee;
While struggling in the vale of tears below,
That never fail’d—nor shall it fail me now.”

“Angelic gratulations rend the skies;
Pride falls unpitied, never more to rise;
Humility is crown’d; and faith receives the prize.”

Thirdly. Hope may cause shame by the falseness of its warrant—and such is the hope of the Antinomian. How dreadful will it be “to fall into the hands of the living God,” while we are imagining ourselves to be his friends: to suppose ourselves in the road to heaven, and drop at once into the depths of hell! “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the paths of death.” And in this way all those are walking, who, while they profess to expect eternal life, and to place all their dependence upon the Saviour, “have not the Spirit of Christ,” and are devoid of his image: whose faith does not overcome the world; whose hope does not purify them “even as He is pure.” For while in this state, their expectation of heaven, whatever

be their knowledge or their creed, is a mere fancy. A man, with all his ignorance, may as well persuade himself that he is the greatest philosopher; or, with all his indigence, may as rationally conclude that he is possessed of all the wealth of the Indies; as persons imagine, that they are in a fair way for glory, while they are strangers to real sanctification and “newness of life.”

There is nothing in the Scripture that does not condemn such a hope. It assures us, that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord;” and that except we “be converted, and become as little children,”

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we “shall in no case enter the kingdom of God.” Hence our Saviour, by a very striking similitude, holds forth the folly of leaning on anything as a proof of our state, separate from holy obedience. “Who-soever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house; and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house; and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

And, indeed, to take another view of the subject, it would be perfectly useless to give such a man a title to glory, and even to bring him there—For he would be miserable still: he would carry hell along with him in his sin: he would have no capacity for the services, no relish for the enjoyments of heaven—God himself cannot do that which contradicts the essential perfections of his nature; and he cannot make us happy with himself till he has made us holy like himself. “For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion

hath light with darkness?" Thus the very nature of things, as well as the word of God, necessarily limits this hope to the regenerate and sanctified. And therefore the grand inquiry should be—what evidence you have of this change, and what reason you are able to give of the hope that is in you? A more convincing and satisfactory one it is impossible to assign, than the Apostle furnishes—

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PART II. When he tells us, "Hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us." Let us examine the connexion there is between this love, and the accomplishment of our hope. The following considerations will render it obvious.

First. This love is the blessed proof of the Divine regard—for the affection is mutual: "I love them that love me;"—yea, our love to him is the consequence of his love to us: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee. We love him, because he first loved us." And what can we desire more, than to know we are beloved of God? What does not his friendship insure? With Him, there is no variability, or shadow of turning. He is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. He knoweth all things. He is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

Secondly. This love characterizes the persons for whom this happiness is reserved. Search the Scriptures, and see who are authorized to claim the promise of eternal life—Not those who are enemies to God by wicked works—not those who live without God in the world—No: but those, and those only, who desire, and strive to please and to serve Him—"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath pro-

mised to them that love him.” “Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?”

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Thirdly. This love qualifies us for the glory which shall be revealed. Take a proper view of this happiness. Is it not divine? Does it not flow from the presence of God? from the display of his perfections? from the adorations and praises which he will eternally receive?—What then can prepare you for it but the love of God? If you do not love a person, it would be a torment rather than a delight to be continually with him, and to hear him extolled. But the stronger the love is which you bear to another, the more pleasure you feel in his company and conversation, the more satisfaction you derive from the share you have in his regards, and from the confidence which enables you to say, he is mine. By loving God, you are prepared for a happiness which is found only in him. And has he made you meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light?—and will he fail to give you possession? Has he qualified you for a situation which you shall never fill? and prepared you for a blessedness which he never designed you to experience?

Fourthly. This love is indeed the beginning, and the foretaste of this happiness. We are always the same with the object of our affection. The image dwelling in the mind, leaves its impression. We take the likeness of the excellency we contemplate, and are exalted into the perfection we adore. If our love be fixed upon anything mean and sordid, it will debase us. If it be fixed upon creatures, we shall partake of their changes and miseries. If it be fixed on the ever—blessed God, we shall become divine and heavenly; it will dignify, and refine, and tranquilize, and fill, and satisfy the soul. With this love, we cannot be miserable. It renders difficult things

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easy, and bitter ones sweet. It makes the duties of religion to be "ways of pleasantness." We call "the Sabbath a delight." We are glad when they say to us, "Let us go into the house of the Lord." It is good for us "to draw near to God." O the "comforts of this love!" They are heaven come down to earth—Heaven is the world of love—There it breathes; there it reigns; there it triumphs. It is all love, and only love—"And he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." Hence it fully appears, that a hope connected with the love of God, may be safely indulged, and can never make us ashamed. For this love is the proof of the Divine favour—the character of the heirs of promise—the preparation for future glory—the commencement of heaven, the dawning of the day, the first-fruits of the Spirit, the earnest of our inheritance.—

Men and Brethren, attend to a few reflections, which naturally arise from this important subject. The first is awful and distressing. We have reason to fear that the hope cherished by the greater part of mankind, and by too many professors of religion, is such as will cover them "with everlasting shame and contempt."—Perhaps there are some of this deluded number in this assembly. You are ready to say—"Our minds are easy—we feel no forebodings—we hope to be saved, and are not inclined to question the propriety of our conclusion." Even this circumstance looks suspicious. This reluctance to examine your state betrays apprehension of its goodness. And who, in a case of such moment, would leave things Joubtful and uncertain? Suffer me then to ask you what your hope is? Will it bear investigation? Is it sanctioned by the word of truth? Has it been

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formed in the light of conviction, or is it the offspring of darkness? Is there no danger of its proving false and fatal?—Such the hope must prove, that is accompanied with no suitable influence, productive of no proper effects—in other words, that is not in alliance with the love of God. But, alas! if the love of God was in you, it would be impossible for you to live as you now do. You could not banish Him from your remembrance; your meditation of Him would be sweet, and your thoughts of Him would be precious. You could not love the world; “for if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” You could not transgress the divine laws: “for this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.” You could not be regardless of the welfare of your fellow-creatures: for “if a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” “Whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” Destitute of the love of God, it matters not what you are—If this be not the grand influencing principle of your lives, your orthodoxy is only a December’s night, equally clear and cold; your religion is vain; your hope presumption, delusion, destruction.

Secondly. You may learn, from hence, how to attain “the full assurance of hope unto the end.” It is not by dreams and visions, sudden suggestions, mysterious impressions, and an inexplicable consciousness—but by keeping yourselves in the love of God, and abounding therein more and more. It is absurd to imagine that your hope of heaven will be lively,

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if your love of God be weak and languid. Every worldly conformity will impede the exercise, and darken the prospect of this hope; every sin will give Satan an advantage over you, and rob you of much evidence and consolation. Though the blessings of salvation are all of grace, they are to be enjoyed only in the way of obedience. "Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord. His going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and the former rain upon the earth." "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and manifest myself to him."

Thirdly. There are some of you, in whose hearts the Holy Ghost has shed abroad the love of God. By a display of infinite benevolence, he has slain the enmity of your minds, enlightened your understandings, and renewed your dispositions. It is now your chief aim to please and to enjoy him. And your language is, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee! The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in Him.—"Yes—and you have reason to do so. Let the exercise of this hope be constant and increasing. Though you have much in possession, you have infinitely more in reversion. In whatever sense you are poor, in one you are certainly rich—Hope. From the emptiness of the creature you can turn to the fulness of the Word, and say, "Thy testimonies have I taken as my heritage for ever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart." You have now the supplies of minority, and in a little while you will be "Lord of all."—Give vigour and scope

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to this principle, in all the circumstances which can awaken thy concern. Hope for strength equal to

thy day. Hope for succour in trouble; for assistance in duty; for help in death. Hope for a joyful resurrection, a blessed immortality, a crown of glory that fadeth not away. "Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost."

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SERMON XV.

**THE PARABLE OF THE TWO
SONS.**

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*"What think ye? A certain man had two sons. And he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard: he answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise: and he answered and said, I go, Sir; and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, the first." MATTHEW *xxi.* 28-38.*

MY Brethren, it is no very easy thing to lodge an obnoxious truth in a mind armed with prejudice. "Lovers of themselves," men are averse to the knowledge of their imperfections, and remain "willingly

ignorant” of discoveries which would interrupt their pursuits, or disturb their slumbers. Hence the wise have contrived a species of instruction, by which they conceal their design, till the sentiment they wish to convey has taken possession of the mind. Then they strip off the disguise, and exhibit their meaning: and the man finds, to his surprise and confusion, that he has admitted a conclusion which criminales himself, and that out of his own mouth he is condemned.

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He is led on unconsciously, step by step, till he finds his retreat cut off, and he is compelled to surrender.

He who “spake as never man spake,” excelled in this as well as in every other mode of tuition. A memorable instance is now before us—His adversaries had asked our Saviour, by what authority he had commenced reformer, and had purified the temple. He engages to satisfy them, provided they will answer him one question; namely, Whence John derived his authority to preach and baptize? They found themselves equally in a dilemma, whether they acknowledged the origin to be human or divine—“If we shall say from Heaven, he will say unto us, why then did ye not believe him? But if we shall say, of men, we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet.” Hence they affect ignorance, and remain silent. Our Saviour perceiving their perverseness, refuses their inquiry; and, by a familiar representation, induces them to pass judgment on themselves. “But what think ye? A certain man had two sons. And he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard: he answered and said, I will not; but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise: and he answered and said, I go, Sir; and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father? They say unto him, the first.”

The Parable has a particular application, which may be thus explained. John preached to the Jews. His audience consisted of two classes: the profane and the pretending. Some among his hearers were profligate—Such were the publicans and harlots. These made no profession of religion: they never spake of the Messiah, or hoped for his kingdom.

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But when they heard John, they received his doctrine—were humbled by it—and obtained repentance and remission of sins. Others were sanctimonious—Such were the Scribes and Pharisees. They assumed extraordinary appearances of devotion, observed every punctilio of the law, wore a peculiar dress, used a singular gait, crucified their countenances, made long prayers and frequent fasts, gave tithes of all their possessions, and pretended a high regard for the writings of Moses and the prophets, who all testified of Christ. But when his forerunner came, and announced his speedy approach, they inconsistently rejected his ministry. Thus far we cannot be mistaken, for we follow an infallible Guide—“Jesus saith unto them, Verily, I say unto you, that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and harlots believed him. And ye, when ye had seen, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him.”

By a more extensive allusion, it applies to the Jews and the Gentiles. The Gentiles were the children of disobedience: they had lived without God in the world, and the way of peace had they not known. But when the Gospel was published among them, they “obeyed from the heart the form of doctrine which was delivered to them: and being made free from sin, they became the servants of righteousness.” The Jews from the beginning were the professing people of God. They had never

been wanting in high pretensions and promises. When the Law was given on Horeb, they exclaimed: "All that the Lord commandeth us will we do, and

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be obedient." When Joshua addressed them in Sechem, they again said, "The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey"—"Nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouth, and they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant."—"What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith: but Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law; for they stumbled at that stumbling-stone: as it is written. Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling-stone, and a rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be confounded."

The similitude will stand as an illustration of various characters to the end of time. Accordingly, we are going to consider it, I. As holding forth the command of God to his creatures. And, II. As exemplifying the manner in which it is regarded by them.

PART I. "The Lord looketh from heaven: he beholdeth all the sons of men." Neither as his creatures, nor as his subjects, are they beneath his concern. To display his authority and to secure their welfare, He addresses them in language appropriate to their circumstances. His command is distinguished by three characters. It is affectionate—it is practical—it is urgent.

First. It is affectionate. He speaks as unto children—"My Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." He is the lovely Father of all mankind; and though

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sin has rendered us unworthy of his care, it has not destroyed our relation to him. "We have had fathers of our flesh, who corrected us; and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live?" They were only the instruments of our existence: but to Him the name belongs in all its perfection. "We are his offspring;" "we are all the work of his hands." Our very souls are his; produced by his power, and subject to his agency. This is the common character given of him in the New Testament. Under this encouraging representation we are taught to address him in prayer: in this tender relation we are to view him as dispensing his commands. I see the father blending with the sovereign: I see goodness mingling with authority: I obey from love: it is a Father I serve, and his service is perfect freedom. If He employ us as children, he "knows our frame, and will remember that we are dust." He will not lay upon us more than is meet: He will be kind to our infirmities, and spare us, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. "We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ."

Secondly. It is practical. For to what does the Father call him? To "work in his vineyard." I admire this Father. He does not bring up his children in idleness. Though he be a rich man, and have a vineyard of his own, he requires them to labour. And "it is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth." The Grand Seignior of Turkey is always taught some mechanical business. The Jews,

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whatever was their rank, always gave their sons some manual trade. Paul had a learned education,

and was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel; but he knew the craft of tent-making. There was wisdom in this plan. It preserved the young from sloth; it filled up the vacancies of life; it prevented temptation; it made them useful in society; it furnished them with a resource in case of reduction and distress. Adam was placed in the garden of Eden to dress it. The Son of God, till he assumed his public character, wrought at the business of a carpenter. Heaven is all energy and activity: "they rest not day nor night." It is better to pursue the meanest occupation, and even to be a servile day-labourer, than to live in idleness, a mere cumberer of the ground. Parents! early accustom your children to exertion and difficulties. Bring them up idly and delicately, and they are ruined for this world, and the world to come. I equally pity and condemn that father, who is ashamed or afraid to say to a son—"Go work in my vineyard." And what think you of God? He assigns us our place of action, and prescribes the nature of our employ. It is extensive and various. Our diligence is to be used in "working out our salvation with fear and trembling." Sinner! there is a burden lying upon thy shoulders, which, unless it be removed, will sink thee to the lowest hell. Thou art pursued by the avenger of blood, and if overtaken, thou wilt assuredly perish. Thy first concern should be a deliverance, a refuge. Thy first effort should be an application to Him who came into the world to save sinners. "Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said

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unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." This is your first care. And a second is like unto it—personal sanctification. You are called not only to believe, but to obey: not to show your faith instead of your works, but your faith by your works.—Many would rather consider

the Gospel as designed to furnish a substitute for holiness, than as a system which requires piety and morality in all its parts. But how readest thou? Where does it promise a salvation in sin? Where does it encourage a hope which leaves its possessor impure? "God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. The grace of God, which bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men: teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." Nor are you less required to serve your generation according to the will of God. "None of us liveth to himself." Our fellow-creatures have claims upon us. We are to "rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep;" to love as brethren; to "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." And however inferior our stations or slender our abilities, we have all one talent. How have we employed it? We have all had some means and opportunities of usefulness—What brand have we plucked out of the fire? What naked wretch have we clothed? What child of ignorance have we instructed? In what instances have we resembled Him who "went about doing good;" who pleased not himself; who came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many?

Thirdly. It is urgent. You are called not only to labour, but to labour immediately. "My son, go

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work to-day in my vineyard." The King's business requires haste—and this is the business of the King of kings. A business of importance requires haste—And no business can be so momentous in its consequences as this. A business requires haste that can be performed only in a certain time, especially if the season be short and uncertain—And "what is thy life? It is even as a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." The Scripture therefore only borrows the language of common

sense when it says, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest." Observe your elder Brother: he never lost a moment: "I must work the work of Him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh, wherein no man can work." God always says, "To-day"—"tomorrow" is always the language of the Enemy of Souls. And wherefore? Because procrastination is the most successful device he employs. Because, if he can keep you from religion to-day, he knows—either that you will not live till to-morrow—or that the delay will leave you more disinclined to duty, and will obstruct your way with fresh impediments. "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." Such is the command of God. Let us see,

PART II. The manner in which it is regarded. This is exemplified in the behaviour of these two sons. There is a remarkable difference between them. One proves better than he promises. The other promises better than he proves. Of the one it may be said, that his words were evil and his actions good;

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of the other, that his words were good and his actions evil.

Behold the first. No sooner does he hear the command of his father, than he answers, "I will not;" and walks off, rebellious and insulting—To such a length of rudeness, insolence, and presumption does sin sometimes carry men; so that they do not make excuses, or plead only for delays, but positively and daringly refuse! "They say unto God, Depart from us; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." Who have said, "With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?" "But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, "We will not have this man to reign over us."

—“Who says this? Yonder Swearer, who never opens his mouth but to express the abomination of his heart. That Drunkard, whose insatiable appetite, like the horseleech, cries, Give, give; and never saith, It is enough. The Fornicator, who lives in chambering and wantonness. The man who neglects all the ordinances of religion, who never calls upon the name of God, never hears his word, never honours his Sabbaths. These make no pretences to godliness; embarrass themselves with no formality; wear no disguise; use no hesitation. They openly show the image of their master impressed upon their forehead. They explicitly avow their determination. Actions speak louder than words; and nothing less than this is the dreadful language of their lives—“I am for hell. I will run the downward road. I am resolved to perish.”

And is it possible, that characters like these should ever be heard. “asking the way to Zion,” or seen walking before God “in newness of life?”—“Such

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were some of you: but ye are washed; but ye are sanctified; but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.” Yes, even this son—“afterward repented, and went.” He came to himself-reflection returned—looking back, he saw the old man lifting up his hands to Heaven, and then wiping his eyes from tears—and he cried—“What have I done? Is he not my father? Has he suffered me to want any proof of tenderness which he could show me? Do I thus requite his kindness and his love? What was there unreasonable in the command I rejected? He that will not work should not eat—What is it for a son to work in a father’s vineyard? Is it not labouring for himself? Mine is the expectation—I will go.” For, my Brethren, no sooner was this undutiful child reclaimed than he was employed.—He did not satisfy himself with returning, and confessing and bewailing his offence. He acted repentance. He

knew the will of his father which he had transgressed—and he repented; and went. The one was the consequence and the evidence of the other. Who could have believed the reality of his remorse and the sincerity of his acknowledgment, unaccompanied with reformation and obedience?

Are there no individuals in this assembly whose history I have recalled to mind? Do you not remember your alienation from the life of God?—But in your departure from him your minds were far from being at rest. Sometimes you thought of home—a Father struck you—your rebellion appeared unreasonable—you condemned yourselves. These recollections at first visited you occasionally, like unwelcome guests, and you got rid of them. At length you found them quartered upon you, like so many

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soldiers—resistance was useless. Alone—in business—surrounded with company—these convictions followed you. You began to pray; to read the Scripture; to associate with the Lord's people. You brought forth fruits meet for repentance. The change in your disposition was discovered in your conversation: and this became the language of your actions as well as of your lips—"I have, sinned; what shall be done unto thee, O thou Preserver of men? What I know not teach thou me: if I have done iniquity, I will do so no more. Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

Let us consider the second son. On hearing the command of his father, "he said, I go, Sir; and went not." His language was respectful, his promise was fair, and he walked forth towards the vineyard, till he apprehended himself out of sight—Then he turned aside—loitered away his time—joined evil company—set off to a revel—in a little time "spent all his substance in riotous living"—died in wretchedness—and as he expired was heard to groan, "O that I had hearkened to a father's counsel!"

Ah! how many in a few years have we seen, whose pretensions were equally strong, whose promises were equally flattering, whose declensions have been equally grievous, whose end has been equally fatal!

We have seen children trained up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, to whose tender minds religion was presented by maternal care in all its loveliness; who lisped the language of prayer and of praise as soon as they began to speak—They promised well.

We have seen young men, ingenuous, teachable,

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despising the bondage of corruption, hating even the garment spotted with the flesh—They promised well. We have seen hearers under the preaching of the Word alarmed, melted, almost persuaded to be Christians—They promised fair.

We have seen men reclaimed from various vices becoming regular in their lives, and attentive to moral and relative duties—They promised fair.

We have seen characters coming forward eager to join in Christian communion, and laying themselves under an obligation to walk “in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.”—These promised fair. And nothing would have been more uncandid and suspicious, than to have questioned their present sincerity, or their future perseverance—And where are they now? See the tears of their connexions; hear the sighs of their ministers; listen to the triumph of the enemy—They are turned aside to vain jangling—they are so bewitched, that they cannot obey the truth—they are walking in the counsel of the ungodly, standing in the way of sinners, and sitting in the seat of the scornful: “for it has 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.”

Let us conclude by deriving an inference from the subject, and by addressing ourselves to persons of two classes.—The parable fully authorizes us to observe, that religious effects are often very unanswerable to expectation; and that the most specious characters are not always the most likely to enter into the kingdom of Heaven. The subject is delicate: we know we tread on dangerous ground, nor would

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we advance without caution. God forbid that we should ever plead for wickedness, or intimate that immorality is preferable to morality.—Our Lord intended to establish no such principle by these examples. He does not view these things as they are in their own nature, but as they are frequently found in their accidental relations and consequences. And is it not undeniable that persons possessed of distinguishing privileges and moral endowments are too often filled with pride, wrapped up in self-righteousness, lulled to sleep by carnal security, deeming themselves safe, from comparisons with those who are profligate? Are they not too often offended when told—that they must be indebted for salvation to grace perfectly free and unmerited—that they must be accepted upon the same terms with the most vile—and that however excellent these things may be in themselves, they afford them no ground of dependence, yield them no claims whereof they may glory before God? An attempt to couch the eyes of those who say we see, an offer of pardon to the innocent, a communication of alms to the wealthy, would only exasperate and disgust—But would this be the case with the blind, the guilty, and the poor? It is comparatively easy to convince the more criminal—how can they deny the charge? to alarm them—how can they deny the danger? Having no armour of defence—they can sooner receive a wound which will make them cry for mercy. Conscious that they have no righteousness of their own—they more readily admit,

that if saved at all, it must be by grace. Having no shelter in which to hide—when they see the storm approaching, they willingly flee for refuge to the hope set before them in the Gospel.

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Nor are such trophies of Divine grace unusual. We can appeal to the page of History: and we can refer to our own age. We have seen the most unlikely materials subdued by Divine agency to holy purposes; and sinners called from courses the most ungodly, whose conversion has awakened not only the joy, but the astonishment of their pious friends.

Let this encourage our hope. Let us consider none of our fellow-creatures as desperate, and, giving up our endeavours and our prayers, abandon them. Reformer! let it animate thee. “Be not weary in well-doing. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, this or that; or whether they both shall be alike good. Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.” Minister! let it encourage thee! “Can these dry bones live?—Prophesy upon these bones; and say, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” Parent! let it animate thee—though means have hitherto proved ineffectual, and instructions and tears have been in vain—“I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham!”

Men and Brethren, let me ask you—Which of these two sons did the will of his Father?—You say, and you say justly, Both of them were culpable: the one was rude, and the other false. But which, on comparison, do you prefer? You say, and you say truly, The first. On what principle? Because his

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actions were better than his words, and his latter end fairer than his beginning. Yes; better is a late penitent than an old formalist. Yes; more desirable is the condition of this returning sinner, trembling at God's word, broken-hearted with a review of unprofitable years, and resolving to redeem the time by future zeal—than the state of yonder professor who has sat under the Word till he is past feeling; honouring God with his lip, while his heart is far from him; having a name to live, while he is dead; saying perpetually, by appearances, I go, but never actually taking one step in the ways of godliness.

But I have another question—Which of these two sons do you at this time resemble?—It is undeniable that you have had calls from God. Your duty, and the consequences of inattention, have been plainly set before you. He has spoken by his creatures. He has addressed you by his providence. Afflictions have had a voice. Fire has rushed out of the brambles to which you repaired for shelter. The gourd, whose shade refreshed you, has withered away. It was a broken reed upon which you leaned: it disappointed your hope, and pierced you through with many sorrows. Sickness told you that you were mortal. The death of others reminded you of your own; and loud spake the silent grave. Many a remonstrance, many a warning, you have had from conscience. From Sabbath to Sabbath you have heard the Gospel. Ministers, some in harsher accents, and some in milder language, have laboured to persuade you—No, you cannot plead ignorance—you do not want motive and encouragement—Suffer me then to ask you, Which of these sons describes you?

Are you saying, with the first—"I will not?"—

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What irreverence! "A son heareth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is

my honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of Hosts.”—What ingratitude! “Hear, O ye heavens; and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me.” “Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise? Is he not thy Father that hath bought thee? hath he not made thee and established thee?”—“What madness! If you abide by this determination, you are undone: “because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” Have you duly considered the work you decline? It is a service the most reasonable, the most honourable, the most pleasant, the most profitable: it is “profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” Here we cannot labour in vain. The reward is sure; the recompense is glorious. Nor are we called to labour without assistance. He who employs us has engaged to make his strength perfect in our weakness, and to render his grace sufficient for us. To which we may add, that it is a work the most indispensable—it is the one thing needful—and it is at the peril of thy soul and thy eternal happiness to say, “I will not”—But I have said this, and lived accordingly.—“O that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears!”—Returning sinner, there is hope in Israel concerning this thing. There is forgiveness with Him, and repentance secures it.

Raise thy downcast eyes, and see
 What throngs His throne surround:
 There, though sinners once like thee,
 Have full salvation found—

—He has pardons to impart,
 Grace to save thee from thy fears:
 See the love that fills his heart,
 And wipe away thy tears.

Thy present distress is a pledge of a preparation for the discovery of his forgiving love—He repented, and went—Go, and do likewise; and encourage thyself under every gloomy fear by representations the most appropriate and tender—“I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke; turn thou me, and I shall be turned, for thou art the Lord 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—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.” “And he said, I will arise, and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his Father—but when he was yet a great way off, his Father saw him, and had compassion on him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him—And said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.”

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Are you saying, with the second—“I go, Sir?”—This is well—but, oh! beware of insincerity. Consider seriously the solemn profession you make. I go, Sir I—But remember to whom you say this—a Being, whose eyes are as a flame of fire, and who desireth truth in the inward parts: thou art not lying

unto man, but unto God. I go, Sir!—But remember that the vows of God are upon you; that you have raised the expectation of your friends and foes; that heaven, earth, and hell are looking for a practice which will verify your pretensions: and will you tell them all, “I am only—a liar—a hypocrite?” I go, Sir!—But remember, that your doom will be determined not by “fair speeches” and a “show of godliness,” but by your actions and your lives. “Not everyone 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.” I go, Sir!—But remember, nothing is so dangerous to the soul as false dealing with God; that no character is so rarely converted as a false professor; that no state is so tremendous as the end of an apostate. I go, Sir!—But remember—it is the language of God—“if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.” “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted of the good word, 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—But, Beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.”

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SERMON XVI.

CHRISTIAN DILIGENCE.

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SERMON XVI.

CHRISTIAN DILIGENCE.

“And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.” 2 PETER i. 5-7.

MY Brethren, it is a very easy, and it is a very difficult thing to be a Christian. It is a very easy thing to be a nominal Christian: but it is a very difficult thing to be a real one. It is a very easy thing to be a modern Christian: but it is a very difficult thing to be a Scriptural one. Do not imagine that we mean to trifle, or advance a paradox to awaken your attention at the beginning of a discourse: we speak “the words of truth and soberness.” It is undeniable that we have many Christians among us, who are strangers even to common decency and morality; “being abominable, and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate.” Others make a much stricter profession—but, alas! their Christianity leaves them as it finds them, and in their lives there is very little

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difference discernible between them and the people of the world. Their tempers are unsubdued; their tongues are unbridled; “they mind earthly things;” they make no sacrifices, no exertions. Their hope is a lifeless expectation. Their faith is a scheme of doctrine, which they have laid asleep in the mind, and which never disturbs or stimulates them.

But is this the religion of the New Testament?—Search the Scriptures. Observe the delineations of the Gospel, and compare yourselves with them. In

these, a profession is found to mean a practical dissent from the spirit and manners of the world; the hope which maketh not ashamed is held forth as purifying the possessor from the love of sin and the dominion of sense; and the faith by which we are justified and saved, is distinguished as a vital and a vigorous principle, drawing after it a train of graces and good works. Witness the language of our Apostle. "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity." Christians! these words specify, I. The additions which you are to make to your faith. And, II. Prescribe the means by which you are to make them.

I. The Apostle does not exhort Christians to seek after faith—This he supposes them to possess already. He addresses them as believers. and calls upon them to pursue a course worthy of their faith, corresponding with their faith, and to which their faith binds them.—"Remember, Christians, the worthy name by

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which you are called. Consider the tendency of the principles you profess to believe. You have embraced the Gospel—it lays an obligation upon you to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world. You say you have faith—but faith without works is dead, being alone. Faith resembles a foundation of high importance in case of a building—but useless if no superstructure be reared. It is only a beginning—which is nothing without progress. What are clear notions unless they influence; or proper motives unless they impel? Abraham had faith, and he offered up Isaac. Moses had faith, and he esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the trea-

sures of Egypt. Abel and Noah had faith—but it was belief, alive and in motion: it led the one to sacrifice, and the other to build. If you know these things—happy are ye if ye do them. You have received the truth—now walk by it. You are sound in doctrine—be so now in practice. You are orthodox—now be holy, defraud no man, speak evil of no man. You have faith—add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity.” Such is the meaning of the Apostle: and thus we conceive he would have explained himself, had he been living in our day and called to address some of our audiences.

The first addition which he requires of you as believers is virtue. But it does not here signify goodness in general: it is immediately distinguished from the various excellences included in the common acceptance of the word. It therefore expresses some

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particular quality; and by referring to the Greek and Latin writers we can soon determine what it is—They mean by it Fortitude, Courage. My Brethren, this principle in the whole of your Christian course will be found indispensably necessary. You live in a world unfriendly to religion. You are called to various duties, in the discharge of which you will meet with oppositions and discouragements the most painful and trying. It will be found no easy thing to deny yourselves, and take up your cross; to pluck out a right eye, and to cut off a right hand—being both the patients and the agents too. It will be found no very easy thing to encounter opinion: to incur the frowns of connexions, the scorn of superiors, the ridicule of the multitude; to feel yourselves in a small and despised minority; to have your designs suspected, your actions misrepresented, your very virtues transformed into vices, and where you have

deserved best of your fellow-creatures to be most condemned by them.

Some of these difficulties indeed might be avoided if you were only to be religious and not to appear so. But not to observe that it is impossible to conceal religion in numberless instances when it is fairly reduced to practice, we wish you to remember that you are required to be open and explicit; you are commanded to "let your light shine before men;" to "confess with the mouth" as well as to "believe with the heart;" to "hold fast," not your faith, but the "profession of your faith, without wavering;" and not only to be "on the Lord's side," but to be active in his service, "rising up for him against the evil doers, and standing up for him against the workers of iniquity."

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If we trace things to their origin, we shall find a thousand evils springing, not from ignorance but cowardice. Pilate condemned a Saviour of whose innocency he was conscious—because of the Jews. Many of the Pharisees "believed on him; but feared to confess him lest they should be put out of the synagogue." The disciples were afraid, and forsook him. Peter trembled, and denied him. It is owing to the influence of the same cause, that persons can hold the truth in unrighteousness; refuse to hear the very doctrines they believe; change with every company in which they are found; hear the name of God blasphemed and the Gospel vilified, and "sit as men in whose mouths there is no reproof." But holy courage will raise a man above this influence. It will produce in him a dignity which scorns every mean compliance; a firmness which gives decision and consistency to his character; a determination not indeed to make singularity his aim, but to walk by those rules which will unavoidably render it a consequence; a boldness to follow his convictions wherever they may lead him, and inflexibly to persevere

in the path of duty, regardless of the reproach he may endure, or the losses he may sustain.

A second addition is knowledge. And this very properly follows the former. It serves to characterize, and to qualify the courage of the believer. It reminds us—that it makes him open, but not ostentatious—ready, but not challenging and vaunting—decided, but not violent—bold, but not rash and inconsiderate. It teaches us that courage is a force which wisdom is to employ—Courage may urge us to undertake the war, but judgment is to manage it: it may impel us along in our course, but knowledge

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is to observe the road—otherwise our animation will only lead us astray, and the swifter our speed, the greater will be our folly.

And hence it will be easy to determine the nature of this qualification. It is practical knowledge; it is what we commonly mean by prudence, which is knowledge applied to action. It is what Paul recommends when he says, “Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. Walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise. Walk in wisdom towards them that are without, redeeming the time.” It is what Solomon enjoins when he says, “Let thine eyes look right on, and thine eyelids look straight before thee. Keep sound wisdom and discretion; so shall they be life unto thy soul and grace to thy neck. Then shalt thou walk in thy way safely, and thy foot shall not stumble: when thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid; yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.”

This kind of knowledge results principally from experience and observation; and he is blameable indeed who does not grow wiser as he grows older, and who does not make every day a correction of the former. Our own history affords us some of the best

materials to improve and embellish our character.— There, being heedless, I was surprised. By that trifle I was robbed of temper. Here, I dashed on a rock, and a plank saved me. Our rashness should teach us the meekness of wisdom. We should derive strength from our weaknesses, and firmness from our falls.

But, alas! what numbers are there, upon whom the continuance of life, and all means of improvement, seem to be thrown away! They have eyes,

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but they see not: ears have they, but they hear not. They pass through a country full of instructive scenes and interesting occurrences—but they travel in a hearse. And here many religious people seem peculiarly deficient: they perpetually remind us of the observation, “the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light.” They are always roving from one public assembly to another, and are never alone. They hear much and think little. Even the kind of information they obtain often serves only to draw them away from things of immediate concern, and to disqualify them for the duties of the stations in which they move. With their eyes stretched to the ends of the earth, or roving among the stars, they go on regardless of anything before them, and fall over every stumbling-block in the road.

Whereas “the wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way.” “The prudent man looketh well to his going.” He draws down his knowledge from speculation, and uses it in common life. He judges of the value of his notions by their utility. He studies his character and condition. He examines his dangers, his talents, his opportunities. He marks events as they arise, and has a plan to receive them. He distinguishes times, places, circumstances. He discerns both when to keep silence, and when to speak. He reproves with skill. He gives with judgment.

He “approves things that are excellent.”

Thirdly. You are to avoid intemperance. There is a sense in which this word may be applied to the mind as well as the body. For we are required to think soberly—to keep all our passions within due bounds—to moderate our desires to enjoy earthly

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pleasures, and our anxieties to acquire worldly possessions. Our Saviour therefore commands his disciples “to take heed lest at any time their hearts should be overcharged,” not only “with surfeiting and drunkenness,” but also “the cares of this life, and so that day should come upon them unawares.” The motive is as pertinent as it is awful; for if we are to live in expectation of this important event, and are to be so habitually prepared for it, as not to be taken by surprise when it comes, it is necessary that we should be temperate in all things.

The word, however, principally refers to moderation in satisfying our bodily appetites. But can it be needful to enlarge upon a subject like this in a Christian congregation? Surely, something far short of the pure and exalted system of the Gospel would be sufficient to restrain men from degrading themselves below the beasts that perish. Surely, we need not interpose the authority of God, and reveal the misery he has prepared in another world, in order to keep them from being gluttons and drunkards. Against this, Heathenism exclaims—Nature rises up—Health preaches. Intemperance is arraigned and punished here. It impoverishes our circumstances. It beggars our families. It renders the body lazy and sickly, and breeds all manner of diseases. It besots the mind, and stupifies reason; it impedes with filthy crudities the way through which the spirits should pass, and bemires the soul so that it drags on heavily; it unfits for every duty, and prepares for every sin—Surely one half of this is enough to make you flee all intemperance; and

to lead you not only to avoid the grosser excesses of this infamy, but to abhor every degree of approach

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to it. Shun therefore those “whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame.” Scorn the bondage of corruption. Disdain to be the slaves of a pampered appetite. Never advance to the bounds of things lawful. Beware of beginnings, and the excuses which would authorize them. “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.”

Fourthly. You are to add to your temperance patience. There is an obvious and striking relation between these. The one requires us to bear, the other to forbear. The one regards the good things, the other the evil things of the world. By temperance we are preserved under the smiles of prosperity, and by patience we encounter the frowns of adversity. These two therefore furnish us “with the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.” And the one is as necessary as the other. For you will not be assailed from one side only. When the weather is fair, the road agreeable, and the adjoining groves and meadows very alluring, you are in danger of pausing and wandering: but the storm driving in your face, and your feet sinking in deep mire where there is no standing, you will sometimes be discouraged because of the way, question whether you are right, and debate with yourselves whether to advance or turn back. Yes, Christians, you will have need of patience, and perhaps of much more than you are aware. You know not what a day may bring forth. “Riches” may “make to themselves wings, and flee away.” Your “friends may deal deceitfully with you as a brook.” Your present comforts may become your greatest troubles. Trials, which so far from expecting, never

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entered your thoughts, may suddenly arise. Has not this world been always a vale of tears? Did any of your brethren who were before you escape sorrow? Are you not assured that it is through much tribulation you must enter the kingdom? But patience will prepare you for every changing scene, and every suffering hour. "What it cannot remove, it will alleviate; what it cannot diminish, it will strengthen you to bear. It will produce a composure which will allow you to discover every favourable circumstance in your situation; a silence which will enable you to hear every message of the rod. "Let patience have her perfect work; that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking nothing."

Fifthly. Godliness is indispensable. Courage and Prudence, Temperance and Patience, would be no Christian qualities, if in the exercise of them we were not influenced by suitable regards to God. Without this reference, our religion is nothing more than morality: our practice has no adequate principle: our duties are in vain, as to their acceptance; and precarious, variable, lifeless, irksome, as to their performance. When we are governed by the authority of God, and make his word our rule, and his glory our aim, we please him; and though our services are attended with many imperfections, they are accepted. When we love and fear him, when we realize his presence, confide in his mercy, implore his grace, and maintain continual communion with him through the mediation of his Son and by the influences of his Spirit—our work becomes our privilege; all is enlivened; all is secured. In this godliness consists: it is, to bring God into every part of life and religion; to make him the Alpha and

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Omega of all we do. Though morality is distinguished from godliness, it always and inseparably

attends it; and he never performs his duty towards God, who lives unrighteously towards man: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God, love his brother also." Hence

We are to add to godliness brotherly kindness. And who are our brethren? All Christians. However they may differ from us in their age, their dress, their features, they are all children of the same Father, members of the same family, heirs of the same grace, travellers towards the same heavenly country. They have therefore claims upon us: and we are to aid and relieve them. "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." Who are our brethren? All mankind. "God hath made of one blood" all the nations of the earth. They possess the same powers of conscience, reason, and immortality; they are capable of the same privileges; need the same succours; are liable to the same afflictions.—Hence love, goodwill to the whole human race, finishes the train, and becomes "the bond of perfectness." And—

—To brotherly kindness, charity. Thus we are "the children of our Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the un-

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just." Thus every dispute concerning the extent or limitation of benevolence is settled"—As we have opportunity, we are to do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. "To some, indeed, I am peculiarly bound; to few, only, can I be personally useful—but my kind

wishes and prayers extend to every individual of the human race. By the law of the Gospel I am required to cherish in my bosom those sentiments of benevolence which are only hindered from being universal in their exercise by inability and necessity."

Thus you are to add to your faith virtue; to virtue, knowledge; to knowledge, temperance; to temperance, patience; to patience, godliness; to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. But let us,

II. Inquire how this is to be accomplished. The Apostle tells us. It is by giving all diligence. To excite you to this, we would remind you—that these things deserve your diligence—that diligence will secure them—and that they cannot be attained without diligence.

First. These things deserve your diligence. It is pitiable to see men employing their zeal and consuming their strength upon trifles. But this is the case with regard to the pursuits of thousands. You may ask them, as they rush by, "Wherefore do ye spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?" None of these things can relieve them in their greatest exigences, promote their chief interests, reward them for their toil, or indemnify them for the sacri-

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fices they make. But this cannot be said of spiritual blessings and graces. These are in the sight of God of great price. They are necessary to man. They purify his passions, and tranquillize his conscience. They enrich, they dignify him: they are his perfection. They make him happy in himself, and render him a blessing to all around him. Conceive how striking and how useful a single individual would be if seen—thus adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things: not only a be-

liever, but courageous; not only courageous, but wise; not only wise, but self-denying, and gentle, and pious: and all this followed by kindness and benevolence! What then would a number of these characters accomplish as they passed along through life? They would look forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners: bearing down reproach, disarming infidelity, putting to silence the ignorance of foolish men, and constraining beholders to glorify God in the day of visitation.

Secondly. Diligence will infallibly secure these things. In the career of worldly good, many run, but few obtain the prize: and the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all. Fame depends upon a combination of circumstances, which may never return. A despised rival may suddenly rise up, and carry off an acquisition which you had been pursuing incessantly through life. Though the sower soweth in hope, many things may frustrate his expectations. "But to the righteous there is a sure reward."

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"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall, doubtless, return again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened." In the world, men spare no pains, decline no difficulty, fear no hazard, though they have nothing more than probability to excite and encourage them—and shall we be insensible and motionless, who have nothing less than actual certainty?

Thirdly. There is no attaining these things without diligence. Diligence is indispensable—

Indispensable if we appeal to analogy. You must labour even for “the meat that perisheth.” Through what a succession of process does your bread pass before it be prepared for use! The same may be said of raiment; of trade; of science—of everything valuable and excellent—you do not expect to gain them without diligence; you would not esteem and prize them if you could.

*“On earth nought precious is obtain’d,
But what is painful too.
By travail, and to travail born,
Our Sabbaths are but few.”*

—Indispensable, if we appeal to the character of a Christian. He is a merchant, a scholar, a husbandman, a traveller, a soldier—the anxiety of the merchant, the application of the scholar, the hardy toil of the husbandman, the wearying progress of the traveller, the painful exercise of the soldier, are images which ill accord with indolence and ease.

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—Indispensable, if we appeal to the promises of the Gospel. These all require it, encourage it, produce it. Is God said to work in us to will and to do of his own good pleasure? It is made a motive to induce us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Has he engaged to renew our strength? It is when we are waiting upon him—this is the condition; it is, that we may mount up with wings as eagles; that we may run and not be weary, and walk and not faint—this is the design. And if the promises of divine grace do not supersede the necessity of diligence—what else can render it needless?

Awake, then, my fellow Christians, and be zealous. Be not satisfied with your present attainments; but, forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, be ever pressing towards the mark for the

prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Others are ambitious, covetous, active. The learned are adding to their intellectual treasures; the honourable are adding to their splendour and distinctions; the rich are adding house to house, and field to field; and none of them saith, "It is enough." And have you no concern to go from strength to strength, to be changed from glory to glory, to shine more and more unto the perfect day? Will not you add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity?

Here, my Brethren, call forth all your diligence. Here is a prize which is able to reward it—which

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will assuredly crown it—but which it is impossible to acquire without it. Keep this always in your remembrance, that there is only one way to prosper in religion; that your strength is not to sit still; that something more is necessary than airy notions, sleepy wishes, feeble resolutions, wavering and cold endeavours; that temptations are to be resisted, obstacles to be overcome, means to be incessantly used—especially prayer, that divine grace may be mighty in you, and sufficient for you. "He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand; but the hand of the diligent maketh rich." "The soul of the sluggard desireth and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat." "And we desire that every one of you do show the same diligence, to the full assurance of hope unto the end: that ye be not slothful; but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises." "Wherefore, my beloved Brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

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SERMON XVII.

**THE ABUSE OF DIVINE
FORBEARANCE.**

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SERMON XVII.

**THE ABUSE OF DIVINE
FORBEARANCE.**

“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” ECCLES. viii. 11.

MY Brethren, to know things in their principles has always been deemed the highest kind of science. The attention of a vulgar mind may be roused by effects; but a wise man looks back from consequences to the cause, and explores the source of the disease in order to prescribe more certainly the means of cure.

That there is much wickedness in the world is undeniable. Whence does it arise? Solomon views it as resulting from an Abuse of Divine Forbearance. Not that this is the only source of iniquity: but it is a very powerful, and a very prevailing one. In such a dreadful course as Sin, a man needs encouragement; and he awfully derives it from the goodness and longsuffering of his God. “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, there-

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fore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.”

There is a sentence denounced against Sin—The execution of it is commonly long suspended—This delay emboldens the sinner in his crimes. These three things are obviously contained in the words before us; and with these I would engage your present attention. “To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart.”

I. Sin is deservedly called an evil work. I fear none of us are sufficiently impressed with a sense of its vileness and malignity. It is “the work of the Devil.” It is folly, ingratitude, rebellion, treason. It degrades the soul. It defiles the soul. It robs us of the likeness, the presence, the favour of God. How deplorable are its consequences! What misery has it produced! For it cannot go unpunished. There is a sentence denounced against it.

God is of “purer eyes than to behold iniquity:” “He is angry with the wicked every day.” But what is anger in God? Not a passion, but a principle—a determination to punish. It is Justice—and this justice is essential to the perfection of his character: and we could neither adore nor love him, if we believed that he was indifferent to an evil which not only subverts his designs, but destroys the welfare of his creatures. What would you think of a magistrate who should “bear the sword in vain;” and who, when you led before him one who had invaded your property, and another who had killed your child, should smile and say, What is this to me? Would you not exclaim—Why, are you not “a minister of God for good, a revenger to execute

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wrath upon him that doeth evil?” Crimes, in all well-governed empires, are punished; and on their

punishment much of our peace and safety depends. Hence prisons are as necessary as houses; and our houses would afford us no security without prisons. What would be the consequence of the abrogation of all the penalties attached to crimes in this country—but disorder, anarchy, robbery, and murder?

God is the governor of the world. But there is no governing without laws, and laws are nothing without sanctions—from these they derive their force and their efficacy. Laws issued by a legislator, unaccompanied with threatenings, would be harmless; and inspiring no terror, would be trifled with, or considered only as advice. Thus the notion of punishment follows from the very constitution of law. If any should be ready to say, “The case before us is a peculiar one, and laws so excellent as those which God has given us should be cheerfully obeyed for their own sake,”—“We answer, First, that man was originally made capable of fear, and that God, even in a state of innocency, addressed himself to this passion, to aid his authority and secure his dominion. Witness the threatening, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” Secondly, as man is now fallen and depraved, and lives so much under the dominion of sense, such a revelation of terror is become far more necessary, to check the power of appetite, and break the force of temptation. Accordingly a sentence the most tremendous is denounced against every transgressor. Do you ask where it is recorded?

Look within thee, O man. and read it there: read it in the trouble, the remorse, the forebodings

of thy own conscience. Why are you uneasy when anything reminds you of the approach of Deity? Whence has sickness, a sudden death, an opening grave, such power to alarm you? Why are you un-

willing to be alone; and why do you require a succession of business and diversion to maintain your tranquillity? Are not these things more frequently your refuge than your choice? And are you not fearful to leave any hour unfilled up, lest a faithful monitor, finding you disengaged, should afford you employment? Why are you uneasy, not only for the time—but for weeks and months after the contraction of the guilt? Why are you uneasy, not only when you are discovered—but when no eye sees you? Why are you uneasy, not only when you have exposed yourselves to the penalty of civil law—but when you have committed crimes for which you are amenable to no earthly tribunal? What judge, what prison is it you then dread? Why do you not shake off these terrors, and be a man? Why do you suffer them to follow you into solitude and into company? Turn, and frown them back; and suffer your peace of mind to be no longer disturbed—Ah! it is in vain to argue against a truth, which depends, not only on reasoning, but sentiment; and to annihilate a principle interwoven in human nature by the finger of God. Where is it recorded?

Examine the history of mankind, and read it there. See it in the expulsion of the happy pair from Paradise; in the flood which destroyed the world of the ungodly; in the fire and brimstone which consumed the cities of the plain. Go, and read it inscribed on the pillar of salt, and engraven on the

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arms rolled to the shore of the Red Sea. View it in the desolations of a people hated and scattered, once the favourites of Heaven—View it in every calamity, in every disease, in every death. Where is it recorded?

Open the Bible, and peruse it there. There you read that the soul that sinneth, it shall die. There the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all

unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. Sometimes it is expressed in simple terms, and more frequently in figurative language. Sometimes a little of it is distinctly specified, but often the whole is left in dreadful obscurity. Sometimes we see the curse coming to meet the sinner, and beginning his misery here; but more generally we are led forward to eternity—For the present is only a state of trial—the future is a world of retribution: here we only sow—there we shall reap: the sentence is already denounced, but the infliction is commonly long suspended. This is the

II. Division of our subject. Sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed. Here, however, we wish to observe—That there is no uncertainty as to its final accomplishment—it is taken for granted that it will be executed. “God is not a man, that he should lie; or the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my word shall not pass away.” It may be also remarked—That he does not always defer the execution of the sentence. Men have perished even in their crimes. Witness the destruction of Korah and his company. The

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leprosy of Gehazi. The death of Ananias and Sapphira. And what has happened to one may befall another.

But the language of the wise man agrees with the general proceedings of the Supreme Being. With much long suffering he endures the provocations of the ungodly, and delays from day to day and from year to year the wrath which they have deserved. He is slow to anger, and punishes with reluctance. Judgment is his strange work. Patience is one of the

distinguishing glories of his character: it is often ascribed to him in Scripture; and the exercise of it appears in numberless and undeniable instances. The old world was warned an hundred and twenty years before the flood came, and took them all away. Four hundred years He suffered the Amorites to fill up the measure of their iniquities. Forty years long was he grieved with the Jews in the wilderness. If we take the history of this people ages after, we hear the God of patience, in language the most exquisitely tender, saying, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, O Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together." And are not you, are not all of you, examples? Can you consider the time of your provocation—the number of your offences—the aggravations of your iniquities; and not say, with wonder and admiration, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not?"—Let us take some particular views of this dispensation, that we may discover the principles from which it springs, and the purposes which it is designed to answer.

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We are obviously intended for a social state: but the intercourse we are required to maintain with our fellow-creatures exposes us to innumerable provocations and offences; and the effects of sudden and uncontrolled resentments would be fatal to ourselves and others. Hence we are commanded to be "slow to wrath;" and to be "patient towards all men." And in this forbearance God places himself before us as our example. He teaches us a divine lesson of meekness and kindness; and calls upon us to cherish that gentleness which is not easily provoked, and to repress those passions which would impel us to revenge. "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account

of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him which owed him ten thousand talents: but forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant, therefore, fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence; and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not; but went, and cast him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came, and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after

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that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not everyone his brother their trespasses.”

If the commission of sin were always immediately followed with the punishment of it, this world would not be a state of probation—obedience would be not voluntary, but forced—we should walk, not by faith, but by sight—we should not honour God by our confidence in his perfections and in the dispensations of his Providence—he would not be “a God hiding himself”—his “judgments” would not be “a great

deep”—and the whole nature and design of religion would be subverted.

If the wrath of God instantly crushed every transgressor, he would be the destroyer rather than the governor of the world. To destroy, is comparatively easy, and discovers little perfection: but the wisdom of God appears in reigning over the extravagance of the world; in taking into his plans such diversities and contradictions, and bending everything he meets with, however adverse, to his own purposes; in bringing good out of evil, and order out of confusion; in making the wrath of man to praise him. It is also worthy of our remark, that many of those who deserve destruction are useful, in the present state of the world: they are able to promote the arts and sciences; and are qualified to render great services to a country. Such men are links in the chain

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of Providence. and their destiny secures them. There are also purposes which the wicked only can accomplish. God calls the Assyrian, the rod of his anger and the staff of his indignation; and says, “I will send him against an hypocritical nation; and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire in the streets.” When he had fulfilled the designs of Heaven, in punishing some and chastising others, he was laid aside. The ungodly, by their continuance, are useful to the righteous: they exercise their patience, call forth their zeal, and wean them from the present world.

Mankind are so variously and intimately blended together, that it is scarcely possible to strike an individual only, without affecting others. Now the Judge of all the earth will not punish indiscriminately, and destroy the righteous with the wicked. He would rather spare a thousand enemies, than injure one friend. If ten righteous men had been found in Sodom, the place would have been preserved. The

angel did not, yea, he said he could not, do anything till Lot was safely escaped. Why were not the messengers suffered to eradicate the tares? Because it would have been doing an injustice to them? No—but lest, “in gathering up the tares, they should also root up the wheat with them.”

But, above all, the goodness of God is to be acknowledged in this dispensation. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness: but is longsuffering to us-ward; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” We are to “account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation.” We see this

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exemplified in Saul of Tarsus. Had he, in his way to Damascus, been smitten to hell when he was struck to the ground, he had never obtained mercy; never have been a Christian, a preacher, an apostle. While the execution of the criminal is still suspended, a pardon may arrive: while life continues, there is a possibility of repentance. “I will give him,” says God, “a longer period—other means may be more effectual. I will afford him a season of recollection—he may come to himself. I will leave him—thoughtfulness may succeed levity: disappointment may break the charm which now fasciuates him. He is near the melancholy consequences of his perverseness—then he will know what an evil and bitter thing it is to forsake the Lord. At such a time he will lose the desire of his eyes with a stroke, and his children shall follow their mother to the grave—then he will enter his closet—and say—And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is even and only in Thee.” Here, Christians, if I knew your histories, perhaps I could say to one of you, Oh! it was well you died not before a change in your affairs occasioned your removal to that city; for there you “heard words whereby you were saved.” To another, You were mercifully spared till Providence brought you that

religious friend; for he “guided your feet into the path of peace.” To a third, What if you had been cut off in your sin! You went on frowardly—you proceeded from evil to evil—a change appeared hopeless—but by-and-by you began to be in want: all prodigal as you were, you said, “I will arise, and go to my father”—Nor was it too late—He came forth to meet you—“received you graciously, and loved you freely.”—“Therefore doth the Lord wait, that

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he may be gracious; and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you.” Such is the design of this suspension—But, alas! “let favour be showed to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness:” and Solomon reminds us,

III. That the depravity of man turns Divine clemency into presumption, and abuses the patience which bears with him to purposes the most vile. “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.”

In this mode of proceeding there is something specious. Man is a rational creature, and is obliged to give his actions a colour of reason. “What he cannot forbear, he will endeavour to justify: what he cannot justify, he will extenuate: what he cannot extenuate, he will excuse—and, unhappily, he possesses no little ingenuity in devising excuses to authorize the passions, or to keep off remorse and alarm.

When men begin a wicked course, conscience is tender, scrupulous, fearful. They are soon terrified, and often look immediately for the punishment they have deserved. But it does not arrive—They venture again—The expectation diminishes. After many successes and impunities, they go forward carelessly and boldly. What they once approached with hesitation, now grown familiar, ceases to shock. What once made them tremble, is now ridiculed as a trifle.

Where conscience once thundered, it is now scarcely heard. They cannot think that what produces no evil consequences can be so bad as they once apprehended. They infer from the Divine indulgence, either that there is no God. or no Providence; either

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that God does not attend to these things, or will not punish them; or derive from his lenity such views of his goodness as lead them to conclude that it has no bounds.

There is a disposition in the mind to reason from the past to the future. Thus, because reprieved so often, Pharaoh concluded he should escape again; and this encouraged him to renew his disobedience. And thus He who assigns motives and gives language to actions has said, "There shall come in the bst days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." "These things hast thou done, and I kept silence: and thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself. He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity." "Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it." "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Nothing is more common, nothing more vile, nothing more fatal, than this perversion.

First. Solomon does not draw the reflection from a few single instances—Nothing is more common than this abuse. Perhaps many of you are examples of it. To decide this, I ask—Would you have continued in your sinful courses to this hour, had you not been persuaded that God would bear with you?—Would you now perpetrate another crime, if you

supposed that God would instantly destroy you for it? Why, then, it is the longsuffering of God, that

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encourages and emboldens you to go forward; and you are evil because he is good.

Secondly. Nothing can be more vile and base than this abuse. Clemency affords you a shelter from the storm; and you enter; and then wound your kind Benefactor, and wound him because he had pity upon you. Had you the least ingenuousness, you could not help admiring, and loving, and serving such a Being—but you insult him because of his excellences and lovingkindnesses. You sin because grace abounds, and choose to appear a monster in a garb of ingratitude blacker than hell.

Thirdly. Be assured nothing will be more fatal. “God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such an one as goeth on still in his trespasses.” Mercy is your final resource; and when this is provoked, to what can you turn? If a father disown you, what expectation can you have from an incensed adversary? God is, in this case, peculiarly concerned to show his displeasure. He designed this longsuffering to answer other purposes; and shall he be over-ruled and mocked? No; he will not lose the honour of his patience, though you may lose the advantage. If it be not glorified in your salvation, it will in your destruction. Wrath loses nothing by sleeping—it grows fresher by repose. The longer the stone be in descending, the heavier it falls. Long preparation indicates the more dreadful execution.

Whoever may hope for audience in the day of visitation, you cannot expect it. “When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you—Then shall they call upon me, but I will

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not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me; for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices.”

Whoever may hope to come off with a lighter doom, you cannot expect it. Thy reckoning is increased by delay—thou “despisest the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and longsuffering: not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance; but after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” “But, and if that servant say in his heart, my Lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the men servants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; the Lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour when he is not aware; and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.”

Whoever may hope to be apprized of his danger, surely you cannot expect it. “He that being often reprovèd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” “For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.”

And do you promise yourself exemption always?—Even the patience of the vine-dresser has an end: he only prayed for another year; and perhaps this was more than eleven months ago. Are you sure that he who waited to-day, will wait to-morrow also?

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Having stood so long knocking, will he never depart? May he not withdraw, this very evening, saying,

“O that thou hadst known in this thy day the things which belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.”

But at present this is not your case. Your harvest is not yet past, your summer is not yet ended. The lives of some of you are spared even to old age. Grey hairs are here and there upon you; and each of them proclaims the patience of God. You are in his House—and before his Throne—and capable of hearing his Word. He has seen all your sin, and abhorred all. He has had you completely in his power: he could have frowned you into perdition. He has guarded you from accidents, and raised you up from beds of languishing. How many, once your companions in folly and sin, have been removed! where are they now? O let this goodness encourage you—not to sin, but to pray. Approach, and kneel before him. “O Thou, who hast given me space, give me also grace to repent. I am now sensible of my guilt, and of thy goodness. I now know what misery I have deserved, and what a blessedness thy mercy is ready to bestow. I am filled with sorrow, and shame, and self-abhorrence, to think that I have so long transgressed thy Law, and despised thy Gospel; provoked thy justice, and contemned thy grace. If, after all, Thou wilt be favourable to such an ungrateful wretch, and accept the remains of a sinful life, I here devote all I am, and all I have, to Thee. Thee I will love and obey. Adieu, my vain and foolish desires, my degrading lusts, my unprofitable pursuits—Pardon—Heaven is even now attain-

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able, and I am following after it. O my God! enable me to run and not be weary, and to walk and not faint.” May God inspire you with these sentiments! To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

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SERMON XVIII.

ASSURANCE.

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SERMON XVIII.

ASSURANCE.

“In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God; neither he that loveth not his brother.” 1 JOHN iii. 10.

MY Brethren, when God would admonish and encourage Jeremiah in the discharge of his office, he said, “If thou take forth the precious from the vile, thou shalt be as my mouth.” This address determines the duty of every preacher, who would “make full proof of his ministry.” It requires him to attend peculiarly to the states of his hearers; to delineate character; to bring forward frequently and boldly the difference between the righteous and the wicked; and to apply with confidence and wisdom the threatenings and promises of the Scripture, for the conviction of the sinner, and the consolation of the godly.

In this manner our Apostle studied to show himself approved unto God,—“a workman that needed not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”—“In this, the children of God are manifest, and the

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children of the Devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God.; neither he that loveth not his brother.”

Of the persons here mentioned we shall consider three things. I. The character by which they are described. II. The manner in which they are discovered. III. The marks by which they are distinguished.

Men and Brethren! While I am endeavouring to explain and improve a subject so important, let me entreat you to employ your minds, not in determining the condition of others, but in judging your own: “let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another: for every man shall bear his own burden.”

I. The persons opposed are The children of God, and the children of the Devil. To suppose that there are no such characters, would be a reflection upon the wisdom of the inspired writer in making the comparison. But let us consider the meaning and importance of the titles.—“The children of God, and the children of the Devil,” mean good and bad men. It is common in the Scripture to call persons, distinguished by any quality or acquisition, the children of those from whom it was originally derived, or by whom it was pre-eminently possessed. Thus we read in the Book of Genesis, that “Jabal was the Father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle; and that Jubal was the Father of all such as handle the harp and the organ.” And thus they who have the faith and do the works of Abraham, are called the Children of Abraham.

The Devil is the introducer of evil: the wicked

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morally proceed from him—partake of his depravity—resemble him—are proud like him. are liars like

him, and so of the rest. Hence says our Apostle, "He that committeth sin is of the Devil, for the Devil sinneth from the beginning." And hence our Lord says to the Jews, who were endeavouring to accuse and destroy him, "Ye are of your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."

God is the author of all goodness; and Christians are said to be "born of Him"—to be "partakers of the divine nature"—to be "followers of him as dear children." They admire his excellences, and imitate his perfections. Is he a God of truth? They walk in the truth. Is he holy? They are holy. Is he merciful? They are merciful.—And thus they are "the children of their Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." The sinner makes the Devil his model, and every degree of transgression adds to the likeness. The believer aspires after conformity to the highest of all examples; and as he grows in grace, he is "changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

These are the persons here described by the characters of "the children of God, and the children of the Devil." This division is the most general and universal. It extends to all mankind; and, by a classification the most simple, reduces the innumerable diversities of the human race into two orders.

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It enters this house, it arranges this assembly: it finds no individual in a state of neutrality: it instantly blends each of you with those children of wrath, or with these heirs of glory.

It is also a division the most serious and eventful. It overlooks everything adventitious, and considers

only character. It passes by the distinctions of speech, complexion, rank; and regards the soul and eternity. It views even the diversities, which arise from the endowments of nature and the gifts of Providence, as nothing, compared with those which spring from faith and infidelity, holiness and sin. How soon will the difference between the learned and illiterate, tyrants and slaves, poor and rich, be abolished!—Death levels them all, and sends them into the world of spirits, not as lords or vassals; not saying, This came from a mansion, and this from a cottage—He separates by a more unchangeable rule of discrimination—This was a true worshipper of God on earth; let him enter the temple above: this made the wicked his choice and his companions; let him be led forth with the workers of iniquity. Death decides the importance of every claim: your true greatness is your final; and those distinctions are alone worthy of your regard, which, being internal and spiritual, will adhere to you when you leave everything else behind, and which will remain with you for ever.

Let us consider, farther, what results from these relations. According as you are “the children of God, or the children of the Devil,” you are crowned with honour, or covered with disgrace. How did David prize an alliance which made him son-in-law to the King! How vain are the people of their

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lineage and extraction!—But to be “sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty” confers substantial dignity, unfading honour, in comparison with which, all the glory derived from secular nobility vanishes into smoke. Upon this principle, what infamy attaches to the sinner—who has for his father the Devil, a rebel, a traitor, who forfeited his inheritance, and is bound in chains of darkness, a murderer, the most accursed being in the universe!—And what renders him more worthy of reproach, and draws from us

execration where otherwise we should rather show pity, is, that this is all his choice, that he is not ashamed to acknowledge the relation—every time he sins, he calls him Father—every time he swears, slanders, takes revenge, Observe, says he, my pedigree, and behold the example I copy.

Upon these connexions innumerable privileges or evils depend. Are you the children of God? Heaven is your home: it is your Father's house, where are many mansions. He has in reserve for you an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. And here you shall want "no good thing." "Your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of before you ask him." Have you afflictions? He will pity you, "as a Father pitieth his children." Have you infirmities? He will spare you, "as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." Are you to be prepared for a "high calling?" You shall "be all taught of the Lord." Do you require care and attention? The angels shall be your guardians: "are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be the heirs of salvation?" But, my dear hearers—I leave you to fill up the remaining article, and to think.

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of the children of the wicked one. I leave you to reflect upon the miseries they endure, from their perplexities, their fears, their passions, and their pursuits in life. I leave you to look forward to the horrors which will devour them in a dying hour; to follow them home, and to contemplate their portion "with the Devil and his angels." "The way of transgressors is hard."—"The end of these things is death." It is therefore, above all things, necessary for you to know in which of these classes you rank: and we are going to show,

II. The possibility of ascertaining this. The children of God, and the children of the Devil, are mani-

fest. Observe, it is not spoken of as a future, but as a present discovery—they are manifest. There is indeed a period of separation approaching, when those who are now blended shall be detached from each other, and mingle no more. It is called “the manifestation of the sons of God.” “Every man’s work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it.” This “will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God.” “And then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.” But even now they are to be discovered, though not sufficiently and perfectly known. They “are manifest.” You ask, To whom?

First. They are manifest to God. It is impossible to impose upon him: he “is not mocked.” “His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.” He “knoweth them that are his;” and he knoweth them that are not his: “neither is there

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any creature that is not manifest in his sight; but all things are naked and open unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.”

Secondly. They are manifest to others. The tree is known by its fruit, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth evil things.” The partakers of divine grace are designed to be distinguished from others: they are to appear religious, as well as be so; they are to hold forth the word of life; to reprove and convince others: their light is to “shine before men, that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father who is in heaven,” And surely there must be an observable difference between them and others. It is unreasonable to suppose that persons, whose principles, and aims, and rules of action, are not only so widely different, but so completely oppo-

site, can be undistinguishingly confounded together. The difference is not indeed so conspicuous as it ought to be—but this arises from the imperfect degree of their religion: for when they live as they ought, they “declare plainly that they seek a country;” “they are manifestly the epistles of Jesus Christ, known and read of all men.”

Thirdly. They are manifest to themselves. It will readily be acknowledged that it is not possible for a man to be wicked without knowing it. He cannot live in the practice of sin, and in the omission of the various duties of religion; he cannot love the one, and hate the other; and not be conscious of it. But is the same true of a good man?—In reply to this, suffer me to ask two things—First. Is it not necessary for him to be able to know his character?

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If promises are made to a religious state, how can he claim these promises unless he can determine that he is in this state? If privileges are suspended upon duty, how can he rejoice in these privileges, unless he can determine that he has performed this duty? Secondly. What is religion? An unintelligible mystery? a charm? an operation which passes upon us and leaves no trace behind?—Is it not the most serious and impressive concern in which we were ever engaged?—Does it not excite fears and hopes, joys and sorrows, far superior to those which can arise from any other source?—Does it not involve us in a succession of difficulties, oppositions, and warfare?—Is it not a general and continued course of action? The business of life, to which we endeavour to render everything else subordinate and subservient? Our prevailing aim? Our chief care?—And is this incapable of being known? But these are the views which you should take of religion; and by these your condition is to be tried—which brings us,

III. To consider the marks of distinction between these characters. "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil."

In what? Not in temporal success. This is given or withholden too indiscriminately to allow of our knowing love or hatred. In this, "all things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked. As is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath."—

In what? Not in religious profession. Judas and Demas were both visible members of the Church of God. There have always been many who had a name to live while they were dead; and assumed a

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form of godliness, while they denied the power thereof. In our day, all this is too cheap to be valuable; too common to be distinguishing.—

In what? Not in talking—not in controversy—not in a sound creed—not in the pronouncement of the Shibboleths of a particular party.—How few, in answering this question, would have adduced the practice of righteousness, and the exercise of love!—But such is the distinction of our Apostle. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: he that doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.

And here we may observe, First. The manner in which the subject is expressed. It is held forth negatively—Nor is this without design. It reminds us that omissions decide the character, even where there is no positive vice. It is the representation of the ungodly, that "he hath left off to be wise and to do good." The "unprofitable" servant is called a "wicked" one; and condemned, not because he abused his talent, but because he "hid it in a napkin." And "every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire: he that doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

Secondly. The union of these excellences is worthy of our notice. We commonly see them combined in the Scripture. It is said of a good man, "He is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous." "He hath dispersed; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness endureth for ever." It is said also, that "pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from

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the world." And this enables us to rectify the mistake of those who are always endeavouring to separate what God has joined together. Some place their religion entirely in charity, and in one equivocal exercise of it—for all they mean by charity is almsgiving; and "this covers a multitude of sins." And some trust in themselves that they are righteous and despise others, who never seem to have read that "the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned;" that "charity is the bond of perfectness;" that "by this shall all men know that we are his disciples, if we love one another."

Thirdly. From these arises a criterion, by which we are to judge of the reality and genuineness of religion.—Not that these are the only marks which we are to employ; there are many other evidences in the Scriptures, and some of them of a more experimental kind, which we dare not depreciate—but all the rest will be vain and delusive if unaccompanied with this righteousness and this love. These are the never-failing consequences of divine grace. These enter deeply into the character. These are indispensable. By these we shall be tried hereafter—By these we should form our judgment here—The Judge himself proposes this rule: "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: he

that doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

Let me conclude by calling upon you to think of this—in forming a judgment of others. It is a serious thing to deprive a fellow-creature of religion, and to exclude him from eternal life; and what authority have you for Going so, if his life be exemplary, and

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righteousness and charity blend and prevail in his character? You say, perhaps, a man may appear to possess these things when he is a stranger to the reality, or his practice may flow from no inward or gracious principle. We allow this; and it becomes such a person to examine himself, to see whether his heart be right with God, and whether his views and his dispositions be such as the Gospel requires—But when I form a judgment concerning him, the case is materially altered. I have nothing to do with his motives; I cannot search his heart: his life and conversation only fall under my cognizance; and these are my rule—“by their fruits ye shall know them.” When will this necessary difference influence the opinions of individuals? When will it be regarded by our churches in the admission of members to communion? When we find nothing objectionable in a candidate—who tells us to keep him back till we find something satisfactory? “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: he that doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

Above all, do not forget this, in judging yourselves. I presume you wish to know your spiritual condition, and that you are not willing to leave your eternal salvation to a mere peradventure—Perhaps I shall be saved; perhaps I shall be lost!! “Wherefore, brethren, give all diligence to make your calling and election sure.” But beware how you proceed in the inquiry. Remember that there are marks and evidences which cannot lead you to a certain and safe

conclusion. Do not place your confidence in speculative opinions: be not influenced by particular feelings, which having much of animal nature in them,

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may sometimes elevate and sometimes depress you, while your state is the same: do not wait for sudden impressions, and visionary suggestions; but remember that the witness and the seal of the Spirit are his work and influences. "Hereby we know that we dwell in him and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit." "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."—

Here then lay the stress. Try yours by your prevailing dispositions, and the tenour of your lives. Many, I know, deride such a standard. They derive their assurance from some other source; especially from "a direct act of faith;" or, in other words, from a persuasion into which they work themselves, without being able to assign any reason whatever to justify it, save the consciousness itself. They not only reject good works, like others, as causes of salvation, but they reject them even as evidences too. They are not satisfied, like others, to exclude them from their justification: they exclude them even from their sanctification too, which with them means only a relative change. May you be preserved, my dear brethren, from this dreadful perversion of "ungodly men, who turn the grace of God into lasciviousness." Remember, nothing can be so awful as final deception: and nothing can more certainly expose you to it, than imagining yourselves the favourites of Heaven, while you are strangers to the renewing power of divine grace, and your tempers and lives are under none of the purifying and affectionate influences of the Gospel. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." "The meek will he guide in judgment,

tand the meek will he teach his way." They, to whom there is no condemnation because they are in Christ,

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"walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." "He that is born of God, overcometh the world." "By this we know that we do know him, if we keep his commandments." These are the true sayings of God; and such is the invariable reference of the Scripture.

Suffer me then to ask you what you know of these things. Are you doing righteousness? and are you doing it—not reluctantly, but with pleasure?—not occasionally, but constantly?—not partially, but without reserve? Do you "esteem all his commandments concerning all things to be right," and do you "hate every false way?" Are your infirmities your afflictions? and do you derive from them motives to vigilance and prayer? or are you satisfied and careless under them? Do you "love your brother also?" Do you regard all your fellow-creatures and fellow Christians? And as you have opportunity, do you do good unto all men; especially unto "those who are of the household of faith?" Does this principle actuate you to afford them relief, to bear their burdens, to seek their welfare, and to serve them at the expense of self-denial?

If this be not your condition, it is well to know it; and it will be your mercy to lay it to heart. For your case, though bad, is not desperate. If you are now sensible of your sin, and really desirous of conversion, he calls, he encourages you. "Wash ye, make ye clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. Let

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the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." And what he requires, he also bestows. Read his promises in connexion with his commands. While the one determines your work, the other insures your ability for the performance of it. Beseech Him to create in you a clean heart, and to renew a right spirit within you. Depend upon his grace, which will be "sufficient for you;" and "being made free from sin, and become servants to God, you will have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord." Amen.

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SERMON XIX.

DOMESTIC HAPPINESS.

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SERMON XIX.

DOMESTIC HAPPINESS.

"The voice of rejoicing is in the tabernacles of the righteous." PSALM cxviii. 15.

NOTHING can more usefully engage our attention than Human Nature and Human Life. The proper study of mankind is Man. His origin and his end; the structure of his body and the powers of his mind;

his situation and his connexions; are all capable of yielding us boundless and edifying instruction.

In observing mankind, the private and familiar views of their character are by far the most curious, interesting, and profitable. The greater part of our history is composed of minute and common incidents: and little and ordinary things serve more to discover a man, and conduce more to render him useful, than splendid and rare occurrences. Abroad, a man appears cautious; at home, he is unreserved. Abroad, he is artificial; at home, he is real. Abroad, he is serviceable; at home, he is necessary. And of this we may be fully assured—that a man is in truth what he is in his own family—whether vicious or virtuous. tyrannical or mild, miserable or happy.

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My Brethren, we are going to enter one of those houses, of which David speaks—a tabernacle “filled with the voice of rejoicing.” Domestic Felicity is our present subject. Let us consider two things: the importance, and the source of this happiness. I. What may be said in commendation of it. II. What will be necessary to the possession of it. O Thou, who hast said “It is not good for man to be alone,” “God of the families of all the earth,” may thy secret be upon our tabernacles! Under the influence of thy Providence and grace, may we derive from our unions all the blessedness they are capable of affording: and to this end, guide and sanctify our meditations!

PART I. One of the most agreeable scenes we can ever survey upon earth, is a peaceful and happy family: where friendship comes in to draw more closely the bonds of nature; where the individuals resemble the human body, and if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it, and if one member be

honoured, all the members rejoice;—where every care is divided, every sorrow diminished, every joy redoubled by discovery, by sympathy, by communion; where mutual confidence prevails, and advice, consolation, and succour are reciprocally given and received. To such a sight God himself calls our attention. “Behold how good and pleasant a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” Some things are good, but not pleasant; and some things are pleasant, but not good—Here both are combined; and the effect is fragrant as the sacred perfume, and reviving as the influences of Heaven. “It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down

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upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the Lord commanded his blessing, even life for evermore.” Let us establish the importance of Domestic Happiness, by taking some particular views of its connexions and influence.

And, First, We may consider it in reference to our avocations and cares. These are numerous and diversified, and demand relaxation and relief. Who could endure perpetual drudgery and fatigue?—and what so refreshing, so soothing, so satisfying, as the placid joys of home!

See the traveller. Does duty call him for a season to leave his beloved circle? The image of his earthly nappiness continues vividly in his remembrance—it quickens him to diligence—it cheers him under difficulties—it makes him hail the hour which sees his purpose accomplished, and his face turned towards home—it communes with him as he journeys—and he hears the promise which causes him to hope, “Thou shalt know also that thy tabernacle shall be in peace; and thou shalt visit thy habitation, and not sin.” Oh, the joyful re-union of a divided family;

the pleasures of renewed interview and conversation, after days of absence!

Behold the man of science. He drops the labour and painfulness of research—closes his volume—smoothes his wrinkled brows—leaves his study—and unbending himself, stoops to the capacities, yields to the wishes, and mingles with the diversions of his children—And

“—He will not blush that has a father’s heart,
“To take in childish playa childish part;

“But bends his sturdy back to any toy
“That youth takes pleasure in. to please his boy.”

Take the man of trade. What reconciles him to the toil of business? What enables him to endure the fastidiousness and impertinence of customers? What rewards him for so many hours of tedious confinement? By-and-by the season of intercourse will arrive—he will be embosomed in the caresses of his family—he will behold the desire of his eyes, and the children of his love, for whom he resigns his ease—and in their welfare and smiles he will find his recompense.

Yonder comes the labourer. He has borne the burden and heat of the day: the descending sun has released him from his toil, and he is hastening home to enjoy repose. Half-way down the lane, by the side of which stands his cottage, his children run to meet him: one he carries, and one he leads. The companion of his humble life is ready to furnish him with his plain repast. See, his toil-worn countenance assumes all air of cheerfulness—his hardships are forgotten—fatigue vanishes—he eats, and is satisfied—the evening fair, he walks with uncovered head around his garden—enters again, and retires to rest: and “the rest of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much.” Inhabitant of this lonely, lowly dwelling, who can be indifferent to thy com-

fort!—"Peace be to this house"—

"Let not ambition mock thy useful toil,
 "Thy HOMELY joys, and destiny obscure;
 "Nor grandeur hear, with a disdainful smile,
 "The short and simple annals of the poor."

Secondly, We may consider this happiness in re-

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ference to the afflictions of life. It looks like a general remedy, furnished by the kindness of Providence, to alleviate the troubles which from various quarters we unavoidably feel while passing through this world of vanity and vexation of spirit. How many little sighing vacancies does it fill up! How many cloudy nervous vapours does it chase from the mind! Whose frowns and gloom will not the mirth of a child dissipate? What corroding anxieties will not retire from the attentions of a virtuous wife! What a consolation is her gentleness! Who has not experienced its healing, enlivening influence, in the day of sickness and in the hour of depression! Is your confidence frequently checked by the baseness and dissimulation of mankind? Here your candour recovers, and you are reconciled to your fellow-creatures again. Does the behaviour of too many with whom you have to do, cherish a dissatisfaction which sours life? Here a serenity, a sweetness, spreads over the mind, from the simplicity, openness, and kindness, with which you are surrounded. Are you repulsed by others? Here you are received with open and welcome arms. Does the storm rage without? Behold an asylum within—Here we realize an emblem of the Saviour: it says to us, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in me ye shall have peace." Here "the wicked cease from troubling," and here "the weary are at rest."

Thirdly. We may consider this happiness in reference to the good things of this life. Without this, all will be insipid, all will be useless. Your titles of

distinction, and your robes of office, are laid aside before you enter your own dwelling. There the senator, the minister, the lawyer, draw back; and we

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behold only the husband, the father, the man! There you stand only in those relations in which nature has placed you. There you feel only your personal character. What remains after these deductions are made, ascertains your value. You are to judge of your worth by the honour you command where rank does not overawe—of your importance, by the esteem and admiration you engage when deprived of all adventitious appendages—of your happiness, by the resources you possess to give cheerfulness and charms to those returning hours which no splendour gilds, which no fame inspires, and in which all the attractions of popularity fail. For what would it avail you to live in popular opinion, and to be followed with applause home to your very door—if you were then to be compelled to continue in the element of discord, the seat of strife, the house of bondage and correction? Imagine yourselves prosperous in your affairs; trade pouring in wealth, your grounds bringing forth plentifully, your cup running over—Misery under your own roof would be sufficient to canker your gold and silver; to corrupt your abundance; to embitter every pleasure; to make you groan, even on a costly sofa, “All this availeth me nothing!”—

Sufferings from strangers are less acute than from friends. David magnifies the affliction he endured by the nearness of the quarter from which it came—“It was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me, that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him. But it was thou—mine equal, my guide, and my acquaintance.” This circumstance gave it all the shock of surprise, all the bitterness of disappointment, all the breach of oblige-

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tion. It is bad to be wounded anywhere; but to be "wounded in the house of a friend" is mentioned as a peculiar aggravation. No foes are like those of "a man's household." Their situation favours hostility: they can choose the moment of attack; they can repeat the blow; they can injure imperceptibly. And what can be so dreadful as to be associated with persons from whom you cannot separate, and with whom you cannot live? What are occasional smiles, against habitual frowns? What is friendship abroad against enmity at home? What is it for a man to be comfortable where he visits, and to be tormented where he dwells? If our happiness flow from others—and that it does in no small degree is unquestionable—it will necessarily follow, that it must be most affected by those to whom we are most seriously related, and with whom we most intimately blend—not those whom we accidentally meet, but those with whom we daily reside—not those who touch one part of our character only, but those who press us on every side.

Fourthly. Let us consider it in reference to the seductions and snares of the world. From the danger of these, there is no better preservative than the attractions of a family. The more a man feels his welfare lodged in his own house, the more will he prize and love it. The more he is attached to his wife and children, the less will he risk their peace and comfort by hazardous speculations, and mad enterprises in trade. A life of innocency, regularity, and repose, in the affections of his family, will check the rovings of restless ambition, and secure him from the follies of the pride of life. "Evil communications corrupt good manners." But these pleasing

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cords will draw him back from" the counsel of the ungodly," "the way of sinners," "the seat of the

scornful." In vain will he be tempted to go abroad for company or for pleasure, when home supplies him with both. "And what," says he, "are the amusements and dissipations of the world? I have better enjoyments already—enjoyments springing fresh from the growth, the improvement, the culture of our rising charge—from our rural walks—from our social evenings—from our reading and conversation—from our cheerful, lively, mutual devotion. Here are pleasures perpetually renewing, and which never cloy. Here are entertainments placed easily within our reach, and which require no laborious preparation, no costly arrangement. Here I acknowledge only the dominion of nature; and follow only the bias of inclination. Here I have no weaknesses to hide, no mistakes to dread. Here my gratifications are attended with no disgrace, no remorse. They leave no stain, no sting behind. I fear no reproach from my understanding, no reckoning from my conscience—my prayers are not hindered. My heart is made better—I am softened—prepared for duty—allured to the Throne of Grace. And can I be induced to exchange all this, O ye votaries of the world, for your anxieties, confusion, agitations, and expense? Shall I part with my ease and independence, for the trammels of your silly forms, the encumbrance of your fashions, the hypocrisies of your crowds? Shall I resign my freedom for the privilege of your slavery, which so often compels you to disguise your sentiments, to subdue your genuine feelings, to applaud folly, to yawn under a lethargy of pleasure, and to sigh for the hour of retirement and release? Shall I

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sacrifice my innocent endearments, to pursue the fatal routine of your dissipation—the end of which is heaviness—and from which you return, deprived of seasonable rest, robbed of peace of mind, galled by reflection, disinclined to prayer, feeling the presence

of God irksome, and the approach of death intolerable?—

“Domestic Happiness, thou only bliss
 “Of Paradise that has escap’d the Fall!
 “Thou art not known where Pleasure is ador’d,-
 “That reeling goddess with a zoneless waist:
 “Forsaking thee, what shipwreck have we made
 “Of honour, dignity, and fair renown!”

—Who can help lamenting to see the valuable enjoyments of home sacrificed to a fondness for amusements, and a rage for indiscriminate intercourse with a false unfeeling world! But so it is. People were never more social, and never less domestic, than they now are.—The phrensy has reached all ranks and degrees. Our females are no longer keepers at home. Even children are led into these circles of infatuation, and made to despise the simple and natural manners of youth. From mansions and shops and common dwellings we see increasing numbers pouring forth to balls, and assemblies, and routs, and concerts, and public spectacles, and theatrical entertainments: every evening has some foreign claim.

“Who will show me any good?”—is the cry. The world passing along hears it, and says, Follow me—emulate this splendour—mix with this throng—pursue these diversions. We comply. We run, and we run in vain—the prize was nigh us when we began; but our folly drew us away from it. Let us

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return home, and we shall find it. Let us remember, that happiness prefers calmness to noise, and the shades to publicity; that it depends more upon things cheap and common, than upon things expensive and singular: that it is not an exotic which we are to import from the ends of the earth, but a plant which grows in our own field, and in our own garden. Every man may be made happy, if you could induce him to make a proper estimate of happiness; if you could

keep him from judging after outward appearances; if you could persuade him to stoop, rather than to aspire; to kneel, rather than to fly. To confine us to our respective stations, God has wisely rendered happiness only attainable in them: were it placed—not in the way of duty, but on the other side of the boundary—the very position would lead us astray, and seduce us to transgress.—But home is not always heaven, nor is domestic life necessarily productive of domestic happiness. Hence it becomes needful,

PART II. To open its sources, and examine on what it depends.

It does not depend upon rank and affluence. It is confined to no particular condition: the servant may enjoy it, as well as the master; the mechanic, as well as the nobleman. It exhilarates the cottage as well as the palace. What am I saying? What says common opinion? Does it not invariably associate more enjoyment with the lowly roof, than with the towering mansion? Ask those who have risen from inferior life, whether their satisfaction has increased with their circumstances; whether they have never advanced to the brow of the eminence they have ascended, and looking down sighed, “Ah!

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happy vale, from how much was I sheltered while I was in thee!” There can be indeed but one opinion concerning the wretchedness of those who have not the necessaries of life. But “Nature is content with little, and Grace with less.” “Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.” “Better is a dry morsel, and quietness therewith, than a house full of sacrifices and strife.” This blessedness then results not from worldly things—and we mention this the more readily, because some seem afraid to enter a state honourable in all, because they have before them no openings of wealth—others dread the increase of children, as an acces-

sion of misery—while many are waiting for a larger fortune, a more spacious house, and more splendid furniture, before they can even think of enjoying themselves.

We may also observe, that some individuals seem much more qualified to enjoy this happiness than others. Some have little taste for anything. They are made up of stupidities: they have eyes, but see not; ears, but hear not. They are the automatons of nature; the machines of Providence; doing the work which the constitution of the world requires of them, devoid of any lively emotions. If they ever feel, it is only from the impression of something tumultuous and violent—if they are ever pleased, it is only with factitious joys. But others are full of life and sensibility. They are susceptible of delicate impressions: they love everything tranquil; relish everything simple; enjoy everything natural; and are touched and dissolved by a thousand pleasing circumstances which convey nothing to others.

There are, however, some things which have an

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indispensable influence in producing and maintaining the welfare of families, which fall more properly under our cultivation. Order—Good Temper—Good Sense—Religious Principles. These will bless thy dwelling, and fill thy “tabernacle with the voice of rejoicing.”

First. Without order you can never rule well your own house. “God is not the God of confusion.” He loves order: order pervades all his works. He overlooks nothing. “He calleth the stars by their names;” “He numbereth the hairs of our head.” “He appointeth the moon for seasons; and the sun knoweth his going down.” There is no discord, no clashing, in all the immense, the amazing whole! He has interposed his authority, and enjoined us “to do everything decently, and in order.” And this command is founded in a regard to our advantage. It

calls upon you to lay down rules, and to walk by them; to assign everything its proper place—its allowance of time—its degree of importance; to observe regularity in your meals—in your devotions—in your expenses. From order spring frugality, economy, charity. From order result beauty, harmony, concurrence. Without order there can be no government, no happiness. Peace flies from confusion. Disorder entangles all our affairs; hides from us the end, and keeps from us the clue—we lose self-possession; and become miserable—because perplexed, hurried, oppressed, easily provoked.

Secondly. Many things will arise to try your temper: and he is unqualified for social life who has no rule over his own spirit; “who cannot bear,” to use the words of a good writer, “the frailties of his fellow-creatures with common charity, and the vexa-

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tions of life with common patience.” Peter, addressing wives, reminds them that “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is in the sight of God of great price.” And Solomon often mentions the opposite blemish in illustrating the female character. “It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house.” “The contentions of a wife are a continual dropping”—and so on. We should deem it invidious to exemplify this imperfection in one sex only—we would address you equally; and call upon you, as you value a peaceful abode, to maintain a control over your tempers. Beware of passion: say little when under irritation; turn aside—take time to reflect and to cool—a word spoken unadvisedly with your lips may produce a wound which weeks cannot heal. “I would reprove thee,” said the philosopher, “were I not angry”—It is a noble suggestion. Apply it in your reprehension of servants and correction of children. But there is something against which you should be more upon your guard than occasional sallies of passion-

I mean habitual pettishness. The former may be compared to a brisk shower which is soon over; the latter, to a sleet drizzling rain driving all the day long. The mischief which is such a disturber of social enjoyment, is not the anger which is lengthened into malice, or vented in revenge; but that which oozes out in constant fretfulness, murmuring, and complaint: it is that which renders a man not formidable, but troublesome; it is that which converts him, not into a tiger, but into a gnat. Good humour is the cordial, the balm of life. The possessor of it spreads satisfaction wherever he comes, and he partakes of the pleasure he gives. Easy in himself, he

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is seldom offended with those around him. Calm and placid within, everything without wears the most favourable appearance; while the mind, agitated by peevishness or passion, like a ruffled pool, even reflects every agreeable and lovely image false and distorted.

Thirdly. The influence and advantage of good sense are incalculable. What streams, what vessels, are the noisy? The shallow, the empty. Who are the unyielding? The ignorant, who mistake obstinacy for firmness. Who are the infallible? They who have not reflection enough to see how liable and how likely we are to err; they who cannot comprehend how much it adds to a man's wisdom to discover, and to his humility to acknowledge, a fault. Good sense will preserve us from censoriousness; will lead us to distinguish circumstances; to draw things from the dark situation of prejudice which rendered them frightful, that we may candidly survey them in open day. Good sense will keep us from looking after visionary perfection—"The infirmities I behold are not peculiar to my connexions; others, if equally near, would betray the same: universal excellence is unattainable; no one can please in everything. And who am I, to demand a freedom from imperfections

in others, while I am encompassed with infirmities myself?" Good sense will lead us to study dispositions, peculiarities, accommodations: to weigh consequences; to determine what to observe and what to pass by; when to be immoveable and when to yield. Good sense will produce good manners; will keep us from taking freedoms and handling things roughly; for love is delicate, and confidence is tender. Good sense will never agitate claims of superiority;

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it will teach us to "submit ourselves one to another, in the fear of God." Good sense will lead persons to regard their own duties, rather than to recommend those of others.

Fourthly. We must go beyond all this, and remind you of those religious principles by which you are to be governed. These are to be found in the word of God; and as many as walk according to this rule, mercy and peace shall be upon them. God has engaged that if you will walk in his way, you shall find rest unto your souls. If it be said—There are happy families without religion—I would answer, First, There is a difference between appearances and reality. Secondly, If we believe the Scripture, this is impossible—"the way of transgressors is hard: there is no peace, saith my God, unto the wicked." Thirdly, Religion secures those duties, upon the performance of which the happiness of households depends. Would any man have reason to complain of servants, of children, or of any other relation—if they were all influenced by the spirit, and regulated by the dictates of the Gospel? Much of religion lies in the discharge of these relative duties—and to enforce these, religion brings forward motives the most powerful, and all ways binding, and calls in conscience, and God, and heaven, and hell. Fourthly, Religion attracts the Divine blessing—and all we possess or enjoy depends upon its smiles. God can elevate or sink us in the esteem of others: he can send us business or with-

hold it; he can command or forbid thieves to rob, and flames to devour us; he can render all we have satisfying, or distasteful—and they that honour him he will honour. “The house of the wicked shall be overthrown, but the tabernacle of the upright shall

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flourish. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked; but he blesseth the habitation of the just.” Finally, Religion prepares us for all events. If we succeed—it keeps our prosperity from destroying us. If we suffer—it preserves us from fainting in the day of adversity. It turns our losses into gains; it exalts our joys into praises; it makes prayers of our sighs—and, in all the uncertainties of time and changes of the world, it sheds on the mind a “peace which passeth all understanding.” It unites us to each other—not only as creatures, but as Christians; not only as strangers and pilgrims upon earth, but as heirs of glory, honour, and immortality—For you must separate—it is useless to keep back the mortifying truth—It was the condition upon which your union was formed. O man! it was a mortal finger upon which you placed the ring, vain emblem of perpetuity. O woman! it was a dying hand that imposed it. After so many mutual and growing attachments, to separate!—“What is to be done here? O Religion, Religion, come, and relieve us, in a case where every other assistance fails. Come, and teach us not to wrap up our chief happiness in the creature. Come, and bend our wills to the pleasure of the Almighty, and enable us to say, “It is the Lord! let him do what seemeth him good: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; and blessed be the name of the Lord.” Come, and tell us that they are disposed of infinitely to their advantage; that the separation is temporary; that a time of re-union will come; that we shall see their faces and hear their voices again.—

Take two Christians, who have been walking together, like "Zacharias and Elisabeth, in all the com-

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mandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless." Is the connexion dissolved by death? No. We take the Bible along with us; and inscribe on their tomb, "Pleasant in life, and in death not divided." Is the one removed before the other? He becomes an attraction to the other; he draws him forward, and is waiting to "receive him into everlasting habitations."—Let us suppose a pious family re-uniting together, after following each other successively down to the grave. How unlike every present meeting! Here our intercourse is chilled with the certainty of separation: there we shall meet, to part no more; we shall be for ever with each other, and for ever with the Lord. Now affliction often enters our circle, and the distress of one is the concern of all: then we shall "rejoice with them that rejoice," but not "weep with them that weep;" for "all tears shall be wiped from our eyes, and the days of our mourning shall be ended."

Come, then, my dear hearers, and invite the religion of the blessed Jesus—this one thing needful—this universal benefactor of mankind. It has "the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come"—It secures our individual and our relative happiness—It brings peace into our bosoms, and joy into our dwellings. Let us resolve to pursue it ourselves; let us enforce it upon our connexions. Let us dedicate our tabernacles to God; offer the morning and evening sacrifice of prayer and of praise: and whatever be the determination of others, let each of us say, for ourselves, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

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SERMON XX.

HAPPINESS IN DEATH.

“For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” 2 PETER i. 11.

MY Brethren! Among the various motives with which Revelation abounds, there are none more solemn and impressive than those which are derived from—Death. Hence the sacred writers often refer to it. They remind us of the suddenness of its arrival. They forewarn us of the nearness of its approach. They also intimate the importance of its consequences, as terminating this state of trial, sealing up our characters, and transmitting them to the judgment of the great day, to be opened and published before an assembled world.

The apostle Peter urges the manner of our dying—He would have us die well—not only in a state of salvation, but of peace—and triumph. “So an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” To do justice to this subject, it will

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be necessary to consider three things. I. The state to which the Christian looks forward—"the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." II. The mode of his admission—"an entrance ministered abundantly." III. The condition on which the privilege depends—it is the consequence of something clearly implied. "So—So an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

I. Christians, We know very little of "the hope which is laid up for us in heaven:" it is "the glory which shall be revealed in us." While we are in this weak state of flesh and blood, the full disclosure would be too dazzling for the feeble eye. It would also, by making too strong an impression, operate injuriously, unhinging us from our present connexions, and depriving those concerns which demand a subordinate share of attention, of all power to strike and engage our minds. "We walk by faith, not by sight"—but "we know in part." We have some representations of our future blessedness, accommodated to our faculties, and derived from scenes with which we are familiar.

It is a kingdom—a state of royal empire, expanding over a better, a heavenly country—where there is no curse—whose laws are equity and perfection—whose riches and honours and resources are infinite—whose subjects are all wise and good—living together as friends—all princes themselves—all happy—escaped from the troubles of life, the infirmities and diseases of body, the distresses and accusations of conscience, the remains of ignorance and of sin—and innumerable vexations, which now make us groan, and long to

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emigrate thither. Two things are spoken of this kingdom, which deserve remark.

The first concerns its permanency and duration—It is “the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour.” Everything here is perishable and transitory. We tremble to look at our possessions and enjoyments, lest we should see them in motion, spreading their wings to flee away. Many already, in talking of their comforts, are compelled to go back—“I had a husband—children—health—affluence—and I said, I shall die in my nest”—

As it is with individuals and families, so it is with communities. “The fashion of this world passeth away.” Where now is the city whose top was to reach to heaven and defy a second flood? What have become of the kingdoms of the earth, whose fame fills the page of history? The Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, Roman empires arose, astonished mankind for a season, and disappeared. And not only the most magnificent and durable productions of human power and skill, but even the established frame of nature, shall be demolished. “The heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up. Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness”—Then follows a kingdom not marred by sin, not liable to declension or change. A kingdom which cannot be shaken, secure from internal decay and external violence. A kingdom, prepared from the foundation of the world, and which shall survive its dissolution; and, having seen the sun turned into darkness and the moon into blood, shall flow on through eternal ages.

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The greater any good is which we possess, the more does it awaken our concern, and the more anxious are we to inquire after its security and tenure. But here is no room for apprehension—the happiness is as certain as it is excellent, as durable as it is vast. And the Scripture never overlooks this important

consideration. Is it “meat?” It “endureth to everlasting life.” Is it a “treasure?” “Moth and rust cannot corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal.” Is it a “crown of glory?” It “fadeth not away.” Is it a “house?” It is “a building of God, not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens.” Is it a “city?” It is “a city which hath foundations, whose builder and whose maker is God.” Is it a “kingdom?” It is “everlasting.”

Behold the second circumstance with regard to this blessed state. It is “the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” And what means this relation? It is surely designed to distinguish him from a mere possessor, and to intimate peculiar prerogative, residence, administration. It is his by claim. As the Son of God, he is “heir of all things: being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he, at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son? And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, “Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom:

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thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” For under another view he acquired it as the reward of his obedience and sufferings. “For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, of which we speak. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour.” “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to

be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that, at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." He has now the disposal of the offices and privileges of the empire among his faithful followers. This was surely the idea of the dying thief, when he prayed, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom;" and of Paul, when he said, "and the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom." He is the Sovereign; and there he rules—not, as here, "in the midst of his enemies"—No treason, no sedition, no disaffection there. All are adoring and praising him—"Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." There he

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reigns immediately—always in view—and accessible to all. There he appears in our nature—the principle, the image, the pledge of our glory and happiness. He has taken possession in our name; and is preparing a place for us; and will by-and-by receive us to himself, that where he is, there we may be also.

It has been often said, "that however we may differ from each other, we all hope for the same heaven." But nothing can be more untrue. The believer in Jesus, who loves him above all, and places the whole of his happiness in him—he—and he alone really desires the heaven of the Bible: a pure, spiritual, christian heaven, the essence of which is the pre-

sence and glory of the Redeemer. This is the heaven he demanded for all his followers—"ather, I will that they also whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am, to behold my glory." This is the heaven Paul desired for himself: "I long to depart, to be with Christ, which is far better." And such is the disposition of every true follower of the Lord Jesus. "This is enough—this is the heaven of Heaven—there I shall see Him who is altogether lovely. There I shall behold Him who gave his life a ransom for me. There I shall approach the Lamb in the midst of the throne, who will feed me and lead me to living fountains of water. There I shall be like him; for I shall see him as he is. There I shall be for ever with the Lord."—Having considered the state to which we are encouraged to look forward, let us observe,

II. The desirable mode of admission. And here we read of all entrance—ministered—abundantly.

What is this entrance? Unquestionably—Death.

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"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death hath passed upon all men, because all have sinned." With two exceptions, this has been the way of all the earth. "Enoch was translated, that he should not see death." "Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven"—They departed, without the separation of soul and body—and knew nothing of "pains and groans and dying strife." They were not unclothed, but clothed upon: and in them, mortality was swallowed up of life. But only one passage remains for us: and this—not an easy and an alluring, but a rough and a gloomy one. A messenger brings us to God; but it is "the King of Terrors;" we enter the land flowing with milk and honey; but it is through "the valley of the shadow of death."

But you should remember that your entrance into the invisible world is administered. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows." "The" very "hairs of your head are all numbered." "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints:" and he orders all the circumstances attending it. Not only is the will of God concerned in the general sentence of mortality pronounced upon us, but death always receives a particular commission from him. Hence, in a similar condition, one is taken and another left. The circumstance of time is fixed by him: "the number of our months is with him." The place is determined by his purpose. The means and the manner of our removal are disposed by his pleasure. "Whether we are to die young or old; whether we are to be seized

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at home or abroad; whether we shall be carried off by accidents or disease; whether we shall expire slowly or suddenly—are secrets impenetrable to us; but all is wisely and kindly regulated by his providence.

The death of some is distinguished by indulgences and honours not vouchsafed to all: and this is what the Apostle means by an entrance ministered unto us abundantly. For all do not enter alike. Some, shipwrecked, are washed by the surge half dead on the shore, or reach it clinging terrified to a plank; others, with crowded sails and with a preserved cargo of spices and perfumes, beautifully, gallantly enter the desired haven. Some are scarcely saved; and some are more than conquerors. A triumph was not decreed to every Roman general upon his return to the capital. Can we imagine that the martyrs issuing from the flames, entered heaven like a Christian who had been often tempted to conceal his religion to escape a sneer or a frown? We may observe a re-

markable diversity even in the deaths of common believers. Some die only safe; while their state is unknown to themselves, and suspected by others. In some, hope and fear alternately prevail. Some feel a peace which passeth all understanding—while some exult with a joy unspeakable and full of glory. And in these is fulfilled the language of the promise, “With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the King’s palace.” They are “joyful in glory” before they have reached it, and “shout aloud upon their” dying “beds.” God deals with them as he did with Moses, when he led him to the top of Pisgah and gave him a prospect of the Holy Land: only with this difference—his view was

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a substitute for possession; while their look is to render the passage easier, and to make them hasten to the goodly mountain of Lebanon. Such a death the Apostle valued more than the continuance of life: all his concern was to “finish his course with joy:” and the assured hope of this would animate thousands, and reconcile them to all the trials they endure. It is desirable and valuable, both with regard to themselves and others.

They will need it themselves. It is a new—a trying—and—an awful thing to die. They will find dying to be work enough, without having doubts and fears to encounter. The distresses of life admit of alleviation and diversion—but it is otherwise with the pains of death. Worldly pursuits are broken off, sensual pleasures are excluded, conversation is difficult, friends are anxious and fearful; and if you have no joy springing up in you from a spiritual source, your condition is deplorable and desperate. Would you die in darkness, or in the light of God’s countenance? Would you enter another world, ignorant whether you shall step into endless happiness or misery; or depart, able to say, as you look back with

a smile upon survivors, "Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know"?

You should long for this also on the behalf of others. This is the last time you can do anything in serving God and your generation; but by this you may be rendered peculiarly useful. Your dying looks and your dying words may make impressions which shall never be erased. Some who have refused to hear sermons, have been convinced by a dying bed. The religion which can produce such patience and resignation, courage and joy, has become honour-

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able in their esteem. They have admired and resolved to follow a Master, who does not cast off his servants when their strength faileth, and who blesses them with strong consolation when others are left without support: the evidence is too plain to be denied, too solemn to be ridiculed.—Such a death has also often been profitable to those who were already in the way to Zion, but walking with trembling steps, and often fearing how it would go with them at last: when they have seen the grace of God, they have been glad, their ardour has rekindled, their courage has been renewed—they have said, "Why may it not be so with me? The Lord is my helper; I will not fear." When Doctor Rivet was labouring under the disease which ended in his dissolution, he said—"Let all who come to inquire after me, be allowed to see me—I ought to be an example of religion, dying as well as living; and Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death."—"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his." But in order to this, it will be necessary for us,

III. To examine the condition upon which this privilege is suspended, and which is obviously here implied—"For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of

our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." There are two things which it will be proper for us briefly to premise. First, There are cases in which Christians may be affected all through life by bodily causes, having something morbid and atrabilarious in their constitution, which subjects them to various changes and depressions with which religion has no concern-

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There is no reasoning from these instances. Secondly, It is not for us to determine what God may do in particular cases: for he does not always deal with his people according to their desert: he is slow to anger, and ready to forgive—Nevertheless he has given us a rule by which we are to walk; and has wisely established a connexion between duty and privilege. And I am persuaded that there is not an individual in this assembly, who would not rationally and Scripturally expect to find one course of life attended with a more favoured and happy death than another: nor can there be much dispute in determining the nature of this course; this being one of those cases in which men are very nearly agreed. It would be well if their knowledge and their practice equally harmonized; but, alas! what ignorance and infidelity cannot make us deny, sin and the world can make us neglect! This course requires—That you should habituate yourselves to familiar thoughts of Death. This will dissipate the terrors which arise from distance and imagination; this will break the force of surprise; this will turn a frightful precipice into a gentle slope. He who can say, "I die daily," is the most likely to die comfortably. It requires—that you should loosen your affections from the world—A gentle breeze, a slight effort will bring down the tree around which you have dug, and whose larger roots you have cut off. And the less powerfully you are attached to earthly things, the more easy will be your separation from them. This is the man to die, whose mind advances with his time; who feels himself

a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth; whose treasure is in heaven; and who views dying as only going home. It requires—That you should obtain and pre-

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serve the evidences of pardon: without these you cannot be fearless and tranquil in the near views of eternity—since “after death is the judgment.” It requires you to keep a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man. Is he in a condition to die, who has lived in the practice of some known sin, and in the omission of some known duty? Is he in a condition to die, who has worn a mask of hypocrisy, which will now drop off, and expose him in his true character? Is he in a condition to die, who by artifice, unfair dealing, grinding the faces of the poor, has amassed gain, which will dishonour him if restored, and condemn him if retained? It requires—us to live in the exercise of brotherly kindness and charity. Of all we do for Him, nothing pleases him more than this: this we know he will acknowledge in the day of judgment—and why not in the day of death? “Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble.” “The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.” Many are praying for him—the widows and the fatherless cry, and their cry entereth “the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth.” It requires—an attention to religion in your families. I pity that father, who will be surrounded when he dies with children, whose minds he never informed, whose dispositions he never curbed, whose manners he never guarded; who sees one an infidel, another a profligate, and all irreligious. I know that you are not answerable for the conversion of your offspring, but you are responsible for the use of all proper means; and if these have been neglected, you will plant your dying pillow with thorns: whereas, if you have seriously and perse-

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veringly attended to them, your dying repose shall not be disturbed by want of success; but you shall be able to say, "Although my house be not so with God, yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure; for this is all my salvation and all my desire; although he make it not to grow."

In a word, it requires you to live in the strenuous cultivation of practical and progressive religion. "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see far off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:—for so, an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

My brethren; If there be such differences among Christians in dying, we may be assured that there will be inequalities in heaven. If there be such diversities in the order of their admission, who can suppose they will all be upon a level as soon as they have entered? There are various ranks and degrees among our fellow servants and elder brethren—thrones and dominions, principalities and powers. The works of God on earth and in the visible heavens are distinguished by a pleasing variety: "All

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flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes,

and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead." Let us therefore "look to ourselves, that we receive a full reward."

It is impossible to close, without asking you, in the presence of God—"What preparation have you made for a dying hour? Surely you do not expect to live here always; you know that you must die; and if ever you think of it, you cannot help wishing to die in peace. But can you hope to conclude in comfort a life passed in guilt? "Be not deceived: God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." You are not in a state to die even safely. You have only heard what you are to lose. To you no entrance will be administered into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour.

But I address myself to Christians; and call upon you to think much of a dying hour. The care of dying well, will influence you to live so. Value things according to the views you will have of them when you look back from the borders of the grave. You see, the blessedness we speak of does not depend upon genius, learning, earthly riches. worldly distinctions. But some things have a favourable influence over a dying hour. Value, select, pursue these. By

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such a death, regulate your plans of living. Be piously ambitious. Seek after spiritual prosperity. Be rich in faith. Be filled with the fruits of righteousness—give all diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.

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WORKS OF WILLIAM JAY

Happy is the man who is no longer “in bondage through fear of death;” who can think with composure of “the house appointed for all living;” who can spend an hour among the tombs, and say, “Well, hither I have no reluctance to come when my heavenly Father sends the summons. I know in whom I have believed; and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.”—“O Death! where is thy sting? O Grave! where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

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SERMON XXI.

SERVICE DONE FOR GOD

REWARDED.

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SERVICE DONE FOR GOD

REWARDED.

“And it came to pass in the seven and twentieth year, in the first month, in the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon caused his army to serve a great service against Tyrus: every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled: yet had he no wages, nor his army, for Tyrus, for the service that he had served against it: therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will give the land of Egypt unto Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall take her multitude, and take her spoil, and take her prey; and it shall be the wages for his army. I have given him the land of Egypt for his labour wherewith he served against it, because they wrought for me, saith the Lord God.”

EZEKIEL xxix. 17–20.

“SURELY the Lord will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.” When he would bring in the flood upon the ungodly world, he divulged his purpose to Noah. From Abraham he would not hide the thing he was about to do, in the destruction of the cities of the plain. When by his judgments he resolved to punish the house of Eli, he lodged the heavy tidings with Samuel—To Isaiah,

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Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, he announced the revolutions and doom of the surrounding nations.

Now this was done—first, for the honour of these distinguished servants of God, by shewing the confidential friendship with which he favoured them—and secondly, for the conviction and confirmation of others. The truth of these predictions would increasingly appear in their successive accomplishments. The inference was obvious and undeniable.—Who could draw back the veil which conceals futurity? Who could pierce through the obscurity of ages and generations, and foretell things to come? He, and He alone, “who declareth the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done;

saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.”

The burden of the prophecy which is to engage your present thoughts, is the donation of Egypt to the king of Babylon for his trouble in taking Tyre.

Tyre was a place famous for navigation, merchandize, and riches. Our prophet calls it “the mart of nations,” and enumerates the various countries in whose commerce it traded. But trade is perpetually changing its residence. It passed from Tyre to Alexandria, from Alexandria to Venice, from Venice to Antwerp, from Antwerp to Amsterdam, from Amsterdam to London. And if there be any truth in history—an abundance—of commerce has generally, if not universally, proved the ruin of the countries in which it has prevailed. It pours in wealth—wealth is favourable to every species of wickedness—and wickedness, by its natural tendency, as well as by the curse of God, brings in calamity and misery.—So it was with Tyre. Luxury, pride, insolence, licentiousness of manners, indiffer-

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ence to the distresses of others, presumptuous confidence in their resources—all these abounded among them, and foreboded the evil day—“Therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against thee, O Tyrus, and will cause many nations to come up against thee, as the sea causeth his waves to come up. For, behold, I will bring upon Tyrus Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, a king of kings, from the north, with horses, and with chariots, and with horsemen, and companies, and much people. He shall slay with the sword thy daughters in the field: and he shall make a fort against thee, and cast a mount against thee, and lift up the buckler against thee. And he shall set engines of war against thy walls, and with his axes he shall break down thy towers. And I will make thee like the top of a rock: thou shalt be a place to spread nets upon—I the Lord have spoken it.”—

This prediction was now accomplished—Tyre had fallen—but not without immense labour and loss. Thirteen years Nebuchadrezzar besieged it with a large army. Toiling for so many seasons, night and day, summer and winter, the soldiers endured incredible hardships—“every head was bald—every shoulder was peeled.” For the walls were deemed impregnable, and the place being open to the sea, could easily receive fresh supplies of provision and of men from the various colonies which they had in the Mediterranean.—But its fate was determined.—At length a breach was made; and further resistance became useless—But numbers of the Tyrians escaped in their vessels, after taking their most valuable articles on board, and throwing the rest into the sea—so that Nebuchadrezzar, when he entered, instead

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of a rich booty, to indemnify him for his losses, found nothing but empty houses and ruins. This was no small mortification: Ezekiel is therefore commissioned to insure him the acquisition of a country, where he would find less difficulty and more recompense; a country abounding in corn, in cattle, and all kinds of riches. “And it came to pass in the seven and twentieth year, in the first month, in the first day of the month, the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Son of man, Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon caused his army to serve a great service against Tyrus: every head was made bald, and every shoulder was peeled: yet had he no wages, nor his army, for Tyrus, for the service that he had served against it: therefore thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will give the land of Egypt unto Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall take her multitude, and take her spoil, and take her prey; and it shall be the wages for his army. I have given him the land of Egypt

for his labour wherewith he served against it, because they wrought for me, saith the Lord God."

These words furnish us with three reflections. I. The disposal of states and nations is the work of Divine Providence. II. Men may serve God really, when they do not serve him by design. III. We shall never be losers by any thing we do for God.

I. The disposal of states and nations is the work of Divine Providence. This Daniel confessed, when he said, "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: and he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and he setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding." He

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rejected Saul, and gave the kingdom to David, an obscure shepherd. He took the ten tribes from Rehoboam, and transferred them to Jeroboam, originally all inferior officer in his own service. It was occasioned, indeed, by the imprudence of the king, in refusing the advice of the old men, and following the rash counsel of the young; but "the thing," so it is expressly remarked, "the thing was of the Lord." Thus He takes Egypt from Pharaoh-hophra, and adds it to the possessions and territories of the Babylonish monarch. Nothing could be a greater judgment upon a country, than to be laid open to the horrors of invasion, and delivered up to the despotism of an unprincipled tyrant, who considered them as his property, used them as his tools, degraded them as his vassals, disposed of them as his victims—so that "whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive"—But "the Lord gave it to him."

Do we examine this dispensation in reference to the authority of God?—It is unquestionably his prerogative: he has a right to do what he will with his own. "I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power

and by my out-stretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemeth meet unto me.”

Do we consider it in connexion with the Divine power?—Nothing is too hard for the Lord; no difficulties lie in his way; he moves—and valleys rise, and mountains become a plain: “all nations before him are as nothing, and are counted to him less than nothing and vanity.” “When he giveth quietness, then who can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, then who can behold him? whether it be done against a nation or against a man only.”

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Do we survey the relation it has to the righteousness of God?—He is the moral governor of the universe, “who renders to every man according to their works.” Individuals can be rewarded or punished in another world; but communities are judged only in this. Here he deals with them in a way of retribution; and in none of his proceedings is he arbitrary: there is always a cause. “Righteousness exalteth a nation, and sin is a reproach to any people.” “O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in my hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them.”

Do we think of it in application to our own times?—We should remember that it has nothing in it peculiar or uncommon; that persons in former ages

are to be viewed as fair specimens of human nature in general, and the dealings of Divine Providence with them as holding forth the unchangeable nature and perfections of God; that "he is the governor among the nations" now, as much as in the days of Ezekiel; and that were a history of modern events to be written by inspiration, we should find him "working all things after the counsel of his own will," and read it recorded, that "out of him came forth the corner,

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out of him the nail, out of him the battle bow, out of him every oppressor together."

And, my brethren, this is precisely the view we should endeavour to take of these changes. A Christian should be wiser than other men; and where they can only find instruments, he should recognise a Divine agency: where they only see a creature, he should acknowledge a God, "of whom, and through whom, and to whom, are all things." When we view this sovereign Cause of all events, the face of the universe is changed; the earth instantly becomes a place of equity and order; the history of the world is the history of God, and is worth reading. Unless we fix upon this principle, we shall be in danger of debasing ourselves by joining in worldly parties and political rage; of feeling too much confidence in one class of men, and too much fear of another; of prescribing the course of events, and suffering disappointment and mortification when our favourite measures are subverted. We have seen how strangely unanswerable to any human expectation various occurrences have proved; how little, comparatively, there is in the various modifications of civil policy deserving the anxiety of a Christian; how much, under all forms of government, the passions of men remain the same. A higher remedy is necessary, and it is to be found in the Gospel only; and by their favourable bearings on the diffusion of this blessing it becomes us principally to estimate all public revolutions. This is the

end God has ultimately in view, and he is able to accomplish it. He is "wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working." He is doing all things, and he is "doing all things well." Let us not make our ignorance the standard of his perfection.—He will

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deduce order from confusion, and good from evil. "He stilleth the raging of the sea, and the tumult of the people." "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice, let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof." "Surely, O Lord, the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain." "Which leads us to observe,

II. That men may serve God really, when they do not serve him by design. Nebuchadrezzar and his army, says God, "wrought for me." "O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and to cut off nations not a few."—The men obeyed their commanders; their commanders obeyed Nebuchadrezzar; Nebuchadrezzar obeyed his pride, ambition, avarice, revenge—and his pride, ambition, avarice, and revenge obeyed the will of Heaven. He knew nothing of God; but God knew him, and "girded and guided him." He had one end in view, and God another—but, in taking a wicked city, he was fulfilling the word of truth, and inflicting the judgments of Heaven—therefore says God, "he wrought for me." And what do we learn from hence,—but that great men, bad men, the worst of men, while pursuing their enterprizes—are subject to a Divine control—are impelled in a prescribed direction—are directed to a destined mark?

What a strange scene was here—the king of Baby-

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lon and his hosts arming at the Divine call, and marching forth to subdue countries, to plunder provinces, to demolish cities—and in all this, doing God service! But God can turn things from their natural tendency into opposite channels—he can make men act necessarily, while they are acting voluntarily—he can bind them, while they feel not their chains, but even boast of their liberty. He has many designs to accomplish, and he suits his instruments to their work—some of his purposes are dreadful; and he can make executioners of those who are unqualified to wait in his royal presence. Some of them are preparatory—and he may use, in removing the rubbish, those who could not be employed in the erection of the fair edifice.

And thus Nebuchadrezzar is called the servant of God, as well as the apostle Paul—but observe the difference between them; and, as God will derive glory from all his creatures, enquire which of these characters you are resembling.—The former serves God, only from the influence of an overruling Providence—the latter, from the operation of divine grace—“Behold, he prayeth;” his language is, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”—He catches the spirit of his Master; enters cheerfully into all his views; doth his will “from the heart.” And so it is with all his sincere followers. Whatever they once were, they are made willing in the day of his power; their minds are enlightened, their dispositions are renewed; they glorify him, from conviction and principle; it is their aim; the delight of their souls, and the business of their lives. “O Lord, other lords beside thee have had dominion over us; henceforth by thee only will we make mention of thy name.—Speak,

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Lord, for thy servant heareth. I hold myself at thy disposal; prescribe the laws which are to govern me; choose my inheritance for me.”—

—Such is their language; and never will they have cause to repent of their engagements. They have chosen that good part which shall not be taken from them: in life and in death, in time and in eternity, they will have reason to say, “Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord.” For,

III. None can be losers by any thing they do for God. In one way or another, He will surely recompense them. Even services done for Him by worldly men obtain a temporal reward. The Egyptian females, though strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, “feared God, and did not as the king commanded them; but saved the men—children alive—therefore God dealt well with them, and he made them houses.” Jehu was a vain, ostentatious, wicked prince, “and departed not from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin”—but “the Lord said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit upon the throne of Israel.”—So here, “I have given Nebuchadrezzar the land of Egypt for his labour wherewith he served against it; because they wrought for me, saith the Lord God.” This is indeed a poor recompense. It may appear splendid and important in the eye of the vain and the sensual, but the righteous are far from envying it. They dread to be excluded from future hope, by the sentence, “they have their reward.” They are more

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afraid of the destiny than of the malice of the wicked, and therefore pray, “Deliver my soul from the

wicked, which is thy sword; from men of the world, who have their portion in this life, and whose belly thou fillest with thy hid treasure: they are full of children, and leave the rest of their substance to their babes.—As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.” Egypt was all the remuneration of Nebuchadrezzar—and what could it do for him? What is it to him now?

Ye servants of the most high God, who know him and love him; He has provided some better thing for you. You may argue from the less to the greater—Does he reward heathens, and will he abandon Christians? Does he observe slaves, and disregard sons who serve him? Does he honour instruments, and pass by those who strive to please and glorify him? “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” He who noticed the hardships endured by the poor soldiers before Tyre, when every head was bald, and every shoulder peeled, will not suffer you to labour in vain: he sees your difficulties; considers the burdens under which you bend; he hears your groans, and your sighs—when without are fightings, and within are fears. They who speak often one to another, and they who think only upon his Name, are—recorded in the book of his remembrance. “God is not unrighteous, to forget your work of faith and labour of love.” He applauded the widow’s mite. He said of Mary, “She hath done what she could.” “He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet, shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he that re-

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ceiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man, shall receive a righteous man’s reward. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a

cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

Christians, let all this animate you to vigorous and increasing exertion. It is condescension and kindness in God to employ you. He needs you not: he does it to improve you, to honour you, to enable you to procure what you can never deserve; to give your happiness the nature of a reward. Do you not long to be employed by him? Is it nothing to be workers together with God? Is it a vain thing to serve the Lord? "Godliness is profitable unto all things; having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." "There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting." "Be ye strong therefore; and let not your hands be weak; for your work shall be rewarded."

Do you ask—how can we work for Him?—In pulling down the strongholds of sin; in diffusing truth; in supporting the Gospel; in maintaining the worship of God; in feeding the hungry; in teaching the ignorant; in reclaiming the vicious—for "it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."

Do you ask—And what will be our reward?—You will find it in the very nature of your work; you will find it in the glow of pleasure which attends virtuous exertion; you will find it in the approving testimony of your own conscience; you will find it in the esteem

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of the wise and good; you will find it in the blessing of them that were ready to perish; you will find it in the applause of your Lord and Saviour—"Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

—What! some are ready to exclaim, What, are you preaching up the doctrine of merit!—God forbid. Merit! when both our disposition and our ability to serve Him come from his grace. Merit! when there is no proportion between the reward and the work. Merit! when, after we have done all, we are unprofitable servants, and have done no more than was our duty to do. Merit! when in many things we all offend, and deserve condemnation for our defects rather than recompense for our doings. Merit! when all who ever served God aright have exclaimed, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give we glory, for thy mercy and for thy truth’s sake. By the grace of God, I am what I am—I laboured—yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” —But let us not, under a senseless clamour, be afraid to do justice to the language of Scripture—to bring forward motives which we find stated by Infinite Wisdom—to display the munificence of God—the folly of those who refuse his yoke—the wisdom of those who serve him—“Wherefore, my 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.”

Finally, Let us think of the Saviour. Did God remunerate a despicable tyrant for his labour and hardships—though they were not personal, and for fulfilling his purpose—though it was not intentional?

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“Behold his Servant whom he upholds, his Elect in whom his soul delighteth.” This was expressly his motive: “Lo! I come to do thy will, O God: thy law is within my heart.” He trod “the winepress alone, and of the people there was none with him.” Behold him poor, not having where to lay his head; despised and rejected of men; exceeding sorrowful. What a life of suffering! What a death of anguish! —What does God think of all this? “He was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Where-

fore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” “He shall see his seed, he shall prolong, his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hands. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors: and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. His Name shall endure for ever; his Name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in him; all nations shall call him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious Name for ever; and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen, and Amen.”

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SERMON XXII.

THE DISAPPOINTMENTS OF LIFE.

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SERMON XXII.

THE DISAPPOINTMENTS OF LIFE.

"Then I said, I shall die ill my nest." JOB xxix. 18.

IF we examine the world in which we live, we shall everywhere discover variety, changeableness, and succession. Here plains rise into mountains, and there hills sink into valleys. We see well-watered meadows, and dry and barren sands. We rejoice in the light; but we are soon enveloped in darkness. We hail the loveliness of spring, and welcome the approach of summer; but the agreeable months soon roll away, and the north pours down the desolations of winter. Equally checquered and variable is human life. Our bodies, our relations, our conditions and circumstances, are perpetually changing. But this diversity constitutes the beauty and the glory of Providence. It displays the Divine perfections, by rendering their interposition necessary and obvious. It furnishes means by which the dispositions of men are tried, and their characters formed. It lays hold of their hope and fear, joy and sorrow; and exercises every principle of their nature, ill their education for eternity.

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Hence Divine Providence is always deserving of our attention. Providence—is God in motion. Providence—is God teaching by facts. Providence—is God fulfilling, explaining, enforcing his own word. Providence—is God rendering natural events subservient to spiritual purposes—rousing our attention when we are careless—reminding us of our obligations when we are ungrateful—recalling our confidence when we depart from him by dependence upon creatures. "Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the lovingkindness of the Lord."

The words which I have read give us an opportunity to pursue and improve these reflections.—When Job uttered them, “he had seven sons and three daughters. His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she-asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.” Hear his own language: “I washed my steps with butter, and the rock poured me out rivers of oil. When I went out to the gate through the city, when I prepared my seat in the street, the young men saw me, and hid themselves; and the aged arose and stood up: the princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth; the nobles held their peace, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth”—He had something better than all this—“When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow’s heart to

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sing for joy. I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out. And I brake the jaws of the wicked, and plucked the spoil out of his teeth.—Then I said, I shall die in my nest.—Then—when I had such wealth, power, authority, honour—Then—when all was green and flowery, when my sky was clear and no cloud appeared—Then—concluding on the permanency of my condition, imagining I was in no danger of vicissitude, and supposing I should live happy and end my days in peace—Then I said, I shall die in my nest.”—

What does this passage of Scripture imply and express? What views and feelings of mind does it characterize?

I. In these words we see something good—Even in his greatest prosperity, Job thought of dying: whatever changes he hoped to escape in life, he expected an hour of dissolution, and knew, if his possessions were continued, he should be called to leave them.

Death is always an irksome consideration to the man of the world, who has his portion in this life, and possesses no hope of a better—He therefore strives to banish it from his thoughts. He puts far off the evil day, and lives as if he flattered himself with an immortality upon earth. But the believer keeps up a familiar acquaintance with it. He does not think of death only when trouble embitters life, and forces him to say, “I loathe it; I would not live always.” He reflects upon it when the world smiles,

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as well as when it frowns. Whatever be his present circumstances, he feels and confesses himself to be a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth. His hope is always infinitely superior to his enjoyments: beyond the grave, he has a house, not made with hands; a city, which hath foundations; a better, a heavenly country; more numerous, more endeared connexions—There lies his inheritance—there dwells his Father—there is his eternal home. Hence we have seen even persons possessed of riches, honour, friends, health, and surrounded with everything desirable, “willing to depart, to be with Christ, which is far better.”

It must, however, be acknowledged, that it is far more difficult to maintain this state of mind in pleasing and prosperous circumstances, than in trying and distressing scenes. It was a wise reflection of Charles the Fifth to the Duke of Venice, when he showed

him the Treasury of St. Mark's, and the glory of his princely palace—Instead of admiring them, he said “These are the things that make men so loath to die.” When everything is agreeable in our condition, we are in danger of feeling a disposition to settle, and of saying, “It is good for us to be here”—Not, “Arise, let us go hence.” We think of adorning, not leaving; of pulling down our barns and building greater, not of contracting all into the narrow limits of the grave. But it would be wise to take often realizing views of death. It would come over us like a cloud, to cool our brainless ardours—It would check the pride of life, which so often carries us away—It would sanctify our possessions, and keep our prosperity from destroying us—It would lead us to use soberly and profitably those talents of which

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so shortly we must give up our account—It would excite us to secure those things in their uses and effects which we cannot retain in their substance—and urge us to be “rich in good works; ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come;” and to make for ourselves “friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when we fail they may receive us into everlasting habitations.”

Accustom yourselves, therefore, to reflections so useful, and learn to “die daily.” Say, while walking over your fields, The hour is coming when I shall behold you no more—When you go over your mansion, “If I wait, the grave is my house”—As you estimate your property, “I cannot tell who shall gather it.” This apparel, which I now lay aside and resume, I shall soon lay aside for ever—and this bed, in which I now enjoy the sleep of nature, will by-and-by feel me chilling it with the damps of death. “Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is, that I may know how frail I am!” And surely it requires contrivance and dif-

ficulty to keep off reflections so reasonable and salutary. Everything is forcing the consideration upon you—everything is saying, “The time is short: it remaineth that they that have wives be as though they had none; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.” I am the more diligent, says the apostle Peter, “knowing that I must shortly put off this my tabernacle; even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed

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me.” And has he not showed you the same—if not by immediate revelation, yet by the language of Scripture, by the brevity of life, by the loss of connexions, by personal decays?—“Stand with your loins girded, and your lamps burning.”—“Man, that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.” “The fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?” We enter the city—and see man going to his long home, and the mourners going about the streets. We enter the sanctuary—and miss those with whom we once took sweet counsel, and went to the house of God in company—their places know them no more for ever. We enter our own dwellings; and painful recollection is awakened by the seats they once filled, by the books they once read, and have left folded down with their own hands: we walk from room to room, and sigh, “Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.” We examine ourselves, and find that our strength is not the strength of stones, nor are our bones brass; we are crushed before the moth; at our best estate, we are altogether vanity—And is it for such beings to live as if they were never to die! O Lord, “so

teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

II. In these words we see something desirable. Who does not wish to have his possessions and enjoyments continued? to escape painful revolutions in his circumstances? “to die in his nest?” We talk of the benefit of affliction—but affliction, simply considered, is not eligible. We decry the passions—but

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we are required to regulate the passions, rather than to expel them. We appeal to Scripture—but the Scripture knows nothing of a religion founded upon the ruins of humanity, and unsuitable to the life that now is. He who made us knows our frame, and does not expect us to be indifferent to pain or ease, to sickness or health, to indigence or competency, to exile or a place where to lay our heads. These temporal things are good in themselves; they are needful: we have bodies as well as souls; we have connexions to provide for, as well as our own persons. They are sometimes promised in Scripture. We find pious men praying for them; and their prayers are recorded with honour. Our error in desiring them consists in two things.

First, in desiring them unconditionally. In praying for temporal blessings, we are always to keep a reserve upon our wishes, including submission to the will of God, and a reference to our real welfare. For we often know not what to pray for as we ought, and may be more injured by the gratification than by the refusal of our desires. We know ourselves very imperfectly, and hence we cannot determine what influence untried circumstances would have upon our minds. Placed in the same situations with others, we may act the very part we now condemn. The changes which may take place in our character may surprise others and shock ourselves. “Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his

vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?" Why God, and God only—Refer, therefore, the decision to Him: it is your interest as well as your duty to leave him to choose all for you—

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“ His choice is safer than your own.
Of ages past inquire—
—What the most formidable fate?
To have your own desire.”

Hence, the prayer which Socrates taught his pupil Alcibiades is not unworthy the use of a Christian—“That he should beseech the Supreme Being to give him what was good for him, though he should not ask it; and to withhold from him whatever was injurious, if by his folly he should be led to pray for it.”

Secondly, when we desire them supremely. For whatever be their utility, they are not to be compared with spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. Things are to be valued and pursued according to their importance. Many things are serviceable; “but one thing is needful.” Civil freedom is valuable—but the glorious liberty of the sons of God is much more precious. It is well for the body to be in health—but it is much better for the soul to prosper. Silver and gold are useful—but there are durable riches with righteousness. It is pleasing to die in our nest—but it is much more desirable to die even in a prison or upon a dunghill, if we can say, with Simeon, “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”

III. In these words we find something very common.—It is affluence and ease cherishing confidence and presumption—It is a supposition that we shall have no changes because we feel none. The consequence is natural, and it is easily explained. Present things

most powerfully impress the mind. Take a man in trouble, and with what difficulty will you persuade

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him to expect better days! The gloom of his situation darkens his very soul, and the burden of his affliction presses and keeps down every cheerful sentiment. Take a man in agreeable circumstances, and his feelings will give a colour to future scenes: every thing will appear favourable, because every thing is easy. The mind softened down by indulgence, shrinks even from the contemplation of difficulties. And when experience has not furnished him with any instances of the precariousness of worldly things, he leans on these supports too firmly, and does not suspect that they will give way. Hence Hagar prefers mediocrity to wealth—"Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord?" Hence we are to charge the rich, "not to trust in uncertain riches:" the admonition implies the tendency there is in the affluent to indulge such a dependence. Having friends and powerful alliances, and encouraged by the success of their former plans and exertions, the conclusion follows—"To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant." "Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations: they call their lands after their own name." "He saith, in his heart, I shall never be moved; for I shall never be in adversity." Hear the man whose ground brought forth plentifully: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry."—When did not prosperity promote carnal security and presumptuous confidence? Of Moab God complains, "Thou hast trusted in thy works and in thy treasures."—"Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked—Then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation."

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For this is not the case with the people of the world only—even the godly are in danger of the same evil. David is an example. Though he had passed through very trying scenes, the ease which succeeded seems to have abolished the memory of them, and by continued indulgence his hopes became earthly and rash—“In my prosperity, I said, I shall never be moved.” Good Hezekiah furnishes another instance. He had been recovered from sickness, delivered from invasion, and enriched by presents—“But Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up”—His greatness elated him. He gloried in his abundance, and vainly exposed the treasures of his palace: to the ambassadors of Babylon he showed his nest—and they told Nebuchadnezzar their master, who returned and took it—it is the very image under which this plunderer speaks of his pillage—“By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures; and my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped.” And this brings us,

IV. To observe in these words something very false and vain—“Then I said, I shall die in my nest!” Ah, Job!—“Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.” “While you speak, the storm is rising which will shake down your nest, and lodge its contents upon the dunghill.” In a few hours you will be deprived of all—one mes-

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senger shall announce the loss of your cattle—another, the destruction of your servants—a third, the death

of your children. You will feel your health converted into loathsomeness and disease—and you will sit amongst the ashes, and take a potsherd to scrape yourself withal. And while your head is bare to the pelting of the pitiless storm—your friends will come around you, and read you lectures upon hypocrisy, and insinuate that the sins in which you have privately indulged have at last found you out—Miserable comforters!—And you, alas! how changed your voice!—You will say, in the bitterness of your soul, “I was not in safety, neither had I rest, neither was I quiet—yet trouble came.”

—So ignorant are we of futurity—so erroneous are we in our calculations—so liable are we to mortifying vicissitudes! “The inhabitants of Maroth waited carefully for good, but evil came down from the Lord unto the gate of Jerusalem.” “Behold,” says Hezekiah, “for peace I had great bitterness.” “We looked for peace,” says the Church, “but no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble!” Indeed whatever engages our affection may become a source of sorrow: whatever excites our hope may prove the means of disappointment. Such is the hard condition upon which we take all our earthly comforts.—

Are we secure from disappointment with regard to Life? This is the tenure by which we hold all our possessions; and nothing can be more uncertain. “For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them.”

“Go to now, ye that say, To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your

life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”

—Are we secure from disappointment in our Health? This blessing is necessary to our relishing every other enjoyment: but how precarious is the continuance of it! Upon how many delicate and combined causes does it depend! How easily may some of them be deranged! Are we ever safe from those accidents which may strike, or those diseases which may invade us? How many have been compelled by pain and indisposition to drop an enterprise which they had undertaken, a journey which they had begun!

—Are we secure from disappointment with regard to Children? The forebodings of the parental mind are fond and flattering: but, oh! how unanswerable to eager expectation have events often proved! “This same shall comfort us” has been said of many a child, who has been dismembered or sickly in body, beclouded in understanding, vicious and disorderly in life, embarrassed and miserable in circumstances.—The father had looked forward and promised himself an entertaining companion; and behold the care and the expense of fourteen years carried down to the grave! See Rachel—she has been laying aside the little garments her busy hands had wrought, and putting out of sight the toys which lately charmed the desire of her eyes—and, “weeping for her children, refuses to be comforted, because they are not.”

—Are we secure from disappointment with regard

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to Friendship? How many of our connexions have dropped us already, and by their painful defections have called upon us to cease from man! How small is the number of true sterling friends, who will abide the day of trial! Some of those who are now fawning, would not, if a change of circumstances occurred, even know us. They leave the garden in winter—there is nothing to gather. The flower which they

placed in their bosom—as soon as it has exhaled its perfume, they throw withered into the dust. Of what use is the scaffolding when the building is finished—it is laid by out of sight. “My brethren,” says the renowned sufferer, “have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as the stream of brooks they pass away: what time they wax warm, they vanish; when it is hot they are consumed out of their place.”

—Are we secure from disappointment with regard to Property? Where can you safely lay up treasure upon earth? Water inundates, flames devour, moth and rust corrupt, thieves break through and steal. Riches make to themselves wings and flee away. Appearances may be favourable, plans may be well laid, every assistance necessary to success may be procured—but “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.” “Money is a defence,” and hence it is so anxiously desired, so universally pursued—but how many have fallen from the highest affluence into the depths of indigence, and have had their necessities embittered by the recollection of the plenty which once made their cup to run over! “Wo to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he

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may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!” “Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest amongst the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord.”

Let us conclude by observing—that it would be an abuse of this part of our subject, were you to suppose that we recommend you to cherish everlasting apprehension and gloom. Much of our happiness lies in freedom from suspicion and anxiety. To live with a

troubled and desponding mind is as bad as any thing we can actually suffer. Imaginary grief is frequently worse than real. It is displeasing to God when we sour the mercies he gives us to enjoy, by distrust. We may avoid solicitude, and not be guilty of the worldly confidence which we have condemned. But it does require you,

First, To be moderate in your attachments, and sober in your expectations. The way to escape disappointment is to keep your hopes humble, and to cultivate such a disposition as David expressed when he said, a 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." The admonition of the wise man is not designed to embitter the comforts of life, but to remind us of its unavoidable calamities, and to keep us from being surprised and disconcerted when they arrive—"If a man live many years and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many: all that cometh is vanity." If, in spite of reason, and the uniform deposition of travellers, you

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will go forth, assured that in your journey the weather will be always fair, and the road always smooth—you must be left to the tuition of events. If you will enter the world, expecting to find it a paradise, thorns and briars, and scorpions and drought, will soon convince you that you are in a wilderness. This caution, my young friends, peculiarly belongs to you. Your age is sanguine. You are most liable to be deceived by appearances, because you have not found how seldom they accord with reality. Do not form too flattering a picture of human life. Believe the testimony of Scripture. Go sometimes to the house of mourning, rather than to the house of mirth. Listen to those who have gone before you. You

only see a little narrow arm of the sea sheltered by the neighbouring hills; but some have sailed beyond the reach of your eye, and have seen storms and wrecks.

Secondly, It calls upon you to seek a better ground of confidence, and to make the Lord your trust. Creatures are broken reeds, but he is the Rock of Ages. They are broken cisterns, but he is the Fountain of living waters. "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." "Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God." Yes: there is something firm and certain. God will not deceive us, cannot disappoint us. His power is almighty, his mercy endureth for ever, his word is faithfulness and truth. "Therefore will I look unto the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation." Having committed all my concerns into his hands, and knowing that he

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careth for me, I am careful for nothing. Persuaded that He who has the direction of every event will make all things to work together for my good, I feel a peace which passeth all understanding, and rejoice in the language of the Church, "God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble: therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, and the mountains shake with the swelling thereof." "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High."

Thirdly, It calls upon you to seek after a preparation for all the changing scenes of life. It is better to depend upon constitution than atmosphere, and to be equal to any climate rather than confined to one. It is better to depend upon appetite than dainties-

delicacies are not always to be procured; and what becomes of you when they are wanting, if you cannot live upon common food? Divine grace will preserve the balance of the soul in varying conditions: it will secure you in prosperity, and sustain you in the day of adversity. This sanctified Daniel when a minister of state, and soothed him when in the den of lions. This enabled Paul to say, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where, and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

Finally, It calls upon you to look beyond this vain and mutable world to a state of solid and unchangeable happiness. Whatever advantages religion affords, by enabling us to endure and to improve the

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difficulties and troubles of life, it does not hinder us from feeling ourselves in circumstances of trial and imperfection. "We are troubled on every side," if "not distressed; we are perplexed," if "not in despair; persecuted," if "not forsaken; cast down," if "not destroyed."—To die is gain. Death ends our toil and our strife, and brings us to the rest that "remains for the people of God." Then shadows will be exchanged for substance. Then we shall embrace our enjoyments without fear of losing them. Then farewell care and disappointment. Our "sun shall no more go down, nor" our "moon withdraw her shining; for God" is our "everlasting light, and the days of" our "mourning" are "ended."

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SERMON XXIII.

NEUTRALITY IN RELIGION EXPOSED

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SERMON XXIII.

NEUTRALITY IN RELIGION EXPOSED.

“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, I and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

MATTHEW vi. 24.

THERE is something in the Scripture suited to every taste except a sinful one. The Bible indeed is so pure—so holy in its Author, its principles, and its design, that it is the easiest thing in the world to account for infidelity and error—they are the natural opposition of evil men. But with regard to others, every peculiar turn of mind may be indulged, and the same end may be secured by various means. Some are fond of history—and here we have narrations, placing before us striking characters and occurrences. Some love a series of proof and a process of argumentation—and here we have frequent specimens of close reasoning. Some take pleasure in imagery and comparisons—and here we have a plentitude of parables and metaphors. And some are charmed with proverbs and aphorisms—and here we find de-

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tached sentences, which by their brevity are easily remembered, and by their significancy furnish materials for the mind to unfold and apply. And of all these, perhaps no one is more important and interesting than the passage which I have read. “No man

can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

One word only requires explanation. What is mammon? It is commonly supposed to mean only riches; but, as the Bishop of London has observed in his Lecture upon this Chapter, the original seems more extensive, and leads us to consider it as comprehending every thing capable of engaging the affections, and of gaining the confidence of men of worldly minds. It is a Syriac word, importing treasure, gain—Whatever therefore is gain to you, is mammon—whether it be wealth, or power, or fame, or sensual pleasure. Whatever you idolize, whatever you place in the room of God, whatever leads you to oppose his nature and his will concerning your duty and your happiness, according to the design of our Saviour, falls under this denomination. Subtilty of interpretation is always, and minuteness of decision is generally to be avoided in expounding the Scripture: words are used in a popular sense; and they would become less useful, if they were rendered less general. The force of an impression which would otherwise have been made, has often been diminished by means of those exceptions, qualifications, restrictions, distinctions, which have so much abounded in commentaries and sermons, and through which the spirit of the Sacred Writings is suffered to evaporate. This being pre-

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mised, we proceed to call your serious attention to three things.

I. No man can serve two masters; you cannot serve God and mammon—This is clearly expressed.

II. One of these you will unavoidably serve—This is fully implied.

III. You ought to serve God—This is fairly inferred. Consider what I say; and the Lord give you understanding in all things. Amen.

I. “Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.” This order the inspired penmen have obeyed. They have made things clear, in proportion as they are momentous; and such is the perspicuity with which many of the principles of religion are laid down in the Scripture, that we should deem it impossible for them ever to be misunderstood—did we not know how easy it is to perplex a rule by which we dislike to walk, and remember what a power there is in the passions to pervert the dictates of the understanding, and to baffle the admonitions of conscience. For instance: What can be more fully, more unambiguously expressed than the determination before us? “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” Nevertheless there are many who contrive to elude the force of this maxim, or who seem resolved to make a succession of awful experiments to try the certainty of it. The number of this mixed

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temporizing race of Christians is constantly increasing; and while they are bringing destruction upon their own souls, they are injuring the cause of the Gospel; and counteracting the labours of faithful ministers tenfold more than those who make no pretensions to religion.—“They have a name to live, while they are dead.” They wear “the form of godliness,” while they deny “the power thereof.” They are equally remote from the excesses of the profane and the fervours of the pious. They refuse to the passions what would disturb the conscience, and to the conscience what would disturb the passions. Endeavouring to reconcile an earthly and a heavenly life, they

waver between truth and error, conviction and appetite, duty and inclination; and divide their affections and services between God and the world. Some moments they give to devotion: they pray, they unite with the holy assemblies, they sometimes approach the table of the Lord—When this is done, they have another master to serve: they leave the house of God, and occupy places of dissipation; they relish the follies, and comply with the manners of a sinful age: and as the eye follows their career, you see them dropping one distinction after another, till they are undistinguishingly blended with the crowd.

Nor are these persons wanting in excuses to palliate, if not to justify their practice. They allege that it renders religion less objectionable; that it keeps up an intercourse which renders them useful; that—But I disdain to enumerate such pleas of worldly-mindedness—they will not abide the day of trial—they are all as tow before the flame—the declaration of our Lord and Saviour consumes them. For observe, my brethren, upon what he lays the stress

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of his reasoning—it is the impossibility of the case. He does not say, You shall not, You must not, You ought not—but you cannot. “No man can serve two masters—Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

There are, however, four cases in which you may serve two masters; but these exceptions will only render the general rule the more remarkable, and will also help us to understand it. For, first, you may serve two masters successively. There are some who have lived in various families; and they have served the gentle and the froward, the evil and the good. Christians once served divers lusts and pleasures, and now they serve God; but they did not serve both at the same time—this was impracticable. “Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.”

Secondly, you may serve two masters, by serving one of them in reality, and the other in pretence. But while you truly love the world, will God be satisfied with appearances and professions? Is he deceived? Can any disguise conceal you from his eye? Will he not abhor you the more for your hypocrisy? And will not such a course of dissimulation be a life of meanness, embarrassment, and misery, in which you will offer violence to nature, and perpetually dread the detection of your real character? Thirdly, you may serve two masters unequally—While devoted to the one, you may occasionally attend the other: but you cannot be engaged to him also; you cannot serve him constantly; you cannot make his service your business, cannot be entirely at his disposal. But nothing less than this does God require of all those who serve Him. Fourthly,

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you may serve two masters, when they are on the same side and differ only in degree. Thus you obey parents and magistrates, and God too; for, in obeying them, you obey him—he has commanded it. But it is otherwise, when two parties hostile to each other require you to espouse their jarring interests, and each says, “My son, give me thy heart.” Now this is the case with the masters here mentioned. For mammon is not subordinate to God, nor does it enjoin the same things. Their orders are diametrically opposite. The one commands you to walk by faith; the other to walk by sight—the one, to be proud; the other, to be humble—the one, to cleave to the dust; the other, to have your conversation in heaven—the one, to be all anxiety; the other, to be careful for nothing—the one, to be content with such things as you have; the other, to enlarge your desire as hell-, the one, to withhold; the other, to give, to be ready to distribute, willing to communicate. Now what is to be done in a case like this? If the mind be full, it can hold no more. Human faculties are not in-

finite. The operations of the soul are limited. We cannot remain in a state of equilibrium between contrary attractions, without preferring one to the other—Hence we always take a part; and the part chosen becomes the master of the heart, and obliges us to separate from the rest as much as they oppose each other or interfere. Here, then, my dear hearers, you are furnished with a criterion by which to judge of your state and your character. The conclusion is obvious and undeniable—If you love and serve the world, you cannot love and serve God. And the exclusion is serious and dreadful—for you are here reminded that worldly attachments, dependences, and

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pursuits, are not only injurious to real religion, but entirely incompatible with it—that they are not some of those inferior mistakes and infirmities which we deplore in good men; but a deadly evil which overspreads all the powers of the soul, infects all the principles of action, gives the whole life a wrong bias, the whole man a direction towards hell. “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.” “Love not the world, neither the things of the world; for if any man love the world, the love or the Father is not in him.” “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

II. You cannot serve both; but one of these you will unavoidably serve. The second proposition is as true as the first—It is as impossible for a man to be without some master, as to serve more masters than one. Man is an active being, and must be em-

ployed; he will always be engaged in the pursuit of something, either by exertion or desire. Man is a dependent creature. Like the vine, he must lean for support; and if the elm be not near, he will embrace the bramble. He thirsts; and if he has forsaken the Fountain of living waters, he will repair to broken cisterns, or kneel down to the filthy puddle. A sense of his wants and weaknesses produces an uneasiness, which urges him to seek after assistance and relief.

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Hence, man cannot be without attachment. Not finding in himself the good he desires, he passes forth, and adheres to something external: but this object necessarily governs him; for it is the very nature of love to subject us to that which we love: and it fastens us by various ties; for desire and aversion, hope and fear, joy and sorrow, zeal and revenge, are only modes of affection.

There is nothing of which men are so tenacious as independence and liberty; and even when they are destitute of the substance, they glory in the shadow. The Jews are an example. In reply to our Lord, they said, "We are Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man"—What! Have you forgotten the land of Egypt? Did you never serve the Philistines, the Moabites, the Ammonites? Were you not seventy years in Babylon?—Whose soldiers are these stationed among you?—Bring me a piece of money—"whose image and superscription is it?" Are you not even now wearing the yoke of Cæsar?—Yes; and you are wearing another yoke far more disgraceful than even this, and which enslaves the mind—for "he that committeth sin is the servant of sin."

And does not this exemplify the folly and delusion of sinners? They imagine themselves to be their own masters, especially when they have shaken off what they deem the prejudices of education and the scruples of superstition. Then they are free indeed; they live without control; and, with affected pity,

consider Christians as subject to the most humiliating restraints. But what if these advocates for independence should be found slaves themselves, and all their boastings of freedom be only great swelling words of vanity?—"While they promise them liberty, they

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themselves are the servants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought into bondage." "Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" What! is there no other master than God? Because you refuse allegiance to your lawful sovereign, does it follow that you are your own? May there not be usurpers? Instead of being under the government of one, may you not be under the tyranny of many, "each seeking his gain from his quarter?" Instead of paying a regular and reasonable tribute, may you not become the victims of illegal exaction, and the tools of arbitrary power?—Hear what Shemaiah said to Rehoboam and the princes of Judah—"Ye have forsaken the Lord; therefore have I left you in the hand of Shishak king of Egypt: and they shall be his servants; that they may know my service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries." To the same purpose is the language of God by Moses to the Israelites: "Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies, which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things; and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck until he have destroyed thee." All this is fulfilled in the unhappy experience of every transgressor. For his rebellion he is doomed, by a law of inevitable necessity, to serve divers tyrants. Yes: if you are not the subjects of humility, you will be the vassals of pride; and what a life will

ambition lead you! If you are not the servants of meekness, you will be the slaves of passion; and is

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the man to be envied, who is governed by the impulses of such a fury? See a man who has sold himself to covetousness: what African slave ever drudged for such a taskmaster as he—compelling him to rise early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows, to assume every form of falsehood, to stoop to every instance of meanness, forbidding him the luxury of refreshing the bowels of the poor and of blessing the orphan and the widow, often denying him the accommodations and sometimes the necessaries of life, and—thus forcing him to live in beggary to die in wealth! Disclaiming the service of God, you serve the Devil, who employs you in drudgery, and rewards you with death—“for the wages of sin is death.” Discarding the Saviour’s yoke, which is easy, and his burden, which is light; you wear the galling and heavy chains of vice—and what slavery equals a wicked life? See the sinner impelled along violently, like the swine possessed with demons—He follows a course which he condemns himself for pursuing—he does things, of which, at the very time, he knows he shall repent as soon as he has done them—actions, which he abhors in others, he is forced to perform himself—when he goes forth, he cannot tell how he shall return; for this does not depend upon him, but upon circumstances over which he has no power—he may see or hear something, by which impressions may be produced which he cannot resist—he may accidentally meet with one of his tyrants, who may say to him, “Do this,” and he must do it—his passions and his lusts make him toil at their pleasure—and he goes on executing their orders, though his understanding blushes, reason remonstrates, conscience upbraids and threatens—he sees and he

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approves better things. and follows worse—and this is the man who pretends to be free!

You say, Religion demands of us a succession of services, from which you are exempted. But, O ye votaries of the world, let us examine your claims, and see wherein your pre-eminence appears.—Have you then no services to Tender? Think of your privations and sacrifices and submissions—think of the numerous and arbitrary laws you have to obey—the laws of opinion, the laws of custom, the laws of extravagance, the laws of folly. Yes; I sometimes think, if religion were to require of me such duties as the world imposes upon its enslaved followers—if it required me to turn day into night, and deprived me of seasonable repose—if it required me to embrace indecent and injurious fashions, and to expose at once my modesty and my health—if it required me to adopt expensive modes of life which devoured my substance, and involved me in pecuniary disgrace—if it required me to spend my evenings from home, and to resign domestic enjoyments to rove from one insipid amusement to another—if it required me to give up all that is easy and simple and natural, for ceremonies, visits, and crowds, where all is artificial, studied, and forced—if it required me to convert my dwelling into the confusion and disorder of a rout; to stoop to the absurdity of a masquerade; to hazard my own life and the life of my fellow creature, because I had received an offence, perhaps unintentionally given, and allowed me not the choice of refusal—Then I should conceive a disgust; then I should long to emancipate myself from such capricious despotism: I should sigh for liberty—for what liberty could I enjoy while compelled to submit to what is unreason-

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able and foolish, to what is dishonourable and shameful, to what is injurious and ruinous? But remember,

ye followers of the vain world, these are the commands you obey—these are the services you render.

Still you tell us—that our Master requires us even to deny ourselves; that this is the grand law of his kingdom: and without obeying it, we cannot be his disciples. But we contend that you are precisely in the same circumstances: we can prove that you also are required to exercise self-denial; and that this is the chief command you have to comply with in the service of the world. And mark the difference between us. Our master requires us to deny only what is false and vain—yours, what is solid and true. Ours requires us to deny what would only make us disorderly and miserable—yours, what would render you peaceful and happy. Ours requires us only to deny the voice of passion and appetite—yours, the voice of reason and of conscience. Ours requires us to deny the body for the sake of the soul—yours, the soul for the sake of the body. Ours requires us to give up nothing but what he will more than repay—yours, to surrender an interest, for the loss of which you cannot be indemnified in time or eternity.

Since then it appears—that you cannot serve two masters—and since it is equally certain that you will serve one—we plead for God, and call upon you to serve Him. It is the

III. Third division of our subject. Here I feel ready to draw back from my engagement: I am shocked to think that it should be found necessary to make a comparison between the ever-blessed God and idols. Has the depravity of the world risen to

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such a pitch, and are men so exceedingly blinded and infatuated, as to require a preacher to attempt to prove that it is better to serve God than mammon!—I feel also perplexed as to the proofs I shall adduce; the case seems too plain to need evidence: and of

evidence there is no end. Let us make a selection of two articles, and

Remind you, first, of his various and undeniable claims in which he stands peculiar and supreme. There is such a thing as justice; and it consists in rendering to all their due. Render to God his due—be only just—and you must be religious. All you are and all you have is his:—he gave you existence; and all your capacities of action and of enjoyment were not only derived from him, but are continued by him; “for in him we live and move and have our being.” There is such a thing as gratitude; and it consists in endeavouring to make suitable returns for favours received. Endeavour to make suitable returns to God for the favours you have received from him—be only grateful, and you must be religious. Whose sun warms you? Whose air do you breathe? Who has fed you all your life long unto this day? When you were lost, who sent his own Son to seek and to save you? “When you were in the bondage of corruption, who, by a price of infinite value, accomplished your release? Let all your mercies be summoned to appear around you—the blessings of infancy, of youth, of mature age; the blessings of Providence and of Grace; the blessings which you possess already, and those which, as attainable, you hope to enjoy—and your Preacher has only to come forward and say, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies

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a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, which is your reasonable service.” So simple are the principles from which the practice of religion is deduced!

Secondly, we would remind you of his designs in employing you in his service. In these also, who is a God like unto him? Why does he require you to serve him? “Can a man be profitable unto God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it any pleasure to the Almighty that thou art righteous;

or gain to the Most High that thou makest thy way perfect?" He does not stand in need of you—but he knows that you stand in need of him, and that without him you can do nothing. Does he require your service, to display his grandeur, to exercise his authority, to establish his dominion? Hear his own language: "O that there was such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always—that it might be well with them and with their children for ever." He employs you, to invigorate your powers, to dignify your nature, to train you up for endless perfection, and to bestow upon you innumerable advantages under the notion of a reward. These advantages may be considered two ways. In the engagements of the master, and in the experience of the servants. These do not always agree. Men, as an allurements, frequently promise what they never perform; and those who have followed them have had bitter reason to complain of disappointment. But God is faithful; and as his promises are exceeding great and precious, so are they all yea and amen in Christ Jesus to the glory of God by us. He spreads before us in his word every attraction to encourage us. "Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, my servants shall eat; but ye

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shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink; but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice; but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart; but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit." And has he not realized all this? Let us consult the experience of those who have served him. And observe the fairness of the examples to which we appeal. Some of you would be unqualified judges; you could not make a proper comparison, because you are only acquainted with one of the things to be compared. You know what the service of sin is; but you are strangers to the service of the Lord Jesus. But

there are persons who have tried both: after serving the world, they have served God. And if it were formerly better with them than now, what keeps them from going back? 'What detains them from the country whence they came out? They have opportunity to return; and are surrounded with the same temptations as others. They have found something more divine and satisfactory: they have tasted of the grapes of Eshcol, and they no longer sigh for the leeks and onions of Egypt. He is rising from his knees, where he has been saying, "Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O Lord." Take him aside, and I converse with him. He is able to give a reason of the hope that is in him. Why, you often mourn. "But my sorrow shall be turned into joy: my very tears are blessed; and I am never more happy than when I can feel a broken heart and a contrite spirit!"—And the world frowns upon you. "But God smiles; and in his favour is life. Heaven is my home: death is become my friend: Providence manages all my affairs; and I am careful for nothing."—And your

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happiness is all future. "No—I have earnest and foretastes of Heaven. I feel a peace which passeth all understanding; and sometimes I rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. In his sanctuary I behold his power and his glory. In my closet I find it good to draw near to God. His statutes are my song in the house of my pilgrimage; and I rejoice in his word as one that findeth great spoil.—Once I thought like you. I supposed, if I began a religious course, I should never have another happy day—but I never had a happy day before. I have found nothing of the fetters and bondage of which I had heard, and by which I had been alarmed. His service has been perfect freedom; and none of his commands are grievous. And oh! could I now lay open my soul; could

I make you see as I see, and feel as I feel!—O taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man that trusteth in him.” All this shews the importance of serving God. But whatever shews the importance of it, shews the wisdom of attending to it.

Let me then, my dear hearers, call upon you to make a choice. From this hour abandon God and his ways, and following your idols and your lusts, have all that they can give you—or, relinquishing the present evil world, take God for the strength of your soul, and your portion for ever. Which of these will you choose?—I cannot conclude without pressing you to a decision. I have already been classing you. My hope has formed one division; my fear, a second; my conviction, a third.

I have been hoping that some of you will retire this evening, and join yourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten; saying, “Lord, I am thine, save me. O Lord, other

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lords beside thee have had dominion over us, but by thee only will we make mention of thy name.” Will none of you realize this pleasing expectation? Will none among you, my younger hearers, verify the language of prophecy, upon which so many ministers, so many parents have hoped? “One shall say, I am the Lord’s; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.”

—A larger number, I fear, will care for none of these things; but go forth, saying, with their rebellious predecessors, “I have loved strangers, and after them will I go.” Let me give you warning from God. Remember, that he will assuredly vindicate the cause of his despised authority and goodness: “As for these mine enemies that would not that I should reign over them, bring them forth, and slay them before my face.” If you are determined to

abandon God, God is determined to abandon you: "But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me: so I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust, and they walked in their own counsels." And have you considered the awfulness of your condition—"without God in the world?" Death will soon snatch you away from your houses and amusements; and what will you do, if your faith and hope be not in God—when you will have nothing but God left! And, even previous to this, an evil day may arrive. Though worldly things do not satisfy the mind, they divert it; and though they are a poor substitute for God, they render you less sensible of your need of him. But they are all uncertain: and what becomes of you when they are

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removed? To whom will you flee for help, and where will you leave your glory?

But an observation of the way in which divine admonitions is commonly rendered useless convinces me, that the generality of you will not decide with the former, nor positively refuse with the latter. "And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled. and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." This is your model.—You wish to pause and consider. But we cannot allow this evasion. Our commission requires an immediate reply: "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart: now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation."—You wish to pause and consider. But you have no time for hesitation; you are dying while you make the proposal: "Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth."—You wish to pause and consider. But he may take your excuses for a final answer, as they are unquestionably a proof of present

disinclination, and say, "None of the men that were bidden shall taste of my supper." "He is joined to idols; let him alone."—You wish to pause and consider. But the longer you waver, the harder you will find it to decide; objections and difficulties will every day multiply.—You wish to pause and consider—but when do you mean to determine? How much longer time do you require? Some of you have had twenty, forty, sixty years, to weigh things already, and are still undetermined. And what is it to decide, that you cannot come to a conclusion this hour, this moment? What room is there for comparison? what possibility is there of embarrassment?

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O shame of human nature! Here are persons requiring additional years to determine—whether hell or heaven is the best portion; whether the God of glory, or the god of this world, is the best master. "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal be God, follow him." "Wherefore choose ye this day whom ye will serve"—"But as fur me and my house, we will serve the Lord." May God inspire us all with this resolution. Amen.

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SERMON XXIV.

THE FAMILY OF OUR LORD.

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SERMON XXIV.

THE FAMILY OF OUR LORD.

“And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” MATT. xii. 49, 50.

ADDRESS this assembly in the language of our Saviour to the Pharisees—“What think ye of Christ?” And surely a more serious inquiry it is impossible to make. Your opinions upon various other subjects are comparatively of little consequence—But it is of the highest importance to entertain proper apprehensions of the person and character, the offices and work of Christ.

There is, however, another question which it is equally necessary to ask—What does Christ think of you? What you are in the sentiment of your fellow-creatures signifies little. It is a light thing to be judged of man’s judgment. Your happiness does not depend upon him: he may be deceived in his conclusion—He that judgeth you is the Lord: his deci-

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sion is infallible, and. his sentence regulates your doom. Does He view you this evening as enemies or friends? As strangers or relations?—Is it possible to determine this? It is not only possible, but easy. Observe what he did, and remember what he said, in the days of his flesh. “And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

Our Saviour preached in various places. He was now in a private house—and is said to be “talking to the people.” It marks the ease, the simplicity, the familiarity with which he spake. When a preacher

can exemplify this mode of address, without sinking, he is peculiarly pleasing to his hearers. and often most successful in the force and sublimity of his thoughts. "While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him"—What was the design of his friends it is impossible to determine. But they had something interesting to communicate, and could not approach him for the intervening multitude. The people therefore conveyed along the notice of his relations from one to another till it reached the person who stood by him—"Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee." Our blessed Lord was despised and rejected of men; but there were some who knew his worth, and loved and honoured him—and at hearing of his mother and his brethren, they were ready to exclaim, O happy brethren! to have such a brother! O happy mother! to have such a son!—Our Saviour was not so confined to his subject as to refuse

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a new idea suggested by the occasion; therefore, knowing their thoughts, he tells them of another connexion with himself: from his family according to the flesh, he leads them to his spiritual kindred; and from a union with him, which was temporal, and confined to few, he leads them to one which was everlasting, and embraced all good men. "But he answered and said unto him that told him, 'Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?—And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

Whence we observe, that obedience to the Divine will is an evidence if our being related to Jesus Christ. Our Lord here gives us the character and the privilege of his disciples.

I. Their Character—they do the will of his Father.

II. Their Privilege—they are his brethren, his sisters, his mother. “Remember me, O Lord, with the favour thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; that I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.”

I. We have the Character of his disciples. He describes them as doing the will of his Father which is in heaven. All obey—

—But some do the will of the Devil. This is a dreadful charge; but it is fully supported by the address of our Saviour to the Jews—“Ye are of

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your father the Devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.” And what is all sin, but “the work of the Devil?” “For the Devil sinneth from the beginning.” He, therefore, who lives in the practice of sin, co-operates with him, resembles him. strives to please him, fulfils his wishes. The Devil loves pride, and the sinner cherishes it; he takes pleasure in revenge, and the sinner indulges it; his empire is maintained by iniquity, and the sinner commits it.

—Some do the will of men. They are entirely governed by others; they receive the law from the opinions, maxims, and manners of their companions, superiors, relations; from the conversation received by tradition from their fathers; from the example of the multitude. And by no better authorities than these are many influenced, even in the concerns of religion! But “we ought to obey God rather than men;” and “to live the rest of our time in the flesh, not to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.”

—Some do their own will. They are as regardless of the authority of God, as if they were persuaded that his being and perfections were a fable: they live

without him in the world; never asking, when they engage in any course of action, whether it will please or offend him, whether he has forbidden or enjoined it? They follow only the bias of their own inclination; and this being, since the Fall, depraved and irregular, carries them widely astray from their duty and happiness. For it is as dangerous as it is criminal to obey such a guide. Hence to be abandoned to its influence is spoken of as the greatest curse—"So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels." It has been said of children, that they are undone if they have their own

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will; and the reason is, because they are not wise enough to choose the good, and refuse the evil. But this is much more true of man: if he has his own will, he will be sure to ruin himself; for a sinner is much more likely to make a foolish choice than a child; and he who wants grace, has less understanding than he who wants years.

But the Christian makes the will of God the grand, the only rule of his life; and every consideration induces him to say, "Not my will, but thine be done." His authority over us is supreme, and his relations to us are numerous. He is our Father, and we owe him honour; our Master, and we owe him fear; our Benefactor, and we owe him gratitude; our God, and we owe him obedience, devotion—all we are, and all we have! Nor does our obligation spring only from his dominion over us, and his claims to us, but from the very nature of his will, which is wise, and righteous, and good.

That we may not be ignorant of his will, he has been pleased to reveal it. This revelation is contained in the Scriptures of Truth. Opening these, we find all needful information: they are a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our paths. They contain general principles and particular rules. There are described the duties we owe to ourselves, to our fellow-crea-

tures, and to God: the duties which spring from the various connexions and conditions of life; the duties of kings and of servants; the duties of prosperity and of adversity. Viewing us as sinners, they show unto us the way of salvation, and preach repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.

The man therefore that would do the will of God walks by this rule. He repairs to the Scripture—

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not for advice, but law. He enters the sanctuary of revelation, and bowing before the lively oracles of God, he cries, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." For you will observe that his concern with the will of God lies not in knowing, but in doing it. And indeed if this be not in our desire and design, when we search for the will of God, we are not likely to be honest in our investigations, or successful in our attempts. For "he that doth his will, shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God; and then we shall know, if we follow on to know the Lord." But allowing it to be possible to obtain the clearest knowledge, unaccompanied with obedience, it would be useless—for "if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them"—yea, it would be even injurious, by enhancing our sin and aggravating our condemnation—for" to him that knoweth to do good and doth it not, to him it is sin." "And that servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him will they ask the more."

To be a Christian then, you must act, and live—and act and live as God would have you: you must do the will of our Father which is in heaven. By two things you may know whether your obedience be such as will class you in the number of our Lord's

disciples. For, first, their obedience is affectionate, arising from a desire to please and glorify God. Hence the declaration of our Saviour, "I call you not servants, but friends." This was not to release

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them from an obligation to obedience, but to purify and elevate the principle of it. And his own language is, in a subordinate degree, the experience of all his followers—"I delight to do thy will, O God; yea, thy law is within my heart:" "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." This is everything, in the view of God. He would have us, in his service, to be liberal and generous: he upholds us by "his free Spirit." He values not the forced submission of the slave: he disdains those actions, in the performance of which the will revolts against the obligation. His demand is, "My son, give me thy heart:" and when this is given, nothing else can he withhold: then the eyes are open to see, the ears to hear, the lips to praise, the hands to communicate; and the man "presents his body a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is his reasonable service."

For, secondly, their obedience is impartial. I speak here of their aim and their disposition. With regard to these, they have no reserve, no objections, no exceptions. Their concern extends to everything, whether great or little, whether easy or difficult, whether pleasing or repulsive: they esteem all his commandments concerning all things to be right, and they hate every false way. The necessity of this will readily appear. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." The reasoning by which this is established is solid: for if a man voluntarily transgress one of the commands of God, why does he observe the rest?—Not from a principle of obedience; for this would lead him to observe the command he transgresses, as well as those he observes—seeing they issue from the same autho-

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rity, and are enforced by the same motives: “for he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill: now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law”—He therefore obeys because the injunction happens to fall in with his humour, or reputation, or advantage. But if doing what we like, and refusing what we do not like, be obedience—it is obedience to our own will, and not to the will of God; and by such a submission we despise God in reality, while we profess to serve him: we exclude his authority, and establish our own pleasure as the governing principle of our lives. This therefore annihilates the system of composition, and all endeavours to balance virtues against vices, and to atone for the indulgence of sin by the performance of duty. For unless you regard the will of God universally, whatever you do, springs not from a principle of religion. but from some other source—for if you performed anyone duty because God had commanded it, you would most certainly practise every other for the same reason; and if you avoided anyone sin because God had forbidden it, you would unquestionably forsake every other on the same ground. It is in vain for you therefore to plead that you avoid that which is evil, unless you cleave to that which is good. It is in vain for you to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, if you do not keep yourselves unspotted from the world. It is in vain for you to be faithful to your engagements with your fellow-creatures, if you are strangers to devotion—this is to be moral, without piety: or to pray and hear the word of God, and not provide things honest in the sight of all men—this is to be pious, without morality. It is in vain for you to assemble together

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in public, if you never enter your closets; or to be saints in the house of God, if you are sinners in your

own. It is in vain for you to listen to the Gospel, while it teaches you doctrines of acknowledged importance, if you do not learn by it to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world. In all these instances in which you appear to conform to the will of God, there is not one act of true obedience; for true obedience consults the will of God, and this enjoins an attention to the things you neglect, as much as to those which from other considerations you regard.—And thus having described the character of his disciples, let us

II. Survey their Privilege. Our Saviour considers them as his relations; regards them as his kindred—they form one family with himself. “He stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” As such I view them, as such I will behave towards them: they shall enjoy every advantage which can flow from connexions so intimate. For our Lord does not speak ceremoniously: his words are true and faithful. Let us see what we can find, to embody the meaning of his expressions.

As soon as we hear him claiming his disciples as his kindred, we look, First, for family likeness—and we have it. “Whom he did foreknow, them he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren.” “The first man is of the earth, earthy;

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the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy; and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” The resemblance, indeed, is not complete in this world, but

it is real; it is sufficient to shew that they have a common origin. One end governs them; their inclinations harmonize; the mind which was in him is also in them; and as he was, so are they also in the world,—meek and lowly, tender and compassionate, patient and forgiving, active and zealous. And the likeness is incessantly growing, and becoming more and more visible; so that, “beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” And by-and-by it will be perfect and entire, lacking nothing. “When he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” The likeness will be extended to the whole man: he shall “change this vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the mighty working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”

By claiming them as his kindred, he, Secondly, confers honour upon them. It is always glorious to belong to persons of illustrious endowments, and who are the admiration of the age. It is in our favour to have it known that we are in the number of their friends, and are prized by them; it shews their opinion of us, and it is supposed that their esteem will not be wasted upon worthlessness. Their own connexions have the greatest opportunities of improvement by them; and often gratuitously obtain credit

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for qualities which they never possess. By relative union we seem to have a right to appropriate some of their talents and virtues: some of their lustre is unavoidably reflected upon those who stand near these polished bodies. Persons have been anxious to go even far back, to claim relation to some extraordinary characters. How would some of you feel, to be acknowledged as the kindred of the king, who is called the fountain of honour? This was the glory of James, and Joses, and Simeon, and Judas, who were the

brethren of our Lord. This was the honour vouchsafed to Mary his mother, and for which all generations shall call her blessed—Think of being the mother of One who was the image of the invisible God, the first-born of every creature, whom the winds and seas obeyed, whom all the angels in heaven are commanded to worship, the deliverer of millions from the disgrace of sin and the wrath to come—No wonder a certain woman, while hearing him, unable to suppress her emotions, “lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.”—“But he said, Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it.” Does he then design to exclude his own relations from spiritual affinity with him? Or does he discountenance natural affection and duty? Far from it—But he would intimate that we need not envy Mary; we ourselves may become his kindred in a nobler sense; “such honour have all the saints”—“Behold my mother and my brethren! for whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

Thirdly, If they are his relations, he will love

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them. What would you think of a man who had no regard for a brother, a sister? Where should we think of looking for affection, if not among those who are attached by ties of nature, by habits of early intercourse, by mutual participations of every youthful enjoyment, by the reciprocal performance of a thousand tender and endearing offices! But conceive of whatever is attractive and binding in the fond image of a mother; one, who after nameless pains and perils gave thee birth, nursed thee on her knees, fed thee at her breast, and through sleepless nights and anxious days watched over thy tender progress—Bring before your mind a man, all genius and sensibility, viewing the picture of a mother,—

“Faithful remembrancer of one so dear,”—

recalling maternal smiles, and the dress in which with blessings she dismissed him to school—forgetting a thousand other things, but remembering her “nightly visits,” her “morning bounties,” her “constant flow of love that knew no fall!”—But no mother was ever so dear to an admiring child, as his disciples are to the Saviour. Everything is defective in holding forth his love; never was love so tender, never was love so tried; it is stronger than death: it passeth knowledge.—See it when he was upon earth. His little family with which he was surrounded was a fair specimen of his people in all ages. How kindly he bore with their infirmities! with what gentleness he reproved them! with what eagerness he encouraged them! with what freedom he unbosomed himself to them!—“And loving his own who were in the world, he loved them unto the end”—and gave proof of it by washing their feet, and then dying for them—by

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which he proclaimed that he considered nothing too low for him to do, nothing too painful for him to suffer for their sakes.

Fourthly, Since he declares them to be his relations, he will provide for them. “If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” And will he incur a reproach which he so severely condemns? It was well for the patriarch and his sons, in the famine which raged all over the country, that they had one so nearly allied to them, who reigned over the land of Egypt, and had the command of its resources. “Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls,” and the land of Goshen yielded them supplies. Christians, you have a relation who is Lord of all: “the earth is his, and the fulness thereof.” See those who rise in the state: they soon draw their connexions after them. And

many evils may arise from this among men. Sinecures may be multiplied, places may be formed in order to be filled, and the state may be burdened to maintain the friends of those who are in power—while offices may be disposed of, not according to qualification, but affinity. But Jesus Christ injures none by the elevation of his kindred; and he prepares them all for the stations they occupy.—And surely, if they are not all exalted, he will suffer none of them to famish. “O fear the Lord, ye his saints; for there is no want to them that fear him. The lions do lack and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.” You may rejoice in all the glory and empire to which he is advanced—you are interested in it—it is for you. “He is made

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head over all things unto his body, the Church.” “He has power given him over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as the Father hath given him.” And not satisfied with his own personal dignity, he wishes his friends to sit with him upon his throne; and this is his language, “Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, to behold my glory.” “And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one.”

Again: Since he regards them as his brethren, his sisters, his mother, he will keep up an intercourse with them. He will correspond with them by means of his word; and many a precious epistle will they receive from him, unfolding the sentiments of his heart, and telling them where he now is, and what he is preparing for them. He will also come to see them: he will peculiarly visit them in trouble; he is a “Friend born for adversity.” “And better is a neighbour that is near, than a brother that is far off.” “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the floods they shall not overflow thee: when thou passest through the fire,

thou shalt not be burned, neither shall the flames kindle upon thee." For,

Finally, he will defend them. When Moses went forth and "saw one of his brethren suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian." We see how Esther exerted herself to preserve from the malice of Haman her nation and her uncle's house—"How can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?" And will the Saviour be an unconcerned spectator of the dangers of his people? Let their enemies beware.

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In opposing them, they persecute him: he that toucheth them, toucheth the apple of his eye. No weapon formed against them shall prosper. Their Redeemer is mighty; and he will plead their cause. "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thine excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee, and thou shalt tread upon their high places."

From the explanation of the words which has been given, we derive four interesting reflections: with which we shall conclude.

The First leads us to admire the grace and condescension of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we look into the world, we find those of rank and consequence detaching themselves as much as possible from those below them: they are ashamed to be too familiar with their inferiors, though the inferiority consists in things which possess very little, if any, real and intrinsic excellency. Why should a man think me beneath him, because he has a greater abundance of "thick clay?" Is wealth dignity? "Silver and gold have I none," says Peter—So then a man may be an inspired apostle and able to work miracles, and be poor. "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head," says our Saviour—A person therefore may

be the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person; and be destitute of worldly possessions. Why should a man swell, as he passes by me, because he wears a title?

“Pigmies are pigmies still, though perch'd on Alps!
And pyramids are pyramids in vales.”

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Take a prince: he has only five senses; he is made of dust, and is returning to dust again, and in that very day his thoughts perish. See those who, springing from obscurity, have soared high in worldly success: how unwilling are they to be found in company with their kindred who remain in indigence! how eager are they to conceal the relation! But here is a subject of wonder, which may well lead us to exclaim, “Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him; or the son of man, that thou visitest him?” See Him that has all power in heaven and in earth, the King of kings and Lord of lords, stooping from his glorious majesty, looking to him that is poor, searching for his connexions who dwell in houses of clay, and desirous of publishing the relation—See him “stretching forth his hand toward his disciples,” and saying. “Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

The Second remark leads us to contemplate the indemnities and advantages of religion. It is readily acknowledged, that in following the Son of God, we must deny ourselves and take up our cross: a succession of painful services will be required of us; various sacrifices are indispensable.—But “verily there is a reward for the righteous.” “Godliness is profitable unto all things; having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.” “Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife. or children, for the

kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting. "—It is no easy thing to pursue

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the will of God inflexibly to the end: the performance of it, in many cases, will deprive us of friends, create us enemies, and draw upon us reproach. But it will never suffer us to repent of our engagement: it requires of us nothing mean; it withholds from us nothing glorious.—Is divine audience a privilege? This is connected with obedience. "God heareth not sinners; but if a man be a worshipper of God and doth his will, him he heareth." Is an assurance of immortality a privilege? This is connected with obedience. "The world passeth away, and the lusts thereof; but he that doeth the will of God, abideth for ever."—Is a union with the family of Jesus Christ a privilege? This is connected with obedience. "Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

The Third remark leads us to observe the holiness of the Gospel. Of this we are perpetually reminded. It is insured by its promises as well as by its commands, by its privileges as well as by its duties. Its blessings, however free, are only to be enjoyed in a course of obedience. The family of Jesus is like heaven: the unrighteous are excluded. "This is the law of the house: upon the top of the mountain the whole limit thereof round about shall be most holy. Behold this is the law of the house." When he was upon earth he did not seek to establish an indiscriminate empire, or to draw a large heterogeneous mass after him: his fan was in his hand: by the application of various tests, he selected those who followed him from principle and inclination, and drove back the cowardly, the mercenary, the false-hearted. What! can the brethren of Jesus Christ be earthly,

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sensual, devilish? "He that is joined to the Lord is of one spirit." And "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." And therefore they who discharge you from obedience, and promise you security, belie every word of the Bible, and oppose the very design of religion, which is, by sanctification, to assimilate man to the image of God. If therefore you value the connection, and are desirous of entering this family, remember, there is only one way of access to it. Do not imagine you can elude the determination of our Saviour, and enjoy the privilege without the character of his disciples. But if this be the only way of admission, it stands open to all. Did your alliance depend upon genius, literature, affluence, or office, many of you must despair. But his family is not of this world. From the hope of the Gospel none are excluded, but those who wickedly exclude themselves.—"Therefore, as He who hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation:" and—pray with David, "Teach me to do thy will, for thou art my God; thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness"—and then you may be assured of your inclusion, whatever be your talents, whatever be your circumstances. "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

The Fourth reflection leads us to enforce upon Christians the duty derived from their alliance. Remember that you are "no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called. Demean yourselves as the relations of the Lord of life and glory.—Let

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brotherly love continue. Let there be no strife between you and your fellow-Christians, for you are brethren. Do not envy the world; it is a reproach to your family; you are placed in a higher order than they; you have better titles, honours, riches, pleasures—Rejoice and glory in the connection: under a sense of your unworthiness, let the thought of it revive you; under the reproach of the world, let the thought of it animate you—let them vilify, let them cast out your name as evil; He is yours, and you are his, and you are precious in his sight.—And, finally, let it reconcile you to death; cherish the pleasing, the familiar notion of it which the words of your Lord supply—It is only going home, and—Home

“Is the lov’d retreat of peace and plenty;
Where, supporting and supported,
Polish’d friends and dear relations
Meet and mingle into bliss.”

Such is an earthly residence. “What is heaven? What will our Father’s house be, where all the dear members of the family will be assembled together? Why do you wish to be detained from home?—How unnatural to long to be always strangers and pilgrims upon earth! How unaccountable is the aversion you express to a messenger, which comes only “to gather you unto your own people!” If persons loved not to travel, surely one thing would reconcile them to it—the prospect of home; especially if their dearest friend was gone before, and had promised to be there to receive them. And if the thought of leaving some few behind pained them, they would be relieved from much of the distress, if they knew that these friends would soon, very soon follow, and that pro-

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bably they may pass upon the road the vehicle destined to bring them.—Christians! what you have

found most like home below has been the sanctuary. There you held communion with your heavenly Father, and embraced your friends and companions in his presence—and for “their sakes” you said, “Peace be within thee.” There you longed to appear, and you found it good to be there. But as the blessedness was imperfect, so it was transient. You blended with few, and soon separated, to mix with others very differently minded. But when you ascend, and enter your Father’s house above, you will never more go out; you will join the general assembly—and “be for ever with the Lord.” “Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”

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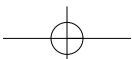
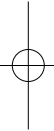
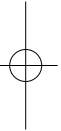
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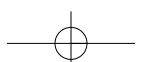
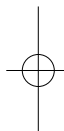
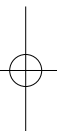
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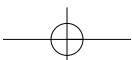
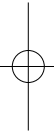
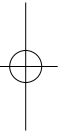
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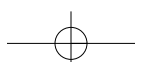
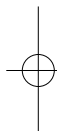
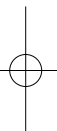




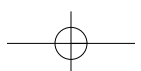
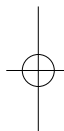
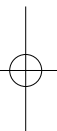
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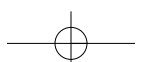
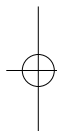
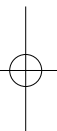
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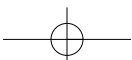
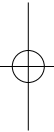
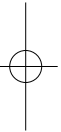
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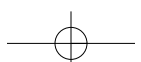
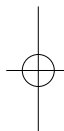
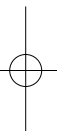




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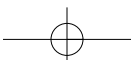
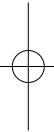
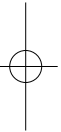
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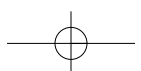
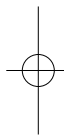
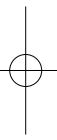




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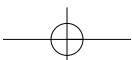
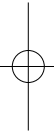
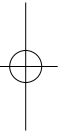
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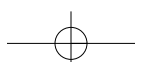
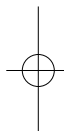
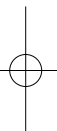




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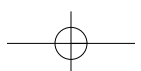
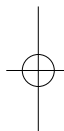
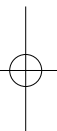
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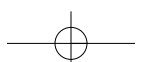
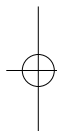
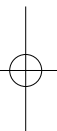




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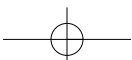
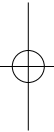
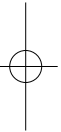
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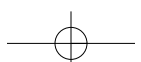
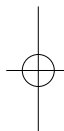
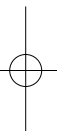




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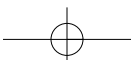
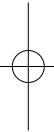
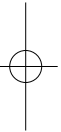
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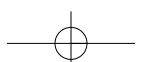
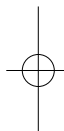
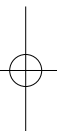




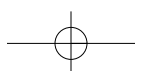
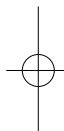
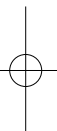
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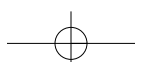
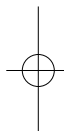
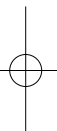
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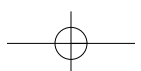
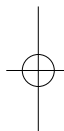
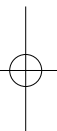
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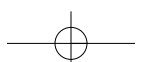
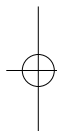
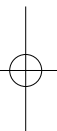




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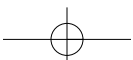
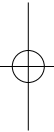
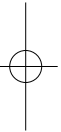
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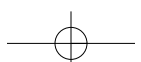
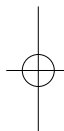
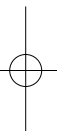




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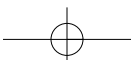
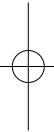
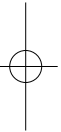
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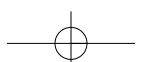
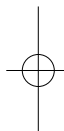
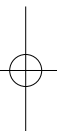




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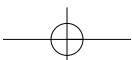
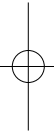
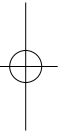
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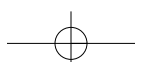
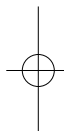
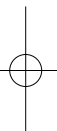




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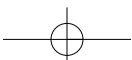
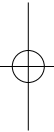
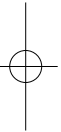
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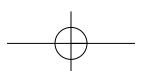
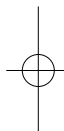
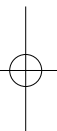




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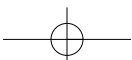
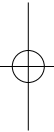
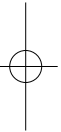
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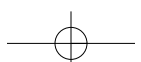
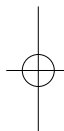
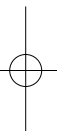




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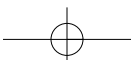
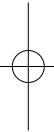
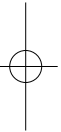
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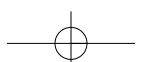
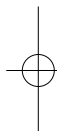
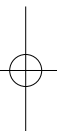




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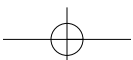
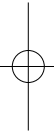
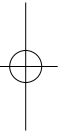
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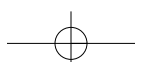
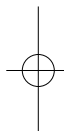
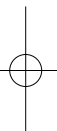




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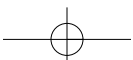
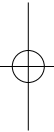
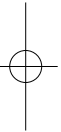
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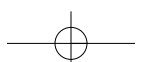
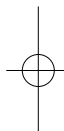
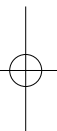




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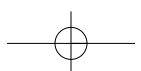
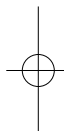
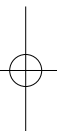
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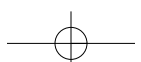
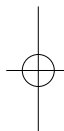
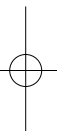




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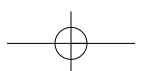
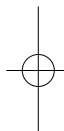
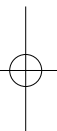
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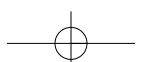
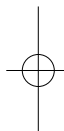
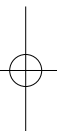




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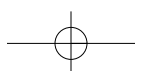
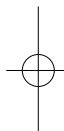
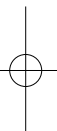
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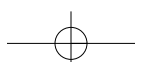
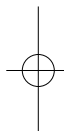
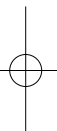




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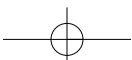
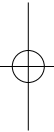
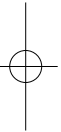
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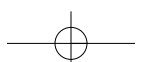
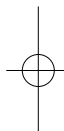
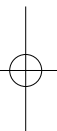




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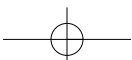
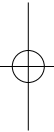
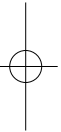
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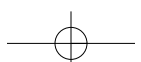
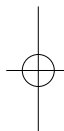
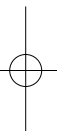




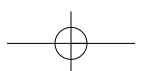
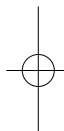
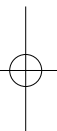
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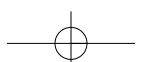
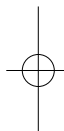
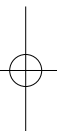
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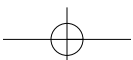
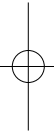
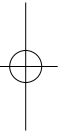
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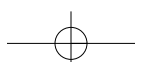
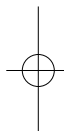
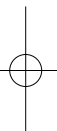




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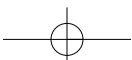
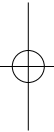
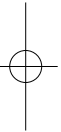
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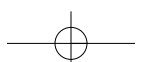
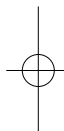
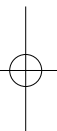




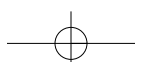
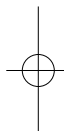
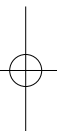
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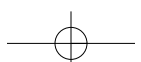
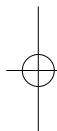
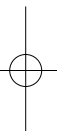
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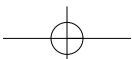
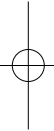
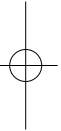
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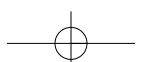
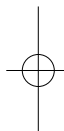
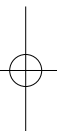




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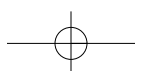
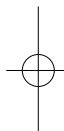
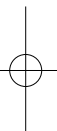
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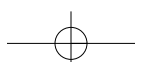
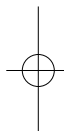
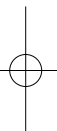




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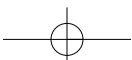
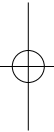
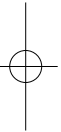
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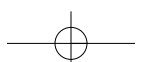
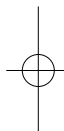
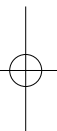




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