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THE WASTE PLACES OF ZION.

SINCE the spirit of missions began to pervade the Church, many persons have written on this subject. We have no hope of adding any thing novel to what has been said, but we think it important to keep alive among Christians, a remembrance of the destitute state of our fellow creatures. For notwithstanding the many conquests which Christianity has achieved, and the numerous spoils which have been brought in to her from heathen lands, there is still a large field for Christian exertion. There are many places where the gospel has never been preached—places that belong to Zion by promise and by covenant. “Ask of me and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance; and the uttermost parts of the earth for a possession. Thus saith the Lord, in an acceptable time have I heard thee; and in a day of salvation have I helped thee; and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant to the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages, that thou mayest say to the prisoners, go forth: to them that are in darkness, shew yourselves.” The pencil of inspiration has thus gone round the earth, and marked it all out, with its kingdoms, its islands, and its deserts, as a possession sacred to the Redeemer.

On so practical a subject we shall wave a discussion of the question how far the gospel has extended already, or whether many nations have not rejected it to whom it has been offered. We believe that all the nations of the world might receive the gospel in a short time, if they had inclinations for its reception. Of course, by its daily rejection, they incur accumulated responsibility. But this responsibility, so far from relaxing the efforts of Christians, is with them an incentive to diligence. They who believe that the heathen incur no guilt by remaining

as they are, in desiring the spread of Christianity, are influenced by such views only, as respect the present blessings, which the system carries along with it. These are pre-eminently great. It draws more closely all the social ties, the numerous domestic relations, the endearments of friendship, whilst it enlarges the affections, widens the field of rational duties, discloses new spheres of thought to the contemplative mind, and embellishes society with a thousand charms. No one can set a higher estimation on these subordinate comforts than the experienced Christian, yet they are not the chief reason why he desires the spread of the gospel. His conscience, purified and enlightened by the Spirit, convinces him of the obligations of all men to be holy; and that the gospel alone can restore to man that divine image he has lost by the fall.

He has found out the beauties of holiness, contrasted with the odious nature of sin; and as the precepts, the promises and threatenings of the Bible point to future scenes, he justly considers all men as the children of eternity. But above all, as the Christian system is a display of the perfections of God, he desires the promotion of the divine glory, in the enlargement of the church, and calling to a fellowship in its blessings, the perishing millions of the human race. We are willing to admit that the rays of revelation have penetrated to a much greater distance among the different tribes and kindreds of the earth, than many are apt to imagine. But let us suppose that the gospel has been offered to all mankind. So long as they continue to decline its gracious provisions, so long would it be our duty to persevere in the praiseworthy attempt, of bringing them to a better state of mind. After all, how confined are the limits of Zion! The claims of six hundred millions are but partially attended to by the church. Geography, books of voyages, with the researches of travellers, give us alarming views of the spiritual desolation, that is abroad in the earth—and were there only a single spot in the world, which the tidings of salvation had never reached, for that spot every pious heart would feel deeply interested.

Among the waste places of Zion may likewise be ranked such cities, villages, and even large tracts of country, as were once possessed of Christianity, but from which it has been taken away. Over such places a kind of sanctity is thrown, which seems to shed a few gleams of light on the clouds that shade the picture. For example, the Holy Land is interwoven with our earliest associations. We have heard with delight of its brooks, and its vineyards. Its mountains and hills, its rivers and vales, are connected with our most classical recollections. The traveller, the historian, and the poet, have here lavished their choicest stores of description.

The same kind of interest is connected with the churches of the Lesser Asia, and in some degree with those planted by the apostles in Greece. Under such circumstances it is possible that travellers, influenced by a warm imagination, may not always exhibit the degraded condition of the people in its true colours. But look at Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Nazareth.* The mosque of Omer fills the place of the temple; monasteries cover the abodes of the prophets; and the prowling Arab lurks amidst the green pastures, where the Psalmist once led forth his tranquil flocks.

The waste places of Zion extend still further. There are many regions where the ordinances of the gospel are regularly sustained—where preachers fulfil their appointed rounds of duty, but where the eye of a Christian can discover, that the spirit of the gospel is departed. Many are to be reckoned among the false teachers of the day, who speak much truth, but who withhold constantly from their hearers the peculiarities of the gospel. Before such teachers the face of the Church is like Eden, behind them it is a wilderness. It is painful to contemplate these desolations of Zion, for the memory of brighter days springs up so soon to embitter every recollection. Behold Geneva, England, and Scotland too, among whose mountains God has so often made the place of his feet to be glorious. We turn to our own country with peculiar interest, and find here the symptoms of a signal apostacy.

It is remarkable, however, that every effort to supply the waste places of Zion, meets with opposition at the present day. We have to encounter the calculations of the philosopher, the suspicion of the sceptic, and the sneers of the profane witling. Will God condemn the poor heathen? is a question often asked. We answer, did he condemn the Canaanites, when he commanded their groves to be cut down, and their altars to be destroyed, because the cup of their iniquity was full. The light of nature avails but little to man, whose moral powers are all in ruins. We challenge the records of paganism, to show the name of an individual, whom the light of nature has made a better man, whose heart it has cleansed, whose tempers it has sanctified.

Other objections arise from the fondness with which the heathen regard their systems of superstition, the strength of their prejudices, and their ignorance. “As to the obstinacy with which nations adhere to those religious tenets which they have imbibed from education, it furnishes no solid argument against our views; it is, indeed, a just and weighty reason for

* The reader may see a faithful description of the Holy Land in Clarke's Travels, p. 222.

an increase of caution, and on the same ground of difficulty it becomes an additional incentive to an increase of diligence. You diffuse the light of philosophical knowledge, though it must lay open the fallacy and absurdity of many opinions which tradition has preserved concerning the origin and structure of the world. You introduce such laws and customs as, in a course of time, will bring on a material revolution in the manners of the nations with whom you are connected; and militate against many ritual observances, which are now protected by the supposed commands of the Almighty."* Had the apostles reasoned in this manner, we should never have contemplated those scenes of moral beauty, evolved before the eye of the philanthropist, in countries that have been blessed with the light of the gospel. Who is able to contrast the present state of England and Scotland, with their state under the reign of the Druids, and not find something to animate his exertions in the cause of Christianity.

O Scotland, much I love thy tranquil dales:
 But most on Sabbath Eve, when low the sun
 Slants through the upland copse, 'tis my delight
 Wandering, and stopping oft, to hear the song
 Of kindred praise arise from humble roofs:
 Or when the simple service ends, to hear
 The lifted latch and mark the gray hair'd man,
 The father and the priest, walk forth alone
 Into his garden plat or little field
 To commune with his God in secret prayer.

Many seem to look with suspicion on missionary efforts for the heathen, who profess to admire Domestic Missions. We are told of our Indians to the west, our coloured population, our dilapidated churches, and vacant perishing congregations. They feelingly represent the situation of our large commercial towns, and of our villages, and wind up with the cold calculation, that charity begins at home. Perhaps these persons then are foremost in the career of benevolence at home—not so reader.

We are far from contending that there are no difficulties connected with carrying the gospel to the waste places of Zion. The conquest of the world must involve perils and hardships. Some of the obstacles, however, arise from ourselves; and an excessive fondness for scientific and literary pursuits is not to be ranked among the least. The love of praise has been called the last infirmity of noble minds. It is a dictate of our nature, but it ought never to be forgotten that our nature is corrupt. Christianity has a literature peculiar to itself, in which it is ornamental to excel, yet even this, if not properly controlled, may make the heart the seat of ambition. The world cannot present

* White's Sermons at the Bampton Lecture, 1784, p. 252.

an object more pitiable, than a minister of the sanctuary, over whom the love of distinction seems to bear imperial rule. Such ministers will not be found among the waste places of Zion. A too great love of literature leads to such softness of character, as disqualifies for conflicting with any thing of a perilous nature. If the time which has been spent in compiling the many folios which are never looked into, but by a few scholars, had been employed in active operations against the kingdom of darkness, the limits of Zion would have been more widely extended at this day. Happy is that preacher who keeps all things subordinate to the love of the Saviour; for who would not rather be Brainard among his Indians, enjoying the rich consolations of the gospel, than the most accomplished scholar, holding a fruitless communion with the sages, historians and poets of antiquity.

Ministers who pursue learning to an unwarrantable extent, may gain their object. They may command the admiration of their fellow men. They may be partially useful. A burning mountain may display spots of verdure on its surface, whilst consumed within by restless fires. So long as the heart is the seat of ambition, so long the tranquillity of the gospel is absent, and unfitness for the duties of the ministry is the consequence. "In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses. By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report, as deceivers and yet true, as unknown yet well known, as dying and behold we live, as chastened and not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing yet possessing all things."

Another difficulty is found in the diversity of denominations into which the church is distinguished. Every effort to rescue perishing sinners, from the wrath to come, is regarded as an effort to spread abroad the influence of a sect. The glory of our Redeemer, the extension of his kingdom, and the happiness of millions, must all be sacrificed to our views of ecclesiastical policy. At the same time, it would be criminal not to acknowledge, that of late years, Christians are becoming more alive to the importance of mutual efforts for the spread of the gospel. The tribes of Israel marched under different standards, but when contending against idolatry, they rallied round one common standard.

The last discouragement we shall mention, is that over-anxious care about the things of time, so characteristic of many who profess to be followers of the Saviour. The slightest contribution is supposed to make serious inroads upon our property. Regardless of the promise of Him who feeds the young ravens when they cry, and who clothes the exposed lily of the

field, they entrench themselves in a selfishness too formidable for the most pathetic representations of the heathen world. They look to their own things, and not the things of others. With the mercies of God, profusely scattered around their dwelling—with grounds and enclosures ornamented like the Leasowes, it is with reluctance they give any thing of their substance to the cause of missions. Can such persons be the followers of Jesus Christ?

But against every difficulty the cause of missions will prevail. God has spoken the word. He has foretold it with an astonishing fulness and clearness. "In that day shall this song be sung in Judah. We have a strong city. Salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks. Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit. Look upon Zion the city of our solemnities. Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation; a tabernacle that shall not be taken down; not one of the stakes thereof shall ever be removed; neither shall any of the cords thereof be broken. But there the glorious Lord will be unto us a place of broad rivers and streams, wherein shall go no galley with oars, neither shall gallant ship pass thereby. For the Lord shall comfort Zion—he will comfort all her waste places—he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness shall be found therein—thanksgiving and the voice of melody." This is the glowing language of inspiration. The eloquence of Greece and Rome must yield to the eloquence of heaven.

Molli paulatim flavescet campus arista,
Incultis que rubens pendebit sentibus uva
Et duræ quercus sudabunt roscida mella.

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ON CHURCH GOVERNMENT.

(Continued from page 171.)

1. My first argument to prove that the government of the church was committed, not to all the members, but to pastors and lay elders, is from analogy. The church is compared to an army, to a kingdom, to a house.

But in what does the analogy consist? A household consists of parents, who are the heads, of which the father is the *supreme governor* of the family; and children and servants, who are *governed*. In an army we immediately recognise officers, of different grades, in authority and power; and in a kingdom, supreme and subordinate rulers.