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S E L E C T
S E R M O N S

O N *Sam: Miller's*

I N T E R E S T I N G

12/

S U B J E C T S.

B Y

H U G H K N O X, D. D.

MINISTER OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
IN ST. CROIX.

To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe.

ST. PAUL.

MOREOVER, I will endeavour that ye may be able, after my decease, to have these things always in remembrance.

ST. PETER.

V O L. II.

G L A S G O W:

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C O N T E N T S
O F T H E
S E C O N D V O L U M E

S E R M. XIV.

THE free and astonishing love of GOD, in the salvation of a lost world, thro' faith in CHRIST, as the condition on the part of sinful man, from

JOHN iii. 16.

For GOD so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Page 1

S E R M. XV.

The goodness and pleasantness of Unity among Christian brethren, from

PSAL. cxxxiii. 1, &c.

Behold! how good and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious ointment, that ran down upon the beard, &c.

27

• 2 •

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S E R M. XVI. and XVII.

The God-like nature and divine reward of a merciful disposition, from

MATTH. v. 7.

Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. 53—75

S E R M. XVIII.

The divine designation and important duty of civil rulers, and the respect and obedience due them by their subjects, from

I PETER ii. 13, 14.

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the LORD's sake; whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well. 97

S E R M. XIX.

The LAW of CHRIST waited for and received by the Isles of the sea, from

ISAIAH xlii. 4.

—And the isles shall wait for his law. 123

C O N T E N T S.

S E R M. XX.

Creatures, broken cisterns: GOD alone, the fountain of living waters, from

JEREM. ii. 12, 13.

Be astonish'd, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD: for my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. 143

S E R M. XXI.

The deluding and infatuating self-blindness of sinners, contrasted with the omniscience of the heart-searching GOD, from

PROV. xxi. 2.

Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: BUT the LORD pondereth the hearts. 166

S E R M. XXII.

CHRIST, the bright and salutiferous Sun of righteousness to a benighted and perishing world, from

MALACHI iv. 2.

But unto you that fear my name shall the SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS arise with healing in his wings. 186

of **C O N T E N T S.**

S E R M. XXIII.

The manifold ways in which the wisdom of
GOD is continually at work to reclaim sin-
ners, from

PROV. i. 20, 21.

*WISDOM crieth without ; she uttereth her voice
in the streets ; she crieth in the chief place of
concourse, in the openings of the gates : in
the city she uttereth her words, saying, How
long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity, &c.*

209

S E R M. XXIV.

The foundation of hell laid in wickedness;—
or sinners self-prepared for destruction,
from

ROM. ix. 22. last clause.

—The vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.

235.

S E R M. XXV.

The providence of GOD, in the long delay of
the punishment of sinners, vindicated, from

2 P E T. iii. 9.

*The LORD is not slack concerning his promise (as
some men count slackness) but is long-suffer-
ing to us-ward, not willing that any should
perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

255

S E R M. XXVI.

The simplicity and folly of sinners, and God's earnest importunity in reclaiming them, from

PROV. i. 22, 23.

How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof: Behold, I will pour out my spirit upon you; I will make known my words unto you!

281

S E R M. XXVII.

The just doom, and awful destruction, of obstinate and impenitent sinners, from

PROV. i. 24,—31.

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. Then shall they call upon me, but I will 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 the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.

303

S E R M O N X I V .

The free and astonishing love of God,
in the salvation of a lost world, thro'
faith in CHRIST as the condition on
the part of sinful man, in three ser-
mons, from

John iii. 16.

*For GOD so loved the world, that he gave his
only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth
in him, should not perish, but have everlast-
ing life.*

S E R M O N I I I .

IN the first discourse from these words I endeavour-
ed to evince, from the text, the unspeakable love
of GOD to our lost world, in sending his Son to re-
deem it.—This I did,

1st, FROM a survey of our world which GOD
so loved: that tho' a world of GOD's own making,
yet it had rendered itself wholly unworthy of his re-
gard or favour; yea, wholly obnoxious to his ven-

VOL. II.

▲

geance and destroying power.—It was a world of *rebels, of sinners, of enemies.*

2dly. THIS was farther made to appear, from a consideration of the *nature and value* of that gift which God gave *to, and for,* our world: it was his *Son, his only begotten and best beloved Son;* the Creator of this world; the Lord of angels; the most excellent and glorious person in the universe; God's *own equal and fellow,* the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person;—one of infinitely more value than all worlds, and all creatures.—Such was the gift with which God *blest, ransomed and redeemed* our world.

3dly. THE same was farther illustrated by a consideration of the *manner in which* God gave this precious gift to our wretched, rebellious world. He *provided and appointed* this gift before our world existed, and upon the foresight of its apostacy and ruin: he gave it *freely, undeserved, unasked, undesired;* yea he gave it to *perishing creatures* who could neither *see its value,* nor their *own perishing need of it,* and who, therefore, as soon as it came into the world, attended with the highest evidence that it came from God, *refused, rejected,* and attempted *to destroy it.*—“CHRIST came to his own, and his own received him not; they rejected the counsel of God against themselves; they refused the holy One and the Just; they would not have the Son of God to reign over them; but they took, and, with wicked hands, did crucify and slay the Lord of glory.”—And this precious gift is still offered to sinners, who

treat it with *equal contempt and neglect* as the *Jews* did; and who can never be persuaded cordially to accept it, 'till they see they must perish without remedy, if they have it not. "They must be first made willing by a day of GOD's power."

4thly. THE amazing love of GOD to our lost world, was farther illustrated from a consideration of the *ends and purposes* for which GOD gave his only begotten Son to it.—It was not to *condemn or destroy* it, as the world had just reason to fear;—no, it was to redeem it from the *lowest misery*, and advance it to the *highest glory and happiness*, by dying for it;—it was "that *whoever or whatever sinner* of this obnoxious world believeth on him, might not perish, but have everlasting life." Under the

11d. GENERAL head, I endeavoured to explain the *condition* on which the guiley inhabitants of this world may be put in full possession of all the blessed fruits and effects of this love of GOD.—This our text affuses us is *faith*, or a believing in the only begotten Son of GOD. This I *defined*, in the shortest, clearest, and most *comprehensive* manner possible, "a firm persuasion, on sufficient evidence, that *Jesús of Nazareth*, is indeed the only begotten Son and *Messenger* of the living GOD; and such a regard to him, under this character, as the gospel requires and prescribes."—*This*, I observed to you, is the most clear and *express* idea of *saving faith in CHRIST*, which we can collect from the *historical and doctrinal* books of the New Testament.—It was the very faith which our Saviour accepted and approved in *Pater:*

—it is the faith every where required both from *Jews* and *Gentiles*, as giving a qualification for Christian baptism, and a title to the kingdom of heaven:—and *this faith*, as I shewed you, is almost every where laid down as the *exclusive term* of a sinner's justification and salvation;—and is really a sufficient principle of all practical religion and holiness.

IN my *second* discourse from the words, I endeavoured, at great length, to shew you, under the

III^d. HEAD of discourse, the *reasons* on which this condition of the salvation of sinners under the gospel (namely faith in the LORD JESUS CHRIST) is grounded. I here observed that many Christians have acknowledged faith in CHRIST, to be a very *improper* and *inadequate* condition of a sinner's salvation:—they have deemed this *doctrine unsafe*, as tending to make sinners *secure*, and to destroy the *necessity of holiness*;—and, therefore, supposing *faith alone* to be insufficient for this purpose, they have called in *repentance* and *sincere obedience*, as two other auxiliary conditions of a sinner's salvation;—or they have rather choosed to say; “that *faith, repentance, and sincere obedience* are jointly the condition of a sinner's salvation.” This I observed was paying the scripture language a bad compliment, which almost every where represents *faith alone* to be the condition of the salvation of a perishing world:—as tho' these inspired writers, who were commissioned to publish the terms of salvation, had done it *imperfectly, incautiously, or improperly*; and as tho' there were some *real danger* in adopting the *scripture language* on this head; or

of forming our ideas of the capital doctrines of religion, on the scripture representations of these doctrines! CHRIST says again and again, "He that believeth; he that believeth on the Son of GOD, is and shall be saved; but he that believeth not, is damned; is condemned already.—He that believeth on the only begotten Son of GOD, shall not perish, but have everlasting life.—If ye believe not, ye shall die in your sins."—The apostles say repeatedly; "He that hath the Son, and believeth in the Son, hath life; but he that hath not the Son, the wrath of GOD abideth on him.—Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.—By grace ye are saved, thro' faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of GOD; not of works, lest any man should boast.—We are justified by faith alone, without the deeds of the law.—The just shall live by faith.—By faith *Abram, Noah, Moses*, and all the ancient worthies, inherit the promises."

THIS is the *tenor and current* of scripture language;—and shall we dare to rise up, and say;—*"This language is unsafe, and dangerous.—Faith alone is not the condition of a sinner's salvation, but as it is joined with repentance and good works.—The contrary doctrine leads to Antinomianism, and weakens our motives and obligations to holiness.—Is such language as this modest, or respectful?—No; it is a bold and rude impeachment, of the purity and perfection of the holy scriptures, as a rule of faith. It is a pert, I had almost said, a blasphemous presumption, to correct and reform the scripture stile; and to*

amend some supposed very capital errors, which our Saviour and his apostles (it would seem) had committed, in laying down the great fundamental doctrines of Christianity and the terms of salvation.

I OBSERVED therefore, that GOD must be true and every man a liar; and that this *mean* and *contemptible* opinion of faith in CHRIST, must needs proceed from some *gross*, *mistake* or *misconception* about the true nature of it, and its great excellency, as a term of salvation, and a principle of all holy obedience! We do by no means say, that *that* faith which is unaccompanied with repentance, and a disposition to universal holiness, is the condition of a sinner's salvation. The scripture *knows not*, *approves not* any such faith as this. But we say, that *true* gospel faith in the LORD JESUS CHRIST, is *always* the *unfailing principle* of repentance and true holiness;—that it always *will* and *must* necessarily produce these:—and then we say, that *this* faith is the *sole condition* of a sinner's acceptance with GOD and final salvation. If mankind did but truly know the *nature*, *worth*, and *excellency* of faith in CHRIST;—what it *is*, and what it *implies*, they would not hesitate a moment to acknowledge its *fitness*, *propriety* and *sufficiency*, as a term and condition of salvation.

To illustrate this I shew'd you.

1st. THAT a true gospel faith in the LORD JESUS CHRIST is “ a giving credit to the testimony of GOD; which we will be convinced is a disposition of great worth and value in a sinner, if we consider—(1.) The *strangeness* and *almost incredibility* of the gospel re-

port to be believed; or which is the proper object of faith.—(2.) The *absent, spiritual, future* and *invisible* nature of the things to be believed, and the *carnal, sensual* nature of the sinner who is to believe them; and (3.) The many objections and difficulties which faith has to struggle with and conquer, from an *infidel heart, a tempting devil, and a deluding, seducing world.*

2dly. FAITH IN CHRIST, is *gratefully* and *thankfully* to receive the gift of GOD, which is also a most worthy and excellent disposition in such creatures as we are; if it be considered, that *blindness* and *ingratitude*, especially towards GOD, is of the very nature of sin; and that there must be a radical change of nature, before the sinner is brought to *see, to prize,* and to *value*, the excellency and necessity of the LORD JESUS, and to accept him with true gratitude and thankfulness at the hand of GOD.

3dly. I SHEWED you that true faith in CHRIST, pays the highest honour to the *Son of GOD*; accepts him just under the notion that the Father declares and offers him, as a most glorious and excellent person, and as a most gracious and all-sufficient Saviour. This is to love him whom the Father loveth, and to honour him whom the Father delighteth to honour; which is a most excellent disposition of soul, and must be peculiarly pleasing and acceptable to GOD.

4thly. I OBSERVED to you that faith in JESUS CHRIST, is a *self-emptying, sinner-abasing,* and *GOD-exalting* grace:—It sets GOD and the *sinner* in their proper places:—it ascribes all power, glory, strength

and salvation to GOD;—all guilt, sin, poverty, and unworthiness to the sinner, and goes out of *self*, to GOD, in CHRIST, for a supply of all its wants;—for strength, pardon, life and salvation; *which*, as it is a *right*, so it must be an *excellent disposition*, and highly pleasing in the sight of GOD.—And,

LASTLY, under this head I shewed you—That as faith *embraces*, and *submits to*, the whole revelation of GOD, and therefore must be an unfailing spring of holy obedience; so it *unites the soul to CHRIST*; pleads his righteousness for justification, and derives strength from him as the head, for the acceptable performance of every commanded duty. Faith not only cloaths the soul with the spotless, mediatorial righteousness of CHRIST, whereby it is justified by an *imputed righteousness*; but it draws down the principles of a *personal, inherent* righteousness from CHRIST, as the head of divine influences.—It is continually deriving supplies of grace and strength from him in every time of need; and it engages the believer to *submit to*, and *observe*, the whole law of GOD.

HENCE, I observed to you, that from the *inherent value and excellency* of faith in itself, it appears to be every way worthy of being established by GOD, as the *grand and sole* condition of the salvation of sinners under the gospel. I have taken the larger review of these two former discourses on this text, that I may give some kind of connected view of the whole subject in this last discourse on it. I now proceed to the

IVth. GENERAL head, namely to shew the *universality* of the offer of this love to sinners of our lost world.

My brethren, did I really believe there was *any bar, any insurmountable obstacle* in the way of *any of my hearers*, to prevent them from embracing these glad tidings, and becoming eternally happy, through faith in the only begotten Son of God;—did I really believe that any *decree of reprobation* had, from the days of eternity, *fated* a number of you to hell, without any possibility of relief from the Saviour of mankind,—I protest, in my present way of thinking, I would not appear among you this day, in the character of a preacher of the gospel. Such a thought would damp my spirits, and close my mouth in silence:—Such a thought would cast a heavy and dismal cloud in my mind, over the *glorious gospel of the blessed God*, and would give me such a *narrow, contracted and disagreeable* idea of it, as would make me doubt of its *sincerity*, and consequently of its truth! I would tremble to think that I was making an offer of *the Saviour* and his *salvation* to many of my fellow sinners, who were under a natural impossibility of accepting them; and whose condemnation must yet be aggravated by their not accepting them. But it is my great comfort and happiness, that I think I have the fullest conviction of the contrary heart-reviving truth, —namely—“That the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and salvation through him, is *freely, and sincerely* offered to the *faith* and *acceptance* of every individual of my hearers; yea to every lost son and daughter of *Adam*;

and that nothing lies in our way to this salvation and happiness, if it be not *our own impenitency and unbelief.*"

ATTEND to the words of my text; "GOD so loved the world, &c. that whosoever believeth in him, may not perish, but have everlasting life." Observe the agreeable *indefinite* so often repeated—"whosoever"—"whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life."—The word in the original is, *πας*, *every one, any one*, whosoever he or she may be, of the race of *Adam*; of the lost inhabitants of this world! Let none of the guilty race, therefore, who will truly believe on the only begotten Son of GOD, despair. Think not that GOD deals *deceitfully*, or with any *bidden reserve* with you in this offer;—or that it is made only to *some* within the limits of *any certain decree*! The thought would be monstrously shocking! The blessed GOD would not thus tantalize his creatures, if any *were fatally excluded*. Such insincerity would be highly unworthy of him. The terms are *universal* in the *highest sense*. CHRIST is speaking of the *lost world in general*; and declares that *whosoever of this world* shall believe on the Son of GOD, shall not perish, but shall have eternal life.

THE same blessed lips have also declared elsewhere;—"Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out; and *whosoever will*, let him take of the water of life freely (a)." What an agreeable af-

(a) John vi. 37. Rev. xxii. 17.

farance is this from him who hath the final state of men at his disposal!

He blamed the *Jews* for "not coming to him that they might have life." This proves the thing was not impossible, otherwise his accusation of them would only have been *solemn mockery*!

THE *number* or *aggravations* of men's sins do not alter the case here: the reason is; the sinner is not received into favour, either in *whole* or in *part*, on the account of any personal qualification in himself, but solely on the account of the righteousness of JESUS CHRIST. Now this righteousness is perfectly equal to all the demands of the law, and therefore when this righteousness is made over to the sinner, by way of imputation through faith, the law has no more demands on him for *great* sins, than for *small*; for *many* sins, than for *few*; because all demands are satisfied by the obedience of CHRIST to the law. Sinners therefore of all characters, who believe in him, are put upon *an equality* in this respect: they are *all* admitted on *one common footing*, namely, the *righteousness of CHRIST*, and that is as sufficient for *one*, as for *another*. Accordingly we find that he has chosen some of the *most abandoned sinners*, to make them examples of the *virtue of faith*, and the *power of grace*; that none might, thro' the greatness of their sins, despair of obtaining salvation through faith in CHRIST. In the days of his flesh he shewed the greatest encouragement to *publicans, sinners, and prostitutes*, to come to him, and believe in him for pardon and salvation. Of this class, was that re-

markable and affectionate convert, *Mary Magdalene*. He commanded the first publication of pardon and life, after his resurrection, to be made at wicked, hell-deserving *Jerusalem*,—and *there faith and grace* triumphed in the pardon and salvation of thousands of his murderers. What monsters of sin became the monuments of his grace (through faith) at *Corinth*? “Fornicators, *idolaters*, adulterers, murderers, thieves, covetous, Sodomites, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners!—Such were many of them; yet they were washed, sanctified, and justified by faith in the name of *Jesus*, and by the Spirit of GOD (b).

WHAT says *Paul*? “This is a faithful saying; a saying that may be depended on, and worthy of all acceptation from a guilty world. That **JESUS CHRIST** came into the world to save sinners.” And what a miracle was *Paul* himself of this salvation by **CHRIST**, through faith? “Of which sinners, says he, I am *chief*: howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that, in me the chief of sinners (or one who have reason to deem myself enormously guilty above most others) **JESUS CHRIST** might shew forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them, which should hereafter *believe in him to life everlasting* (c).”—And now, after all this, what sinner needs to despair of salvation thro’ faith in **CHRIST**?—You see then, upon the whole, *my brethren*, that none of you are excluded from *Christ and life*, by the *greatness of your sins*; but if you perish, it must be from another cause;

(b) 1 Cor. vi. 9.

(c) 1 Tim. i. 15, 16.

it must be on account of your *wilful unbelief*, in not accepting of JESUS CHRIST as your Saviour?

BUT some will perhaps still object and say; "What avails the *richness*, the *freeness*, yea and the *universality* of the offer of CHRIST and salvation, since you say that *faith is the gift of GOD*, and that sinners cannot believe in CHRIST, nor receive him as he is offered in the gospel, without a *special gift of grace*; which, at the same time, they *cannot merit*? It is only tantalizing sinners to urge and persuade them to believe in CHRIST, when you know they have no power to do so:—for to have *no offer*, or to have *no power to embrace it*, is, to all intents and purposes, the same thing. I am a sinner: I have no power to believe: faith is the gift of GOD: when GOD is pleased to give me this gift, for which I must wait his own time and pleasure, then I will believe in CHRIST without intreaty; but, till then, all intreaties are as vain as addresses to the *dead!*"

To this objection I answer: it is true we have *no natural, inherent power* to believe in CHRIST. —Faith is *wholly the gift of GOD*, and the effect of his renewing grace: nor can we at all *merit or deserve* this grace.

BUT still I hold, in perfect consistence with this, that, to believe in CHRIST, and receive him by faith, is put in the power of every sinner under the gospel, by the gracious appointment of GOD. If this were not true, faith in CHRIST could not be made a *duty incumbent on all sinners* under the gospel;—nor could it be made the *matter of a command*, or of per-

suasions or *intreaties*, as we find it is frequently in the gospel.—“ Believe on the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and thou shalt be saved, and all thy house, says *Paul* to the jailor of *Philippi* (d).” And Jesus says to the wicked *Jews*, “ This is the work of GOD, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent (e):”—much less could *unbelief* be charged as the chief cause of the condemnation of sinners, if it was no how put within the reach of their power to believe on the SON of GOD:—for this would be to condemn sinners for not doing an *utter impossibility*. Both these scripture doctrines, therefore, must be *true*, and reconcilable with each other; otherwise the scriptures would be *contradictory*. It is then certain that faith is the gift of GOD: that no sinner is able *of himself* to believe in CHRIST; and that none will come unto CHRIST unless the Father draw them.—And it is also no less certain, that faith in CHRIST is some how or other put in the power of every sinner under the gospel;—otherwise all sinners would not be *commanded*, *exhorted*, and *persuaded* to believe; and threatened with an increased damnation if they do not. In order to reconcile this difficulty, I would observe,

1st, THAT altho' sinners can do nothing to *deserve* the *grace* of GOD and the gift of faith, yet they can do something towards obtaining it, in the way of GOD's gracious appointment. They can *consider*, *reflect* and *meditate*: they can *shun gross sins* and *evil company*: they can *read their bibles*; and *attend*

(d) Acts xvi. 31.

(e) John vi. 39.

the ordinances of grace; yea they can pray for the Spirit, and it seems that in some sort acceptably too:—and altho' their best prayers merit damnation, yet God hath graciously encouraged them to ask and pray for his Holy Spirit; with a promise, that if they do, he shall be given to them. And if he is given to them, then they are enabled to believe in the only begotten Son of God. If it should be said that this natural use of means, and these imperfect prayers of the wicked, have no merit in them to obtain God's grace,—it is readily granted that they have not:—but if God has been graciously pleased to affix the promises of his Spirit and grace, to these prayers and endeavours of the sinner,—then God hath bound himself to a performance; and we should admire his mercy and goodness in doing so. Besides; it is in the use of these means that God hath promised to give converting and sanctifying grace and faith; and sinners have all the encouragements in the world to expect the blessing from God, in the diligent use of these means. "Faith cometh by hearing the word of God." Conviction comes by light in the understanding, and light in the understanding, by meditating on divine truth. It is reasonable for sinners to expect the gift of faith from God, while they are actually contemplating, as well as they can, on the love, power, grace, and excellency of his Son.—Not that these endeavours of the sinner deserve this grace; but because these are the means, in the use of which God has graciously promised to communicate it.

2dly. God hath given a measure of common grace

to every sinner under the gospel. The Spirit of God strives more or less with all sinners. If sinners have any *good thoughts* or *dispositions*, they are from *this source*; for of themselves they cannot so much as think a good thought (*f*). Now sinners may certainly either *comply* with these common motions of the Spirit, or *reject* and *oppose* them. When they do the *latter*, they are said to *resist*, and *quench* and *grieve* the Spirit of God. And if sinners could not comply with these motions of the Spirit; they could not properly be condemned or punished for *grieving*, *resisting* or *quenching* them. Now by *cherishing*, and *complying* with these motions, the Spirit would have still more and more *room* and *ingress* into the heart, till at length those influences of the Spirit, which were at first *common* and *resistible*, would at length become *effectual* and *saving*. Nor let us imagine, that this compliance with the common operations of the Spirit, implies *any merit* in the sinner. It is no *act* or *exertion* of power in him; it is only *submitting* to the operations of the Spirit, and being led by his dictates. For tho' there is great *iniquity* and *rebellion*, in *resisting* and *opposing* the motions of the Spirit, yet there is *properly no merit* in *complying* with them; so that salvation is still, in this case, *wholly of grace*, and no part of it ascribable to *merit* or *works* in the sinner. God has still the *undivided glory* of our salvation; and the sinner is still a *debtor* to *free and unmerited grace*.

HERE, then, is every obstacle removed out of the

(*f*.) 2 Cor. iii. 5.

way of sinners, but their own *perverse obstinacy* and *loathful security*. Here is a door wide enough for you all to enter into eternal life by faith. And now, since all obstructions are removed, on God's part, that lie in the way of our salvation, why should we not all be saved together? What is there to hinder our crowding into heaven promiscuously? Or what excuse shall we find if we shut ourselves out? "Come then, enter in, *my fellow sinners*, even such of you as may have formerly claimed a horrid precedency in sin, and been ring-leaders in vice.—Come now, take the lead and shew others the way to JESUS CHRIST and eternal life!—Come, *barlots, publicans, thieves and murderers*, if there be *such* among you * ;" even for you there is salvation. If you will but believe in the only begotten Son of GOD, believing on him you shall not perish, but have everlasting life. I might now proceed to the

Vth. AND last head of discourse, namely, to shew the impossibility of our being saved, and the certainty of our destruction, if we continue to *reject this offer*, and *neglect this condition*. But indeed the whole tenor of the discourse tends to prove this, and the words of our text clearly imply it. The question, *my friends*, is of a *guilty and perishing* world of sinners for and to whom GOD, out of his amazing benevolence, gave his only begotten Son, that, becoming their Redeemer, he might *seek and save* them. The *only condition* which GOD hath proposed to this lost world of sinners (upon which they may escape pe-

* Davics.

nishing under the guilt of their sins, and obtain pardon and everlasting life) is, that they should *believe in this Saviour*—i. e. that they should *thankfully accept of* and *receive him* agreeable to the Father's offer, and submit to be *guided, ruled, and saved by him, in his own way!* This is GOD's declared method of saving sinners; and it is his *only method*. He hath not published or established any other; nay, he hath declared that he will neither *admit of*, nor *accept* any other. He hath not said that men may be *justified and saved by any works, or merits, or righteousness* of their own; or by their obedience to any laws, *moral, natural, judicial or ceremonial*;—or in virtue of any particular *form or profession* of religion;—nay, he hath declared the express contrary. He hath declared that the law is *weak and unable to save us, thro' the flesh*; i. e. thro' the corruption of our nature. Not that GOD hath any objection to his creatures obtaining life thro' obedience to the law: this was the very term upon which *Adam* was to seek for life. But the thing is now wholly impossible to us. We are sinful creatures, and therefore no obedience which we can pay to any law of GOD, can possibly justify us. Indeed the apostle tells us, “that if there had been a law given which could have given life to such creatures as we, verily righteousness should have been by the law, and Christ would have never died in vain; but it seems the thing could not be; it was impossible in its own nature; and therefore the scripture hath *concluded all under sin; all in a guilty, perishing state*, incapable of being saved by their obe-

dience to any law that the promise of the gospel by the faith of JESUS CHRIST, might be given to them that believe:—"Knowing therefore, *says the apostle*, that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but *only* by the faith of JESUS CHRIST, even we have believed in JESUS CHRIST, that we might be justified by faith in CHRIST, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified (g)." Faith then, you see, is the *only, exclusive* condition of salvation to lost sinners established by GOD;—and for any sinner to imagine that this *condition* may be dispensed with, or that GOD will accept of *any other condition* of his own making or contriving in the room of it,—such as *penances, mortifications, religious professions, a formal attendance on ordinances, zeal for parties, good works, or what sinners call sincere endeavours and moral righteousness*, is certainly the *greatest folly*;—nay, *it is more*; it is *treason and rebellion*, under a pretence of pleasing GOD.

IN a word; if ever sinners expect to be saved; it must be in GOD's *own appointed established way*; it must be thro' faith in CHRIST; and not in any *invented, contrived way* of their own, how plausible soever that may be. GOD will have sinners saved in *his own way*, otherwise they *must perish* and come short of eternal life, with all their fond conceits about them. —"He that believeth and is baptized, *shall be saved*; but he that believeth not shall be *damned*, whatever he may do besides.—Yea, he is condemned *already*."

(g) Gal. ii. 26. iii. 21. 22.

because he hath not believed on the only begotten Son of GOD. "If ye believe not in Christ, ye must die in your sins." Heaven *will* not save you, and ye *cannot* save yourselves.

APPLICATION.

PERMIT ME NOW to hold a treaty with my fellow-sinners about your reconciliation with GOD, thro' his only begotten Son. I have been opening to you the method of salvation thro' JESUS CHRIST—the only method in which you can be saved: "For there is none other name given under heaven among men, whereby you must be saved, but the name of JESUS of Nazareth (*b*);" and there is none other way of being saved by him, but in the way of faith producing obedience; by gratefully accepting him from the Father, and consenting to be saved by him in his own way and on his own terms. I would therefore now bring the matter home, and propose it to all my hearers and to all the sinners of mankind to whom these plain discourses may reach, to consent to be saved in this method; or, in other words, "to believe on the only begotten Son of GOD, that you may not perish, but have everlasting life thro' his name." This is surely the most important proposal that ever was made by indulgent heaven to lost, sinful, miserable man, and if ever mankind should consider us who are by office stewards of the mysteries of GOD to be in earnest and greatly anxious about the manner in which our messages are received, it surely ought to be while we are, in the name and by the authority of the great GOD,

(*b*) ACTS iv. 12.

making them this all-important proposal in which *their all*, their eternal interests are concerned. The thing we are here in treaty with you about is not a small, light, trivial matter, it is *your life*, the life and happiness of your immortal part! It therefore claims your whole undivided attention, being *the one thing needful*;

“ Which done, the poorest can no wants endure ;

“ And which not done, the richest must be poor !

“ This is the record which GOD hath given of his Son, that GOD hath given unto us eternal life, and that this life is *in his Son* ; so that he who *hath the Son*, hath life—but he who *hath not the Son*, i. e. believeth not on him, hath not life, but the wrath of GOD abideth on him (i).” “ GOD is in Christ reconciling a guilty world to himself, and hath given unto us his unworthy servants the ministry of reconciliation. So that as ambassadors for Christ, even as tho’ GOD himself did condescend to come down from heaven, and entering into us, speak thro’ our organs, and beseech us by our tongues, we are to pray you in CHRIST’S stead that ye be reconciled to GOD, and not any longer oppose or neglect his method of salvation by faith in and union to CHRIST (k).” O, *my dear friends*, if ever you had ears to hear, or hearts to receive a proposal, let it be this ; and if it can enter into your hearts to believe that GOD and his ministers are ever earnestly engaged and deeply solicitous about the suc-

(i) 1 John v. 11, 12. (k) 2 Cor. v. 19, 20.

cesses of any tender they make to you, believe that it is *here*. Here, my dear brethren, centers the grand design of our ministry—even in this *single point*, that sinful men lay down their rebellious weapons and be reconciled unto GOD, thro' faith in Jesus Christ. If we carry not this point with you, we do nothing to purpose:—if we effectuate this matter, we do all that you need and that GOD requires. What would it avail *us* or *you*, if we could make you *sober* or *civilized*, or attenders on GOD's public ordinances and sacraments, if we still left you short of CHRIST and reconciliation to GOD thro' him? To be near the kingdom of heaven, and yet not to enter in, but to behold the glory and happiness of the blessed at an unapproachable distance, thro' the impassable gulf, and from the regions of misery, will probably prove an aggravating circumstance of our wretchedness.

I HAVE taken some pains to convince you that there is no decree of GOD, no insurmountable obstacle in your way to CHRIST and compleat salvation through him. I have told you that altho' faith is the *gift of GOD* and the *fruit of his Spirit*, yet this gift and this Spirit are freely held out to sinners in the gospel offer, without *money*, *price*, or any other qualification than asking and receiving;—that God encourages the worst of you to pray for this Spirit;—that he is even now knocking at the doors of your hearts, working in you, secretly moving and inclining you to open to him and admit him, and to be reconciled unto GOD thro' his Son JESUS CHRIST; and that if you cherish and comply with these motions, GOD will

give you higher and more effectual supplies of his grace ;—but that if you continue to resist and quench the Spirit, he will in just judgment withdraw his abused influences from you, and leave you to your own natural *blindness of mind and hardness of heart.*

GOD hath also laid all the external evidences of faith before you, and calls you to consider them. You have *abundant reason* to believe that CHRIST is the Son of GOD and Saviour of the world, from the ancient prophecies concerning him, and their fulfilment in him, from his Father's testimony to him—his own miraculous works, and above all, his resurrection from the dead—from the surprising spread of his religion against every species of opposition, and its firm establishment in the world at this day—and from the glorious change it has made in the hearts and lives of many thousands of your fellow-creatures—many of whom, who are far above the suspicion either of fraud or enthusiasm, can sincerely assure you that they have the undeceiving witness within themselves both of the *truth* and *divinity* of this religion. What excuse then can you have for not believing on the only begotten Son of GOD ? And why will you not come unto him that you may have eternal life ? You are drawn by the force of external evidence : you are drawn by the gospel call : you are drawn by the Spirit : you are drawn by your own perishing condition—by the necessity of salvation—and by the glorious nature and benefits of that salvation—and will you resist all these united attractions—all these combined forces ? Will you be rebels against your CREATOR, your REDEEM-

ER, your SANCTIFIER, your interest and your happiness? Will you not turn from your wicked ways and live, when GOD not only declares that he can have no pleasure in your destruction, but is even reaching forth his gracious hand to snatch you from the gates of perdition? Let me therefore seriously repeat this proposal to every one of my hearers, and let your own consciences bear witness that it has been repeated to you, and urged upon you. The matter will not admit of delay, and the duty is *so plain, so reasonable, so beneficial*, that there is no need of time to deliberate: will you therefore, or will you not this day believe on the only begotten Son of GOD? —Will you, or will you not accept of him as your Saviour agreeable to the Father's offer? —Will you, or will you not submit to him under his prophetic and kingly offices, and embrace his sacrifice as your atonement? —Will you, or will you not put yourself wholly under his authority and guidance, to be ruled and saved by him in his own way?

LET not the badness of your nature, or the mountainous load of your guilt deter any of you from consenting to GOD's gracious covenant. You are invited to come to CHRIST just as you are, with all your sins (save unbelief) about you, as the *sick* to a *physician*, or as the *lost* to a *Redeemer*. Whoever of you shall, this day, as guilty, unworthy, self-condemned and self-loathing sinners, believe on the only begotten Son of GOD as your Saviour, and fall in with this *self-humbling* and *God-exalting* method of salvation; such shall in no wise perish, but have everlasting life

—such shall go away from this house in a state of reconciliation with GOD, and *begun* salvation. To this I therefore exhort and urge you by the authority of GOD, whose great commandment it is to sinners to believe on him whom he hath sent into the world.— To this I earnestly exhort and urge you by the LORD JESUS CHRIST who died for sinners, and came to seek and save the *chief*—by your own perishing necessity—by the immense blessings proposed in the gospel—and by the heavy doom pronounced against all unbelievers!

BUT is there no reason to fear that many of my dear hearers, as usual, will refuse to comply with this proposal, some from the love of sin, with which they seem to have made a covenant, and of death and hell, with whom they seem to have made an agreement, and others thro' mere indolence, and from a want of considering the matters proposed? Are you all this day persuaded to believe on and embrace the only begotten Son of GOD?—If so, I am authorized to pronounce you *blessed* in the name of the LORD: “For blessed are all they that put their trust in him; there is no condemnation to them that are in CHRIST JESUS, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.”—But if not, I must, in the same awful name, pronounce your doom. Be it therefore known unto you, O my fellow-sinners, from the living GOD, that if you thus continue in unbelief, you wilfully exclude yourselves from eternal life, and all the mercy of heaven can avail you nothing. Whatever plausible pretences, flattering hopes, or splendid appear-

ances of virtue you may have; whatever may be your professions or expectations, yet they must be all deceitful and delusory, seeing the express sentence of the gospel lies in full force against your souls—"If ye believe not in me, ye shall die in your sins. He that believeth not shall be damned. He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed on the only begotten Son of God. This is the work of God (by way of eminence) that ye believe on him whom he hath sent into the world." This, you see, is not a doctrine obscurely or infrequently revealed, but clearly expressed and frequently repeated, that the dullest of apprehension, the most inattentive sinner may not be able to mistake or overlook it. Will not therefore this doom so often pronounced by the lips of the Redeemer himself awaken my unbelieving hearers? Will you *risk the certainty* (if I may use a solecism) of *perishing*—of *thus perishing*, not only under the curse of a broken law, but under the inexpressively heavier curse of a Saviour's profaned blood, rejected grace and despised gospel! O that God, by his Spirit, would open the eyes of all unbelieving sinners to see the miseries that are speedily coming upon them; that they might be thus effectually alarmed and awakened from their security, and engaged in earnest to flee for refuge to the mercy of God, and to believe in his only begotten Son, that so they might not perish, but have everlasting life. Amen.

S E R M O N XV.

The goodness and pleasantness of Unity among Christian brethren, from

PSAL. cxxxiii. i, &c.

Behold! how good and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity. It is like the precious ointment, that ran down upon the beard, &c.

THAT beautiful unity and simplicity of design which is discoverable in all the works and ways of God, is a striking character of wisdom. The fewer and more simple the *causes* are, and the more numerous, beneficial and important the *effects* which flow from them, the more forcibly we are struck with the wisdom of the contrivance. The simplicity of Sir *Isaac Newton's* system, is a strong presumption of its truth. That wonderful man has rationally accounted for the motion and regulation of the whole machinery of the material world, by two or three simple laws of nature, namely, *motion* (or projectile force) *attraction* and *gravitation*. He may be said to have proved demonstratively, that all material bodies, whe-

ther greater or lesser, are formed by the simple law of *attraction*, from the to us invisible, and next to infinitely minute atoms or corpuscles of matter ;— and that it is to this law the various combinations of matter, their forms, shapes, density, colours, tastes, and every other sensible property, which belongs to a solid extended substance is owing.—From the law of *projectile force* he has deduced the amazingly rapid movements of planets and comets ;—and by the law of *gravitation*, if I may so speak, he has balanced the material system of the universe, and accounted for that amazing regularity and symmetry of the motions and revolutions of the heavenly bodies, whereby *eclipses, transits* and other *phaenomena* are calculated with the greatest precision, hundreds of years before they happen.

IF we descend from these *general* laws of nature, to those that may be deemed *more local* and *particular*, we shall still be struck with the same grand *unity* and *simplicity* of design and operation in the DEITY !

THAT remarkable analogy between the propagation of *plants* and *animals*, which has been discovered by a late *cultivated* and *improved* philosophy, has opened a new world of wonders to the curious and inquisitive mind ;—as has also the *doctrine of light* and *colours* discovered by the *immortal Newton*. And I make no manner of doubt at all, but that the more *true philosophy* is cultivated and improved, the more evidently will the *unity* and *simplicity* of GOD'S designs and operations appear, both in his government

of the *natural* and *moral* worlds;—and that many of those numerous laws of nature, which we now imagine to be *original* and *independent* on any other; may be yet traced up as *branches*, or *remote effects* of those *primary* laws already mentioned:—by all which, the children of men will still have a clearer demonstration of the propriety of that *sublime scriptural eulogium* of GOD;—“That he is WONDERFUL IN COUNSEL, EXCELLENT IN WORKING; WISE IN HEART, and MIGHTY IN DEED (a).”

If my hearers should ask, *whither* all these philosophical reflections tend?—I answer;—merely to introduce another grand and striking analogy between the *physical* and *moral* worlds.

WHAT the law of attraction is in the *material* or *physical* world, the same is the *law of love* in the *moral* or *spiritual* world. Invisible and impalpable atoms are formed into solid bodies, and acquire extension, colour, shape, proportion and beauty by the law of attraction:—souls or spirits are formed into social, domestic and political *unities*, by the law of love.

LOVE, in short, is the *law of attraction*, in the moral world;—it is the *cement of souls*,—the source of all virtuous unity,—the bond which knits and unites together—and that secret charm which gives *strength* and *solidity*, *form*, *proportion*, and *beauty* to every society of rational beings.

I MIGHT add still farther, That *love* is much the same to the moral world, which the *sun* is to the na-

(a) Isa. xxviii. 29.

tural. As the sun, by its warming and vivifying influences gives fertility to the earth, and draws forth all the principles of vegetation into exercise; as it is the grand source of *animal, vegetable and mineral* productions, in the world of nature:—so *love* is the very *life and soul* of all our moral actions.—It *warms and fructifies* the soul, and is that capital principle which elicits and cherishes all the moral virtues towards GOD and *man*, and makes them grow and flourish in the soul.

LOVE, therefore, is a primary law and principle of natural religion. It is congenial to the rational nature, and never could have been lost but by apostasy and rebellion, and by an entire effacing of that moral image of the Creator, which he at first impressed on the spirits of all his rational off-spring.

AND here, my friends, let me just observe, in its proper place, that it is a strong presumption of the truth and divinity of *revealed religion*, that it appears evidently to be its leading design to *renew this glorious part of the lost image of GOD* on the souls of his human creatures, and to restore *love, peace, unity and harmony* among men;—to reconcile men to GOD and to each other, and to reduce their exorbitant jarring passions to the government of reason, and the rule of GOD's law.

THERE is nothing which more strongly marks and characterizes the genius of Christianity, and which it more powerfully inculcates, than *love and unity*; and yet, perhaps, there is nothing which, at this day, is less practised among Christians:—which shews

how far we come short of the *truth* and *spirit* of that religion which we profess, and how little right we have to be called the *disciples of Jesus*, the *Lord of love* and *prince of peace*.

REVEALED religion presents us with four grand *unities*. The *first* is what *divines* term the *hypostatic* union of the three *persons* or *subsistences* of the adorable Trinity, in one essence or GOD: and probably the *unity* and *harmony* of these persons among themselves, may constitute the ineffable glory and felicity of the Supreme Being, the fountain of love and harmony.

THE *second* is that inexpressible union subsisting between the divine *Logos*, or the second person, of the Trinity, and the man *Jesus*, which constitutes that glorious and mysterious person, the *GOD-man Mediator*. But as these two unities are wholly peculiar and supernatural, they are only the objects of *faith* and *adoration*, and afford no pattern or resemblance of any unities among men.

THE *third* is the mystical union between Christ and his church; the *nexus* of which on the part of Christ, is the influences of his regenerating and sanctifying Spirit; and on the part of the believer, *faith* and *love*. Nor is this union merely *relative* or *political*, such as that between disciples and their master, or subjects and their king; but *real* and *physical*, such as that which subsists between the vine and its branches; the head of a natural body and its members, or the foundation in a building and its superstructure. Thus, by this mystical union, Christ

is represented as *living, dwelling and abiding* in believers, as his spiritual temples, and the members of his mystical body; and they are said, to grow up in him 'in all things, who is the head. This is one of the most glorious mysteries of the Christian religion, without a right knowledge of which we shall never understand the necessity of spiritual regeneration, or know wherein true Christianity consists. Now, this *mystical union* between Christ and his church, lays the foundation, and paves the way for

THE *fourth* grand' unity held forth to us in the gospel,—namely—"The *communion of saints, or the great Christian Brotherhood.*" Now

THE great, common and universal tie of humanity;—GOD'S having made of one blood all nations who dwell on the face of the whole earth;—the sameness of nature, wants, weakness, passions and affections among men;—their common origin from the same stock;—their dwelling together as fellow-citizens of the same world; and their common tendency to the same death and eternity, altho' merely *natural bonds*, yet they should be strong enough to unite mankind together into *one great fraternity*, and inspire them with sentiments of mutual love, charity, justice, mercy and reciprocal good offices towards each other. And this is that noble lesson of sublime morality taught by our Saviour, in the parable of the stranger which fell amongst thieves (a).

BUT the bond which forms the *communion of the saints*, should be incomparably stronger, than the tie

(a) Luke x. 30; &c.

of humanity; because in the unity of the Christian brotherhood, the supernatural influence of grace, is superadded to the natural tie of humanity.

CHRISTIANS are not only linked together by the common ties of humanity, as other men; but if they are indeed true Christians, they have received a *new spirit*, and a *new and divine nature* from Christ their living and life-giving head. He lives in them, and animates them by *one common spirit*, which assimilates them to him and to each other, and unites them in the sacred and indissoluble bonds of a divine and heavenly love; so that it is agreeable to the renewed nature of all true Christians, so far as they know each other, to *love the brotherhood*; to love one another, *without dissimulation*; *with a pure heart, fervently*; not *in word* and *in tongue*, but *in deed* and *in truth*; and, as they love him who begat, to love them that are begotten also (b).

AND therefore, whatever names the members of this communion of the saints may bear, or may have borne;—in whatever age, or under whatever dispensation they may have lived;—under whatever denomination, or form of church government they may have classed themselves; whether *Patriarchs, Jews* or *Christians*; the churches of *Greece, Rome* or *Africa*; *Catholics* or *Protestants*; *Lutherans* or *Calvinists*, yet they are, and *must have been*, of *one heart* and of *one mind* in all things *necessary* and *essential*. They have all imbibed the same spirit of faith, of love, and of a sound mind from Christ, their common head.

(b) 1 John v. 1.

They have all *one faith, one hope, one baptism*. They all run in the same *steady and invariable* course of virtue and goodness; and are all the happy heirs of the same glorious hope and inheritance: for being all *quicken'd and animat'd by the same Spirit*, and all members of the *same mystical body*, they must needs be *all at unity*; all of the *same heart* and of the same mind, in *all things truly necessary and essential*: and, therefore, all those things in which they differ, must needs be *utterly unessential to true, real and saving religion*.

THIS, my brethren, is the ONE, GLORIOUS, CHRISTIAN BROTHERHOOD!—The one *truly catholic, apostolic, universal, invisible* church of Christ, both in heaven and on earth, which he hath *redeem'd by his blood*, and *sanctified by his Spirit* out of every *age, nation, kindred and religion* upon earth:—not, indeed, under *any one visible head* upon earth; but under *one, glorious, invisible head* in heaven;—even Jesus Christ, whom God hath made *head over all things* for the good of his church universal (c).

SOME imagine that *David* penned this psalm to promote *domestic* peace and unity among his sons, who much needed such a lesson; but it is much more probable that the Psalmist's design was far more *catholic and extensive*. The tribes of *Israel* had long pursued separate and discordant interests under their *judges*, which had been very pernicious to the state: but being united now under *one head*, and formed into *one Kingdom*, he seems, in this psalm, to point out to them

(c) Ephes. i. 22

the unspeakable advantage of *unity* and *unanimity* in all their counsels and measures.

AND, indeed, let us consider society in what view we will, whether as *domestic*, *political*, or *religious*, we will still find that *unity* and *unanimity* is its capital *strength*, *beauty* and *ornaments*.

“ BEHOLD, says the Psalmist, how *good* and how *pleasant* it is, for brethren to dwell together in *unity*!”
 —It is *good in itself*; being agreeable to the will of God, and to the original law and constitution of our nature.—It is *good for us*; being advancive of our highest honour, interest and happiness.—It is *good for others*; as it promotes the general good of society, and sets before mankind an example which it will be their honour and happiness to imitate.—It is also *pleasant*; *pleasing* to those who practise it, and *amiable* in the eyes of all who behold it. Behold how *good* and how *pleasant* it is! Attentively consider the unspeakable benefits and advantages derived from this *unity* and *unanimity* to every kind of society!

THIS *goodness* and *pleasantness* of *unity* among brethren, is here beautifully illustrated

1st. By the precious oil with which the high-priest was anointed, at his consecration, and

2dly. By the dew which fell on mount *Hermon* and mount *Sion*.

THIS precious oil was a high and rich perfume: it was exceeding fragrant, diffusing its odour to all around; especially when it was poured upon the head of the high-priest so plentifully, that it ran down his face, even to the collar or binding of his garment: ♣

lively emblem of the fragrancy and agreeableness of brotherly love and unity to every spectator and beholder, who cannot but be delighted and charmed with such a spectacle! This oil was also exceeding *precious* and *rare*; prepared of the most costly ingredients, and by a divine recipe. The like of it was not to be prepared for common use. In all these respects, therefore, it was a fit emblem of that *holy unity* and *fraternal love* which arises from a divine principle; is so rare and valuable in itself; so pleasing to GOD, and so amiable and ornamental in men.

AND as this unity is *ornamental* and *decorous*, so it is also highly *profitable*: "It is as the dew of *Hermon*, and as the dew which descendeth upon the mountains of *Sion*." *Hermon* was a *common*, and *Sion* was a *sacred hill*; by which the Psalmist would probably insinuate, that *unity* and *unanimity* are of equal utility both to *civil* and *religious* societies. Brotherly love is like *the dew*: it brings blessings with it numerous as the drops of dew from the womb of the morning. It cools the scorching heat of men's passions, as the evening dew cools the air and refreshes the earth. It *meliorates*, *entenders* and *fertilizes* the hearts of men; prepares them for receiving and cherishing every good principle and impression, and renders them abundantly fruitful in every thing virtuous and praise-worthy. The precious fruits of both *Hermon* and *Sion*, both of *civil* and *religious* societies, must soon fade and wither away, without the refreshing and fructifying dew of brotherly love and unity. It is very remarkable to

this purpose, that when the apostle exhorts Christians "to receive with meekness, as new-born babes, the sincere milk of the word, that they might grow thereby;" he earnestly exhorts them, as a necessary prerequisite to this, to "lay aside all *malice*, and *guile*, and *hypocrisies*, and *envies*, and *evil-speakings*;"—well knowing that the word of GOD could never take root in the same soil with these poisonous weeds; these unfriendly, unfocial passions (σ).

AND then to crown this charming description of brotherly love and unity, the Psalmist adds, That *there*, namely, where brotherly love and unity prevail—"there the LORD commandeth the blessing, even *life for ever more*." The blessing of GOD attends and rewards this temper. The very GOD of *peace*, *love* and *harmony* will dwell among those brethren who live together in unity, and command the blessing upon them. He will give them *peace* and *happiness* in their unity *here*, and finally *life for ever more* in that world of *light*, *love* and *harmony*, where friendly kindred spirits will be inseparably united, without one discordant sentiment or passion, thro' eternal ages.

SUCH is the amiable nature, and such are the blessed effects of unity among brethren.

THE word *brother* in the *Hebrew* tongue, is derived from a root which signifies *one*, or *unity*, or *sameness*; and is used with a great latitude in the Old Testament scriptures, where it signifies not only a *brother*, properly so called; but also a *relation* or *kinsman* of any kind either by affinity or consanguinity, a *neigh-*

(c) 2 Pet. ii. 2.

bour, or one of the same *nation*, *profession*, *religion*, or *manners*, or who is united to another by the ties of *friendship* (*f*). The Greek word ἀδελφω, although it properly signifies *those who tumbled together in the same womb*, yet it is used in the New Testament with nearly the same latitude, and comprehends almost every social and relative connection among men; and it is in a very special manner used to express that intimate *love*, *affection* and *unity* which should subsist among *Christians* (*g*).

THIS unity among brethren does not necessarily suppose that they should be precisely of the same opinion and way of thinking in all things. There is indeed doubtless such a thing as *truth in opinion*, which truth is but *one*: and it ought certainly to be the endeavour of Christian brethren, as much as possible, to be of *the same mind*, and to aim at *unity of spirit in the bond of truth* in all things. Christians are doubtless tending to that state of perfection in light and knowledge, where this perfect unity of opinion will take place; where they will behold all things in their true natures, and in a light which will preclude the possibility of error and deception—and they should be aiming at *oneness of faith*, and *unity of opinion*, while travelling together in the way to this world of perfect light: but such is the multiplicity of objects about which human opinion is concerned; such is the diversity of human capacities for dis-

(*f*) Gen. xiv. 14. Lev. xxv. 46. xlx. 17. Prov. xviii. 19. Gen. xiii. 8, &c. &c. (*g*) Mat. xxiii. 8. John xxi. 23. Acts vii. 26. xi. 29. Rom. xii. 10, &c.

cerning truth ; the different mediums through which men view objects ; the different degrees of advantage with which they behold them, and the different passions, prejudices, and prepossessions of men, arising from diversities of constitution, education or social connexions in life—all of which more or less influence and diversify *human opinions and judgments*, that it is nearly as absurd to expect that *all men* should be at *perfect unity of sentiment and opinion*, in the whole extent of human knowledge, as that *all men* should have the *same features, complexion, and temperature* of body.—Hence the absurdity of compelling whole kingdoms and empires to *think and believe* and speak the same things, in every article of a long creed !—Hence the absurdity of fining, imprisoning and burning men for what is called *heresy* or *heterodoxy* of opinion ; as though these coercive methods could force mankind into a right faith or opinion, or cause them to think and believe against their highest evidence ;—or, as though there could be any merit in an *extorted profession*, against a man's *inward and real sentiments* !

SUCH an unity as this has never yet obtained in the Christian world. It is evidently but a *mere name* in that church which has pretended to the *reality* of it—and indeed it is not easy to conceive how it ever should obtain in the present dark, cloudy and imperfect state.

YET there must subsist such an unity even of sentiment and opinion among Christian brethren, as may lay the foundation for mutual *love, esteem, commu-*

nion, and every Christian duty and good office thence arising. Without this there could be no *communion of the saints*. All Christians must, in a very important sense of the words, be agreed in "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one hope of their calling, endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." This is called by the apostle, "*The unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.*" And in order that they may keep up this necessary unity, while they differ and disagree in less essential matters, the apostle shews how necessary it is "that they should walk with all lowliness, meekness and long-suffering, forbearing one another in love (b)."—But then this unity is *only* necessary, and can *only* happen, in *essential* and *fundamental* doctrines, the number of which is not, perhaps, very great, nor can it be easily ascertained.

BUT the grand unity among brethren, is that of the *heart* and *affections*. They should dwell together in unity; dwell even *as one*, as the words may be translated, having *one heart, one soul, and one interest*. Nor is there any good reason at all why Christian brethren, who *hold the head*, and are agreed in the great essentials of religion, should not dwell together in the most perfect harmony of affections, and love one another with a pure heart fervently, notwithstanding many lesser differences in opinion. I do not mean that this unity of affection among Christian brethren should in all cases, carry them so far as to *constant, external church-communion*; because there

(b) Ephes. iv. 2,—13.

may be many things in the modes, ceremonies, usages, and even doctrines of one Christian church, which, being either wrong in themselves, or at least contrary to the prejudices of Christians otherwise educated and principled, may so offend their consciences, and mar their devotions, as to prevent their edification—and thereby render it highly inexpedient for them to maintain constant external church-communion with such societies of Christians. Nay, I am not even certain that *occasional* church communion with such societies, can answer any very good end in the Christian world; unless those who hold it, are clear in the matter, that there is nothing essentially wrong in the church with which they thus communicate: for altho' *occasional communion* has a specious appearance of *generosity* and *candour*, and is a high proof of our *charity* for that church with which we hold it; yet where there is the least remaining doubt of its *lawfulness* or *expediency*, it is certainly much too costly a sacrifice for a weak and doubting conscience. Besides; I am not clear that it is consistent with Christian sincerity, and with that hatred which we ought to bear to every false way, to countenance even the *smallest errors* in circumstances by occasional communion with churches, in which we think there are many deviations from the purity and simplicity of Christian worship. Every man, however, has undoubtedly a right to think for himself, and be satisfied in his own mind about these matters: and happy is he who, in all things he does, has the full and explicit approbation of his own conscience.

THE unity I am pleading for here, as *necessary*

and *essential* among all Christians who hold the head, is such a harmony of affection as may unite them all in *the common cause* against the *common enemy*; as consists in an unfeigned love of each other as members of the same mystical body, which prompts them not only to pray for, and wish well to each other, but also to a ready mutual intercourse of, all good and Christian offices.

THIS love and benevolence may and will, I confess, have its degrees of fervour and liberality, according to the greater or smaller degrees of unity of sentiment, ties of nature, similarity of temper, personal attachment, ecclesiastical or political connexions, &c. which may subsist among Christians; but towards *all* it will be *sincere, pure, unfeigned, ready to distribute, and willing to communicate*. Every Christian brother, which it believes to be such, will it embrace, and to none will it refuse that *love, that compassion, that mercy, that succour*, which they stand in need of, and which it can afford. All this is implied in those *strong, expressive, and comprehensive* gospel precepts; "Love as brethren: love the brotherhood: love one another with a pure heart, fervently: be kind, affectionate, tender-hearted, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another: let brotherly love prevail, and be without dissimulation: love not only in *word* and in *tongue*, but in *deed* and in *truth*: if ye say to a brother or sister, who is naked or destitute of daily food, depart in peace, be ye warmed and be ye filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful for the body; what doth it profit? Do good

unto all; especially to those of the household of faith." This, *my brethren*, is the *law of Christian love and unity*, and he who acts not up to the spirit of it, is so far defective in the Christian character. His religion is a *name*, but not the *thing* or *reality*. Being destitute of charity, and that unifying spirit which results from it, it profiteth nothing.

LOVE is the parent of *unity*; it draws and cements men together: and *unity*, on the other hand, strengthens and perfects *love*. Indeed these two principles act reciprocally on each other. There must be a certain conformity of sentiments and dispositions in order to create love; and love, when it is once enkindled, encreases this conformity, and so strengthens and confirms the union of the parties. Christians, who are such indeed and in truth, being all quickened and animated with the same spirit of love and of a sound mind, have the principle of this unity within themselves; and tho' it may be at some times impeded in its operations by the remains of selfish passions and unmortified corruptions, yet it ever tends to *love, peace and concord*; and the soul of a true Christian never feels a *satisfying rest* but in this happy temper and state. If it feels itself disunited in heart and affections from its Christian brethren, or them from it, it is unhappy 'till the obstructing cause is removed, and *peace, love and unity* re-established. It is in a state of pain and anxiety, like a dislocated joint, or a member nearly severed from the body, until this happy event is accomplished.

THE Christian spirit, as it unites all the members

to the head, so it also unites them to each other by the bond of love. Indeed it is the *one spirit* which pervades and animates *the whole mystical body* of which Christ is the head, and therefore cannot vary or differ from itself. As it exists in many individuals, it may not be always able to assign proper reasons of its attractions to the other members, and to the whole body; but it *feels* and *acknowledges* the influence of this attraction, and cannot be reasoned out of these cogent and powerful feelings. Christianity, indeed, consists more in the sentiments of the heart, than in the reason and philosophy of the head: not that it is not supported by the highest reasons; but because it is chiefly practised by the virtue of *kindly* but *powerful* feelings of the heart, which are the product of a *new* and *divine* nature.

So much for the general doctrine of my text: I would now beg leave to improve it to some doctrinal and practical uses.—And

- 1st. **THE** unity here so much extolled by the *Psalmist*, is a *religious*, or at least a *virtuous* unity. There are combinations in fraud and villany, in oppression and robbery, which are so far from being *virtues*, that they are the blackest and most opprobrious *vices*. Wicked men are often drawn and banded together, by a similarity of vicious temper and disposition, and united in the most iniquitous designs. But the unity of Christian brethren, is a *virtuous* unity: it is a harmony in *moral* and *Christian sentiments and affections*, which has for its principle a *new* and *divine* nature, and for its aim and design both the *temporal*

and *eternal good* of the brethren so united. The vital spirit of this union, being *from above* and *divine*, "is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy;" and all its fruits and effects correspond with the principle from whence they spring. "*Love* wisheth no ill to his neighbour; suffereth long and is kind; doth not behave itself unseemly; seeketh not her own; is not easily provoked; thinketh no evil; beareth all things; believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things (i)."

If unity among brethren is pretended or supported on any other principles than these: if it seeketh its own exclusive good, to the hurt of its neighbour; its own exclusive profit, to the injury of its neighbour; or its own exclusive pleasure at the expence of its neighbour's honour, reputation, virtue or happiness—it is a *cheat* and *counterfeit*: the pretender is a *hypocrite*, who should be excluded from the Christian brotherhood, and branded with infamy as a deceiver and impostor. Brotherly love is *pure, undesigned, candid* and *disinterested*; and whatever proposals are made of love or unity on any other principle than these, ought to be rejected with contempt and indignation by every Christian.

2dly. THAT love which is the principle of this unity, is the fruit of the regenerating Spirit, and cannot be supposed to exist in any but in true Christians, who are *born of this Spirit*, and *renewed in the spirit of their minds*.

"THE fruit of the Spirit, says St. Paul, is love."

(i) 1 Cor. xiii. Jam. iii.

“ Beloved, says *St. John*, let us love one another, for love is of GOD: and every one that loveth, is born of GOD, and knoweth GOD. He that loveth not, knoweth not GOD; for GOD is love (*k*).” The love of GOD, therefore, must be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit given unto us, before we can experience that love which will unite our hearts to the *Christian brotherhood*. “ The LORD, says *St. Paul*, make you to increase and abound in love one towards another, and towards all men (*l*).” Indeed the LORD only can work this love in our hearts, by giving us the spirit of love and of a sound mind. “ Seeing, says *St. Peter*, ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth, thro’ the Spirit, to the unfeigned love of the brethren; see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again not of corruptible seed, but incorruptible, by the word of GOD which liveth and abideth for ever (*m*).”

LET us therefore ask that love which is the principle of Christian unity, from GOD the giver of every good and perfect gift, and frequently and fervently pray that he who is love itself, and the source of it in the moral world, would make us to increase and abound in love, one towards another, and towards all men.

3dly. THE scriptures every where abound with representations of the necessity of love and unity among brethren, and precepts for the inculcation of it. The intimate union and communion among Christi-

(*k*) Gal. v. 22. John iv. 7, 8.

(*l*) 1 Theff. iii. 12.

(*m*) 1 Pet. i. 22, 23.

ans, is represented by the *closest unities* in nature and art—by the communion of the branches in one vine—of stones in the same edifice—and of the joints and members in the same natural body. “One is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.” “All the members, being many, are one body: for by one spirit we are all baptized into one body (*n*).” “I am the vine, ye are the branches. We are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones: therefore grow up in him in all things, who is the head, even CHRIST, from which all the body, by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of GOD (*o*).” “Can two walk together, except they be agreed? Every kingdom divided against itself, is brought to desolation. Brethren be at peace among yourselves: live in peace, and the GOD of love and peace shall be with you. If possible, live peaceably with all men, and follow after the things which make for peace; endeavouring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. He that will love life, and see good days, let him seek peace and ensue it. Behold how good and how pleasant it is to see brethren dwell together in unity (*p*)?”—So that you see *love, peace, and unity* among brethren is the very *genius* and *spirit* of the gospel, and a duty which it inculcates with distinguished uniformity and vehemence.

(*n*) Mat. xxi. 8. 1 Cor. xii. 12, 13. Gal. iii. 28.

(*o*) Eph. v. Eph. iv. 15, 16. Col. ii. 19.

(*p*) Amos iii. 3. Mat. xii. 25. Rom. xii. 18. xiv. 19. 2 Cor. xiii. 11. 1 Thess. v. 13. Heb. xii. 14.

4thly. THE advantages arising from love and unity among Christian brethren, should strongly recommend it to our practice. And,

(1st.) IT IS the *strength* of every society *civil, religious, or domestic*. *Divide et impera*, is a well known maxim. How easy is it to subdue and defeat a divided people? Where the seeds of discord and animosity are sown among a people, first a confusion, and then a dissolution must ensue. It is impossible that a *house, a society, a kingdom, a church* divided against itself should stand. Equal forces destroy each other. Suppose a society of *sixty* persons equally divided upon any point, their strength is not equal to that of *one* individual. Indeed it is nothing. Suppose *forty* of a majority, and *twenty* of a minority, the force and influence of the whole, is only equal to that of *twenty*. Besides, there is no knowing the issue of discord and dissention in society. Rents and breaches are easily augmented, and from inconsiderable beginnings, may soon become formidable. "The beginning of contention is as when one letteth out water." A society of any kind which has the principles of dissention within itself, is like a house caught by a spark of fire, which may quickly spread and involve the whole edifice in flames. No purpose can be carried where dissention reigns: all is *weakness, irresolution and confusion*. Whereas *unanimity and joint endeavour* carry every thing before them. Where a society of men are united and firm, draw equally in the same yoke, and set their shoulders to any enterprize, the greatest tasks are performed with ease, difficulties vanish, and

opposition itself totters and falls prostrate before such united force. The bunch of rods given by the father to his children, on his death-bed, is no bad illustration of the advantages of unity in this respect. *Union* adds the strength of the whole to every individual: whereas *separation* and *dissention* sets every individual against another, and thereby destroys the strength of the whole. How evidently therefore is it for the *interest* and *advantage* of brethren, that they dwell together in unity?

(2dly.) *Unity* is not only the *strength* of every society, but also its greatest *ornament* and *glory*. A virtuous unity bespeaks mutual love among the members, which is the highest proof of their moral worth. It proves that they are animated with the same spirit of peace, and love, and of a sound mind; and that living together, and loving as brethren, they are children of the same common father, and heirs of one common hope and inheritance. It proves that altho', as men, they cannot but have diversity of opinions and sentiments in smaller matters, yet they have virtue and prudence enough to *bear* and *forbear* in these smaller matters, while they are agreed and united in matters of essential importance, where both their duty and interest demand this harmony and agreement. What efficacy and force would our prayers have, were our souls united with fervency and ardour before the throne of grace? How easily would *public-spirited* and *charitable* designs be carried into execution, were men of one heart, of one mind, and of one endeavour in the prosecution of them? And

what a glory and lustre would such an unity and unanimity reflect both upon civil and religious societies of men?

HARMONY is, in itself, the highest form of *beauty*. The harmony of the divine perfections, constitutes the *glory* and *beauty* of the divine character. The idea of GOD, is the idea of *supreme beauty*, because it is the idea of all possible excellencies and perfections in perfect harmony. *Beauty* in moral character in men, consists in harmony of virtuous affection, and uniformity or consistency of virtuous action. We are immediately struck with the *deformity*, *imperfection* and *viciousness* of that human character, which is patched up of jarring and discordant principles and manners—which is perpetually at variance with itself; perpetually distracted and divided between *truth* and *error*, between *virtue* and *vice*. In like manner, the supreme beauty of human societies results from a *virtuous unity* and *unanimity* of *sentiment* and *conduct*. This is the bright emblem of that heaven to which Christians are tending, and for the glorious society of which they can never be qualified, unless they are here below endued with those virtuous sentiments, and with that spirit of love and of a sound mind, which constitutes the *unity*, the *harmony*, the *glory* and the *happiness* of that blessed society of heavenly friends and lovers.

O THAT my dear hearers were more and more transformed into this divine image;—that they were imbibing more and more of that spirit of *truth*, and *peace*, and *love*, and of a *sound mind*, which is the

bond of this celestial unity, the spirit of this celestial glory, and an indispensable qualification for this celestial happiness.

MAY this be, in particular, the *endeavour*, the *boast* and *glory* of our little society, that we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace—that we be at peace among ourselves, and follow peace with all men—that we love as brethren, and are kindly affectionate one to another.—That, by a diligent search after truth, we study to be of *one heart*, and of *one mind* in matters of *essential importance*; while we learn with all gentleness and meekness to bear and forbear with each other in things of smaller importance and doubtful disputation. In so doing, we will enjoy the prelibations of heaven in the present life; set the most glorious and useful example before our fellow-men; and the very GOD of peace and love will be with us in time and thro' eternity.

(3.) THE sacrament of the Lord's supper which is approaching, is not only the *appointed sign*, but also the *grand cement* of love and unity among the *Christian brotherhood*. The eucharist is a feast of love: it shews the reconciledness of GOD to the creatures whom he thus entertains at his table, and that the persons thus communicating with each other, are at perfect love and unity among themselves. True communicants have real communion with each other in the *same head*, the *same spirit*, the *same graces*, the *same privileges*, and the *same inheritance*: for as *many* grains of wheat, being grinded and knead together, make *one bread*, and *many* grapes being pres-

fed together make *one wine* or *drink*; so Christians partaking together of that *one bread*, and that *one cup*, do testify their union and communion with each other in the mystical body of Christ, being united to him their glorious head by the spirit of faith, and to each other by the spirit of love. Well therefore may the sacrament of the supper be deemed the most distinguishing ordinance of Christianity, seeing it is so excellently calculated to *represent, strengthen* and *confirm* the most distinguishing spirit and genius of the Christian religion, which is brotherly love and unity.

LET it, therefore, *my brethren*, be our chief study to cherish and promote this temper in ourselves, and in all men; and let it be an additional motive to our more frequent and devout attendance on this divine ordinance, that it is so signally subservient to the promotion of this divine principle in our souls.

S E R M O N XVI.

The God-like nature and divine reward
of a merciful disposition, from

MATTH. V. 7.

*Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain
mercy.*

S E R M O N I.

THE best commentators on these beatitudes have observed that in each of them there is a peculiar *congruity* or *correspondence* between the graces enjoined and the rewards promised. This is plain in the present instance. The grace or virtue here enjoined by CHRIST on his disciples, is a merciful disposition towards their fellow-creatures; and the reward promised, as the retribution of this virtue, is mercy from GOD to themselves. As tho' our Saviour had said; "Ye expect to be happy in the *Messiah's* kingdom by conquering your enemies, and spreading desolation and slaughter thro' the world by your victorious arms, but this is a grand mistake;—for I declare unto you, that rather happy and blessed are the merciful;—those tender-hearted and compassionate

souls, who easily forgive injuries, and who feeling the sorrows and distress of *others* as their own, make haste with the tenderest sympathy to relieve them:—for they and they alone shall obtain that mercy from GOD, which the very best and happiest men need, and upon which they entirely and constantly depend.”

BEHOLD! here, *my friends*, a *short, easy and delightful* way to true *happiness*—even to be merciful, as our Father which is in heaven is merciful.—Indeed it is but the repetition of a *sentiment* which obtained under the Old Testament dispensation—“With the *merciful*, says *David*, thou wilt shew thy self *merciful*; and with the froward, thou wilt shew thy self froward (*f*).”—Reason itself justifies this sentiment. It is not at all to be doubted but that GOD must esteem and reward so bright a character of his own image in his reasonable and accountable creatures; that a GOD who delights in mercy, and in whom compassions flow, should delight in and reward *merciful men*, and abhor and punish the *unmerciful*, the *hard-hearted* and the *cruel*, as of a temper and disposition diametrically opposite to his own!

In the farther prosecution of this subject it shall be my business, thro’ the divine assistance,

1st, To describe the character and point out the duties of those whom our Saviour here terms merciful, and

2dly, To shew *how* or in what respects he pronounces them blessed; with the reason here given

(*f*) Psa. xviii. 25, 26.

(which indeed constitutes the chief part of their blessedness) “for they shall obtain mercy.” This is a vast and comprehensive subject—and will require two discourses, to open and explain it with any degree of precision. The

Ist. HEAD shall therefore be the subject of the present discourse—namely to describe the *character* and point out the *duties* of those whom our Saviour here denominates merciful.—And while we take a survey of this amiable and divine virtue, may GOD the great father and perfect model of mercy, transform us by his Spirit into the same image, and make us merciful as he is merciful through JESUS CHRIST, Amen!

MERCY, *my brethren*, is a disposition of mind to pity and help the *miserable*. *Mercy*, whether exercised by GOD or man, has *mifery* for its object. If *mifery* had not made its entrance among creatures, there would have been no room for the exercise of the divine mercy, as it could have had no proper objects. So that among all the evils which sin hath brought into the creation of GOD, it hath brought this good, that it hath given room and occasion for the display of one of the most amiable and noble of the divine perfections.—Had no creature ever sinned, and all the creation continued perfectly happy, GOD’s *power*, *wisdom*, *goodness* and perhaps *justice* might have been known; but his *mercy*, as to the actual exercise of it, would still have been a secret.

AND as *mifery* among GOD’s creatures has given occasion to the exercise of his *mercy* towards them,

—so misery among mankind has given occasion to the exercise of mercy from one man to another.

MERCY therefore, as it is a virtue in us, may be defined, “ A disposition of mind, whereby we are inclined tenderly to sympathize with our fellow-creatures in their various evils, dangers and distresses, and to help and relieve them as far as it is in our power.”

MERCY is the child or off-spring of love or charity to our neighbour.—Love indeed is a more general and comprehensive virtue. Man, our equal, in whatever condition he is, *happy or unhappy, rich or poor, friend or enemy*, is the proper object of our Christian love or charity:—but man, only as *unhappy, distressed, afflicted, persecuted, indigent* or our *enemy*, is the proper object of our mercy. Mercy purely regards *man as miserable*.

THIS amiable God-like virtue has its seat in the heart; in a heart *moved, touched and wounded* as it were, with all the pains, and wants, and groans, and misfortunes of its fellow creatures.

HAD mankind continued in their primitive state of innocence and happiness, this virtue would never have had any object to excite it in this lower world. But since GOD by a wise and just decree has been pleased to smite this earth with a curse, and punish its guilty inhabitants with countless plagues and miseries, we find on all sides numberless objects of *our mercy*. This world is become, as it were, a vast hospital, where all is full of the *sick, the miserable, the indigent* and the distressed!—All parts

of the universe are like the five porches of *Bethesda*, where nothing almost is to be seen but *unhappy creatures*, labouring under diverse diseases and infirmities both of body and of mind; insomuch that a *merciful man* can hardly stir abroad or look around him, without being moved with compassion and pained at the heart to see so many pitiable objects, to whom he can render so little relief!—Now it hath not pleased God, in the common course of his providence, to send his angels to relieve these objects of mercy, as he once did to *Hagar*, *Elias* and the pool of *Bethesda*:—no—the merciful are the good angels of God to their distressed fellow creatures.—By the hands of these he hath appointed the poor to be fed—the naked to be cloathed—the sick and afflicted to be visited and comforted—the oppressed to be relieved and the injured to be redressed. The *merciful* are those refreshing showers, which God hath appointed to water the dry and thirsty earth, nor will they do it in vain.—God will not forget their work and labour of love, which they do for his name's sake to his poor needy creatures.—They that thus water shall be watered again.—“Blessed are the merciful &c.”

IN explaining this grace—it will be proper to observe that there are some *counterfeits*, which are too often and too easily mistaken for it.—Nature has formed some men to a merciful and compassionate disposition:—they are merciful as it were by *nature* and by *constitution*.—Their natural *temperament* is so formed; their blood, spirits, nerves and organs are so disposed, that the sight of misery pains them

and fills them with pity from their very infancy. This may be called a *happy natural disposition*; but it is no more a Christian virtue than the falling of a stone downwards, or the rising of a smoke upwards, can be so termed. These persons are so constituted, and they cannot help it or be otherwise. They are merciful by instinct and not from any reasons or motives for being such. When they do a merciful action, they do it as it were from a kind of blind impulse and necessity; and if you were to ask them their reason for doing such an action—they can scarce give you any, but that it was not in their *nature* to do otherwise. All that can be said of these persons is, that *nature* has formed them to *humanity*, and that they are better off (and all concerned with them) than if they had been naturally of a *cruel, savage and morose* temper.

OTHERS again, of not the most happy natural tempers, have, by study, reason, philosophy and a good education attained to a kind of *artificial politeness, humanity and sweetness of disposition*.—Indeed where this cultivation meets with a soul naturally tender, generous and compassionate, it forms what the world calls an accomplished and excellent character.—But at bottom both of these are only counterfeit kinds of *mercy; shining and specious* indeed, but wanting the *soul and spirit* of true religion—and not being rooted in genuine *Christian charity*.

WHAT *St. Paul* says of the law, “that it bringeth nothing to perfection,” may be said with equal justice of a *good natural temper* and a *happy educa-*

tion destitute of a true principle of grace. Nature may give us happy dispositions; reason may cultivate them; but grace alone can transform them into Christian virtues. Nature may give us *humanity*;—reason and philosophy may give us *honour and beneficence*;—but the grace of GOD and the laws of the *gospel* alone can make us *truly merciful*! We can never have a true sympathy and fellow-feeling in the miseries of our fellow creatures until the hard and stony heart is taken away, and the spirit of grace and love which was in CHRIST JESUS has transformed the soul into the same divine image;—nor shall we ever be disposed to succour and relieve them, as we ought, until we can do it for GOD'S sake and *for Christ's sake*, and from a pure principle of Christian charity to themselves, as the creatures of GOD, the redeemed of Christ and our fellow creatures and brethren. Besides; the *truly merciful* in Christ Jesus, as they are such by *grace*, and by *principle*, so they are such *constantly, habitually, perseveringly* and to the utmost of their power. It is not a single act or a few acts of any virtue, that can prove a person *virtuous* and make him pass for *such*. True grace is a *rooted and confirmed* habit of the soul, which produces a series of familiar acts whenever proper objects and occasions offer. He, that is merciful only as it were accidentally or in a few singular instances, and habitually lives in the contrary disposition, needs no other proof to convince him that he is wholly destitute of the evangelical grace of mercy.

MERCY is also to be distinguished into the *soul*

and the *body*, or the *inward sentiment*, and the *outward expression*. Mercy must begin at the *heart* and end in the *life*. Merciful actions have their rise and principle in a *tender sympathizing* spirit, apt to have a quick and feeling sense of other people's calamities and dangers, and to be nearly touched by them;— and from that inward charitable frame, mercy proceeds to do them all proper good offices. Indeed without this inward merciful temper of soul, actions which have the greatest appearance of compassion (even if a man should bestow all his goods to feed the poor (*b*), will pass for nothing with GOD. Whereas, on the contrary, if a man has in truth this grace of a merciful disposition, and should be at the same time so weak and poor, as to be able to afford no other succour to his miserable neighbour, than that of his *pity* and his *prayers*, yet will GOD accept of this feeble offering as the truth of mercy: for, says the apostle, if there be first a *willing mind*, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not (*i*.)

SUCH is the purity and perfection of the gospel scheme of morality, that all its virtues must begin in the heart, and be perfected by correspondent actions where *these* are possible.

I HAVE said they must *begin in the heart*; and therefore we are called to *put on bowels of mercies*; i. e. to be possessed of merciful dispositions of heart (*k*). — This figure is applied to the blessed GOD himself,

(*b*) 1 Cor. xiii. 3. (*i*) 2 Cor. viii. 12. (*k*) Col. iii. 12.

whose *bowels* are said to yearn, and to *be moved* over the misery of his creatures; in whom compassions are said to flow, and whose most glorious character it is, that he is the LORD GOD merciful and gracious (l).

—But,

2dly. TRUE mercy does not remain dormant in the heart as a *dead, fruitless, inactive* principle.—It delights to exert itself in merciful actions according to capacity and opportunity.—It is a fertile seed which rejoices in bringing forth the fruits of charity and beneficence, and in abounding yet more and more in them to the glory of GOD, and the relief of its fellow creatures (m).—It cannot rest satisfied in a few *sighs, and wishes, and prayers* or even *tears* for the miserable, but studies what it can do towards their *actual relief*. “The liberal man, says the prophet, deviseth liberal things (n): he makes it his study how he may be useful in his generation to his fellow creatures, and *what* he can do for the proper objects of mercy; knowing that this is true and undefiled religion before GOD, even the Father, to visit the fatherless and the widow in their afflictions, as well as to keep himself unspotted from the world (o).—He cannot be contented with that *cold, barren, fruitless* mercy, which consists wholly in *good words* and *wishes*, and which is so justly reproached by the apostle; “If a brother or a sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto him, Depart in peace, be thou warmed and filled: notwithstanding

(l) Exod. xxxiv. 6. (m) Phil. i. 9.

(n) Isaiah xxxii. 8. (o) James i. 27.

you give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit (*p*)?"

THE truly merciful heart, anxiously enquires what it can do for its needy or distressed brother by its counsel, by its interest, by its labour or sollicitation, and finds an inexpressible pleasure if it can by any means alleviate his misery.

THERE are three distinct objects of our mercy which it may be useful farther to consider and illustrate—1. The souls of our fellow creatures and their spiritual miseries and dangers—2. Their bodily afflictions and sufferings—and 3. The injuries they may have done us, by which they lie at our mercy!

1st. A TRULY merciful and compassionate temper will engage us to *pity* and attempt to remove the spiritual miseries and dangers of our fellow creatures, whereby they are exposed to eternal misery. That man has the truest and justest compassion for his neighbour, who cannot without a tender sorrow see him provoking the great GOD to jealousy, throwing away his immortal soul, and treasuring up unto himself wrath against the day of wrath, &c."

IF we do indeed believe the truth of religion and have its interests at heart, we must be much more moved with such a melancholy sight, than by all the worldly wants, and pains, and groans, and miseries of mankind put together:—because we must know that the danger of their souls is infinitely greater.—The merciful heart of *David* was deeply affected with this:

(*p*) James ii. 16,

he beheld the transgressors, and was *grieved*, because they kept not God's law; yea, rivers of tears ran down his eyes on this account (q).—This also most strongly moved the bowels of compassion in the breast of the merciful Jesus:—"He looked round upon sinners and was grieved at the hardness of their hearts.—He had compassion on the multitude and taught them, because they were as sheep having no shepherd:—and he shed tears of pity over impenitent *Jerusalem*, saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

Now, if we have indeed this kind of mercy in truth towards our fellow creatures, we will shew it by all proper endeavours to save them from sin and ruin.—We will labour according to the utmost of our capacity and influence to instruct the ignorant, to reprove the vicious, to comfort the sorrowful doubting soul, to reclaim the profane, and to pluck them if possible with the hands of mercy out of the flames of hell (r). Thus will we have mercy on the souls of our children, our servants, our neighbours.—And where our own abilities and influence cannot reach, we shall rejoice if by any means, we can engage others, who are more capable, in so good a design. If we had a true compassion for the souls of men, we would

(q) Psalms cxix. 150. (r) Judges xxiii.

cheerfully support with our countenance, our influence, our purses and our prayers, every measure which could be taken for the reformation of manners and the propagation of the gospel, that true religion might prevail among mankind, and that the gospel might have free course and be glorified in the salvation of souls.

O THAT there were more such merciful men to the souls of their fellow creatures!—more who were duly persuaded, “that he who converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death (r).”

2dly. A TRULY merciful disposition, as it regards the spiritual miseries and dangers of our fellow creatures, so also their bodily afflictions and sufferings, their pains and diseases of body, their sorrows and afflictions of mind, their wants in the necessaries of life and their oppressions and unjust sufferings by others. Here the heart is first moved with a tender sympathy and fellow-feeling, and this inward merciful disposition expresses itself in acts of charity and compassion to the suffering object. — Those *hearts of brass*, who are proof against the calamities of others, as long as they themselves are in easy circumstances, are not possessed even of *common humanity*, much less do they act as Christians.—Even a heathen could say “*Homo sum et nihil humanum a me alienum puto;*” being a man, I feel for the whole human nature.

CHRISTIANITY teaches us “to weep with those that weep—to bear one another’s burdens—to look

(s) James v. 20.

not only at our *own things*, but every man also on the things of others—and that if one member of the Christian body suffer, all the other members should suffer with it." Our religion teacheth us "to put on bowels of mercy, to be tender hearted, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another:—that to him that is afflicted pity should be shown by his friends— that we should deal our bread, and draw out our soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul—that even if our enemy should hunger, we should feed him, and if he thirst, we should give him drink—that whoso hath this world's goods and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, the love of God dwelleth not in that man." The great Author of our religion abounded in such acts of mercy.—His whole life was a constant series of them.—He bore our afflictions *on his heart*, as well as *on the cross*.—He had compassion on whole multitudes and fed them, and cured their diseases and infirmities.—He wept over the grave of his friend *Lazarus*, and raised him and many others.—It was his constant employment to go about doing good to the souls and bodies of men, and all his miracles, were but so many acts of mercy.

IN his parable of the good Samaritan, he most beautifully recommends and inculcates this grace upon all his followers—"A poor unhappy Jew, in the road from *Jerusalem* to *Jericho*, happened to fall in the way of robbers, who evilly entreated and wounded him. A *priest* and a *Levite*, tho' both *Jews*, and men of sacred character, who should have been exam-

plary for humanity and mercy, passed by him regardless of his misery, and turned away their eyes from beholding a brother in distress: Shortly after a *Samaritan*, a stranger and an enemy to the *Jews*, saw, pitied and relieved him. Which of these three, says the Redeemer, was neighbour to him that fell among the thieves? The Jew with whom he conversed, said, "He that shewed mercy on him." Then said Jesus unto him, "Go, and do thou likewise."

We have also a noble example of this kind of mercy in *Job*, which well deserves our attention and imitation. "If I did despise the cause of my manservant or my maid-servant, when they contended with me; what then shall I do, when God riseth up? And when he visiteth, what shall I answer him: if I have withheld the poor from their desire, or caused the eyes of the widow to fail: or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof. If I have seen any perish for want of cloathing, or any poor without covering:—if his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep;—then let mine arm fall from my shoulder blade, and mine arm be broken from the bone (t)."

We have also an amiable and engaging description of the merciful man in the *fourth*, *fifth*, *sixth*, *seventh* and *ninth* verses of the hundred and twelfth psalm. "Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous. A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth;

(t) Job xxxi. 13.—22.

he will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour."

IN a word; a true principle of evangelical mercy will dispose us to concern and interest ourselves in the various miseries and distresses of our fellow creatures;—to sympathize with, and tenderly compassionate them;—to do what we can to relieve them, and if we cannot do this *actually* and *effectually* ourselves; it will engage us to comfort them, to pray for them to the Father of mercies and to solicit others on their behalf. Once more,

3dly. WHEN others have injured us, and we have it in our power to be revenged—here is a noble opportunity for the exercise of a merciful disposition. I speak here of *private* and *personal* injuries—for it is certain, that as it is the office of magistrates to be a terror to evil doers, so it would be a criminal lenity in them to dispense with the laws of their country, by shewing an undistinguishing mercy to all offenders.—This would be a capital injury to society, rendering the laws of no force, and encouraging lawless men to offend with hopes of impunity.

HOWEVER a truly merciful disposition will engage magistrates to be tender of the lives, liberties and properties of their subjects; to abstain from all unnecessary severities, and even to *pity the man*, while

the duty of their office obliges them to *punish the malefactor*. Mercy in this case will temper justice and severity, and render them public blessings.

“ Mercy and truth, says *Solomon*, preserve the king; and his throne is upholden by mercy (u).

NOR does mercy oblige us to put up with all private and personal injuries. Our usefulness depends upon our reputation, and our livelihood upon our property.—When therefore we are attacked in these, and cannot vindicate ourselves without the prosecution and punishment of the offender, it is past doubt that we may and ought to do ourselves justice in this way. In such circumstances, mercy to others would be injustice to ourselves—yea, and injustice to the public also; which, as a social body, suffers more or less by the injuries done to any of its members. Examples of just severity, in this case, vindicate our own rights—tend to deter offenders from the like vices—and consequently prove a *real good* to the whole community!

BUT mercy, in cases of private and personal injuries, will check the sallies of inordinate anger, will prevent us from all resolutions of private and lawless revenge, will engage us coolly and dispassionately to weigh the probable motives and temptations to such injuries, and to put the most favourable construction possible on them.—*Mercy*, like *charity*, suffereth long and is kind—envieth not—seeketh not her own—is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil—beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things (v).

(u) Prov. xx. 28.

(v) 1 Cor. xiii. 4,—7.

MERCY is glad to find that an injury is not so great in itself, nor done from such bad principles as at first appeared to be.—It wishes well to its enemy, and would rejoice in his amendment. It tries every gentle method to make him sensible of his offence. If it is obliged to force him to a reparation of the injury, it had rather forego some part of its natural rights, than distress or ruin him;—and finally, it is ready to forgive him on the smallest credible marks of repentance and a change of sentiments, &c.

WE have a most noble recommendation and illustration of this grace, in Matthew xviii. 23, &c. which it will be worth your while to read attentively, and at your leisure.

I AM sorry I have scarce time to add,

4thly. THAT a merciful disposition displays itself in mild and humane treatment of our slaves, domestics, and even such of the brute creation which are immediately under our power. The wisest of men hath told us, that a righteous man regardeth the life of his beast; but that the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel (*w*). How savage and barbarous is it to exercise a tyrannical cruelty over any, even the meanest, of God's creation, when he is so tender and indulgent both to us and to them. If we shew no mercy to those whom God hath put under us, can we expect any other than judgment without mercy from him whose creatures we abuse? If God hath declared himself ready to forgive us the ten thousand talents which we owe him; shall we have no com-

(*w*) Prov. xii. 10.

passion on our fellow-servants—but take them by the throat, and demand the utmost farthing of the debt of punishment?—O! if God did but treat us with the same severity, as many of us are disposed to treat those under us—how miserable should we be? And yet we are assured that only to the merciful, he will shew himself merciful. “If, says Job, I did despise the cause of my man-servant or my maid-servant, when they contended with me; what then shall I do, when God riseth up; and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him?”

A CRUEL *uncompassionate* temper is a *diabellical temper*—the temper of the devil, who delights in the misery and torment of all his fellow creatures!

So much for the character of the merciful—the consideration of *their reward* I shall leave for some future opportunity—and shall conclude the present discourse by briefly hinting at a few of the grounds, reasons, and motives of this Christian virtue.

1st. WE should be merciful—because there is an eternal obligation on us to be so from our own circumstances.—Mercy is a reciprocal duty.—We live upon it ourselves, and shall we not shew it to others? “Thou hard-hearted human creature, who hast no bowels of compassions to others, dost thou not live daily on the tender mercies of God?—Art thou not thyself in the body—and subject to the same miseries and misfortunes with thy fellow creatures?—Art thou certain never to be sick, never to be poor, never to be naked, or hungry, or sorrowful, or injured, or oppressed? And if this should be *thy* case, (as

Doubtless it may,) wilt thou not *desire* and *expect* the pity, compassion and help of thy fellow creatures? And if so, wilt thou not do that unto them in the like circumstances? How then canst thou hope for mercy, who wilt not shew it now?"

2dly. WE should be merciful to our fellow creatures, because it is a duty expressly enjoined by the authority and word of GOD. "He hath shewed thee O man what is good: and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly and to love mercy (x)?" "Be ye merciful, says the apostle, be kind to one another, forgiving one another.—Be of one mind, having compassion one of another. Love as brethren, be pitiful;—bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of CHRIST: for whose shutteth the bowels of his compassion, how dwelleth the love of GOD in him?" And numberless passages to the same purpose.

3dly. WE should be merciful to our fellow creatures, because GOD is merciful to us.—It is of his mercy that we are not consumed, that we are not in hell; even because his compassions fail not.—We have daily need of mercy to pardon, and grace to help.—All we either enjoy or hope for from him, is of mere mercy and sovereign grace, and contrary to all our deserts. And when GOD hath such compassion on us, who are evil and unthankful, should it not move us to compassion toward our fellow creatures?—How can we pray GOD to forgive our debts and supply our wants—if we will not forgive them

(x) Micah vi. 8.

that trespass against us, and supply the wants of those that need as far as we are able? “Brethren! if GOD so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

4thly. WE should be merciful in imitation of the example of GOD and his Son Jesus Christ. As Christians, we should be followers of GOD as dear children;—and imitators of Christ as our LORD and example.—And it is remarkable that nothing in the character of the great GOD is set so plainly and frequently before us, for imitation, as his mercy.—“We are commanded to be merciful, as our Father in heaven, is merciful:—to love and do good to our enemies, that we may be the genuine children of our Father in heaven, who maketh the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust:—to be tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as GOD for Christ’s sake hath forgiven us (y).

IN a word, there is nothing which can render a human creature more *divine* and GOD-LIKE, than a *merciful disposition*, and a correspondent practice.—This being the brightest and most amiable glory of *him* who is the LORD GOD merciful and gracious;—who is good unto all, even to the evil and unthankful, and whose tender mercies are over all his works.—As to the example of this virtue, which Christ has set before us—it has had a place in the former part of this discourse—and it is only needful to ob-

(y) Luke vi. 36. Matth. v. 45. Eph. iv. 32.

serve that it is our duty to have the *same spirit* which was also in Christ Jesus;—and that he having set us an example of the most tender and universal mercy, we are bound as his disciples to follow his steps (z).

5thly. We should be merciful, because it is agreeable to the very constitution of our nature, and necessary to the well-being of society. Wherefore hath God implanted sympathy, and fellow feeling in our hearts, which is naturally excited by the groan of misery and the tear of distress? Is it not because every man's misery needs this friend and solicitor in the heart of his neighbour?—And if all were of a merciless, hard-hearted disposition, what would become of the poor, the sick, the afflicted and the oppressed?—Nay, what would become of ourselves in these circumstances? A plain proof of the universal obligation of all mankind to the exercise of this grace.

6thly. We should be merciful, because it is an express condition of our acceptance with God.—“Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.” “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (a).—He shall have judgment without mercy, who hath shewed no mercy (b).—If therefore we would expect mercy either from God or man, in the day of our extremity and distress;—if we would submit to the authority or imi-

(z) 1 Pet. ii. 21. (a) Matth. vi. 14, 15. (b) James i. 13.

tate the example of the blessed God and his Son Jesus Christ.—In a word, if we would be like God in holiness and happiness and enjoy him for ever—let us lay the foundation of this blessedness in a merciful temper and conduct—Blessed are the merciful ; for they shall obtain mercy. Amen.

S E R M O N XVII.

The God-like nature and divine reward
of a merciful disposition, from

MATTH. V. 7.

*Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain
mercy.*

S E R M O N II.

IN a former discourse from these words, it was proposed; *1st*, To describe the character of the merciful—and *2^{dly}*, To point out their reward—the first of these heads has been largely insisted on;—the *IId.* Is the business of the present discourse. “*They are blessed, says the Saviour, for they shall obtain mercy.*”

To obtain mercy from God, is indeed the greatest blessedness which a guilty creature can enjoy, and comprehends in it every other kind of blessedness.—To obtain favour and mercy from God, is to be blessed in time, and blessed through eternity.

THAT I may therefore consider the blessedness of the merciful in its greatest extent, I shall view this disposition as it regards our *bodies* and our *souls*,

time and eternity.—*Mercy*, like *godliness*, is great gain, having the promises both of this life and that which is to come.

THE promises of this present life, (as far as they shall subserve the best interests of the merciful, and GOD's great design in saving them),—and the promises of the life to come, without limitation or reserve belong to it.—“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy”—some copies have it in the plural number—*mercies*. “They shall obtain *mercies*.” *Mercies temporal and eternal*:—the blessings both of *earth*, and *heaven*,—of the upper springs and of the nether springs.—“God will give grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from those, who do *justly, love mercy, and walk humbly before him*.”

To be particular—the merciful are blessed—*1st*, In that inward, heart-felt happiness and satisfaction which flows from a consciousness of their doing good and shewing mercy to their fellow creatures—*2^{dly}*, In a good name or character, which is better than precious ointment—*3^{dly}*, In the peculiar providence and retribution which God has engaged himself by promise to exercise over such men, their interests, and even their families after them.—*4^{thly}*, In the answer of those prayers which are put up for them by the poor, miserable and distressed, which they have relieved—and *5^{thly}*, In their peace and reconciliation with God, and eternal happiness in this enjoyment.

THESE five rewards of a merciful temper and con-

duct, I shall by the divine assistance illustrate and then make some improvement of the subject.

1st. THE merciful are blessed in that inward heart-felt happiness and satisfaction, which flows from a consciousness of their having done good and shewed mercy to their fellow-creatures.—This, my dear friends, is no other than the testimony of a good conscience, which is the constant joyous attendant of a virtuous disposition and conduct. It is a kind of blessedness which nothing but virtue can give, and which nothing but vice or great melancholy and weakness can rob us of!—Well might our Saviour say, “That it is *more blessed to give, than to receive (c).*” There is a joy in helping the needy, in comforting the afflicted, in relieving the oppressed, in forgiving the injurious, and in wiping away the tears from the eyes of the sorrowful, which no wicked man ever yet *felt*, or possibly *can feel*.—The cruel, the unforgiving, the uncompassionate, the close-handed and hard hearted intermeddle not with this joy; they are strangers to it, and can no more comprehend it, than a blind man can perceive the beauty of colours, or a deaf man the pleasure of sounds.

MEN who are wholly under the power of self-love, who set an extravagant value on their worldly interests, and who make idols of their money and ease, must be satisfied to live wholly without this sweetest and noblest satisfaction of life, and find what little happiness they can in their worldly enjoyments.—But they will never know that superior blessed-

(c) Acts xx. 35.

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ness, which our Saviour declares there is in *giving*, above what there is in *receiving*.

THIS is a blessedness peculiarly appropriated by God to merciful, compassionate, benevolent souls. That seemed a hard command which our Saviour laid on to the rich young man in the gospel, and would still seem so to all worldly minded men, who trust in uncertain riches, and hope for all happiness from them, "Go and sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven (*d*)."

—To give away his money to the poor was in his opinion to loose his idol, and all his happiness at once, and he could not readily imagine that any *treasure in heaven* could make up for the loss of *his money*—and yet our *Lord* was directly calling him to a greater treasure and blessedness than all his riches could afford him:—he was calling him not only to *heavenly glory*, but to all the present (to him) unknown joys of a benevolent heart and a merciful charitable conduct.

—CHRIST, indeed, laid this command upon *him* only to try *him* and to make *him* sensible of his criminal attachment to this present world, and how unworthy he was of those heavenly treasures which he so lightly esteemed.—He does not require such costly sacrifices from *us*:—but if he did, it would surely be our interest to offer them and trust *him* with the reward.

EVER those who have never experienced the blessedness of a merciful temper, may yet be persuaded of it, by this plain reason—that God, the *best* and *most*

(*d*) Mat. xix. 21.

merciful Being in the universe, is also the *happiest* and *most blessed*—and that the devil, the *cruellest* and *most malevolent* being in the world, is the most wretched and miserable.

THE blessed GOD is not only *good* but doeth good;—is not only *merciful*; but delighteth in mercy and is rich in mercy.—He does good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works—is good to the evil and unthankful—causeth his sun to rise on the evil and the good—and hath joy at the repentance of one sinner.—He rejoiceth in giving to all, life and breath and all things.—It is in the very nature of GOD (who is love itself) to communicate his goodness continually to an universe of being:—and it is by no means a thought unworthy of GOD, to suppose, that in this his *communicative mercy and goodness* consists the chief part of his blessedness.—So that GOD (if we may so speak with reverence) is *chiefly* if not *only* happy in *designing, decreeing, and doing* good! His giving life, sustenance and happiness to so many creatures, and more especially his expensive plan of redeeming sinners, are no contemptible confirmations of this sentiment.

So that (to advance a little farther, with reverence on the same sentiment) GOD himself could not be completely blessed or happy, if he were not infinitely merciful and benevolent.—And if he exercises a *just severity* and *unrelenting vengeance* on a number of impenitent irreclaimable creatures in the universe, it is only from a principle of *benevolence*, and to promote and advance the *general happiness* of the whole!—

If then mercy and benevolence are natural causes and sources of blessedness in God, must they not needs be so in *man*, who was made after the image of God? If the merciful God is happy *in being merciful*, must not merciful men be happy in being merciful also?—Yes, assuredly, my friends; and every merciful, compassionate, benevolent man finds it to be true by happy experience—he finds a present great reward, in his own merciful disposition—he is conscious that he is in the way of duty, and he feels a secret joy arising from that consciousness! he needs no man to tell him that he *is blessed*; he feels that he *is so*, and that he *is so* in exact proportion as he feels himself to be truly merciful.—His heart is so far from reproaching him, that his reason approves and applauds his merciful disposition, and he hath joy in himself, and confidence towards that God whose mercy and goodness he imitates. “A good man (says the royal preacher) shall be satisfied from himself (e),” — i. e. from those graces, which God hath wrought in him.—His happiness does not depend on the pleasure or censure of an ignorant fickle world, but arises from the inward evidences of his own holy and virtuous dispositions, and from the well-grounded hopes of the divine favour and acceptance, which spring from thence. This is what the apostle means when he says, “Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another (f).” — Oh! how happy, my friends, to feel our conformity to the image and will of God;—to be conscious that we are mer-

(e) Prov. xiv. 14.

(f) Gal. vi. 4.

ciful, as our Father in heaven is merciful,—and that we imitate the blessed God in his good-will and benevolence to our fellow creatures?

Idly. THE merciful are blessed in a good name and character, which is better than precious ointment.

ALTHOUGH the approbation of God and conscience are springs of the purest and noblest joys in this life, yet is not the approbation of our fellow creatures to be despised, when we are conscious that it is justly founded. Next to the good opinion of God who searcheth and judgeth the heart, we should certainly endeavour by every lawful method to *merit, obtain and preserve* the good opinion of our fellow creatures;—and this both as it is an evidence of some real worth in ourselves, a cause of solid comfort to us, and a means of our usefulness. And none surely stand so fair a chance for this kind of blessedness as the truly merciful and compassionate.

POWER is generally dreaded—*greatness* envied—*riches* are coveted—*beauty* is admired—but *goodness* and *mercy* are pretty sure of being very generally *beloved*.—“For a good man, says the apostle, some would peradventure even *dare to die* (g).” There is something at once so sweet, so beautiful, so great, generous and divine, in doing good, in forgiving injuries, in relieving the needy, the oppressed and miserable, that this virtue has *ever* been admired and beloved in the world.—And *that jealousy* and *envy*, which have *ever* laboured to blacken other great and good qualities—have seldom dared to attack *this*, as

(g) Romans v. 2.

knowing it has so many friends among the human race; in so much that the ill returns which our Saviour met with from the Jews, for the numberless miracles of mercy he wrought among them, is perhaps the highest proof of their desperate degeneracy and unparalleled wickedness!

THE very *heathens* exalted mercy and goodness above all the moral virtues, and imagined that the exercise of these virtues raised men to a level with the gods, and intitled them to a place among them after their death. Hence the *apotheoses* of the heathen world, or their deifying their dead princes, who during their life-time had been benefactors of the people.—Hence the number of their gods; their *Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Bacchus*—who were nothing else but ancient kings, who because of the services they had done in life, were, thro' the gratitude and superstition of their subjects after their death, ranked among the number of the gods, and worshipped thro' succeeding ages.—The people were powerfully inclined to celebrate and eternize the memory of their *Euergetes*, their *beneficent princes*.—And as these had been to them like gods upon earth, by the exercise of mercy and the profusion of their goodness, they thought themselves justified in placing them in heavenly thrones after their death, and in still expecting from them the blessings of which they stood in need.

CICERO praised *Caesar* for having pardoned *Marcellus*, more than for all his victories! He extols this act of mercy above all his conquests, and above all the glory of his arms; as that *greatness* and *goodness*

of soul, which can forgive an enemy, and render *good* for *evil*, is undoubtedly a more noble and divine accomplishment, than all the military prowess and success in the world. The good emperor *Titus* was called the *delight of mankind*, because he deemed that day wholly lost, in which he had no opportunity of doing good to some or other of his fellow creatures. And *Augustus*, altho' a *tyrant* and an invader of the liberties of his country, was yet universally esteemed and beloved, because of the *mercy of his nature*, and the lenity and mildness of his government.

It would be needless and endless to multiply instances of that universal approbation which the world (unjust and unreasonable as it is) has nevertheless conferred on persons of a merciful, compassionate and forgiving temper.—Indeed it seems to be the *only virtue* which the world in general approves and esteems; and *that* probably because it *so much needs it*: there being no man who does not in some period or other of his life, lie more or less at the mercy of his fellow creatures.

In a word; there is nothing in which we can more *perfectly resemble* God, than in a constant disposition *to give and forgive*. He who delights to be called *the Father of mercies*, and the *Father of the merciful*, is continually *thus* employed.—He, as it were with one hand, is perpetually supplying the wants of all his creatures, supporting and sustaining them by the gifts of his providential goodness—and with the other, pouring out the blessings of *pardon* and *grace*

upon guilty sinners. In these two acts of mercy, in *giving* and *forgiving*, the *merciful* imitate him, and are, as it were, his *ministers*, and *vicegerents* upon earth. And indeed there is so much of GOD (if I may so speak) in scattering and diffusing blessings among men, in supplying the needy, supporting the weak, comforting the afflicted, relieving the miserable, forgiving offenders, overcoming evil with good, and exercising gentleness, lenity and mercy to those who are under our power,—that the world (blind as it is to many other virtues) quickly sees the resemblance between GOD and a merciful man,—between a *divine* and a *merciful* disposition,—and can scarcely refuse to such a character, its *esteem*, *approbation* and *love*. Blessed, therefore, are the merciful, for they shall not only have an *unreproaching heart*, but also a *good name*, which is better than precious ointment—their name while on earth shall be like incense poured forth, and they shall be had in honourable and everlasting remembrance (*b*).—They shall be deemed the genuine children of that GOD, who is good, and who does good, and whose tender mercies, &c.—who is good even to the evil and unthankful;—and while the memory of the miser, of the cruel, uncompassionate and unmerciful shall rot, and be had in just detestation by posterity; the merciful, generous and liberal shall still live in the grateful remembrance of their families, neighbours, friends, and of all who had opportunity to see the beauty, or taste the fruits of so amiable a character!

(*b*) Psal. cxii. 6.

Thirdly. THE merciful are blessed in that peculiar providence and retribution which God hath engaged himself by promise to exercise over such men, their interests and even their families after them. The merciful have a very *peculiar right* to the favours of providence, and a *special reason* to expect from it a very singular protection of their persons and interests. Hear what *David* says in the forty-first psalm—
 “Blessed is he that considereth the poor, the LORD will preserve him in time of trouble.—The LORD will preserve him and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon the earth, and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies.—The LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.”—Hear also the inspired preacher; “Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine (i).” Yes, my friends, a merciful man may assure himself that *that* GOD whose eyes are ever upon the righteous, and whose ears are open unto his cries, will, in a *very special manner*, regard him. He is the man after GOD’s own heart; and is it possible that he who takes a providential care of the lilies of the field, and of the birds of the air, and who heareth the young ravens when they cry, should be regardless of those who make it their study to imitate him in *giving* and *forgiving*—in acts of *mercy* and of goodness? To the cruel and unmerciful he hath indeed threatened that

(i) Prov. iii. 9, 10.

he will be as a *moth* and as *rottenness*—as a young lion who will tear and take *away*, so that none shall rescue them (*k*).

BUT as to the *just* or *merciful*, who hath dispersed and given to the poor, it is expressly promised, that he shall be paid in everlasting remembrance, that his horn shall be exalted with honour, and that he shall inherit the earth (*l*).

GOD, my friends, in the course of his providence seems to deal with the merciful in a way of *retaliation* or *restitution*—and to treat them in a manner which has a likeness and proportion with their treatment of their miserable and indigent brethren—“With the merciful, God sheweth himself merciful”—They obtain mercy not only on the day of judgment—but even *in kind* in this present life. Nay, I verily believe, that many men otherwise wicked have yet been amply rewarded in this life for acts of *mercy* and *compassion*, which they have shewn to the poor and distressed, altho’ these acts have not proceeded from the purest principles—and that their families have flourished, and their basket and store have been increased on this account.—They did those acts of mercy from *mere natural* motives; and probably in this life *only* they had their reward:—for God will never suffer us to loose our recompence, for what we do in behalf of his poor, needy, distressed creatures, though we do it *not* perhaps, from the purest and best views. He will, *some how or other*, either by extra-

(*k*) Hof. v. 12, 14.

(*l*) Psal. cxix. 9. Matth. v. 5.

ordinary and miraculous means; or in the common course of his providence, repay us such debts with usury! Indeed it is almost impossible in the very nature of things, that he who hath been merciful to his fellow creatures, should not, in his turn, obtain mercy from them—that he who hath been ever ready to pardon for his own offences—that he who hath ever made it his glory to succour the miserable, and relieve the distressed, should himself obtain no pity. No, no, a Christian who hath gained the hearts of the poor,—who, by a meek and forgiving temper, hath conquered the malice of his enemies and made them his friends,—who hath established a just reputation for mercy and compassion—of being the father of the fatherless, the husband of the widows, the friend of strangers, the comforter of the afflicted and the reliever of the oppressed—can never be wholly without friends among men!—And if he should, “the Lord will deliver him in the day of trouble, and make all his bed in his sickness.”—He may indeed be afflicted—he may loose his estate, his health and even his friends, as *Job*—but he shall be finally *re-established* and *rewarded*—“God will not forget his work and labour of love which he hath done for his name’s sake”—and even a miracle shall be wrought in his favour, rather than the number of divine promises made to the merciful shall fail of being fulfilled! God is a just and good debtor; can we therefore doubt of being payed in due season?—“He that hath pity on the poor, lendeth to the LORD, says *Solomon*, and that which he hath given, will he pay him again”—and there-

fore he exhorts—"Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days. Give a portion to seven, and also to eight; for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth.—But we will not believe this—we will not believe that God will be our *honest pay-master*—what we give to *his poor*, we think is put in bad hands—even cast upon the waters—and thence proceeds our unmercifulness and hard-heartedness!

BUT blessed are they that *believe*, and by correspondent acts of mercy, make the LORD of heaven and earth their debtor—verily I say unto you that every cup of cold water given from this principle, shall have its full reward.—The barrel of meal and cruise of oil, shall be multiplied to those, whose bowels of compassions are opened to God's poor and needy creatures—he has abundant ways to supply the expences of a wise, well regulated charity; and to remunerate the truly merciful, either in value or in kind!

NAY; there is even a blessing entailed on the families and off-spring of such. The charities of the father is often repayed to his children. So that to be merciful to our fellow creatures is really to lay up a rich inheritance for our off-spring—an inheritance, which often extends to their children and their children's children; which often feeds and clothes them, and raises them friends, when their monies, and houses, and lands are lost and spent—*Jonathan* shewed much favour and friendship to *David*,—and *David* in return, when all the family of *Saul* had forfeited their

lives, carefully searched out the family of his friend *Jonathan*, and shewed favour to them, making *Mephibosheth* eat continually at his table!

THUS GOD, as it were, searcheth out the posterity of the just and merciful man, that he may raise them friends, and reward the mercy of their ancestors in their persons. "I have been young, says *David*, and now am old: yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed (n).

IVthly. THE merciful are blessed in the prayers put up for them by the *poor, miserable* and *distressed* which they have relieved—and in the answer of their own prayers. As GOD heareth the cry of the afflicted, so doubtless their prayers for those who have lightened the burthen of their afflictions. The prayers and blessings of the poor and distressed—their thanks to GOD for seasonable supplies, and their blessings on those who are the immediate instruments of GOD's providential goodness to them—are not at all to be despised, and would often prove a greater blessing to us than the trifling favours we shew to the miserable.—GOD often hears those prayers, and restores ten fold into the bosom of the merciful—But, be this as it will, the prayers of the truly merciful are insured of acceptance. Prayer has a wonderful power with GOD, when it is joined with alms deeds. The words of the angel to *Cornelius*, are remarkable in this view—" *Cornelius*, thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before GOD (o). And, so *Isaiah*, "If

(n) Psalms xxxvii. 25, 26. (o) Acts x. 4.

thou draw out thy soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here am I (p)!"

Vthly. THE merciful are compleatly and fully blessed in their peace and reconciliation with God, and eternal happiness in his enjoyment. This is that blessing of the merciful which crowns and sweetens all the rest, and without which the rest would be very insignificant; and therefore it is principally expressed and pointed out in the promise—"for they shall obtain mercy"—and

1st, WHICH is included in this promise, they shall obtain the pardon and remission of their sins. Charity or mercy in this respect covereth the multitude of sins (q).—This is expressly promised and stipulated by GOD in the new covenant. The words of CHRIST to this purpose are remarkable. "Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again: and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind to the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: give, and it shall be given unto you, good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over; for with the same measure that ye met withal, it shall be measured to you again.—For,

(p) II. lviii. 2, 10. (q) 1 Pct. iv. 8.

if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you : but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses (r).”

BEHOLD then, my brethren, the *privilege* of the *truly merciful*; their guilt is cancelled; their numberless sins are blotted out of the book of GOD’S remembrance, and sunk as it were in the depths of the sea ! And need I enhance the value of this blessing by a number of words, or tell you how greatly and richly blessed that sinner is whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered, and unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity (s) ? And then,

2dly, By consequence he hath peace and reconciliation with GOD. Finding in himself that truly merciful disposition, which is a principal branch of that new nature—that renewed image of GOD—which is the unfading character of the regenerated and sanctified, and to which GOD hath appropriated the promises of his special favour and grace—he hath peace of conscience, confidence towards GOD, and a joyful hope of his everlasting love. And by the increase of this merciful disposition in the soul, his pardon is as it were sealed in his own conscience, his evidences for future happiness brighten, his title to the favour of GOD becomes less doubtful and more certain, his calling and election are made sure, he is enabled as it were to read his own name in the book of life, to rejoice in hope of the glory of GOD, and

(r) Luke vi 35,—38. Mat. vi. 14, 15. (s) Psalms xxxii. 1, 2.

is sealed by the Spirit of promise unto the day of redemption (1). And accordingly in the

3d PLACE, The merciful are blessed with a sure title to that gift of GOD's mercy which is called eternal life.—Let me repeat once more (for it deserves to be often repeated, and had in perpetual remembrance by Christians) what our LORD has recorded as the procedure of the last judgment, as it refers to a merciful disposition and conduct.—Such is the regard which the Judge of all the earth has to this amiable and unspeakably important grace, that all must have been found in the exercise of it, who shall find favour with him on that day; as tho' it were the only virtue he required from his disciples—"Come (will he say) ye blessed," &c. and when these modest and humble persons (confounded on the reflection of the little they had done, now so highly acknowledged and so gloriously recompensed) shall answer, and say, "LORD when saw we thee an hungred," &c. —he shall make them this gracious and astonishing reply, "Inasmuch as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." —*Ye have done it unto me!* O! amazing words! O! astonishing grace! CHRIST is not ashamed to call the poor and miserable his *brethren* and *friends*; yea, *one*, as it were, *with himself*—flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone—so that whatever favour is shewed them, he reckons it as shewed to *himself*. And as a recompence of those little kindnesses shewed to his poor friends and brethren—he causes the mer-

(1) Eph. iv. 30.

cial to go away into life eternal (u).—Let us now
 APPLY THE DOCTRINE, and

1st. HERE, *my brethren*, we have the greatest possible motive to charity and mercy; *sinners*, what is your great request of GOD? Of what do you stand most in need? For what do you appear here this day before GOD? What is the request of your prayers and tears, if you do indeed ever pour out any before GOD?—Is it not *mercy*—Is it not that you may obtain *pardon* and *remission* from GOD?—Is it not that your sins should be blotted out, your consciences quieted—your fears of hell removed—and the hopes of heaven let in upon your souls?—Behold, then, *the way* marked out by heaven for obtaining this blessed end—“Put on, in CHRIST, *bowels of compassions*:—be merciful to your fellow creatures, from a principle of Christian charity, and GOD will shew you mercy! *Christians*, who profess yourselves to be the children of a merciful GOD, and the disciples of a compassionate Jesus—who have tasted, and seen that the LORD is gracious—who live by mercy—dearly beloved, put on, as the elect of GOD, *bowels of mercies*!—Imitate the mercy of GOD and his Son Jesus.—Be not hard hearted.—Hide not yourselves from your own flesh.—Shut not up the bowels of your *compassions* from your poor, sick, afflicted, oppressed, indigent brethren; for if you do, how dwelleth the love of GOD in you (v)?—Be ready to forgive the injuries of your neighbours, as GOD for CHRIST’S sake hath forgiven you.—Be ready to love,

(u) Mat. xxv. 46.

(v) James iii. 17.

and even do good to your enemies, in imitation of him who doeth good to the evil and unthankful—and of him who loved us and died for us, while we were enemies.—“Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body (w).”—Visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction.—Draw out your souls to the hungry, and comfort the afflicted soul. *Ye rich*, give liberally to the poor, out of your abundance.—*Ye poor*, who cannot even cast in one mite, give the charity of your prayers and good offices to those who are still more miserable—Be stedfast, be immoveable, always abounding in the works of mercy, knowing that your labour will not be in vain.—Remember that whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. Let us not therefore be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.—As we therefore have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially to them who are of the household of faith (x).

LET us be ready to *give* and *forgive*, for the love of Christ who gave himself for us, and to us;—of that Jesus who conceals himself, as it were, in the persons of the poor and miserable—that we may have an opportunity of feeding, and clothing, and visiting him in them; for the love of that Jesus, who tho’ so rich, yet became poor for us, &c. (y).—Let us be ready to *give* and *forgive* for the love of that gospel, which is honoured in the world by the merciful and charitable lives of its professors.—Let us be ready to

(w) HEB. xiii. 3. (x) Gal. vi. 8,—10. (y) 2 Cor. viii. 9.

give and *forgive* for the love of our brethren, whose prayers and blessings will reach the ears of God on our behalf, and bring down the blessings of heaven on us and on our children:—finally, let us be merciful, that we ourselves may obtain mercy at the coming and appearance of Christ.

IN vain do we cry, The temple! the temple! religion! Christianity! faith! and grace!—if our temple is without the sacrifices of righteousness—if our religion is without mercy—if our Christianity is without charity—if our faith is without works—and our grace without goodness and compassion! all our religion is *a lie*, if it is devoid of charity:—and all our hopes are vain, if they are destitute of mercy and bowels of compassions. “But blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

2dly. If the gospel lays us under such strong obligations to a merciful disposition, where shall the cruel, the savage and the barbarous appear? If the meek, the tender-hearted, the compassionate, whose hearts are tenderly touched with the miseries and calamities of their fellow creatures, and whose hands are ever open to their relief, shall *alone* find mercy with God—what must be the final doom of those hard-hearted and uncompassionate souls who never knew what it was to feel for the miseries of others,—who are unmoved at the cries, and unconcerned at the intreaties, of the needy and distressed? What must be the final doom of the *spiteful*, *malicious* and *unforgiving*?—of the injurious oppressor, who sees the anguish of his brother’s soul, when he beseecheth,

but will not hear?—And what, finally, shall be the end of the bloody persecutor and merciless tyrant, who sport with the miseries of their fellow creatures, and laugh at their agonies and torments?

THERE is an awful reverse, my brethren, in the words of our text—if the *merciful* are *blessed*, the *cruel* are *curfed*: they have a *curse* corresponding to every *blessing* of the merciful;—wretched in their *tempers*;—uneasy in their *consciences*;—curfed in their *name*;—curfed in their *estates*; and as the *merciful* will finally obtain mercy,—the *cruel* shall finally be chased away from the judgment seat *with a curse*—“Depart from me ye curfed—and these shall go away into everlasting punishment (z).”

LET us then, brethren, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on bowels of mercy! Let it not be said that wicked men and even *heathens* have done more this way, from mere principles of *good-nature*, *humanity* and *philosophy*, than we do from a *principle of grace*, and from the *example of Jesus*!—And where we find ourselves defective in a merciful disposition, let us, by faith in CHRIST, seek it from God, who giveth liberally to all men and upbraideth not, and it shall be given us! Let none of us rest satisfied without so eminent a branch of the Christian temper by which we so signally resemble God, are marked out as his genuine and legitimate children, become the objects of his tender mercy, and are qualified for his eternal enjoyment.

(z) Mat. xxv. 41, &c.

S E R M O N XVIII.

The divine designation and important duty of civil rulers, and the respect and obedience due them by their subjects,* from

I PETER ii. 13, 14.

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the LORD's sake; whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well.

NOTWITHSTANDING the calumnies of the *Jews* against *Christ* as an enemy to *Caesar*; and of both *Jews* and *Heathens* against the *primitive Christians*, as disturbers of civil society, and turners of the world upside down; yet it is most evident to all who are the least acquainted with the *spirit* and *genius* of *Christianity*, that no religion in the world ever secured the royal prerogative of princes, or the just and loyal

* Delivered before his excellency General *Clausen* on his arrival at *St. Croix*. Nov. 7th, 1773.

VOL. II.

I

obedience of subjects, *so fully*, or upon *such noble* and powerful principles, as the *Christian*.

THE *fullest* and most *unreserved* subjection; the *highest* and most *respectful* honour and observance, is enjoined to the magistrate, acting agreeable to the tenor of his sacred office;—and on the other hand, the duty of the magistrate is *strictly enjoined*, and the *rights* and *privileges* of the subject fully *ascertained* and *vindicated*. So that if mankind would obey the *dictates of Christianity*, the rights of the magistrate would never be encroached on, nor those of the subject ever infringed or abridged.

“LET every soul (*says Saint Paul*) be subject to the higher powers; for there is no power but of GOD: the powers that are, are ordained of GOD (a).” *Saint Paul* in this thirteen chapter to the Romans, lays down in *very strong* and *comprehensive terms* the dignity of the magistrate; *his duty*, and that *honour*, *fear*, *respect* and *obedience* which is due to him by the subject.

As to the dignity of magistrates, he tells us “they are ordained of GOD;” his ministers and servants, appointed by him for the terror of evil doers, and for the good of them that do well—“and that, for this purpose, they are invested with that part of the image of GOD which consists in *power*, *dominion* and the administration of justice.”

As to *their duty*; “they are not to bear the sword of civil power *in vain*, but to use it as a terror to evil doers (those who are enemies to the *peace*, *prof-*

(a) Romans xiii. 1.

perity and happiness of civil society).—That is; they are to protect and *succour* the injured and oppressed, to vindicate the cause of the widow, the fatherless, the helpless, innocent and stranger, and to discountenance and suppress vice and injustice of every kind, by suitable laws and punishments.—And they are to “attend continually upon this very thing;” i. e. they are to make it their *chief* and *principle* study to promote the glory of that God whose ministers they are, and to watch with solicitous anxiety over the best interests of civil society.

As to the *duty of subjects*: it is *strongly expressed* and *powerfully enforced* in this chapter. “They are not to resist this ordinance of God; but are “to be subject to the higher powers,” in all commands which do not oppose or contradict the supreme law and authority of that God whose ministers they are.

If we do evil, we are to be afraid of them, because they bear not the sword in vain. So that we *must needs* be subject to them, not only *for wrath* (or because they have a power of executing vengeance upon evil doers)—but *also*, and *more especially*, “for conscience sake,” (because they are the *servants* and *ministers* of God, ordained by him, and clothed with his authority: so that, in *obeying* them, we virtually obey God whose ministers they are. And hence, subjection and obedience to the lawful magistrate is plainly a *matter of conscience*, and a part of that *religious duty* we owe to God, the Author and Fountain of all lawful power.)

This, therefore, is a *noble summary*, not only of

the *duties* of *magistrates*, but also of that *respect*, *submission* and *obedience* which subjects owe to their lawful rulers. And it is well worth observing, that the apostle laid these injunctions on the Christians at *Rome*, when their magistrates were *heathens*; *haters* and *persecutors* of the Christian name. So that *difference*, or even *contrariety* of religion, can afford no pretext to Christian subjects to withdraw their duty and allegiance from their lawful rulers, while they continue to *protect* and *defend* their lives, liberties and properties.

“THE powers that are, says the apostle, are ordained of GOD.”

ALTHO' perhaps, *necessity* might at first suggest the usefulness of such an order of men as civil rulers to mankind, yet *reason* as well as *scripture* may easily convince us that civil government was *ordained* and *appointed* by GOD, who delights in *order* and in the *happiness* of his human offspring.

IN the *earlier* and *simpler* ages of the world, before mankind were multiplied and crowded into near vicinities—before the arts of luxury were invented;—while men had *few wants*, were satisfied with the simple demands of modest nature,—and consequently before *avarice* and *ambition* prompted them to *rapine*, *oppression* and *cruelty*, every master of a family was the *sole king* and *governor* of his own household. He exercised a *supreme jurisdiction* over his own domestics in matters of *life* and *death*, *right* and *property*, in such a manner as to be accountable to none but GOD for his conduct. *Such*, probably, was the condition of *all mankind* before the flood. And *such*

was that of those heads of families commonly called the *Patriarchs* in the Old Testament history, such as *Terah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Lot, Noab, &c.*

BUT, when mankind multiplied and began to live in close vicinity—when the arts of luxury were invented, and the *imaginary* and *artificial* wants of mankind began to be multiplied, *ambition* and *covetousness* tempted the *stronger* to *plunder, injure* and *oppress* the *weaker*. Hence, those who were thus injured by their neighbours, found it expedient to *combine* and *associate* themselves with others, in order to *protect* and *defend* their persons and interests from the violence of injurious neighbours.

THESE combinations or *societies* of men could not long subsist without *some laws or regulations*, and this plainly pointed out the necessity of choosing *one or more* of their number, to have the *superiority* or *command* over the rest, to whom they should, by stipulation, *transfer* and *make over* some part of their *natural powers* and *rights*, in matters of government and *judgment*, for the better regulation and security of the whole society.—And the persons *thus chosen* and *impowered* are what we understand by the words—*kings, princes, governors, rulers* or *civil magistrates*:—and hence, the districts of men over which they ruled, are known by the names of *empires, kingdoms, states, or commonwealths*; so that those kingdoms, which at first did not, perhaps, consist of more than twenty or thirty families, have, in the course of time, by *conquest* and *alliances*, swelled to *vast* and *unwieldy empires*.

THIS seems clearly to have been the *origin* and natural *progress* of civil government among men. And, indeed, it is so necessary in order to the maintaining of *peace* and *order* in the world, that the least reflection may convince us of its being an *ordinance* and *institution* of GOD, for the *being* and *well-being* of civil society.

NOR are we left merely to *conjecture*, or to the *deductions of reason*, in this matter.—GOD'S special appointment of *leaders*, *judges*, and *kings* in the Jewish nation,—the express laws and *rules* for civil government laid down in the code of *Moses*,—and the frequent injunctions of subjection and obedience to civil rulers which we find scattered up and down through the whole *Jewish* and *Christian revelations*, put it beyond all doubt that “*the powers, which are, whether heathen or Christian, are ordained of GOD,*” that all lawful civil magistrates are *his ministers* and *servants*,—and that *their persons and characters*, (so far as they act up to the design of their office) are *sacred* and very *respectable*.

THE words of my text from *St. Peter*, may be considered as *exactly parallel*, to the before *cited* and *illustrated passage* borrowed from *St. Paul's epistle to the Romans*. “*Submit yourselves unto every ordinance of man, for the LORD'S sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him, for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well.*”

IN these words, we are led to *observe* and *consider* the four following things.

1st. WE have the *obedience of the subject* enjoined: "Submit yourselves unto every ordinance of man."

2dly. WE have the object of this *obedience or submission* pointed out: "Whether it be to the king as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him."

3dly. WE have *the motive* of this submission or obedience urged: "For the LORD's sake." And

4thly. WE have the *office and duty* of the civil magistrate laid down and explained: "He is ordained for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise and reward of them that do well."

I HOPE it will not be deemed inconsistent with my office and character, as a minister of that JESUS "Who is the King of kings and Lord of lords, by whom kings rule and princes decree justice"—if I attempt briefly to *explain and illustrate* these words of his holy apostle, and endeavour by divine assistance to shew you in the

1st. PLACE, (according to the method proposed) "What is implied in *that submission*, which we are here commanded to pay to a *lawful and faithful* magistracy. "Submit yourselves unto every ordinance of man." And

1st. IT undoubtedly implies a *high esteem and respect* for their persons and characters. "Honour thy father and thy mother," is the express injunction of GOD in the fifth commandment. By *father and mother* here are meant *all superiors* whether of a *natural, civil or religious* kind. So that as we are by

this commandment bound to honour our *natural parents*, we are equally bound to honour *civil magistrates*, who are our *civil or political parents*,—who, (where they act worthily) are justly entitled to the *amiable and endearing character of fathers of their country*, and whom GOD honours with the title of *nursing fathers* of his church (b). There is something, methinks, very *striking and engaging* in the title of *father*, which the *Chinese* give to their *emperor*, and in his considering his subjects as his *children*, whom he is bound to *cherish, defend and protect* with a *paternal care and affection!* *St. Paul* commands us to “render unto all their dues; honour to whom honour, and fear to whom fear is due,” which is plainly meant of the *civil magistrate* (c), and that noble compendium of our duty, laid down by *St. Peter*, expressly enjoins us; “to fear GOD—love the brotherhood—and honour the king (d).”

INDEED, *this civil honour* which we owe to the *magistrate*, is a *debt justly due* to the *dignity and usefulness* of his office, as the *minister of GOD*, *invested with his authority*, and *charged with his commission*.—All *good and wise and useful members of society* deserve a degree of our *esteem* in proportion to their *usefulness to society*,—and *how much more* “those, whom GOD hath delighted to honour” by conferring upon them *that part of his own image* which consists in *power and dominion over others*,—especially, if they use this power *to the glory of GOD and the good*

(b) Isa. xlix. 23. (c) See Rom. xiii. (d) 1 Pet. ii. 17.

of their fellow creatures? And hence appears the reasonableness of that honour and esteem which we are commanded to pay to a *lawful and faithful magistracy*.

Now, *this honour* should shew itself in a *filial, respectful and dutiful* behaviour to our civil rulers—in a tenderness of their reputation, a free and chearful acquiescence in their judgments and determinations, and in giving them *all those titles*, and paying them *all that respect*; which their *dignity, usefulness and superior place* demands.

DIRECTLY contrary to *this duty*, is that *detestable and rebellious practice* of *defaming and slandering* the civil magistrate, undervaluing his person, and putting the worst construction on all his conduct and determinations. This conduct has a natural tendency to destroy *all order and authority* in the world, to draw subjects from their duty and allegiance, and to introduce universal *disorder, anarchy and confusion* into civil society. We are expressly forbid “to speak evil of the rulers of our people, or to bring against them a railing accusation (e).” And those are justly ranked among the wickedest of men, who *despise dominion and speak evil of dignities*: “*Presumptuous* are they (says the apostle) and *self-willed*, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities, who shall utterly perish in their own corruptions (f).

2dly. THIS submission to the magistrate implies *obedience to his laws*, so far as such obedience may be

(e) Exod. xxii. 23. Jude ver. 9. (f) 2 Pet. ii. 10. Jude ver. 8.

consistent with that duty which we owe to God the great governor of the world. This is the *principal part of a subject's duty*, and indeed *without it any other kind of submission can be of no avail.*

To *scrape and cringe to magistrates—to give them lofty titles, and pay them swelling compliments, without paying any regard to the laws by which they govern, is to pretend an esteem for their persons, while we despise and abuse their lawful authority—the only thing which entitles them to our honour, as magistrates.* Therefore, the apostle Paul commands; “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers.” And why so?—“Because the powers that are, are ordained of God—and therefore, whoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God (g).”

OBEDIENCE to the reasonable laws of the magistrate is also, doubtless, principally intended, in the words of our text: “Submit yourselves unto every ordinance of man;” i. e. to every *well established law of that man who is in lawful power.*

INDEED, *power in the magistrate plainly supposes the duty of obedience and submission in the subject; and, as this power and authority is conferred by God, our obedience to the civil magistrate has in it the nature of a religious duty; so that (as the apostle says) we must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but for conscience sake (b).*

AND hence appears the *crime and guilt of rebels, of all who are enemies to civil government, of all*

(g) Rom. xiii. 1, 2.

(b) Rom. xiii. 5.

who *disobey*, or *resist* the authority of the civil magistrate, or raise disaffection in the minds of subjects to their lawful rulers. *Such men* resist the ordinance of GOD, and they that continue *thus to resist*, shall (as the apostle speaks) receive unto themselves a *just* and *deserved* damnation (i).

3dly. THIS submission to magistrates implies in it, "A *ready*, and *cheerful* payment of their *dues*." Government is a *laborious*, *expensive* thing, and nothing can be more equitable, than that those who attend wholly to the cares and concerns of government, should be *cheerfully* and *generously* reimbursed and rewarded by the subject. "The labourer is worthy of his hire." The *minister* of GOD, and the *dignified* servant and *benefactor* of the public, is intitled by the laws of equity to an *honourable* and *liberal* appointment from that public over whose interests he watches with an *assiduous*, a *paternal* care.—"For this cause (says the apostle) pay tribute also: for they are GOD's ministers attending continually upon this very thing"—namely—to promote the good of society. And therefore he adds: "Render unto all their dues, tribute to whom tribute, and custom to whom custom is due (k)."—One captiously asked our LORD, "Master, is it lawful for us Jews, to pay tribute unto *Caesar*, a *Roman* governor?"—Our Saviour answered to this question by *calling for a penny*—and asking "Whose is the image and superscription?"—They said unto him, *Caesar's*." Then

(i) Rom. xiii. 2.

(k) Rom. xiii. 6, 7.

said he unto them, "Give unto *Caesar*, the things that are *Caesar's*:" q. d. it appears by the current money among you, that you are *Caesar's subjects*; why therefore should you dispute paying *that tribute* which you *justly owe* to your *lawful sovereign*?— And upon another occasion, we find him *working a miracle*, rather than *Caesar's tribute* should not be paid by him and *his disciples* (l).

4th. THE submission we owe to civil magistrates, implies in it, a *vigorous vindication* and *defence* of their *persons, honour, and just prerogatives* in the time of danger. We have a fine lesson of this duty in that pointed reproof which *David* gave to *Abner, Saul's armour-bearer*, when his royal master was in jeopardy of his life by *Abishai*. "And *David* said to *Abner*, Art not thou a valiant man? and who is like thee in Israel? Wherefore then hast thou not kept *thy lord, the king*; for there came one of the people in to destroy the *king, thy lord*. This thing is not good that thou hast done: as the LORD liveth, ye are worthy to die, because ye have not kept *your master, the LORD's anointed* (m)."

It is surely *highly equitable* that we should *protect* and *defend* the *lives, honours and just prerogatives* of those who are the guardians of our *lives, properties and liberties, civil and religious*.

5thly. ANOTHER important duty which we owe to a *lawful and faithful magistracy*, is *prayer and thanksgiving* to God for them. Civil government is

(l) See Mat. xvii. 27.

(m) 1 Sam. xxvi. 15.

{next to the everlasting gospel) the *greatest blessing* that ever GOD vouchsafed to the children of men—and therefore in a particular manner, claims our *gratitude* and *thankfulness* to the Father of mercies, and the Author of every good and perfect gift. The right discharge of the magistrate's duty, also, requires much of that *light, wisdom* and *prudence* which cometh from above, and which is the *special gift* of GOD. When the Almighty encouraged *Solomon* “to ask from him, whatsoever he would have;”—*Solomon* never gave a higher proof of his wisdom than in the request which he made—“Lord, says he, give unto thy servant *an understanding heart*, that I may judge thy people; and that I may discern between the good and the bad: for who is able to judge this so great a people (n)?”

Now, as it is the highest wisdom of every magistrate to *make Solomon's choice*, and to implore this blessing at the throne of grace—“LORD give me wisdom; give me prudence; give me a wise and understanding heart, that I may judge thy people, and be capable, in all cases, to discern between the evil and the good;”—so 'tis the duty of every subject to implore these blessings for their magistrates. And this is what the apostle strictly enjoins (o); “I exhort that prayers and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.” So much then for the duties implied

(n) 1 Kings iii. 7,—10.

(o) 1 Tim. ii. 12.

in that *submission* we owe to a lawful and faithful magistracy. Proceed we now.

Idly. To consider "the persons to whom this submission is due; " Whether, says the apostle, it be unto the *king*, as supreme, or unto *governors*, as unto them that are sent by him."—The apostle *Peter*, had doubtless particularly, in his eye, the *Roman emperor* and the *governors of the provinces*, under whom the Christians (to whom he wrote) lived—and to whom he strictly enjoins their *dutiful submission and obedience*.

In general: by "*the king*, as supreme," we are undoubtedly to understand the *highest rank and order* of civil rulers in any *empire, kingdom or commonwealth*—whether it be *kings*, in *monarchies*,—or *chief states*, in *republics*;—or *nobles*, in *aristocracies*.—And by "*governors*," all *inferior magistrates*, deriving their power from *kings*, or those that are *supreme*, and exercising it, under certain limitations, over *smaller parts or districts* of states or kingdoms:—all, in short, who are *under kings* or states, and *over us*,—who enjoy any degree of *civil honour*, or sustain any measure of *civil power*.—All such are comprehended under this plural title, "*governors*," who are sent by him—i. e. by the *king*, or *supreme power*—and therefore, unto all such do we owe the *before-explained* submission and obedience in their respective places and stations: for they are the ministers of God, sent for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise and reward of them that do well.—But I hasten, in the

III. PEACE, to inquire, what should be the *great* and *leading* motive of our subjection and obedience to the civil magistrate.

THE grand motive here urged, is *conscience*, or a regard to the divine will and authority: "Submit yourselves unto every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake!" A *powerful* motive this, my brethren, for the submission and obedience of subjects, and which no real Christian, methinks, can *gainsay* or *resist*.

"For the Lord's sake, (as well for your own sake, and for the sake of civil society) submit yourselves." This word carries in it the *whole weight* of Christian duty, and binds it upon *conscience*! for the main ground of human authority, is that interest which *divine authority* has in it. The ordinances of human government, altho' executed by *men*, who are chosen by their fellow men, is yet of *divine original*,—derives its *power* and *efficacy* from God; and therefore God should be principally regarded in it. "The judgment is the Lord's (p)." We are principally to obey God, in obeying the magistrate: for it is "by him that kings rule, and princes decree justice." He is the *author* and *fountain* of civil power: magistrates are only *ministers* of it.—He is the *cause* and *first mover*: they, only *instruments*.

If we only obey magistrates because of the *honours* and *distinctions* with which they are clothed—or merely because of their *power* to execute wrath on evil doers—our obedience is very *defective*, and

(p) Deut. i. 17.

arises from very low and unworthy motives. True, indeed, power is conferred on the magistrate, that he may enforce obedience on evil-doers and refractory members of society. "Wherefore, says the apostle, we must needs be subject for wrath" (or because the magistrate has a power to punish:)—but not for wrath only; but also, and more especially "for conscience sake"—or, which is the same,—“for the Lord's sake.”

THIS, my brethren, is the highest and noblest motive of submission and obedience in subjects, and transforms their loyalty and obedience, into a Christian and religious duty. We are to obey magistrates chiefly as they are the ministers of the most high GOD. We are to view GOD in them, and submit to the divine authority, in submitting to theirs. So that it is not so much the person of the magistrate which we honour and obey, as his office and authority. This annexes a kind of sacredness to his person, which is the chief, if not the only thing which claims our honour, submission and obedience, as subjects.

AND here we are naturally led to observe, how much this consideration tends to humble the pride even of the highest rank of magistrates.—“I have said, says the Almighty, that ye are gods: but ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes (q).”

THE honour and dignity of magistrates is indeed very great, but it is wholly borrowed from GOD. It is he alone who hath caused them to differ from others. They are indeed as gods upon earth, but they

(q) Psa. lxxxii. 6.

must die like men, and give an *awful* and *impartial* account of the important trust committed to them. Crowns are *glittering ornaments*, but they are also *exceeding heavy and ponderous*; and God *putteth them on* and *taketh them off* when he pleases. As *the planets borrow their light from the sun*, so *magistrates derive all their power, dignity and grandeur from God*, and hold them merely *at his pleasure*.

“Promotion cometh neither from the *east*, nor from the *west*, nor from the *south*; but God is the judge: He putteth down one and raiseth up another (r).”—

“Magistrates could have *no power or honour at all*, except it were given them from above: for the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he pleaseth (s).”—Be wise now, therefore, ye *kings*; be instructed ye *judges of the earth*:—serve the LORD *with fear*, and rejoice before him with trembling!—not unto *your selves*, nor unto *your selves* but unto *his name*, be the glory, who hath conferred upon you *all your honour, and all your power*—and who hath appointed that your subjects should submit themselves unto you—not for *your own sakes*, but for *conscience sake*, and for the *Lord's sake*: unto whom appertaineth *all glory, honour, dominion and power*, both in heaven and on the earth.

I need not still beg the patience of my hearers, while I briefly consider in the

14th. AND last place, the *office and duty* of the magistrate laid down in our text. “He is ordained

(r) Psal. lxxv. 6. (s) Deut. iv. 15. John. xiv. 11.

of GOD, and sent by the *king*, for the punishment of evil doers, and the praise and reward of such as do well.

By *evil doers* we are undoubtedly to understand all those who are enemies to the *peace, tranquillity* and *prosperity* of the state;—and these are *principally* such as publicly violate and transgress the laws of GOD, (which *are*, or at least ought to be, the *foundation* and *ground work* of all human laws). If, therefore, *all civil law* and *justice* is built upon the law of GOD as its foundation, consequently *all these* are to be repeated *evil doers*, and enemies to the *peace* and *happiness* of the state, who profanely violate the divine laws, and ought to be punished by the magistrate according to the tenor of his office: *all* who *deny* or *blaspheme* GOD, who *neglect*, *corrupt* or *abuse* his worship; who *profane* his name, or *break* his sabbaths.

If any should ask, “How the magistrate’s punishing sins committed against the *first table* of the law, can contribute to the advantage of his government, which is chiefly concerned about the *lives, properties*, and *reputations* of his subjects, which are all duties of the second table?”

I ANSWER, *many ways*; for

1st. CAN it be imagined that GOD, who gives the magistrate his power for the punishment of *evil doers*, and who is jealous of his own honour above all things—can it, I say, be imagined, that this GOD is indifferent how little care is taken of the honour of *his name, his worship* and *his sabbaths* by the magi-

strate, provided *the rights of mankind, worms of the dust*, are but well guarded and secured?

CAN it be thought that it is agreeable to the most high GOD, to see the magistrate solely employed in *defending the names, estates and lives* of his subjects—while the sacred *rights of his own DUTY*, are wholly neglected and overlooked as no part of the magistrate's concern?—Is it at all probable that the High possessor of heaven and earth, is pleased to see men invested with his own *sacred power*, wholly busied in enacting laws and penalties against *treasonable and rebellious persons, murderers, thieves, false witnesses, slanderers* and the like—while *his own sacred and venerable name is blasphemed, his ordinances despised, and his sabbaths profaned*, without the least notice taken by government, or the least exertion of the civil power? It cannot be, my brethren.

2dly. The punishment of sins against the first table of the law, is conducive to the welfare of civil government, in as much as the duties of the *first table*, are a guard to the duties of the *second*.

RELIGION is the *only bond of conscience*, and the *only thing which can reach it*. A man who is *truly religious*, who pays a conscientious regard to the duties of the first table of the law—will be a *peaceable and useful member of society*, and a *staunch friend to civil government, out of principle*;—not because he is *obliged to be so* by the external constraints of civil power,—but because he fears GOD, and reverences his conscience.

WHEREAS an *impious man* who violates the laws

of piety in the first table, has no *restraints of conscience*. He only *fears man*, and therefore, will never submit to any ordinance of man, *for the Lord's sake*, or *for conscience sake*; (which is the only valuable principle of obedience to magistrates; and without which there could be no civil government).

Hence it is, that all *wise and prudent legislators*, even among the *heathens*, ever enacted the *first and severest laws* against the *contempt of religion* and of *the gods*, as the chief pillar and security of their government.

Hence *blasphemy, perjury, idolatry and sabbath breaking*, were punished with death by the law of *Moses*.—And hence it is that all Christian princes have ever thought it *their first duty* to enact *strict laws and severe penalties* against the same sins, however poorly they have been executed in many parts of the Christian world, by a *corrupt or faithless magistracy*.

THE second part of the magistrate's duty here specified, is "to *praise and reward* them that do well."

MAGISTRATES praise them that do well, when they encourage them by their *favour and approbation*;—When they shew a *peculiar affection and love* to good subjects,—when they promote them to *places of profit and honour* in the state—and especially, when they *punish and discontinue* evil doers: for *this* is the most honourable distinction which can be made between the *evil* and the *good*, when *good and peaceable subjects* enjoy the *favour of their rulers*,

and the *privileges* and *immunities* of the state,—while those who are *wicked* and *refractory* are *discountenanced* and *punished*.

BUT I have already too far trespassed on the patience of my hearers, and must hasten to a *very brief*

APPLICATION of the subject. And 1st. If *such* is the office and duty of the civil magistrate,—if he is *ordained* by GOD for the good of society, “to be a terror to evil doers, and a praise and reward to such as do well,” we ought to be *duly sensible* of this great blessing, and *thankful* to GOD for it. “The civil powers that are, are ordained of GOD.” *Unto him* therefore ought to be given the glory of this institution of men.

WERE it not for the *regulations* and *restraints* of civil government, what a wretched world would this be in which we live? No man’s *life*, *liberty*, *character*, or *property* would be secure. The strongest must always prevail against the weakest. The *cunning* and *deceitful* must ever prevail against the *simple* *honest* man. The *quiet* and *peaceable temper*, must ever become a prey to violence and oppression. The *passionate* and *revengeful*, would kill *his* neighbour on the slightest provocation.—And if every man were left to be *his own judge* and *avenger*, it is easy to see, how *partial* he would be to himself; how *unjust* and *injurious*, to *others*!—Nay; *so many* and *great* are the *advantages* of civil government, that the generality of those who have studied politics, agree, that *tyranny* is preferable to *anarchy*;—i. e. that the *worst* go-

vernment in the world, is better than no government at all.

THRO' this wise and gracious appointment of GOD; the malice, hatred, covetousness and ambition of man; are in a great measure restrained—we can call our wives, our children, and our possessions, our own;—and our lives, liberties, characters and properties are in a great measure secured against the attacks of violence, injustice, oppression and slander.

If, therefore, we have a due value and esteem for this ordinance of GOD, we will honour the civil magistracy;—we will obey their reasonable laws;—we will submit ourselves to their lawful authority;—we will defend their just dues; we will defend their persons and characters in the administration of justice—and, especially, “we will pray for all in authority, that they may be faithful to GOD, and to the interests of society, that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty under their administration. In a word, we will cheerfully obey the apostle's exhortation; “we will submit to every ordinance of man; and that too for the LORD's sake; whether it be to the king as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well.”

ably. As I have now the honour of addressing myself to Christian magistrates, I would beg leave, in the most humble and respectful manner, to do my duty, upon this occasion, by putting you in remembrance of yours.

HONOURED SIR! you have heard the honour, ob-

dignity and submission which is due you from those over whom God hath set you, — and the *power and authority* you have to *enforce and secure* this duty from your subjects. You have also heard from whom you have derived *this power*, and *in whose cause* you are to exert it. “The powers that are, are ordained of God.” You are the dignified ministers and servants of the most high God. You bear and reflect the *image of his authority*; and are honoured with *his high commission*. And like him, you ought to be the *guardians of society* and the *benefactors of mankind*. Your dignities and honours are great; but *great also and exceeding important* is your *trust*. If you seek, *only or principally your own honour, pleasure, interest or ease*, in the discharge of the magistracy, you *displease God*, and do not answer the design of his ordinance. “You bear not the sword of civil power *in vain*; but are sent for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise and reward of them that do well.”

You have also heard *who these evil doers* are, to whom your punishing authority reaches: they are *not only the breakers of the six last commandments*; — the transgressors against the *honour, reputation, chastity, property, and lives* of their neighbours; — but also *such, and more especially such, as violate the duties of piety towards God*, — who *blaspheme his name, despise his worship, and profane his sabbaths*. These are rebels against the King of heaven, and call for the interposition of the civil magistrate to vindicate the honour of the *divine laws*, and ascertain the

rights of *affronted* DEITY. *These* are also the *greatest enemies* of every state, as they lessen *that awe* and *reverence* of the Supreme Being, which gives law to conscience.

I WOULD take leave, by offering to your consideration, the instructions of *good king Jehoshaphat* to his deputy governors: (1)—“And the king set judges in the land, throughout all the cities of *Judah*—and said to the judges—“Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man; but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment. Wherefore now, let the fear of the Lord *be upon you*; take heed and do it: for there is *no iniquity* with the LORD our GOD; nor *respect of persons*; nor *taking of gifts*. Thus shall you do, in *the fear of the Lord*; *faithfully* and *with a perfect heart*. Warn them that they trespass not against the Lord, and so wrath come upon you. *Deal courageously*, and the Lord shall be with the good.”

MAY I now be permitted to address myself to *your excellency*, in a more particular manner?

THE providence of GOD hath sent you among us, distinguished by the favour, and loaded with the honours of your royal master, and invested with *ample powers* and full commission to be the chief ruler of this people.

“As righteousness exalteth a nation, and sin is a reproach to any people,” we make no doubt but you will have a peculiar regard to the interests of *virtue* and *religion* in your government.—That you will be

(1) 2 Chron. xix. 5, &c.

to the evil doers, and a praise and reward to them that do well. Persuaded of your excellency's abilities in the *artificial* and *important* science of governing, we have not the least reason to doubt of the *uprightness* and *integrity* of your intentions.

But we have *still farther benefits* to hope from your excellency. Just emerging, as it were, from one of the severest calamities, with which ever the *Canaan* Isles have been visited—generally reduced to poverty, and oppressed with debt—next to *GOD* and our *gracious sovereign*, our eyes are fixed on your excellency, as the *only person* who, by your influence at court, and the intimate knowledge you have of the interests and circumstances of these islands, can make such a representation of them to your *gracious master*, as may procure his royal *favour* and *indulgence* to this *poor distressed people*.

MAY your government be *long, useful* and *happy* amongst us. May you live to see yourself *universally beloved* and *caressed*, as the *father* and *friend* of the people over whom you rule;—as the *benefactor* of the *Danish* islands of *America*.

I WOULD conclude this short address by begging leave to recommend, in a particular manner, to your excellency's *patronage* and *protection*, the *two protestant reformed churches* of this island. And I trust that, by our *loyalty* to our *gracious sovereign*, our *respect* and *observance* to you his dignified minister, and our *quiet* and *peaceable* deportment under your government, we shall be enabled to *merit*, as well as to *claim*, this favour.

AND now, that *subjects* may learn to lead still *more quiet* and *peaceable* lives, in all godliness and honesty, under the privilege and blessing of civil government—and that *all who are in authority*, may be *still more faithful* and *watchful* over the interests of *religion* and *civil society*, may GOD of his infinite mercy grant, for the sake of CHRIST.—Amen and Amen.

S E R M O N X I X .

The Law of CHRIST waited for and received by the Isles of the sea, from

ISAIAH xlii. 4.

—*And the isles shall wait for his law.*

IT is obvious to every one who reads the prophecies with attention, that the Spirit of GOD, by which the prophets were inspired, took occasion, in all the outward calamities and distresses of the church, to comfort her by glorious promises of the MESSIAH, “the hope and consolation of *Israel*, and the Saviour thereof.”

THIS unhappy people were now at the very eve of the *Babylonish* captivity, which was one of their greatest public calamities, as a people; and this *truly evangelical prophet*, who was commissioned occasionally to denounce this heavy judgment against them for their sins, had it in charge also to pour out the balm of consolation to the pious among them, in a rich profusion of the *clearest, sweetest and most comforting* descriptions and prophecies of the MESSIAH, that we

any where meet with in the scriptures of the Old Testament.

THE words of our text make a part of one of those *glorious descriptive prophecies*, and which should be the *more peculiarly precious* and endearing to us, as it points out a period in which we are personally interested, and foretels events which our eyes have seen in part accomplished—namely, the *conversion of the Gentiles*, and the propagation of the *everlasting gospel* to the *ends of the earth*, and the *isles of the sea*.

THE prophet had a commission, in the *fortieth* chapter, to make a glorious promulgation of the gospel; of *good tidings of free grace and rich salvation by CHRIST*.—In the *forty-first* chapter, he *exposes, ridicules, and confutes idolatry*, too common among this professing people.—And in the present chapter, he introduces GOD the Father as pointing out his own Son, both to *Jews and Gentiles*, as the *great prophet and light* of the world and of the church, who should teach the *true doctrine of salvation*, so long *needed, desired, and hoped for*, amidst the darkness of this world.—Hence he takes occasion to excite the *Gentiles* to celebrate and rejoice in this wonderful gift of this grace conferred upon them—
“Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise from the ends of the earth—ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles and the inhabitants thereof.—Let them give glory unto the LORD, and declare his praise in the islands:—for I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead

them in paths that they have not known : I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight : these things will I do unto them, and not forsake them (a).”—And then after those encouraging promises to the *Gentile* nations, he turns to the *Jews*, and reproaches them with their *stupidity*, *hard-heartedness* and *impenitency*, that he might awaken them to *repentance*, and *emulation*.

IN the *nine* first verses, CHRIST the MESSIAH is emphatically pointed out by his eternal Father—as the *light of the world* and the *teacher of the Gentiles*; “Behold ! my servant whom I uphold ; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth : I have put my spirit upon him, and he shall bring forth judgment to the *Gentiles*.”—CHRIST, altho’ in his divine nature he is GOD equal with the Father, yet *as man* and *mediator*, he acts in subordination to him, and is truly *his servant* in the great work of redemption.—For this purpose GOD hath *chosen him*, *upholds him* and *furnishes him* with the Spirit without measure, to qualify him for this important work. The voice from the excellent glory, at the time of our Saviour’s baptism, when *he* was eminently consecrated and set apart to the work of redemption, seems to allude directly to this passage—“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased ; hear ye him !”

IN the *second* and *third* verses, the *genius of the Messiah’s doctrine*, and the *meek, mild, compassionate* and *benevolent* method of his teaching, are beautifully represented. “He shall not cry, nor lift up,

(a) *I*. xlii. 10, 11, 12, 16.

nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets.—A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench, till he shall bring forth judgment unto victory.”

IN the fourth verse, we have the *zeal, diligence, perseverance* and *abundant success* of this divine teacher, until he shall have fully accomplished the end of his mission, and *planted* and *established* his *institution* in the whole earth, and in all the isles of the sea: “He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth; and the isles shall wait for his law!”—repeated again with some variation in the *sixth* verse below—“I the Lord have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people; for a light of the *Gentiles*!”

BEHOLD! my brethren, this scripture is this day in some measure fulfilled in our ears, and before our eyes;—CHRIST, the *glorious*, the *long promised* and *long expected Messiah*, hath been given for a covenant of the people, for a light of the *Gentiles*, and the isles (far distant from the scene of his sacrifice, to the *north*, and to the *south*, and to the *west*) have waited for, and in some measure, *received his law*!

GOD his heavenly Father, hath already given him many of the *heathen* for his inheritance, and much of the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession;—and we are encouraged to wait, with hope and expectation, for the *full* and *complete* accomplishment of this glorious prophecy, “When all the ends of the earth shall remember themselves and be turned to

the LORD, and when all the isles of the sea shall bow down before him;—when the knowledge of the LORD shall cover the whole earth, as the waters cover the face of the deep.”

O THAT these happy periods were advanced!—that the triumphs of the cross were spread!—that the kingdoms of this earth, were become the kingdom of the LORD of his CHRIST!—and that *the isles*—even *these isles* in which we live, did *not only wait for*, but also *cordially and universally receive* his law, and put themselves under his wise and happy government—*Amen.*

IN farther improving this subject, I shall *first* (by the divine assistance) a little illustrate and explain the words, and the doctrine which they contain—and *secondly*, make some practical improvement of them.

1st, I AM a little to illustrate and explain the words of the text, and the doctrine which they contain.—“And the isles shall wait for his law.”

THE most judicious interpreters and scripture critics allow that these words, in the original, may admit of two translations, and a *double sense.*

1st. “The isles shall *wait for*, or *expect* his law with desire.”

ACCORDING to the *Hebrew* idiom, persons are said to *desire*, *hope for*, *wish for* or *expect* all those things which *they want* or stand in need of. So, in an excessive drought, the earth is termed thirsty, as tho’ it felt the appetite of thirst, and vehemently desired to be refreshed with the rain from heaven.

MANY of the *Gentiles* or heathens seemed to be

deeply sensible of their want of *that true wisdom* by which the way of attaining eternal life might be *clearly* and *fully* laid open to them. Their philosophers, generally speaking, *earnestly desired* to be convinced of the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards for the virtuous.—And altho' they used many *ingenious* and *powerful natural* and *moral* arguments for the proof and establishment of this important doctrine; yet they could arrive at *no absolute certainty*, thro' a defect of evidence, and rather *wished*, than *could prove*, that the soul was immortal, and that human virtue would meet with an eternal reward. “The *Greeks*, says the apostle, seek after wisdom (b).”—They applied themselves by every human means, and to the utmost of their power, to investigate true wisdom.

Now, as it is evident that *the doctrine or law* of the MESSIAH can alone exhibit the true knowledge and way of salvation to a guilty world—and as it is manifest by the event, that God revealed this doctrine to the *Gentiles* to supply this defect of wisdom, and to instruct them in the knowledge of salvation and eternal life, which they sought for in vain, among all their systems of philosophy;—so the *Gentiles*, altho' ignorant of the MESSIAH, and of the councils and promises of God, yet might be said to *wait with desire* for the MESSIAH'S law, in as much as the MESSIAH preached and published *just such a law and doctrine* as they *needed*, and as they were *laboriously wishing* and seeking for among the various discordant systems of

(b) 1 Cor. i. 22.

their human philosophy. Conscious of their own want of a better wisdom than they had yet attained, they were *earnestly seeking* after it—and what other was this, than that system of *divine and heavenly philosophy* revealed by the MESSIAH, which exhibits the *true nature of God*—the *true state of man*—and the *only way* wherein *guilty, sinful and polluted man* can be restored to the favour and image of GOD, and advanced to a state of eternal felicity in his presence and enjoyment?

THE Gentiles *earnestly desired salvation*, i. e. a freedom from the *power, guilt and dominion* of sin, and from that *condemnation* which it deserves:—but seeing there is no other name given under heaven among men, whereby we can be saved, but the name of JESUS—neither is their salvation in any other—therefore they may be said by a *very natural and obvious figure*, to have *expected or waited for him with desire*... They needed a *divine prophet*, and a *Saviour*, just such as JESUS was, and therefore he is said by the prophet, with the greatest propriety, “to have been the *desire of all nations* (c).”

So much, then, for the *first* sense of the words, which is that expressed in our English translation—“And the isles shall wait for his law.”—They shall have obtained such a *sense and conviction* of the *vanity and insufficiency* of their philosophical knowledge, with respect to the salvation of a lost world—and such a *sense of their need* of a *clearer and fuller revelation* of GOD’s will in a matter of such importance

(c) Hag. ii. 8. o. *isles shall wait for his law.*

—that they shall be *prepared* and *disposed* to embrace with *desire* and *eagerness* the MESSIAH'S doctrine and law when it comes to be promulgated to them.

AND indeed the rapid progress of the gospel at its first promulgation—the *joy*, *desire*, and *avidity* with which numbers of the heathen philosophers embraced it, as that very system of divine and heavenly truth which they had been so long in quest of—and the celerity with which it extended itself over both the *continent* and *islands of the sea*—afford a *beautiful illustration and strong confirmation* of this delightful prophecy. But

2dly. OTHERS *thus* translate the words; “The isles shall put their hope in his law, or doctrine.” *q. d.* The isles shall receive his doctrine with *faith* and *hope*; they shall *believe his doctrine*, and *place all their hope of salvation in this faith*; or, they shall find *that* in the doctrine of the MESSIAH on which they may confidently repose their hopes; that *sure foundation*, that *precious corner stone*, on which they may securely and confidently build up the noble fabric of their heavenly hopes and eternal expectations.

As *the ignorance* of the *Gentile* nations in the true knowledge of salvation, may be figuratively said to have cried unto GOD for the light of divine truth;—so their *miserable, guilty, corrupt, wretched* state and condition, drawn in such black and frightful colours, not only by *St. Paul* in his epistle to the *Romans*, but also by their own poets and satyrists, pro-

claimed aloud their perishing need of a *teacher* and *Saviour*.

THIS seems strongly and beautifully described by the apostle. "For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of GOD. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope: because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption, into the glorious liberty of the children of GOD. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now: and not only they, but ourselves also which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body (d)."

GREAT was the *guilt, corruption* and *pollution* of the *heathen* nations.—There seemed to be an earnest expectation of the whole creation for the manifestation of the sons of GOD—it *groaned*, as it were, under the enormous load of its guilt and iniquities, and *travailed in pain* for a general reformation; "to be delivered from the bondage of corruption, and to be brought into the glorious liberty of the children of GOD."—The grand prophecies of the *Messiah's* kingdom were upon the very eve of being accomplished, and every thing was ripening for that glorious event. There seemed to be a *general desire* and *expectation* of some such *mighty* and *universal* revolution as that which the gospel produced. The world wanted *such a pro-*

(d). Romans viii, 19,—23.

phet and deliverer as the *Messiah*—*such a doctrine* as he revealed—and *such a reformation* as his *law* inculcated, and as his *example* pointed out. *What doctrine*, indeed, but that of the *Messiah*, could be the *object of faith*, or the *foundation of hope* to a world *dying in wickedness*, and oppressed with *mountainous loads of guilt*?—*Who* but the *Messiah*, the *glorious God-man-mediator*, who was not only appointed by *God*, but also able to save unto the uttermost, could be an *adequate object of faith*, or a *sufficient foundation of hope* to such a world?—*What* but his *atoning sacrifice* could give them confidence in the presence of an *offended God*?—*What* but his *merciful intercession* could advocate their *hopeless cause* before the throne of his *mercy*?—*What* but the *grace of his all-purifying Spirit*, could conquer their *prejudices*, eradicate their *deep-rooted corruptions*, cleanse their *polluted souls* and renew them in the *spirit of their mind*?

It was, therefore, to be *rationaly expected*, that, when the *Gentile nations* and the *isles of the sea* came *rightly to understand* and *apprehend* their own *wretchedness, guilt and danger*, and the *glorious supply* provided in the *person and the doctrine of the MESSIAH*, for all their *spiritual wants and exigencies*, they would *cordially receive and embrace him and his law*, and *confidently repose their hope in him*; many *glorious prophecies* of which event we have recorded in the *prophecies of Isaiah*;—“In the last days, the *mountain of the LORD's house* shall be established on the top of the mountains, and all nations shall flow

into it ;—and many people shall go and say, come ye and let us go up into the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the GOD of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths ; for out of *Zion* shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from *Jerusalem* (e)—Again ; “ And in that day there shall be a root of *Jesse*, which shall stand for an ensign of the people ; to it shall the *Gentiles* seek, and his rest shall be glorious.—And so in that passage parallel to our text (f) ;—“ My righteousness is near : my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people. A law shall proceed from me, and I will make my judgment to rest for a light to the people : the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust.

IT is remarkable also, that when the apostle *Matthew* quotes our text from *Isaiab*, in the *twelfth* chapter of his gospel—instead of saying—“ And the isles shall wait for his law.”—He gives the word this turn—“ And in his name shall the *Gentiles* trust ;”—which, we may be sure, is the *true* and *genuine sense* of the *Spirit*, in the words of our text.

By the law of the *Messiah* here, we are not to understand the *law of works*—“ Do, and thou shalt live ;” but the gospel *law*, or *law of grace*, which runs thus ;—“ Look unto me all ye ends of the earth, and be ye saved—believe in the LORD JESUS CHRIST and thou shalt be saved—the just shall live by his faith.”—Nor is it in any *law* or *doctrine* of

(e) Chap. ii. 2, 3. (f) Chap. xi. 10.

CHRIST, separate from CHRIST himself, that the *Gentiles* are to trust and hope for salvation. No, it is in CHRIST the MESSIAH himself, as *contained and held forth* in the law of grace, that they are to believe, hope and trust, as the grand *object of hope and cause of salvation*.—It is in the glorious *person and merit, sacrifice and atonement, power and love* of the MESSIAH himself that they are to hope.—“In HIS NAME, shall the *Gentiles* trust: Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else, a just God, and a Saviour, there is none beside me.—Be of good courage and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD.”—And therefore he is called, by way of eminence, “the LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS”—the hope of *Israel* and the Saviour thereof.

Now, in order that the *Hees* may *truly wait for and cordially receive* the law of CHRIST, the inhabitants of them must be *in general* possessed of the following qualifications and dispositions—*In general* I say; for while the very best qualifications and dispositions are confined to a *few individuals only*, the majority who are destitute of them, will effectually prevent the *cordial reception, and free course* of the gospel, in any place.

1st. THEY must have a *deep sense of their guilt* and an *alarming apprehension* of their danger by sin. This temper must necessarily lie at the bottom of all religion in sinful guilty creatures which need redemption and salvation. Before ever religion will be prosecuted *with vigour, desired with earnestness, or made*

a *serious business* of, its *necessity* must be first *discovered* and *apprehended*. "The whole need not a physician, but they that are sick, and who *know* and *feel themselves to be so*." The glad tidings of salvation will have no charms to any but those who apprehend their *lost condition*. The balm of *Gilead* will afford no consolation to any but the *broken of heart* and *wounded in spirit*. The *food of the gospel*, the *bread of eternal life*, will only be relished by those who *hunger and thirst after righteousness*.

THE law of CHRIST therefore will never be impatiently waited for and cordially received in the isles—nor will the Redeemer's kingdom come with power and prevailing efficacy in any place where there is not previously excited by the Spirit of God a *general sense* of their need of the *gospel salvation*—a *general conviction of guilt and danger*, and a *general hungering and thirsting* after righteousness.

ADLY. ANOTHER necessary qualification is "a proper concern for the soul and its eternal salvation."—While a people continue immersed in sensuality—or so lost to all sense of the immortal nature and eternal duration of their souls, as scarcely to admit the conviction that they have souls, or that these souls are to exist in a future state either of happiness or misery,—it is utterly impossible that the gospel, which entirely addresses itself to the spiritual and immortal part of our nature, and which is wholly concerned about the cure and salvation of our souls, should ever obtain any footing among them, or meet with any cordial reception from them.—No, no; those who

are not yet convinced that they have immortal *souls*, will be little anxious about their eternal salvation.

IN order to the *heartly reception of the gospel*, we must be *all alive* to the *hopes and fears* of immortality. Our souls must be considered as our *most important realities*, and their eternal salvation, as the *summum bonum*, the chief good of our natures. We must be persuaded that we are not *mere mushrooms of Epicurus*—*mere brutes* of an *erect posture* and different shape from others—but that we are *immortal beings*, bound to an *endless duration*; and that it *highly, yea infinitely* imports us, to prepare in the *present state* for an *eternal conscious existence*. This *conviction* will give a *reality and importance* to religion which we never felt before—and will incline us to give a *sober attentive* hearing to the gospel of CHRIST, which proposes blessings of eternal moment to the soul.

3dly. THESE *qualifications and dispositions*, where they truly exist, will produce several others which I have not time particularly to enlarge on—for instance—a *full and true conviction* of the *soul's immortal nature and duration*, and of its *imminent danger* of endless misery thro' guilt and defilement, will naturally excite an anxious desire to know the way of salvation.—The glad tidings of the gospel will be *exceeding welcome* to such a people.—They will *solicitously desire* to be acquainted with the *person and offices* of the glorious Redeemer, and the whole extent of his saving plan, in all its *parts and dependencies*.—He will appear unto them, the *pearl of great*

prize, the *treasure* hid in a *field*, the chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely.

AND as the hearts of *such a people* will be set on the *gospel treasure* above every earthly concern; so the *gospel*, the *field* in which this treasure is hid,—the *cabinet* which contains this pearl of great price, will be exceeding precious to them—they will set a *high value* upon the *holy scriptures*, which exhibit and hold forth this *Saviour* and his great salvation!

THE *ordinances* also, and *all the means of grace* which tend to put them in possession of this treasure, they will prefer even to their necessary food—and will be ready to cry out with *heart-felt rapture*—“How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the *gospel of peace*, and bring glad tidings of good things!”—Among *such a people*, there will be an *universal desire* to hear the *gospel*—to frequent *ordinances*, and to profit by every means of *grace*. The concerns of their *souls* and *eternity* will have an *evident preference* to the concerns of their *bodies* and of the *things of time and sense*. Religion will be no more, among *such a people*, a *mere matter of form*, a *business by the bye*, but the *great leading business* and *concern* of life; the one thing *needful*, about which their choicest thoughts and cares will be *cheerfully* and *diligently* employed.

SUCH, *my brethren*, were the *qualifications* and *dispositions* which prevailed in the early ages of *Christianity*, when the *gospel* had free course and was glorified, and when nations were born, as it were, in a day!

WITH such dispositions did the continents of *Asia*, *Africa* and *Europe*, the isles of the *Archipelago* and *Britain*, receive the truth in the love of it, shortly after its first promulgation.

SUCH was also the ardour with which mankind received divine truth, at the dawn of the Reformation; and with such dispositions, indeed, must it be received and entertained, wherever it will have free course and be glorified. But I now proceed to some

APPLICATION of the subject. We have been considering, my brethren, this glorious prediction—
 “That the *isles* shall wait for the MESSIAH’S law, and that in his name shall the Gentiles trust.”

WE have seen this ancient prophecy already in part fulfilled, and have ourselves tasted, in part, the fruits of its accomplishment. We *ourselves* are the posterity of *those very Gentiles*—we are the children of *those very isles*, to which, by the grace of GOD, this law of the MESSIAH has been early transported. Through the tender mercy of GOD; this mercy promised to the father’s of the Jewish church, has been performed to our *heathen* ancestors in the isles of the sea.—“The day spring from on high visited them, giving light to those who sat in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide their feet into the way of peace (g).”—The *same glorious light* hath also accompanied and followed us, *their children*, to these far distant isles. The sun of righteousness hath arisen in our hemisphere (once the dreary abode of Pagan idolatry and barbarous manners) and

(g) Luke i. 78.

shines upon us with direct rays.—In *one sense*, these *western isles* may be said to wait for the *Messiah's law*—and, in *another sense*, they may be said to have received it.

IF the *immortal nature*, *infinite value*, and *endless duration* of our souls;—if their *guilt* and *pollution* and the *danger* they are in of eternal perdition, may be plead as reasons why the gospel should be dear unto us, and should be *cordially* received by us, we surely have them to plead as much as any people under heaven.

BUT it may perhaps be pleaded, “Have we not already received the *MESSIAH'S* law, and submitted ourselves to it?”—This is indeed the *grand interesting question* upon which our everlasting fates are suspended; but, my brethren, can it be fairly determined in the affirmative?—“What is it to embrace it in the love of it, and cordially submit ourselves to its yoke?”

WILL our having been baptized in the name of *CHRIST*, prove this?—Will a *bare, formal, lukewarm* profession of *Christianity*, in contradistinction to *Paganism* or *Mabometanism*, prove it?—Will a professed adopting the morality of the gospel, while we daily violate and dishonour its laws by *swearing, intemperance, sensuality, uncleanness, slander, covetousness* and *dishonesty*, prove it?—Will a *cold and disgustful* attendance on the public Christian worship twice or thrice a year, when we have nothing else to do, and nothing else to enjoy, prevent it? Is this agreeable either to the *important nature* of religion, or to the *value and esteem* which good men in all

ages have set upon it?—Can persons be said to love CHRIST above all things, to esteem him as the pearl of great price, as the chief among ten thousand and altogether lovely, who care not whether they ever hear of his name, and who esteem every hour they employ in his worship *lost time and intolerable confinement?*—Can those be said to have a zeal for the divine glory, who never attend divine ordinances?—Can those be said to delight in the Redeemer's laws, who violate them daily with contemptuous pride?—What palpable contradictions are these? What art and sophistry must it require to maintain and keep up *a hope of the gospel salvation* under such an inconsistent profession of Christianity as this?

ALAS, my dear friends, if we calmly and impartially consider the present state of *these isles of the sea*, on which we dwell, we shall have great reason to fear that the time is not yet come, for their receiving the MESSIAH'S law, and cordially embracing it in the love of it.

None of these dispositions, previously necessary to such a glorious event, seem to have taken place amongst us.—Many are extremely unsettled even in the fundamental principles of natural religion—“the belief of the souls immortality; the moral government of GOD, and a future state of rewards and punishments: and every *stupid Atheistical writer or speaker*, who has the hardiness to call in question these eternal fundamental truths of natural religion, finds easy profelytes among the *herd of brutish sensualists, and unprincipled minds*. This *destructive delusion*

is greedily swallowed by men immersed in sensuality and buried in worldly cares and pleasures, and its contagion spreads *amongst such a class of men* with amazing celerity; the certain consequence of which is, an utter contempt for all serious religion and hatred of it, as a restraint on the supposed liberties of human nature.

AND besides this kind of speculative *Atheists*, who seem to support themselves by some kind of principles—there are a number of *practical ones*, who, under a flimsy profession of Christianity, live in the free indulgence of every vice.—These are generally adventurers, who strangely suppose that their whole business in these islands is to *make fortunes*, without allowing any thing for the chances of mortality (notwithstanding the uncommonly frequent instances of it they have daily before their eyes;—of their countrymen and fellow adventurers snatched on a few days warning into an awful eternity from the midst of their intemperance, worldly cares, and sensual pleasures)—and who, with a prudence consistent enough with all the other contradictions of sinners, lay the business of religion wholly aside, 'till (having once made their fortunes,) they shall return, and prosecute it at their leisure in their own countries.—Another class of men are so intoxicated with *the libertinism* and *sensual indulgences* so fashionable in these unhappy climes, that they have *no leisure*, and *much less inclination*, to spend a *thought* or an *hour*, about the melancholy business of religion. And thus, by

one means or another, true religion seems, at present, to be wholly out of the question amongst us.

THE very *outward forms and ordinances* of it, are generally *neglected and despised*. And this single circumstance renders it morally impossible, that men should be ever convinced of its *necessity* and importance.

BUT matters will not always stand thus. The period is already marked out in the book of GOD'S pre-science and purpose, when the isles of the sea shall be as gardens of the LORD bringing forth plants of righteousness;—when they shall receive the MESSIAH'S law, not in *mere form and profession*, as now, but in *love and power*.

LET us, at least, pray for this blessed period. Let the united endeavours of all GOD'S people be employed to hasten and advance it; that the glorious kingdom of the MESSIAH may more fully come, and that his will may be done on earth, as it is in heaven.
Amen.

S E R M O N X X .

C R E A T U R E S , broken cisterns : G O D
alone, the fountain of living waters,
from

J E R E M . ii . 12 , 13 .

Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD: for my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

IT is indeed greatly amazing that there should be found any rational creature in the universe so stupid, and such an enemy to its own happiness, as to forsake God—*voluntarily and of choice* to forsake God, and that too for lying and destructive vanities which cannot profit—but must certainly prove the ruin of all who attach themselves to them, and take up their portion in them! And yet this is, *in fact*, the *strange case*, the *astonishing choice* and conduct, of mankind in general; a few only excepted, who

by grace, have been delivered from this awful delusion!—Well may this, indeed, be the case of mankind in general, when it was the case with the generality of God's *chosen, peculiar* people, who had advantages far above all others for knowing the richness and all-sufficiency of their covenant God, and who were under numberless peculiar obligations to *love, and choose, and adhere* to him, and *rest and confide* in him superlatively. And yet this was the case of that highly favoured people in general—“for *my people* have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, &c.”

THE crime for which GOD is particularly reproving the *Israelites* here, is *idolatry*. This is indeed *literally* to commit the two great evils specified in the text—“to forsake GOD the fountain of living waters, and to hew out to themselves dumb idols, which, like broken cisterns, could neither succour them, nor supply their wants.” In order to convince them of the *vileness* and *perfidy*, as well as the *folly* and *absurdity* of such a crime—GOD charges the prophet to begin

1st. By putting them in mind of their attachment to him in the infancy of their state, when he took them out from Egypt, and led them thro' the wilderness; this he calls “the kindness of their youth, and the love of their espousals, when they went after him in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown (a).”

2dly. He reproaches them with their early for-

(a) Ver. 2.

getfulness of their *first love*, and challenges them, if able, to produce some *reason* why they proved so treacherous; instancing some remarkable proofs of their apostacy, and insinuating some instances of his kindness to them, which rendered it very provoking (b).

3dly. He condescends yet farther to plead with them, inviting them to examine even the heathen world, and see if any of the idolatrous nations could afford such a flagrant instance of folly, as they had committed (c).—Even the idolatrous nations were so attached to their own *gods*, tho' *dumb idols*, that they would by no means renounce them, nor change them for other idols—yet his own people had changed their glory, for that which could not profit them. They had changed the *living and true God*, who ought to have been their chiefest glory, for the *vanities* and *dumb idols* of the heathen nations, thus committing *spiritual adultery*, doating on other *gods*, and going a whoring after them. This is *that crime*, at the folly and *absurdity* of which, he calls the heavens to be astonished—the angels of light to be horribly afraid, and very desolate—for that his people had forsaken him the fountain of living water;—and for what too? why, “that they might hew them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that could hold no water”—that they might make them dunghill *gods* of their own workmanship, who have eyes, but they see not—ears, but hear not—mouths, but speak not with their tongue!

(b) Ver. 5, 9.

(c) Ver. 9,—12.

AND doubtless the *wise*, and *holy*, and *shining* hosts of heaven—those angels of God which excel in strength, hearkening to the voice of his word—and who are sent forth as ministering spirits, to minister to their younger brethren of the human race—are struck at once with *horrible astonishment* and *heavenly pity*—when they look down from heaven, and behold—men—their fellow-rationals, fellow-immortals, and fellow-subjects of the great King, acting so *absurd* and *desperate* a part as this—forsaking God the fountain of blessedness, and busied in the strange work of hewing them out, and making them creature *gods*.—Nor does it much alter the case, *what* these *gods* are which we *make* and *worship*—whether they be *beauty*, *power*, *wealth*, *ambition*, or *lust*.—These latter idols are every whit, as *stupid*, as *empty*, as unfit to be put in the place of God, as the *former*; and as unfit to be the portion of a soul. He who puts his confidence in riches—he who pursues *filthy lusts*, or *vain honours*—or the empty shadows of *grandeur* and *ambition* as his portion, is as *stupid*, tho' not perhaps so *gross* and *palpable*, an idolater, as he who makes an idol of *brass* or *wood*, and falls down and worships it as his *god*.—All, all, beneath the living God, the fountain of living waters, are *empty idols*, *broken cisterns* that can hold no water—equally unfit to be the objects of our supreme love, or the portion and confidence of a reasonable soul—and all who, forsaking the living God, do put their trust *in*, and expect their portion *from*, such things, are *gross idolaters*, “who have changed their glory for that which doth not

profit."—We are here led *first*, to consider the difference between God, and all creature enjoyments; considered as the idols of mens affections and pursuits—And, *secondly*, to consider the criminal absurdity of sinners giving the preference to the latter.

Ist. WE are to take notice of the difference between GOD and all creature enjoyments, considered as the idols of mens affections and pursuits—I say, considered as the idols of mens affections and pursuits. For it must be allowed, that there is a sense in which all the creatures of GOD are *very good*, and have a *fulness* and *sufficiency* in them every way answerable to the *wise design* with which GOD created them. *That wood*, out of which the idolater makes a *god*, and falls down and worships it, is very good when used for fuel, building, or household furniture.—*That gold* or *brass* out of which the founder casts an idol, is very good when applied to commerce, or the conveniencies of life.—*That meat* and *drink* which the glutton and drunkard make their *god*, and in the abuse of which they employ their chief care and delight; are *very good* when moderately and thankfully used for the support and refreshment of our bodies, and to strengthen us for the discharge of the great duties of life.—Those *natural desires* between the sexes, which the unclean part of mankind abuse to the vilest purposes, and which they pursue as their heaven, and prefer to the favour of GOD, and to the pure delights of virtue and holiness—are *good* and even *necessary* for the formation of families, the propagation of our kind, and the increase of mankind.—*That money*

which, to the *covetous* and *extravagant*, is the *root of all evil*—those riches which by the wicked are abused to luxury, violence, oppression and a forgetfulness of GOD, and which they do indeed make their *god*, by trussing more in uncertain riches than in the living GOD, and by seeking, pursuing and setting their hearts upon them more than upon GOD—are yet *good* and *necessary* when moderately used, and charitably and usefully employed.—That power, honour, strength, beauty and wisdom, of which many make idols, and pursue and esteem them with that *zeal, diligence* and *affection* due only to GOD—are yet *good* in their place, and serve excellent purposes in life.—So that when *vanity* is ascribed to the *creature*, it is not meant *absolutely* and in *all respects*; but only *relatively*, and when compared with GOD the *chief good*, the *source of good*, and the alone all-sufficient and soul-satisfying portion. To affirm absolutely that *creatures* and *creature comforts* are *not good*, is, in truth, to impeach the wisdom and goodness of GOD, and to say that he hath made a *useless* and *unprofitable world*;—it is also to speak against our own daily experience; for, notwithstanding the *curse* which sin hath brought upon the creature, and the thorns and briers which our apostacy hath sown among our sweetest enjoyments, yet we are daily tasting *good* and *pleasure* from the creatures, and enjoying much of the goodness of GOD in the use and enjoyment of them. The creatures of GOD are therefore *good*, and excellently adapted to serve the purposes for which GOD hath made them;—or, as the apostle excellently expresses it, “Every creature of GOD is *good*, and nothing to

be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving (d).” But if mankind will take these good creatures of GOD, and abuse them by making *gods* of them, and putting them in the place of GOD, and setting their chief affections upon them, and putting their chief trust in them, and seeking that happiness and satisfaction from them which can be only found *in* and *from* GOD—then indeed the *good creature*, by this abuse of it, becomes *naught*, an *idol*, a *vanity*, an *abomination*—and then, those who thus abuse it, become *idolaters*—changing their glory for that which doth not profit—loving and serving the *creature*, more than the *Creator*, who is over all, GOD blessed for ever.—And of such it is justly said in our text, “that they commit two great evils—they forsake GOD the fountain of living waters, and hew out to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns of lying vanities which can hold no water.”—And it is in this view of *the creature*, that the wise man writes *vanity* upon it—“Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity and vexation of spirit”—*useful*, indeed, and *excellent* when kept in their place; but *filthy idols* and *empty vanities*, when made *gods* of by the folly and abuse of sinners!”

Now the *contrast* formed here in our text between GOD, on the one hand, and *all creatures* and *creature-enjoyments* put in the place of GOD by sinners, on the other, is formed on a comparison between a *continually springing perennial fountain of water*, and a *broken cistern* which can hold no wa-

(d) 1 Tim. iv. 4.

ter. Indeed; *properly speaking*, there can be *no* comparison formed between the *living* GOD and *creature idols*.—Yet, as the Spirit of GOD has condescended to represent this difference, by a comparison, to the dull capacities of sinners, it must be confessed that a more *proper, expressive* and *significant* comparison could not have been chosen; for this purpose

1st. THE blessed GOD is here represented under the figure of a *fountain of living water*. How beautifully expressive is this of the *inexhaustible fulness* and *sufficiency* of the divine nature, and of that free, *unconstrained* and *exuberant benevolence* with which his goodness flows—incessantly flows—to supply all the wants, and satisfy all the just and reasonable desires of his creatures! Well may he be compared to a *fountain of living waters*, “with whom is the fountain of life, and at whose right hand there flow rivers of pleasures for ever more (e),”—But, in the eastern phrase, “a fountain of living waters” signifies a *perpetually springing* and *running fountain* which never fails nor dries; in opposition to *cisterns, stagnant ponds*, or *such wells* and *other reservoirs* of water as do not send forth streams, and as sometimes fail and dry up—either by dry weather, or continual drawing!—Now that we may a little pursue this metaphor;

(1st). IT is the property of a *living fountain* of water to have the source of its own abundance *within itself*. Rivers often borrow their waters from a confluence of the smallest springs—lakes and ponds are

(e) P^{sa}l. xvi. 11. xxxvi. 7,—9,

often supplied by rivers—cisterns depend wholly upon those runs and other conveyances which supply them; but it is the *peculiar property* of a perennial fountain to supply its own water.—It is, in a certain sense, *self-sufficient*; the head of its own influences, having a *well spring* within itself.—A beautiful figure this of the divine *self-sufficiency* and *independence*. GOD being *self-originate*, and deriving his being from none, has all his fulness *in*, and *of*, and *from* himself. He is the *uncreated independent* source and fountain of his own perfection, glory and blessedness. He is indeed, in a very peculiar sense, the *living God*, who alone has *life* and *immortality*, *necessarily, un-derived*, and which therefore can never be impaired. Every thing else in this universe *depends* upon him; he alone is *independent*.—In all other beings, *being, life, and blessedness* are only *borrowed things*; he alone is the *fountain being*, the great I AM, than which there can be no other GOD!

(2dly.) 'Tis the property of a fountain of living water never to dry up or be exhausted. Some of these fountains have supplied whole towns from time immemorial, and yet in the driest summers they never yield less water—are never exhausted.—How beautiful an emblem this of the *unchangeable, inexhaustible all-sufficiency* of GOD! Were all the beings of the universe to draw from this fountain, being to their utmost capacities, yet could they never *empty* or *exhaust* it; but it would still afford a supply for ten thousand other universes. Here is a source which can never be wasted or impaired—a treasure which

can never be drained nor exhausted, but is ever replenished and supplied from its own exuberant springs. This universe, with all its various riches and fulness, sprung from it, and yet is not its fulness exhausted; but it is able with ease to produce numbers besides.

(3dly.) IT is the property of a fountain of living water, by its perpetual streams, to slake the thirst, and supply the necessities, of all who apply to it. A living fountain of water, is a *constant treasure*, which, as it never *fails*, so it cannot be *confined* or *appropriated*, but is a blessing common to all, and to which none can be easily denied access. *Wells* and *cisterns* are the properties of individuals or communities, and may be so *inclosed*, *guarded* and *defended* by their proprietors, as to exclude all others from the use and benefit of their waters.—But it is not easy to *confine* and *appropriate* the streams of a living fountain.—These will make their way over all *bounds* and *inclosures*, and in spite of all the attempts of their first proprietors, will water the fields of others, and offer their treasures as a common blessing to slake the thirst of the weary traveller and pilgrim in the way, and supply the wants and necessities of the poor and needy stranger. Indeed such fountains are *that blessing* which, next to the air, cannot be *monopolized* or *confined* by the hand of avarice, but is free and common to all, even the most poor and miserable.

How lively an emblem this, of the *boundless liberality* and *unrestrained benevolence* of that God
 “ Who is good unto all, who causeth his sun to shine
 on the evil and the good, and sendeth his rain on the

just and the unjust?" Not only is the Divine Being *self-sufficient* and *all-sufficient*, but he is also a *continual source of goodness* to his creatures. His fulness is not confined to himself, as waters to a cistern which contains them, but is continually flowing out in plentiful streams for the supply and gratification of an universe of creatures. His goodness is so *communicative* and *diffusive* that all continually partake of it, in all ages and places of the universe, without intermission. "Even the young ravens that cry, are not neglected.— All things look unto him, and wait upon him, and he openeth his hand, and liberally supplies the wants and satisfies the desires of every living thing." The *poorest* and *meanest* creatures are not denied access to the streams which flow from this living fountain. Indeed *all without exception* or *distinction* are invited to take of this water of life freely, and none are excluded unless they exclude themselves. It is a fountain open to *all*; used by *all*; supplying the wants of *all*; and at which the *poorest pilgrim* may as freely slake his thirst, as the *mightiest monarch*, or the *highest arch-angel*. Blessed be God, neither *riches*, nor *power*, nor *honour*, nor *principalities*, nor *dominions*, nor *wars*, nor *famines*, nor *pestilences*, nor *any other creature* can stop the streams of this living fountain, nor withhold its waters from the *poor*, the *miserable*, the *wretched*, the *blind* and the *naked*. Violence and oppression, may confine us in dungeons, may fill our bodies with torture, and finally may cut us off from the land of the living—but they cannot exclude us from this fountain of living waters—which is every

where open thro' the universe :—they may indeed cut off from us some of the smaller streams, but they cannot seal up the fountain.

(4thly.) WATER is the most noble and extensively useful element, and is absolutely necessary to the life of man, and of all other animals.

How fit an emblem this, of the *excellency* and *necessity* of the *divine goodness*? Some things are *good* in one respect, and *bad* in *others*—are good in *some times*, and *circumstances*, and bad in *others*—are good for some kinds of beings and would be hurtful to others: but such is the property of the *divine fulness*, *all-sufficiency* and *communicative goodness*, that it fits and adapts itself to *every nature* and *every circumstance*. It supplies the wants, and gratifies the appetites of the meanest *reptile*, of the most trifling *insect* and *worm*, as well as swells the joys of the highest *arch-angel* and *seraph*. It feeds the young ravens when they cry, and supporteth the life both of man and beast. “The whole earth is full of the riches of this goodness, and so is the great and wide sea.” All look unto him and depend upon him; he openeth his hand and bountifully supplieth the wants of every living thing. “He is good unto all (who have not forfeited his goodness) and his tender mercies, are over all his works.” Indeed this goodness of the LORD, is not more *excellent* than *necessary*. All are debtors to it, and pensioners upon it, both for being and well-being.—*Water* is not more necessary for the support of animal life, than the *divine goodness*, for the sustentation and support of all created being.

All are derived from it as their source; *all* hang upon it as their support, and all rely on it as their portion.

So much then for the *justness* and *propriety* of the comparison here drawn between GOD, and a *fountain of living waters*:—nothing in nature more fully and beautifully representing the *self-sufficiency*, the *all-sufficiency*, the *excellency*, and the *exuberant communicative goodness*, of the divine nature.—We now proceed in the

II^d. PLACE, to consider how justly all creature vanities, idols and enjoyments, when put in the place of GOD, when depended on and made our portion and our confidence, are compared to “*broken cisterns that can hold no water.*” This representation of *creature idols* is very *emphatical* and *expressive*.—A *cistern* would have made a good emblem of *the creature*, when compared to GOD the fountain of living waters:—but to make the *emptiness* and *vanity* of the creature more clearly and strongly appear, it is here compared, by the Spirit, to a *broken or leaky cistern which can hold no water*. If we consider creature enjoyments in their own place, as supports and comforts which GOD hath graciously allowed us while we travel like pilgrims through this valley of sorrow and tears, towards heaven our Father’s country and promised rest—they may be well compared to *cisterns*—for—

Ist. CISTERNS do indeed contain water which yields comfort and refreshment, and supplies the wants of man and beast; altho’ they depend for this water

on the clouds of heaven, and have no well-spring within themselves:—in like manner *the creatures* are furnished to give us much comfort and refreshment in this our pilgrimage state.—We receive much of real pleasure and satisfaction from our food and raiment; from the gratification of our senses and appetites; from beautiful prospects, pleasant tastes and smells, harmonious sounds; from the enjoyment of our families and friends, and from a thousand other objects around us; but still all these creature enjoyments are like the *waters of a cistern*, they are all derived from heaven, and have no source in the creatures which afford them. So that as we must say in strict propriety, “We are indebted to the showers of heaven, or rather to that divine goodness which forms them, for the waters in our cisterns, and not to the cisterns themselves, which otherwise could afford no water;”—so with equal justice we must say, —“It is not to these creatures which, in themselves, are but *empty cisterns*, that we are beholden for the comfort and pleasure we taste from them;—but to that God who fills them, and makes them comforts and blessings to us. It is the *goodness of God*, and not *their own goodness*, which we taste and enjoy in these creatures; and therefore to his goodness it is that we owe all the thanks and praises.—Have we pleasure in *eating, drinking and sleeping*;—have we pleasure in *health, strength and plenty*;—have we comfort in our *wives, children, parents, families and friends*—this pleasure and comfort flows *originally from God*, and is only treasured up in these creatures for our use,

as the waters which fall from the clouds of heaven are collected and contained in a cistern for our supply and refreshment."

AND indeed true religion instructs us to consider all our creature comforts and enjoyments *in this view*, and to give GOD all the glory of them, as the original source from which they spring—and to consider the creatures *in and from* which we enjoy them, only as *cisterns* which hold and communicate to us the divine bounty. And if we do not thus, we forget GOD and idolize the creature; we sacrifice to our own net, and burn incense to our own drags; we forget that the creature is a *cistern*, and make it a *living fountain*, putting it in the place of GOD. Again

2dly. We may have *cisterns*, and yet have *no water*. The clouds may deny their needed timely succours, and then what are our *cisterns* but *empty tantalizing vanities* which can afford us no refreshment unless supplied from heaven? Just *such* are the *creatures* when GOD is pleased to withhold his influence and ceaseth to make them blessings to us. If he is pleased to withhold the blessing of *health* from us, we can have little or no pleasure or enjoyment from our senses and appetites. The *finest dainties*, the *richest flavours*, the most *melodious sounds* can have no relish—can afford no pleasure.—If he is pleased to withhold the blessing of a *contented mind*, or a *peaceful conscience*, the greatest riches and honours, the kindest friends, the most promising families, and the richest abundance can administer no satisfying comfort or enjoyment—yea; if he is provoked to withhold his

bleſſing from the creatures by our ſins, they will ceaſe to be comforts and enjoyments, and will become curſes, ſnares, temptations and torments to us :—health—riches—children—honour—plenty—all—all will be ſmitten with a curſe, and will encreaſe our guilt and miſery.

INDEED, at beſt, the creature, without the divine bleſſing, is but an *empty ciftern*, which can neither afford us ſupplies nor comforts.

BUT if we ſtill *proceed farther*, and *ſeek more* from the creatures than God intended we ſhould receive ;—i. e.—If, making them our *gods*, we truſt in them as our portion, and ſeek our ſupreme and ſatisfying happineſs from them—we ſhall be ſure to find them, not only *empty*, but even *broken* and *leaky* cifters, which can hold no water. God will certainly make them *ſuch* to all creature idolaters, who, forſaking him the living fountain, betake themſelves to ſuch lying vanities. Were men ſatisfied to take, and moderately and thankfully to uſe the creatures for the purpoſes for which God appointed them, they would find them *full* and *refreshing* cifters. But if they will needs renounce their truſt and dependance on God, and ſet up the creatures *in his ſtead*, and worſhip them *as God*, thus turning their glory into ſhame, and provoking the moſt High to jealousy by their adulterous abominations, the LORD will deſtroy their imagery, confound their idols, and break their cifters, to their confuſion and diſappointment. So far ſhall they be from receiving that *ſupreme happineſs* from the enjoyment of the creature which they ex-

pected, that they shall receive nothing but *sorrow* and *shameful disappointment*—and that *creature*, or *those creatures*, whom they *made their gods*, shall, by the righteous judgment of heaven, become their *shame*, *snare* and *torment*. Such is the *danger*, as well as the *guilt*, of setting up this world or any of its creatures and enjoyments in the place of God, and making them our *hope*, *confidence* and *portion*, while we shamefully forget the GOD that made us, and forsaking the fountain of living waters, hew out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water ! I am now

Idly. To shew the criminal absurdity of forsaking GOD the fountain of living water, and hewing out unto ourselves broken cisterns of lying vanities. This is a conduct which is said to astonish the angels, and to fill heaven with horrible amazement—“ Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; be ye very desolate, saith the LORD !”

1st. IT shews that sinners are *brutish*, and *void of understanding*; that their understandings are amazingly blinded and darkened, so that they are disqualified from making any right judgment in spiritual things;—in short, that they are, as the scriptures justly represent them, *fools*, *blind*, a *people of no understanding*, not knowing the things of the Spirit of GOD, incapable of discerning the things that are excellent, making a judgment and choice in things of the highest importance, which would be matter of sport and ridicule in the greatest *idols* and *madmen* in things of common concern ! It would *amaze* and *divert* all the world to see a man in his sins *prefer* and *choose* a *bro-*

ken leaky cistern that could hold no water, to a *living fountain* of the purest and most excellent water, whose waters never fail, but would prove a supply and continual refreshment to all generations while the earth endured.—And yet, as I observed to you before, this is but a *very imperfect emblem* of the folly and madness of sinners, who forsake God, and take up their portion in the creatures. A broken cistern may be repaired and collect refreshing supplies from the clouds of heaven; but, if we forsake God, we forfeit all right to creature comforts and enjoyments—and they must prove a *curse* to us instead of a blessing. Creatures can never be *more* to us, than God is pleased to *make them*; and at their very best, they can never supply the place of God, or be a *satisfying portion to the soul*. At best, they are but *cisterns*, affording *uncertain* and *momentary* refreshments at the will and disposal of God the living fountain: but if we make them our *gods* and *idols*, the LORD, who will not give his glory to another, or his praise to graven images, being provoked to jealousy, will certainly so break these cisterns, and confound these idols, that they shall never yield us any comforts; but will prove briers and thorns and vexations to us. Our *Dagons* shall fall, and be broken to pieces before the ark of his glory!

WE laugh at the stupidity of the *Pagans* who made the gods whom they worshipped—and yet we see not the *vile absurdity* of our own *spiritual idolatry* in setting up *our riches*, *our lusts*, and our creature enjoyments in the place of God, and in bestow-

ing that love, esteem and affection on them which is due to GOD alone; “ Being lovers of sinful pleasures more than lovers of GOD, and worshipping and serving the *creature* more than the CREATOR, who is GOD over all, blessed for ever.”

2dly. THIS proves, that the taste and relish of sinners is wholly corrupted and perverted—that they have no taste of *excellency* and *beauty*, but are in love with *deformity* and *rottenness*:—like persons whose palates are so vitiated by a fever, that the sweetest things taste bitter, and the most nauseous draughts are relished—or like some persons who have laboured under such a strange perversion of appetite, as to prefer clay, or even the most stinking carrion, before the most wholesome and delicious food. Thus the appetites of sinners are so depraved, that, nauseating and forsaking the fountain of living waters—turning away with aversion and disgust from the pure and high-relished pleasures of religion and a good conscience—they greedily drink down the dirty puddle of sensual pleasures, and, like filthy swine, wallow in the mire of impure delights. They have lost their *taste*, as well as their *understanding*, and are altogether as an unclean thing before GOD, “ drinking in iniquity, as the ox drinketh in water.”

SUCH then is the criminal and amazing absurdity of the conduct of sinful men, who, forsaking the fountain of living waters, hew out unto themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water. Let us therefore here, by way of

APPLICATION,

1st. SHED a tear of sorrow and compassion over the lamentable ruins of fallen human nature. To what a sad and deplorable condition is our boasted reason reduced by sin? How little cause have we to boast of the dignity of human nature, and of the elevated and extensive powers and capacities of the human understanding, when it must be said of *every un-renewed sinner*, and consequently of a vast majority of adult mankind, that they have committed, and are daily and habitually committing the two great evils represented to the astonishment of heaven and earth in our text—that, having forsaken God the sempiternal and never failing fountain of life, perfection and blessedness, they are hewing out unto themselves gods and idols among the creatures—broken cisterns of lying vanities, which can yield no pure permanent delight or comfort! Alas! “How is the gold become dim, and the most fine gold changed! The crown of glory is fallen from our heads, and woe unto us that we have thus sinned!” O *human nature*, how dreadful hath been thy fall? How low and abject is thy present condition? What a deplorable breach has been made in thy powers by the apostacy? How art thou fallen from the perfection of thy beauty, and from the center of thy happiness? What little cause hast thou to glory, exult and boast of thy virtue and reason—(vain and empty names!)—when this is thy general condition—to have forsaken the *living, self-sufficient* and *all-sufficient* GOD, the exuberant foun-

tain of all good, and thine only satisfying portion— and, for what?—What art thou pursuing, having forsaken him?—What *god*, O sinner, hast thou put in his stead? What art thou worshipping, and seeking for a portion?—O shameful to be mentioned!—A filthy lust!—A fleeting honour!—A golden dream!—A polluted, momentary pleasure!—The aerial phantom of popularity!—The favour and esteem of a blind-polluted sinner like thyself!—A poor pitiful estate!—And *these*, with the pangs of a guilty conscience, and the approaching terrors of an endless hell!—Blush, O sinner, and be confounded at the madness and folly of such a choice and preference as this!—Mention not thy reason, while such symptoms of the most brutish stupidity remain upon thee!

2dly. HENCE we may infer the absolute necessity of a *supernatural* power and principle to mend and repair such a radical breach in our nature?—Alas! what can our reason do when it is thus besotted and perverted, that we prefer a *broken cistern* to the LIVING FOUNTAIN—when we prefer creature idols and vanities to GOD?—No—A ray of light from *this excellent glory*, must first break in and shine upon us, and shew us both GOD and the *creature* in their true natures and capabilities—what they are *in themselves*, and what they are qualified to *be* and to *do* unto us—before we can make the right choice:—a *stream* from that LIVING FOUNTAIN must flow into our hungering and thirsting souls, before we will ever heartily choose and relish heavenly delights, and prefer them to the mean, muddy, polluted gratifications

of sensual sinful pleasures. "The *natural man* amidst all the improvements of his boasted reason, amidst all knowledge of sciences and refinements of taste and genius, receiveth not, relisheth not the things of the Spirit of GOD:—they are foolishness to him, neither indeed *can* he *know* them, because they are *spiritually discerned* (d)."—In a word, "GOD himself must shine into our souls, and condescend to give us the light of the knowledge of his own glory in the face of his SON JESUS CHRIST, before we will see him in his beauty, and, chasing away every rival from our hearts, will give him the full and undivided possession."

3dly. AND to conclude: Let us be watchful over our own hearts, lest we provoke the LORD to jealousy against us by committing spiritual whoredom. We do not, indeed, fall down to idols of wood and stone, as the ancient *Pagans* did; but this notwithstanding we may be as great idolaters as they.—Is there no *lust*, no *sensual pleasure*, no *creature* or *creature-comfort*, however lawful or innocent in themselves, that we *love* more than GOD—that we *seek* and *pursue* more than GOD—that we *desire* more than GOD—and rather than to lose which, we would wilfully offend GOD?—Let us not deceive ourselves—this is *our idol*—this is *our god*—and this broken cistern, whatever it be, we prefer to the FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATER; thus provoking the Lord to jealousy by worshipping and serving the creature more than the CREATOR, who is GOD over all, blessed for ever!

(d) 1 Cor. ii. 14.

LET us henceforth, therefore, have no other gods before him, but choose him as the alone object of our supreme regard and affection, saying with *David*, "Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee; my heart and my flesh fail; but thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

S E R M O N XXI.

The deluding and infatuating self-blindness of sinners, contrasted with the omniscience of the heart-searching God, from

PROV. xxi. ii.

*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes ;
BUT the LORD pondereth the hearts.*

IT is the observation of God himself by the pen of an inspired prophet, "That the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (a)." Of all kinds of knowledge in the world *self-knowledge* is certainly the most useful, and one would imagine not the most difficult to attain, and yet experience teacheth us that there are fewer adepts in this kind of knowledge than in any other. Strange ! that a man's *heart* should deceive him !—that a man should be ignorant of the disposition, and tendency of his *own heart* and affections !—How few would

(a) Jer. xvii. 10.

credit this truth in their own particulars? How few would be prevailed on to *believe*, much less to *confess*, their ignorance of *their own hearts*?—And yet if GOD is true, this is a great truth with regard to *the multitude*, and is in some measure true with regard to *all*, “That the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.”—“Who can know it,” adds the ALMIGHTY?—Intimating that while numbers are wholly ignorant of their own hearts, none know them *fully* and *perfectly*, so as GOD knows them, and so as to know all the hidden evil and corruption which they contain.

THE *wicked*, to a man, are wholly blind to the deceit of their own hearts, and know nothing of them, as they ought to know; of them it may be said *fully* and *without reserve*, that their hearts are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: and as to the truly converted and good, it is their most *difficult*, *laborious* and *continual* study to find out the deceits and lurking evils of their own hearts, and to mortify and eradicate them; and after they have done their best, they will be grieved and pestered with these *inward enemies* to their latest hour, and until GOD wholly transforms and purifies the soul by its separation from sinful flesh and corrupt nature. That is therefore a very proper form of speech used by some, when speaking of themselves, “If I know my own heart, it is so and so with me.”—And indeed truly wise and good persons, who have any experience in the study of their own hearts, are ever apt to distrust them, and to doubt of the goodness and sincerity of their

intentions : and from this wise and wholesome distrust of *ourselves* proceed that *humility, modesty, meekness* and *lowliness* of *spirit*, which are the brightest and loveliest ornaments of the true Christian, and the most amiable graces of genuine Christianity :— whereas *pride* and *self-conceit*, a proneness to *commend* and *justify* ourselves in all things, and to *degrade* and *undervalue* others, as they are ever to be found in the most *wicked* and *worthless* of men, so they wholly proceed from this wretched ignorance of their own hearts—of those hearts of theirs which are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.

BUT altho' *wicked men* and *hypocrites* will not know their own hearts and are afraid to study them—and altho' even good men, with all their pains and study, cannot attain to a full knowledge of their own hearts so as never to be deceived by them into false and flattering opinions of themselves—yet GOD searches and knows them perfectly ; and this he does as a *strict* and *impartial judge*, that he may try and judge us by their tempers and dispositions, and reward or punish us accordingly : “ I the LORD, says he, search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruits of his doings (b).”—If this then is indeed the case, what avails it for men studiously to avoid the knowledge of their own hearts, or artfully to conceal them from one another? If *self-ignorance* could hide us from GOD—if *deceit* and *double-dealing* could screen our thoughts and designs from his all-seeing eye, or de-

(b) Jer. xvii. 9, 10.

send us from the sentence he will pass against us in consequence, this kind of hypocrisy might stand us in some stead:—but hear what he says—“ I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, that I may give unto every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. Am I a GOD at hand, saith the LORD, and not a GOD afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him, saith the LORD? Do I not fill heaven and earth with my presence, saith the LORD (c)?”

ACCORDINGLY, good men have a *practical sense* and *belief* of this infinite knowledge of GOD. They know that the righteous GOD trieth the hearts and the reins—that he searcheth us and knoweth us, compasseth our path, possesseth our reins, and is acquainted with all our ways—yea, that there is not a thought in our hearts, nor a word on our tongue, but he knoweth them altogether. *This they know and practically believe*, and therefore they appeal to him the heart-searching GOD, and study to approve their hearts to his omniscient eye, and, conscious of their own incapacity for a proper *self-knowledge*, recommend it to HIM to search and try them, and discover their secret and unknown evils unto them: “ Judge me, says *David*, examine and prove me, try my heart and my reins:—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 (d).”

(c) Jer. xvii. 10.—xxiii. 23, 24. (d) Psal. vii. 9.—xxvi. 1, 2.—cxxxix, 1. &c.

VOL. II.

P

THE words of our text are a *proof* and *confirmation* of what I have been saying, and will lay a foundation for a more particular consideration of the same subject. “Every way of a man, says *Solomon*, is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts.”—And so *Proverbs* xvi. 2. “All the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes: but the LORD weigheth the spirits.” This general remark of *Solomon* however, must admit of some restriction and limitation. He does not say, “every way of every man;” but every way of a man. This is not the false, perverse and delusory way of judging of all mankind concerning their own ways. If all mankind laboured under this *self-blindness* and *self-error*, then all reproof and advice would be in vain—all the means of virtue and grace ineffectual—and it would be utterly in vain to persuade any man that his ways were wrong and wicked, seeing it would be impossible for any to believe it! The truth is, this is only meant of the *wicked* and *impenitent*; of *self-deceiving self-deluding* sinners, concerning whom alone it will hold true. For, blessed be GOD, wicked and deluded as the world is; sunk as it is into blindness, self-love and self-idolatry, there are still numbers of mankind quick sighted enough to see their own failings, humble and modest enough to confess them, meek enough to bear to be told of them, and honest enough to correct and reform them.—Nay, there are many *humble* and *afflicted* souls, who see more evil in themselves than all the world can see, who think and believe worse of themselves than the impartial world, who

are continually distressed and bowed down under a sense of their own failings and infirmities, and whom it is the most difficult thing in the world to persuade that they have *any good thing* in them, or that God has *any mercy* in store for them; while, at the same time, the charitable world cannot help *hoping* and *believing* the best things concerning them. And this, altho' it may be in a great measure a *faulty error* and *excess*, is certainly infinitely less criminal and dangerous than *presumption* and *self-conceit*; since God hath declared that he "hateth the proud, but giveth grace to the lowly—that the proud shall be abased, but the humble exalted—that his most acceptable sacrifice is that of a broken heart and a contrite spirit—and that he will condescend to dwell with that man who is of an humble spirit, and who trembles at his word, to bind up the broken heart, and to revive the contrite spirit (e)." But *this*, if it be indeed an *error*, it happens that it is a very uncommon one in the world; and I dare venture to affirm, from a general survey of the human nature in its present depraved state, that where one person errs by thinking *too meanly* of himself, a thousand err on the other extreme, by a prejudice in their own favour against *truth* and *fact*. *This* indeed is the error of the *wicked universally*, without one exception; and the error here levelled against by the inspired preacher: "Every way of a man, of *such a man*, of a *wicked man*, is right in his own eyes."

(e) Jam. iv. 6. Prov. iii. 34. Isaiah lxvi. 2.

THE sin therefore here aimed at by the wise man is “a criminal and dangerous partiality in judging of ourselves.” “Every way of the wicked man, all his designs, all his doings are right and clean in his own eyes. He will not see any thing amiss in them, any thing of which he ought to be ashamed, any thing for which he ought to condemn himself, of which he ought to repent, any thing which he ought to amend or reform. He is perfectly wise, and good, and just, and pure in his own eyes; nay, he is one of the wisest and best of men—so wise and so good that he neither needs instruction nor advice, and that all other persons are wholly his inferiors in these noble accomplishments! Nay, so full is he of his own worth and goodness, that he can scarce allow any other to be good in the same measure, or indeed to have any real goodness at all! Do you speak of justice? Why, he cannot do an unjust thing.—Do you talk of charity or benevolence? Why, he is the greatest living example of these virtues. Do you speak of mean and dishonourable actions? Why, he is utterly incapable of these, and never was guilty of one in his whole life. Do you mention wisdom? Why, this is his master-piece; he is wiser than the whole world, yea wiser than GOD himself;—all men should learn of him, and he cannot learn ought of any man. And then he has such a hearty and sovereign contempt of all fools! And indeed all men are such in comparison with himself.

BUT has not this non-such man some failing at least? Surely no man is quite clear of these. Why,

he will sometimes, in an excess of good humour, condescend to allow that *every man has his failing*, and that, God help us, *all men are sinners!*—But if you come to insinuate that *he himself* has some *particular failing*, some flaw in his character, or blot in his conduct, he is immediately affronted, and thinks you very unjust and injurious; and as to any *particular sin*, he cannot bear the imputation of that. If you would be his good friend, you must not seem to think he is *a sinner*. True, he is *intemperate* at times; but this happens only in good company, and what harm is there in that?—True, he *swears* sometimes; but this is only *in passion*, and what man can forbear it in such circumstances? His swearing therefore is *necessary*, and consequently, as he would have it, *no sin!*—It is true, he is apt to be a little *abusive* upon occasions; but this happens only under great provocations, and what he says against his neighbour is all *true* and right, and what harm can there be in this?—Should he be *angry, fretful, peevish* or *ill-natured*; why, his servants are so bad, his slaves are so provoking, his family so unruly, his neighbours so unreasonable, and things go so cross with him, and all about him are such fools and wretches, that it is *impossible* for him, or any man, or even an *angel*, to keep their temper in such circumstances.—Should he be *hard* or *unjust* in his dealings; why, no man can live otherwise, and it behoves every man to *look to himself* and to *take care of himself*; and God be thanked no man can say he is either a thief or a robber!—Should he be a little *hard-hearted* or *uncha-*

nitable; why, his own family needs all; and why don't the poor work and do as he does, and then they would live as he does;—or the poor are idle or extravagant, and therefore such a charity would be thrown away.—Should he be a little given to *strife-making* or *tale-bearing*; why, even this is all for the public good: he cannot bear to hear any thing amiss spoken of his friend, and tho' he does not see fit to espouse his friend's cause behind his back, yet he will let him know what the world says of him; for it is but right that men should know their friends from their enemies:—and then if he should happen to make any mistake on the *uncharitable side* in relating facts, why it is only *a mistake*, and he *thought* it was so, and is there any harm in all this?—Perhaps such a person neglects the public worship of God: why, either he does not like the preacher; or there is some supposed enemy there; or he can employ his time better at home;—or—~~or—~~—or— he has some other weighty and sufficient reason to offer in his excuse.—Perhaps he neglects his bible, and does not take sufficient care to cultivate and improve his understanding in religious knowledge: why, he is wise enough already; or too much study of the scriptures will turn his brain; or the more people know, the wickeder they are, or he has some other equally wise and sufficient reason in excuse.—Perhaps he does not strictly observe the sabbath, or keep up family religion, or frequent the sacrament:—but this is all *hypocrisy* and *formality*, and for his part he does not see that those who observe all this strictness and pre-

tion, are any better than their neighbours. For his part, he makes no professions of religion;—he abominates all hypocrisy and canting pretensions to devotion—the world shall know what he is:—besides, what needs so much ado about religion, and it is not good to be righteous over-much?

IN a word, *every way* of such men, is *right* and *clean* in their own eyes. If their friends impeach and condemn their conduct, they satisfy themselves by impeaching and condemning the judgment of their friends, and suspecting them of ignorance, pride, or evil intention. If the whole world condemns them, and they can find none to countenance their faults, or justify their conduct, they take sanctuary in their own *self-importance*;—they appeal from the judgment of the world, to their own *self-love* and *self-approbation*, and content themselves with taxing the whole world of folly, ignorance and injustice. Thus do they carefully shut their eyes against *self-conviction*, and cautiously shut out every ray of light which might shew them truly to themselves, and give them a plain and unflattering view of the evil of their ways, and the error of their conduct.—Such persons are at infinite pains to *deceive themselves*, which is the most foolish and dangerous kind of *hypocrisy*. Their wits are continually at work to put a *fair face* on a *sour matter*, to gloss and varnish over their most culpable actions, and to make that appear right *of* and *in* and *to* themselves which is just the reverse, and which can admit of no reasonable apology or justification;—and all this merely to bribe conscience, procure a false

peace in their evil ways, and flatter themselves in their own deceivings. A *foolish* and *accursed* project this, which must needs bring that dreadful woe upon them; with a peculiar aggravation, which is pronounced by the prophet; “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter: woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own conceit (f)!”

THIS picture, I confess, is perhaps too strongly drawn for the generality of sinners; but yet it is lamentable to observe how many come nearly up to it. And it is most certain that the more nearly any approach it, the farther they are from all moral probability of amendment and improvement, and the more *hopeless* and *desperate* their case is: “For, says *Solomon*, see’st thou a man that is wise in his own conceit, there is more hope of a fool than of him (g):” and therefore the apostle earnestly exhorts against this vice: “Be not wise in your own conceit (h).”

THE *nature*, *progress* and *effects* of this odious and dangerous character, are painted in very strong and frightful colours in the four first verses of the *thirty-sixth* psalm; where the Psalmist—1st, points out the persons to whom this character belongs, and in whom it prevails, namely, *the wicked*: “The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of GOD before his eyes.”—*Saith*

(f) *Is.* v. 20, 21. (g) *Prov.* xxvi. 12. (h) *Rom.* xii.

within my heart, i. e. gives me a full persuasion and an *inward conviction* that the fear of GOD hath no practical influence upon him.—2dly, We have a general account of the *cause* of his wickedness: “He flattereth himself in his own eyes;” which is exactly parallel to the words of our text; “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes.”—Here then are the two great inlets to *desperate wickedness*: *first*, men cast off the fear of GOD; and *secondly*, they flatter themselves in their own eyes—will not *see* nor *own* the evil and danger of their wicked practices—no wonder then if they run headlong to perdition. As

(1.) THEY make no conscience of what they say, but give an unbounded loose to impious, profane and immoral language: “The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit;”—they are contrived to do wrong, and yet to cover it with specious and plausible pretences.—Nor is it strange that those who labour to deceive and put a cheat on themselves, should attempt to deceive all mankind!

(2.) GOODNESS and virtue end, where this temper begins: “He hath left off to be wise and to do good.”

(3.) HAVING renounced the ways of wisdom and virtue, and baffled the convictions of their own minds, they contrive to be mischievous and do hurt to others: “He deviseth mischief upon his bed.”—Where there is no rational *self-love*, true Christian *charity* and *benevolence* can never be expected. We can only be supposed to love our neighbours, *as* we do ourselves; not *more* or *better*. When mankind once

abandon the ways of goodness, they come under the full power of the *tempter*, and he easily, makes them *tools* and *instruments* to hurt others, either by drawing them into sin, or involving them in trouble. "He deviseth mischief on his bed;"—To do mischief by *surprize* or by the *force of temptation*, is bad; but to *devise* and *contrive* it, to do it *deliberately* and with *resolution*, to do it with *plot* and *management*, to do it with the *cunning* and *malice* of the *old serpent*, to devise it *on our bed*, where we should be engaged in prayer and meditation on GOD—shews that the sinner's heart is *fully set* in him to do evil. And so

(4.) WE find in the *fourth* verse, that he "set-teth himself in a way that is not good." He obtains a *formed, established character in wickedness*. All before him is down-hill; and nothing can effectually stop his mad career, unless the grace of GOD interposes. He *sets* himself to execute the wickedness which he hath devised, and is *resolved* to go through with it, and justify himself in it, come what will!—And then, which finishes and compleats this character,

(5.) THEY are in love with their own wickedness, and often with that of others: "He abhorreth not evil."—On the contrary, he takes pleasure in it, and rejoices to see others as wicked as himself. If he has tempted any to sin, he glories in it as a noble achievement—and if he has done the mischief he devised, instead of abhorring it, it is matter of his triumph and exultation!

THUS he flattereth himself in his own eyes.—But will this *self-deception* continue long?—Will it hold

always?—No, says the Psalmist, “His iniquity shall be found hateful.”—It is “the accursed thing which GOD’s soul already hates (*i*);”—when it is discovered it shall be abhorred by all virtuous and good beings, —and if ever GOD gives him true repentance, he will abhor himself for it, in dust and ashes (*k*).”—Nay, if this should even never happen in the present life, yet the day is coming when he shall no longer be able to *flatter himself in his own eyes*,—when conscience can no longer be bribed or silenced, but shall rise up against him, and make him *a terror to himself*—and when those iniquities which he now rolls under his tongue as a sweet morsel, because of the *pleasure or profit* they afford him, shall be bitter in his belly as worm-wood, or as the poison of asps (*l*).

So much then for the vice here represented by the wise man; “Every way of a man is right and clean in his own eyes.” Let us now

Idly. CONSIDER the words subjoined; “But the LORD pondereth the hearts and weigheth the spirits.”—I have proved to you sufficiently, in the introduction of this discourse, that GOD is the searcher of the hearts and the trier of the reins of the children of men. And indeed this is a truth so manifest to natural reason, and so universally allowed by all who believe the being of a GOD,—by *Christians, Jews, Mahomedans and heathens*, that it would be needless for me to resume the argument here.

IT is clear to a demonstration, that an *infinite* and

(*i*) Jer. xlv. 4. (*k*) Job xlii. 6. (*l*) Job xx. 13, 14.

every where present Spirit, who is perfectly wise and intelligent, must intimately know the hearts, thoughts, designs and desires of those creatures whom he has made, and momently sustains; and that all things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do, neither is there any creature which is not manifest in his sight (m).—My present business, therefore, shall be to consider the words, as they are here intended and applied: “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts.”—Men may easily deceive themselves, but they cannot possibly deceive GOD, or impose upon HIM by flattering pretences. They may judge as favourably as they will of their own evil designs and wicked doings, and so deceive their own souls into guilt and perdition—this is a very possible, and a very common case.—But the LORD pondereth the hearts of sinners, and weigheth their spirits in an even balance, and so findeth both them and their actions wanting.—Thus he did with the proud, wicked and self-conceited Belshazzar: “Tekel,” says he, “thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting (n).”—Good Paul was so sensible of this, that he paid little regard either to his own judgment of himself, or the judgments of others concerning him; being convinced that the all-seeing, all-knowing, heart-searching GOD alone could and must decide the affair of his moral character: “With me, says he, it is but a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea I

(m) Heb. iv. 13.

(n) Dan. v. 27.

judge not mine own self (i. e. I depend not wholly on my own judgment of myself, which may perhaps be too favourable and partial:—I pretend not wholly to determine and decide upon my own character and state)—for tho', adds he, I know no evil by myself (tho' I am able to charge myself with no wilful sin, or allowed rebellious temper) yet I am not thereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the LORD (o)."

1st. THEN, GOD'S *pondering the hearts* and *weighing the spirits* of men, implies, that he considers their most secret thoughts, tempers and designs, very *critically*, and with great *exactness* and *attention*. To *ponder* a thing, is to study it with *great care* and *precision*—and to *weigh the spirits*, is a metaphor borrowed from the weighing of money, in order to try and find out its intrinsic worth and value.—These forms of speech, therefore, imply, that GOD not only always *sees* the hearts of men, but also makes them his *peculiar study*; *examining* and *weighing* every thought and desire of the human heart, in the balance of the sanctuary, as a judge examines the evidences in a trial at law to see whether they will acquit or condemn the criminal.

2dly. THE words imply, that he pondereth the hearts, and weigheth the spirits of men *in order to judgment*;—that he may make a just and impartial estimate of their moral and religious characters, and so *acquit* or *condemn* them accordingly. This is manifest from *Jeremiah xvii. 10*. "I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, that I may give to every

(o) 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." And

3dly. The words imply, that, in the matter of judgment, GOD looketh chiefly at the heart, judging of men's *actions* according to their *principles* and *intentions*;—and that his judgment of the human heart is more exact than ours can be of any thing which we ponder and study with the nicest attention, or which we weigh with the steadiest hand, and the most accurate exactness: for as GOD'S *wisdom*, and *knowledge*, and *justice* are *infinite*, so his judgment must be always *according to truth*, without either error or partiality: "It is impossible but that the Judge of all the world should do right (p)." It is now time to make some

IMPROVEMENT of the doctrine—And

1st. IS THE heart of man so deceitful? Are mankind so apt to be partial in their own favour, and so prone to deceive themselves, that it may be said of *most*, I had almost said *all* wicked and impenitent men, that "all their ways, even the *worst* of them, are *clean*, and *pure*, and *right* in their own eyes?"—O then how much should it be the study of all men to set a strict watch over their own hearts, those hearts of theirs which an inspired prophet hath declared to be deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, —and to distrust their own opinions and judgments concerning themselves?—It is truer than most would be willing to believe, that "every man is his own greatest enemy!" The whole combined world could

(p) Gen. xviii. 25.

not injure us (I mean, in our best interests) if we did not injure ourselves. The *devil* himself could have no power over us, if we did not give him *access*, and *invite* his temptations. Wicked examples, or the wicked world, could never tempt us to sin, or draw us into misery, if we were not first *willing* to be drawn and tempted.—Our lusts and passions could never get the mastery over us, and involve us in guilt and misery, if we did not first throw the reins on their necks, and add fuel to their fire. In a word, as the apostle assures us, “ every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed: then when lust is conceived, it bringeth forth sin, and sin when it is perfected, bringeth forth death (q).” It is “ from within, out of the heart of man, that all wickedness proceedeth (r).”—The *desperate evil* habits which many men have contracted, and which are now as a *second nature* to them—so *familiar*, that they seem *harmless*—and so deeply rooted, that they know not how to shake them off—have taken their rise at first from indulging their lusts and passions in *small matters*, and have gradually gathered strength from repeated acts.—And what is the source of all this mischief?—Why, *self-conceit*, *self-flattery* and *self-approbation* in their own evil ways.—They flattered themselves in their own eyes until their iniquity is become hateful in itself, hateful to God, and hateful to all men. *Every way* of theirs was *right* and *clean* in their own eyes. *Bad actions*, once committed, must needs be justified, until at length mankind are

(q) Jam. i. 14, 15.

(r) Mat. xv. 18, 19.

engaged to justify a *bad conduct* in the general—to call evil good, and good evil;—and when men once come to this pass, all human hopes of amendment are over—conscience becomes seared—the light of virtue is extinguished—all avenues to conviction are shut up—reproof is lost upon persons who are resolved at all events to justify their own ways—and, as the Psalmist says, “Such persons leave off to be wise and to do good; cast off the fear of GOD; abhor not evil; devise mischief upon their beds, and set themselves in a way which is not good (s).”

O THEN, what reason have we to be jealous of ourselves—to be distrustful of our hearts—and to keep them with all diligence, seeing that out of them are the issues of *life and death eternal* (t)? Especially when we consider, in the

2d. PLACE, “That the Lord pondereth the hearts, and weigheth the spirits”—that he attentively considereth all our ways, and weigheth them in an equal and unerring balance, and *this* in order to our final judgment!—This consideration, if we had any feelings of conscience, ought to make the very best of us tremble.—“O LORD, art thou now and at all times pondering this heart of mine, and putting down the nature and weight of each of my *thoughts, desires, designs*, words and actions, in the book of thine everlasting remembrance—and shall this register be produced before me, on the day of judgment, in the presence of angels and men;—and shall I receive sentence for eternity according to the things written

(s) Psal. xxxvi. 1,—4.

(t) Prov. iv. 23.

in this book?—Is it so, O LORD, that I thus live continually under thy critical inspection as my *witness* and *judge*; and that not the smallest article of my behaviour can pass unnoticed of thee, or unrecorded by thee?—Good LORD, how *watchful*, how *circumspect* a life then should I live? Thou hast said that if we *judge* and condemn ourselves, we shall not be judged and condemned with the wicked world. Let us, therefore, be ever critical and severe judges of our own conduct—ever ready to justify thee, and condemn ourselves, that we may be able to stand in the day of thy judgment.”

3dly, AND to conclude: since this is the capital failing of the wicked, and still too much the failing of many good persons, to be *ignorant of their own hearts*, and *criminally partial in their own favour*; it is surely the great duty of all men to use every means and method of obtaining a proper *self-knowledge*. The glass of GOD'S *word*, if the heart were frequently laid open to it, would give us an unflattering picture of ourselves—our *friends*, would we encourage them, might do much this way—our *enemies*, could we admit their hated testimony, often tell us truths greatly conducive to *self-knowledge*. Above all, let us pray, with *David*, “Search me, O GOD, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts, —shew me to myself without veil or disguise—see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” Amen.

S E R M O N XXII.

CHRI^ST, the bright and salutiferous Sun:
of righteousness to a benighted and
perishing world, from

MALACHI iv. 2.

*But unto you that fear my name shall the SUN:
OF RIGHTEOUSNESS arise with healing in
his wings.*

THIS is allowed on all hands to be an eminent prophecy of **C**HRI^ST. — It has been often observed concerning the *Messiah*, that the nearer his advent approached, the more bright and luminous, and the less doubtful; obscure or ambiguous, were the prophecies concerning him. Prophecy may be compared to a *sun* which rises muffled and veiled in a cloud, which gathers brightness and lustre as it advances to the Zenith, and which sets, or goes down full-orbed, in its greatest magnitude and splendor:

To foretel the incarnation of the *Messiah*, to point out and describe his person and offices, and to pre-

pare the world for his reception, were eminent branches of the prophetic office. *Moses* and *all the prophets* bore witness to him; but none more *plainly* and *fully* than *Malachi*, who closed the *canon* of the Old Testament scriptures. He was the last luminary (if I may so speak) of the Jewish church. There was to be a long interval of darkness between his time and the coming of the *Messiah*; and it was fit that he who was the *last prophet of Israel*, and with whom the prophetic spirit ceased for a season, until it was restored in *John the Baptist*, should speak something *plainly* and *unambiguously* concerning HIM who was the *hope* and *consolation of Israel*, in order to support the faith of the pious *Jews*, thro' the dark, confused and troublous period which was then approaching.

ACCORDINGLY he disappointed not this reasonable expectation; but has given *two* of the clearest and most comfortable assurances of the speedy coming of the MESSIAH, and of his forerunner *John the Baptist*. "Behold, says he, in the name of the LORD,—behold I will send my messenger, *John the Baptist*, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the LORD whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple; even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in: behold he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts: but who may abide the day of his coming? And who shall stand when he appeareth? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like a fuller's soap (a)."

(a) Mal. iii. 1, 2.

AND so here, in our text and context, he shews them the judgments which would fall upon the wicked and unbelieving *Jews*, at the coming of CHRIST, and under his kingdom: "For behold the day cometh that shall *burn as an oven*, and all the *proud*, yea, and all that *do wickedly*, shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall *burn them up*, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch."—And then, in order to support the faith and hope of the *pious*, amidst that degeneracy and those calamities which might have tempted them to imagine that GOD had totally rejected *Israel*, and cast them off for ever, forgetting his mercy and his truth; the prophet ushers in that glorious and refreshing promise contained in our text: "But unto *you who fear my name*, shall the SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS arise with healing in his wings, and ye shall go forth and grow up as calves in the stall."—Thus is the *canon* of the Old Testament scriptures closed, as it were, with one of the most *bright* and *precious promises* of the *Messiah*—a promise which lay warm at the hearts of all those who, with good old *Simeon*, "waited for the consolation of *Israel*," and proved their most reviving cordial, amidst all those external calamities and internal corruptions and convulsions which mangled and deformed that unhappy state, from its return after the *Babylonish* captivity, till the coming of CHRIST.

IT shall be my business in what remains of this discourse,

1st. A LITTLE to illustrate the metaphor here

used to represent our blessed Saviour to the faith of the *Jews*—"The SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS," and to shew its propriety—and

2dly. To make some practical improvement of the subject.

1st. THEN, I am a little to illustrate the metaphor here used to represent our blessed Saviour to the faith of the *Jews*—the SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS—and shew its propriety. And this will be best done by shewing

1st. WHEREFORE he is called a *sun*—a *righteous sun*—or a *sun of righteousness*.—And

2dly. How he indeed appears to have produced the effects of a *righteous sun* in the *moral world*, so far as his light hath shined upon it.

FIRST : It is well known that nothing is called the *sun*, in strict propriety of language, but that great and bright celestial luminary which *makes* and *rules* our day ; and which, from his unfailing source of fire, dispenses *light* and *heat* to our whole system—being, under God his Almighty Maker, the source of colours, the medium of vision, the cause and continuer of animal and vegetable life, and the chearer and enlivener of the whole face of nature. When therefore the word *sun* is *figuratively* or *metaphorically* used, if the figure or metaphor be just, it must be used to represent and set forth something that is exceedingly *bright* and *luminous* ; *warm*, *salutary*, *beneficent* and *invigorating*—something whose influence is very *benign* and very *extensive*—something, in short, which, like the great luminary of the day,

enlightens by its rays, and *vivifies* and *enlivens* by its genial warmth. And this metaphor may be, and often is, applied, not only to *natural* light and heat, but also to *moral* and *spiritual*.

KNOWLEDGE and *virtue* make the *sun* of the soul, the great luminary of the moral and spiritual world. Without these, the soul is *in darkness* and *seeth no light*. It is like a human creature under one of the poles, bereaved of light and chilled with cold. The soul which is void of saving knowledge, and the principles and habits of heavenly virtue and holiness, is, if I may so speak, in the *region of the shadow of death*. It is at best guided by a *dubious* and *infatuating* light, which only renders that *blackness of darkness* with which it is surrounded the more *horribly* and *frightfully* visible. It has only some glimmerings of light, which (like flashes of lightning in a cold, dark, tempestuous night) discover, at short intervals, the surrounding horrors and dangers of its situation—but which can by no means direct its steps, or prevent it from falling over precipices. Even the lamp of philosophy itself, which was however the best natural light the world enjoyed by its own unassisted endeavours, was no more to the moral world, when compared to the light from heaven communicated by divine revelation, than the pale chilling rays of the midnight moon, to the bright vigorous warming beams of the sun in his meridian glory. It was a light which indeed shewed some great and useful truths to the human mind, and these but very *imperfectly* and *indistinctly*. It furnished *some light* to the moral world,

but *no heat*. Some of the greatest philosophers among the heathens, were some of the worst livers. Their *fine notions* had but little influence upon *themselves*, and still less upon *the people*. They were considered rather as topics of conversation and *theses* of dispute, than rules of a virtuous and holy life. In a word; by this boasted philosophical wisdom the world knew not GOD, and had little power to serve him. The light which it afforded was little better than darkness, under the influence of which, as the apostle strongly expresses it, they might be enabled “haply to feel after the LORD, and find him,” like persons groping after an object in the dark (*b*).

Now, agreeable to this metaphorical way of speaking, we find that the scriptures almost every where represent *saving knowledge* and *virtue*, by *light*; and those who communicate and dispense them, by *luminaries*, or the *great lights of heaven*. It would be tedious to quote the one half of such passages which every where occur in the sacred writings. The few following may suffice.

GOD’S word is called “a light to our feet, and a lamp to our paths, and the very entrance of it into the mind is said to *give light* (*c*).” “The commandment, says *Solomon*, is a lamp, and the law is light, and the reproofs of instruction are the way of life.”—He also observes that the ways of virtue and knowledge, in which the just walk, are “like the shining light, which shines more and more unto the perfect day (*d*).”

(*b*) Acts xvii. 27. (*c*) Psal. cxix. (*d*) Prov. iv. &c.

—*Isaiab* says of those who will not bring their opinions to the standard of the *law* and *testimony*, “that there is no light of saving knowledge in them (e).” Agreeable to this, it is said of the prophet *Daniel*, “that light and understanding were found in him (f).” And when *Isaiab* prophecies concerning the conversion of the *Gentiles* from ignorance, idolatry and wickedness, to the knowledge and holiness of the gospel, he describes these two contrary states under the emblematical figures of *darkness* and *light*: “The people, says he, that walked in darkness, have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined (g).” — And this same passage is quoted and referred to by the *evangelists*, at the very time when this prophecy began to be fulfilled (h); “And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the LORD, to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, thro’ the tender mercies of our GOD; whereby 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.” To this also agrees the prophecy of good old *Simeon*; “LORD, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the *Gentiles*, and the glory of thy people *Israel* (i).”

(e) *Is.* viii. 20. (f) *Dan.* v. 11. (g) *Is.* ix. 2. (h) *Mat.* iv. 16. *Luke* i. 76,—79. (i) *Luke* ii. 29,—32.

CONSONANTLY to this, *John* speaks of our Saviour, and our Saviour of himself, as a *light*. *John* professes that he came to bear witness of THIS GLORIOUS LIGHT, which he calls the *true light* which *lighteth every one that cometh into the world* (*k*). "I am the light of the world, says CHRIST; he that followeth me, shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. Yet a little while is the light with you, walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you:—while ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light (*l*)."—In like manner, our Saviour calls *John* the Baptist (as a prophet of God and teacher of saving knowledge) "A burning and a shining light," in whose light the *Jews* rejoiced for a season (*m*).—And to all his apostles, he says, "Ye are the light of the world"—and exhorts them—"Let your light so shine before men, that others, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father which is in heaven (*n*)."

AGREEABLE to which, all Christians, without exception, are exhorted to walk as children of *the light* and children of *the day*, and to put on the armour of light;—and are said to shine as *lights* in the world, holding forth, as it were, the lamp of knowledge and holiness for the example and direction of others (*o*).—And it is probably in allusion to this, that glorified saints are said to "shine as the sun, in the kingdom of their Father;"—and that those faithful ministers of the LORD, who have led others into the paths of

(*k*) John i. 8, 9. (l) John viii. 12.—xii. 35, 36.

(*m*) John v. 35. (n) Mat. v. 16. (o) Phil. ii. 15, 16.

saving knowledge and virtue, are said to be rewarded by a bright effulgence of divine glory, and a high degree of celestial illumination in the upper world:— they laboured to bring others to the glories of supernatural light, under the cheering and enlivening beams of the **SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**: and they themselves shall be rewarded by a superior measure of the same divine glory and blessedness:—“ They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that have turned many to righteousness—brought many souls under the direct beams of **THIS RIGHTEOUS SUN**—shall themselves shine as the stars for ever and ever (p).”

In like manner, in conformity to this way of speaking, that system of saving knowledge and heavenly virtue which our Saviour has revealed in his gospel, is termed *light*. Christian converts are said “ to be brought out of darkness into a marvellous light.”— And we read of the light of the glorious gospel of the blessed God shining in unto them (q). “ God is said to shine into the hearts of sinners, and give them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus (r).”—By the gospel dispensation “ life and immortality are brought to light”—and it was the grand commission of the apostles “ to preach this gospel to *all nations, to all the world, and to every creature*; turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God (s).”—In allusion to all which it probably is, that the church, in which this

(p) Dan. xii. 2. (q) 2 Cor. iv. 4. (r) 2 Cor. iv. 6.
(s) 2 Timothy i. 10

divine light shines, is held forth to the mind under that beautiful comparative similitude—"Bright as the sun, fair as the moon, and terrible as an army with banners (†)."

No wonder then if CHRIST, the *great source* and *sovereign dispenser* of all this light—who enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world—who is the brightness of the Father's glory, the image of the invisible GOD—of that GOD who is the Father of lights, the fountain of knowledge, and the Spring of all holy influence—no wonder, I say, if this divine person is foretold in the sublime and figurative stile of Oriental prophecy, under the notion of "THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, arising on a dark and benighted world, with healing and salvation in his wings!"

HE is indeed a RIGHTEOUS SUN; himself holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners—while he dispenses, at the same time, a marvellous and divine light of *knowledge*, and a shearing and invigorating warmth of *heavenly virtue* to a world, formerly lying in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death.

HE is also a SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS—by whose active and passive course of obedience, a complete justifying righteousness is wrought out for sinners—and by the light of whose doctrines, and the vital energetic warmth of whose influences, they are made *actually* and *inherently* righteous—and so *qualified* and *made meet* for that consummate salvation, to which he will finally conduct all those who lay themselves open to

(†) Cant. vi. 10.

his benign influences, and walk in the beams of his saving light.

So much then for the *first* thing proposed, namely, the propriety of the appellation here given to our Saviour, by the spirit of prophecy—"The *sun of righteousness* which should arrive with healing in his wings." Proceed we now

Idly. To shew, how he indeed appears to have produced the effects of a **RIGHTEOUS SUN** in the moral world, so far as his light hath shined upon it.

To give this truth its *fullest force* and *clearest evidence*, it ought to be well understood and fully considered, in what state this world of ours was, when this **GLORIOUS SUN** arose upon it, with healing in his wings.

HUMAN nature was universally corrupted. A dreadful *darkness* and *ignorance* had spread itself over the *heathen* world. The *Jews* themselves, the favourite people of **GOD**, were become greatly degenerate. They had corrupted the sacred fountains of revealed truth by a mixture of the most ludicrous fables and absurd human traditions; and having almost lost the *knowledge of the truth*, they had, at the same time, lost all *taste* and *relish for holiness*. In short, virtue had lost all that influence over the human mind, which was originally given to it. No longer was it able, by its own force, to retain us in that course of duty, wherein we were appointed to move. The world, by all its admired wisdom, knew not **GOD**; and by all its celebrated rules of virtue, found itself incapable of serving him. Nay, so far from it, that

the most renowned parts of it for wisdom and knowledge—namely *Rome* and *Greece*—seemed to be at the remotest distance from the practice of *true virtue* and *religion*. Whoever doubts that the world lay thus in *ignorance* and *wickedness*, at the dawn of the gospel dispensation, let him attentively read the *three* first chapters of *St. Paul's* epistle to the *Romans*, on which he will find the general history of those times a lively comment.

SUCH then was the true state of our nature and circumstances at that ever memorable period when the *Messiah* became incarnate—when this SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS lent all his beams to expiring virtue and religion, and gave them a life and brightness which they never knew before.

As a man who has been born with the sense of sight, and who has been accustomed from his early infancy to see the glorious light of the sun, and to behold all the grand beauties of nature which are revealed to the eye by this beauteous luminary of heaven—as such a man, I say, can be little *charmed* and *astonished* by the visible beauties of the creation, in comparison of another who, having been born blind, is instantaneously restored to his sight at the age of maturity:—in like manner *we* who have been born and educated in Christian countries, under the clear day of gospel light, cannot half so easily form a *strong* and *adequate* conception of the value of a blessing which we have always enjoyed—as those did who lived at the first appearance of Christianity in the world—when it could be contrasted with the hypocrisy and

formality of the *Pharisees*, the Atheism of the *Sadducees*, the gross ignorance and superstition of the *vulgar heathen*, on the one hand, and on the other, with that *feeble lamp of philosophy*, wherein was collected nevertheless all that light which could be supplied from all the sources of human reason. The dark and shadowy dispensation of the *Jews*, accompanied with the dreadful corruption of their religious sentiments and manners—the barbarous ignorance, superstition and idolatry of the *vulgar heathen*—and the weak and inefficacious glare of *Pagan philosophy*—all served as so many *soils and shades* to brighten the beams of the *gospel sun*, and to increase its visible lustre!

To a world in this situation—to a people who walked in darkness, and dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, how astonishing must have been the appearance of this great light!—We who never walked in heathen darkness, are less sensible of this effect: we behold this great light without being *struck* by it; because the full blaze of gospel day did not burst *all at once* around our understandings!

IT would be impossible in the compass of this *half-hour* to handle this great argument in that detail, and with that fulness and perspicuity which its vast importance deserves. I must therefore observe very briefly, in the

1st. PLACE, That this glorious SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS has, by the brightness of his rising, greatly enlightened the moral world in all the branches of saving and important knowledge. He hath ac-

acquainted us with GOD, by giving us a *brighter* and *more enlarged* view of his *nature* and *perfections* than ever the world enjoyed before. Such, indeed, of the divine perfections as were employed in the creation, could not lie concealed: “The invisible things of GOD, from the creation of the world, were *clearly seen*, being understood by the things which were made; even his eternal power and God-head.”

—All the parts of creation have been for ever preaching and demonstrating, to every rational beholder, the *power*, the *wisdom*, and the *goodness* of him who *educed* them out of nothing, and linked them into one harmonious system; in every part of which the attentive eye is struck with the wisdom of the contrivance, the goodness and benevolence of the design, and the consummate beauty, order and proportion of the execution.—But when we have heard all that this visible creation can tell us of GOD, we shall have heard only a small part of what God is.

But what a wonderful *confirmation*, and *enlargement* has the proof of GOD's *creating power* received from the *sun of righteousness*, while he was veiled in flesh, and working out our redemption?—Had the laws of nature continued in one uniform course, it might have given some colour to the Atheistical opinion of those who believed the *eternity of the world*, and that nature is kept in motion by some power inherent in herself. But when we see all nature bending before this glorious SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS—the very winds and seas obeying him—the most inveterate diseases fleeing away at the authority of his

word—water changed into wine at his command—and the dead raised into life at his call—we have an ocular demonstration of *creating power*—of a power which could as easily have called an universe out of nothing, as a dead man out of his grave!—We have also a farther proof, that he whom *nature* thus obeys, must be *nature's* God—that he whom we worship as our Redeemer, and on whom we depend for our salvation, is really the sovereign Lord of universal nature!

THAT *wisdom*, also, which is written in fair characters in the harmony and proportion of all the parts of the universe, and in the grandeur and unity of design of the whole, breaks forth with additional lustre under the beams of this RIGHTEOUS SUN. Here we behold *the wisdom of God in a mystery*, which was hidden from ages and generations—that glorious plan of redemption which took its rise in the counsels of eternity, and which began to dawn in the earliest ages of time, breaking forth in its full lustre—that plan which is the wonder of *angels*; which unites all the divine perfections in perfect harmony, and which saves the sinner, devoted to destruction, while the fullest and most honourable amends is made to the divine *justice* and *holiness*, by the punishment inflicted on the surety.—And here we see this plan of divine wisdom, so far above all the natural notions of mankind, carried into execution, established and propagated in the world, by a few *poor despised* men, devoid of *learning, eloquence, power, credit*, or any kind of human accomplishment adequate to such a task.

—Here in short we see light brought out of darkness, and order out of confusion in the moral world, by means the most unlikely which could have well been imagined by *human wisdom*.

By the rising of this *sun of righteousness* upon the moral world, the *veracity* and *truth* of GOD was also gloriously illustrated and confirmed. All GOD'S ancient prophecies were punctually fulfilled by the coming of the *Messiah*. This *sun of righteousness* arose just in the *place*, at the *time*, and in the *manner*, as GOD had promised and foretold in ancient days. His *conception*, his *birth*, his *life*, his *doctrines*, his *miracles*, his *sufferings*, his *death*, his *resurrection*, and his subsequent *glory* and *exaltation*, all of them answered exactly to the divine predictions, and proved to a demonstration, that the GOD of *Israel*, is a GOD of *truth*, performing the mercy promised to our fathers, and remembering his holy covenant.—“Blessed, therefore, be the LORD GOD of *Israel*, who hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant *David*, AS HE SPAKE BY THE MOUTH OF ALL HIS HOLY PROPHETS WHICH HAVE BEEN SINCE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD (u).” Again,

THE *goodness* of GOD is indeed very visible in the work of creation; but by the rising of the *sun of righteousness*, the divine goodness rose, as it were, above itself, and was exalted into, what we may term, the *new attribute* of *mercy*—*mercy* and forgiveness to guilty hell-deserving sinners—*mercy*, the

(u) Luke i. 68, 69, 70.

darling attribute of heaven, the peculiar discovery and richest glory of the gospel, thro' every page of which it sheds its benign influences on a perishing world, and holds out the divine compassions to rebellious sinners.

ON that blessed auspicious night, when the **SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS** first arose on our benighted world, was this glorious attribute of the **DEITY** first published in *clear* and *luminous* characters by the heavenly host—"Glory to **GOD** in the highest; because there is peace upon earth, and good will towards men."—O happy shepherds, whose ears were first saluted with these joyful sounds of the everlasting gospel!—Well might ye go home, rejoicing and praising **GOD** for the things ye had seen and heard!—Cheerfully and zealously might ye catch those glad tidings of great joy to a guilty world, from the mouths of these *celestial heralds*, and repeat them to a grateful astonished world—to a world sinking in ruin, and overwhelmed with despair—"That unto *you*, and unto *them*, and unto *us*, was born, on that ever-memorable day, a **SAVIOUR**, even **CHRIST** the **LORD**!"—And well may *we*, unto whom the word of this salvation is come, tho' living in far distant times, and inhabiting the *isles of the sea*, catch the holy flame, and reciprocate the joy, when we call in-to remembrance the advent and nativity of this *glorious SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS*, who is the Saviour of the ends of the earth, and of them who live afar off in the distant isles!

2dly. **THE beams of this RIGHTEOUS SUN have**

shed a surprising light on the *nature, circumstances, danger* and *eternal destiny* of the moral world. The most enlightened parts of the heathen world were in *great darkness*, with regard to *most*, if not *all*, of these objects. But CHRIST the *sun of righteousness* has, by the brightness of his rising, scattered all this darkness of the moral world, and shewed mankind in the clearest light,—their natural depravity and corruption—the full extent of their moral obligation and duty, in all its branches—the immortal duration of their souls—the enemies, perils and dangers which surround them, and the risk they run of endless perdition. He hath shewed us the naked deformity of vice—the poison that is mixed with its sweet intoxicating draughts of pleasure, and that ruin in which its flowery paths end.—He hath laid before our reflecting minds the native charms of virtue—its manly rational joys, and those pure and unmixed streams of heavenly pleasures, by which it dwells for ever more.—“*Life and immortality* are fully brought to light by his gospel.” *Judgment, heaven and hell* are clearly unveiled to our understandings—that future and eternal weight of glory which awaits the righteous—that scene of endless torments which shall be the certain portion of every soul which despises the grace of the gospel, and rebels against infinite love—and that impartial judgment by which the fates of all moral agents will be finally decided and determined—are all revealed and laid naked and open by the beams of this **RIGHTEOUS SUN**.

3dly. By the same glorious light, the most power-

ful persuasives against vice, and the strongest motives to duty, are unveiled to the mind:—motives peculiar to the gospel, of which the wisest heathens had no knowledge, and which were but very imperfectly understood by the *Jews* themselves. I shall here but just hint at *one* among a number which might be mentioned.

ALL will acknowledge, with the apostle, that “**GOD IS LOVE.**” *Creation* and *providence* proved this truth to the *wiser heathen*. Those *streams* of the divine benevolence, which spread themselves in all directions over the whole face of nature, led their reflecting thoughts up to the *fountain*, and taught them to give him that sublime appellation, **DEUS OPTIMUS MAXIMUS**—“the **GREATEST** and the **BEST** of Beings!”—But what is **GOD’S** *creating* and *conserving* love, when compared to that which he has manifested in the *redemption* of sinners by **CHRIST**?—Not contented to have borne witness to this truth, “that **HE IS LOVE,**” by the creation of an universe, he sends the **LORD** of the universe himself to give us the strongest assurances of it. “His own eternal Son vouchsafes to bring the commendations of his Father’s love towards us. He veils the brightness of his glory, which would have dazzled and confounded us, and becomes *a man*; that, in our own nature and likeness, he might become a more effectual preacher of the divine loving kindness to our race, and set before us for our imitation, an example of divine grace and human virtue nearer our standard!”—And what does he more?—He dies on a cross for our guilty race, and

expiates our sins, that he might bring us under the direct and eternal beams of the divine loving-kindness!—Here is divine love and philanthropy!—Here is a motive to repentance and holy obedience, which is the *peculiar discovery* and the *brightest glory* of the gospel!—“Hear, O heavens, and give ear O earth! He dies for those by whom he dies; and that very blood which mankind had shed, was poured out to testify his love of man!”

4thly. THAT which is the distinguishing glory of this *sun of righteousness*, and of that dispensation of light which he has shed on the moral world, is, that all this important knowledge is made level to the meanest, weakest capacity. Those great truths and doctrines which are the basis of eternal salvation—that knowledge of the only true GOD, and of JESUS CHRIST whom he has sent, which is eternal life to all who enjoy and improve it—are not couched in *philosophical terms*, or darkened and perplexed by *subtil reasonings* and *puzzling distinctions*, but are made so obvious to every honest mind, that he who runs may read it. So that with truth it may be affirmed, that the knowledge of all the heathens put together, is no more to that knowledge which is now in the power of the weakest, humblest, most illiterate Christian, than the light of a thousand twinkling tapers, to the light of the sun in his meridian glory.

WHEREVER the everlasting gospel is faithfully preached, this marvellous light prevails, and is accompanied with a dispensation of the quickening Spi-

rit, which, if not rejected and abused, must render it the power of GOD unto salvation to every one who believeth.

THUS therefore does it appear, with an evidence which cannot be resisted, that CHRIST has produced the effects of a RIGHTEOUS SUN in the moral world, so far as his light hath been permitted to shine—and hath, in a great measure, chased away the clouds of error and ignorance from the Christian hemisphere.

MUCH more might be added to illustrate this charming subject—but our time is elapsed—and I must hasten to conclude by a brief

APPLICATION—And

1st. THESE illustrious effects produced by the SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS in the moral world—that superior light of knowledge which every where prevails, where the gospel is regularly and faithfully preached—are public and standing proofs of the divinity of that revelation in which we believe, and are alone sufficient to convince all gainsayers. It is a proof of the strongest kind, demonstrating the cause from its visible and permanent effects. It cannot be denied that, since the promulgation of the gospel, *vulgar Christianity* hath excelled *learned Paganism* in the most sublime and important branches of knowledge. Whence comes it to pass that a poor illiterate *peasant* or *herdsman* is master of more important knowledge, and shall give more pertinent answers to those sublime questions concerning the being and perfections of GOD—the production of this world—the origin of moral evil—and the nature and dura-

tion of the human soul;—and shall lay down more excellent rules and motives for virtue and piety, than *Aristotle, Plato, Seneca*, or the greatest philosophers of the heathen world?—Proceeds it not hence, that near *eighteen hundred* years ago, the SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS arose in *Palestine*, and dispensed a new communication of saving light and knowledge to a world which lay in darkness;—being “a light to lighten the *Gentiles*, the glory of his people *Israel*, and salvation to the ends of the earth.”

2dly. How great should be our gratitude and thankfulness to the blessed GOD, that he hath not only caused this *day-star*, this glorious *sun of righteousness*, to arise on this benighted perishing world of ours; but that he hath also brought *us* out of *darkness*, into *this marvellous light*—*us* the seed of the *Gentiles*, whose forefathers, not many ages ago, lived in the grossest ignorance, and in the vilest idolatries and superstitions!—Glory be to GOD in the highest, not only for that there is *peace upon earth* and *good-will towards men*; but that the word of this salvation hath reached even to *us* sinners of the *Gentiles*—and that, thro’ the tender mercies of our GOD, he hath caused this day-spring from on high to visit us, and give light to *us* and our heathen ancestors, to guide our feet into the way of peace and salvation—that *we*, who walked heretofore in darkness, have seen a great light; and that upon us who once dwelt in the region of the shadow of death, this light hath shined, and now shines, in its meridian brightness!—Glory be to the Father of lights and of mer-

cies that our eyes now behold this luminary of the moral world, who by his rays hath illuminated the whole Christian hemisphere, and is daily *enlightening* and *warming* the souls of *millions* of our fellow-creatures, and ripening them for the world of glory; “where they shall have no need of the *sun*, neither of the moon to shine in it; for the glory of God doth lighten it, and the *Lamb* is the light thereof^(u).”

3dly. SINCE such is our privilege and felicity under the beams of the *sun of righteousness*, shall we who glory in being Christians, continue insensible of this privilege and felicity?—Shall we continue *cold*, *barren* and *unfruitful* under the light and warmth of this **RIGHTEOUS SUN**?—Shall it be *our* condemnation (as it will be that of *many*) that this glorious light is come into the world, and shines around us, while it appears that we are lovers of darkness, by our attachment to evil deeds?—O, God forbid, *my dear fellow Christians!*—Rather, while we enjoy this light, let us believe in the light, and walk in the light, that we may prove ourselves children of the light, and of the day; putting on the breast-plate of faith and love, and for an helmet, the hope of salvation:—and while we receive the rays of this light from the glorious **SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**, let us endeavour, like the moon, to reflect it on the world around us—shining as lights in the world—holding forth the word of life—and letting our light so shine before men, that others seeing our good works, may glorify our Father in heaven—Amen.

(u) Rev. xxi. 23.

S E R M O N XXIII.

The manifold ways in which the wisdom of GOD is continually at work to reclaim sinners, from

PROV. i. 20, 21.

WISDOM crieth without ; she uttereth her voice in the streets ; she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates : in the city she uttereth her words, saying, How long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity, &c.

SOLOMON, in this and the following verses, takes pains to prove, that sinful man is the procuring cause of his own perdition:—that the blessed and righteous GOD, in *all ages*, and in *all places*, but more especially within the pale of his church, does every thing, consistent with his wisdom and justice, to reclaim and reform all mankind, and to bring them to *the knowledge of the truth*, and so, to *repentance and final happiness*:—and that those who finally perish of our guilty race, shall perish *justly*, the whole

world being judges, and without *reason of pity*; seeing they perish thro' their own obstinacy and perverseness, and against all the *means, motives, and arguments* which a wise and good God can *consistently* use for their reformation and happiness.

IN the words of our text, we have an account of the *instrument or messenger* which God makes use of to reclaim and call home his wandering creature MAN unto himself and happiness, from those paths of sin in which he is posting on to misery and destruction—namely, *wisdom*: “Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets;—she crieth in the chief place of concourse.&c.”—Or, as we have it, chap. 8th.—“Doth not wisdom cry? and understanding put forth her voice? She standeth in the top of high places; by the way, in the places of the paths. She crieth at the gates, at the entry of the city, at the coming in at the doors.—Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. O ye simple, understand wisdom, and ye fools, be of an understanding heart. Hear, for I will speak of excellent things, and the opening of my lips shall be of right things!”

THE word in the original, is *wisdoms*—which is probably intended to signify, both the *excellency* of divine wisdom, and the *manifold ways* by which God is continually preaching this wisdom to sinful men:—not only by his *word*, but also by his *works*, his *providences, reason, conscience*, his *spirit*, and abundance of other methods and means of instruction.

IN all these ways does the wisdom of God call

without, and utter her voice in the streets : she standeth, as it were, and crieth in the top of high places—in the chief places of concourse—by the way of the paths—at the entrance of the city, and at the very gates and doors of sinners hearts.—And her voice is addressed—not to *beasts* or *birds*, to *trees* or *stones* ; not to *angels* or *devils*, nor to the *dead* in their graves, nor to the inhabitants of *heaven* or *hell*, whose day of trial is over, and whose everlasting destiny is determined and fixed—but to the *living* and *rational*, though *sinful* and *unworthy*, inhabitants of this earth : “ Unto you, O *men*, I call, and my voice is to the *sons of men* ! ”

FROM these words, it is my purpose, thro’ the divine assistance, to lay before you a brief display of the various methods which the wisdom and goodness of God has been using in all ages and nations, and is still using, to reclaim sinful *human creatures*, and to lead them in the paths of virtue and holiness to the supreme happiness of their nature. This I shall attempt in a variety of instances ; “ And O that while our ears dwell upon the important subject, our very inmost souls might be made to hear the voice of divine wisdom, and to cherish, comply with, and conform to her salutary dictates—Amen.”

1st. THEN, If we understand the words *metaphorically*, they may imply *one* or *both* of the following truths.

1st. THAT GOD has implanted a divine instinct in the breast of every human creature, which, were

it carefully attended to and obeyed, would lead them to virtue and happiness *. And,

* WHEN I say "That GOD has implanted a *natural instinct* in the breast of every human creature, which, were it carefully attended to and followed, would lead them to virtue and happiness;" I would not be understood to mean "Any hidden inward *Christ* or *seed of life*, born with the soul, or making any essential part of it." This is an opinion which seems to me to have no clear or solid foundation in the word of GOD; but rather flatly to contradict what the scriptures every where say concerning that depraved and corrupt state of our nature with which we are born into the world—"Conceived in sin and brought forth in iniquity; children of wrath; born in *the flesh*, even in *that flesh* or *corrupt nature*, in which there is *no good thing*, no right or holy principle." Sinners are represented as "In darkness; altogether as an unclean thing; naturally dead in trespasses and sins; without GOD, *without Christ*, and without hope in the world."—Which certainly could not be strictly true, if CHRIST were in them the *hope of glory*, and if they were born with this seed of life in the soul.

NOR would their conversion be represented as a *new creation*, a *new birth*, the introduction of a *new principle* of life and light into the soul—an entire *renovation* and *transformation* of the soul, by bringing it from a state of *darkness* into *light*, and from a state of *death* into *life*,—if CHRIST, the *hope of glory*, were indeed *born in us*, and this *seed of life* were a *constituent innate* part of our nature.

WHEN therefore I speak of "An instinct implanted by GOD in the breasts of all men, and which may be called *natural* to them in the present constitution of things," my meaning comprehends and includes in it two distinct objects.

1st. THE remains of *natural conscience* which our apostacy has not entirely ruined and defaced, but which is still

2dly. THAT the effects of GOD's wisdom, power, goodness and providential care, so conspicuous in all

left by GOD as a *principle* and *centinel* in the breast of man; for many important purposes.

WERE it not for this *natural conscience*, this instinctive power and faculty of comparing our actions with the rule of them, and approving or condemning them in consequence, men would be as *stupid* and *unfeeling* as brutes, and as little capable of moral government as they are—human society would fall into utter disorder and confusion—and *religion* could have no possible hold of the minds of men.

NATURAL conscience is that handle of the soul on which religion takes hold.—By *this* man is instinctively convinced, that he is a subject of moral government; that he is under a law; and, by the *hopes* and *fears* which it excites in him, he has a clear proof and demonstration (was it duly attended to) that rewards or punishments await him in a world and state to come. For, as nature does nothing in vain; and as these *hopes* and *fears* are *natural*, *instinctive* and *spontaneous*, extending to the whole human kind—he may hence clearly infer that these *hopes* and *fears* are *not*, *cannot be*, *imaginary* or *groundless*, but that they must have their *real objects* in nature—i. e.—As sure as a sense of the divine favour and a hope of future reward and happiness, spring up in the mind, upon a consciousness of our having obeyed the dictates of our conscience; so surely there *is* and *must be*, a state of future reward for the righteous—and as sure as a dread of the divine displeasure, and a fear of future punishment spring up in our minds, on a consciousness of our having disobeyed the dictates of our conscience, so surely there *is*, and *must be*, a state of future punishment for the wicked. This is that *law* and *light*, written on the hearts of the heathens, by which, as the apostle observes, they judge and condemn themselves, and by which they will be judged and condemned; see the 2d. chap. of his epistle to the *Romans*.

2dly. TOGETHER with this universal law and light of

the works of his hands which we see or know, call sinners with a loud voice to virtue, piety and happiness.

1st. THAT GOD hath implanted a divine instinct in the breasts of all men, which, were it carefully attended to and followed, would lead them to virtue and happiness, has been a prevailing sentiment both amongst the *Jews* and *heathens*.

PHILO seems to have been clearly of this opinion. *Levi ben Gershom* an ancient Jewish *Rabbi*, expressly says, that "Divine wisdom calls upon all mortal men with a loud voice, whilst it infuses itself into their souls, prompting them by certain natural instincts, motions and propensions to practise goodness and virtue, and to shun the contrary."

IT has been the general opinion of the *heathen philosophers*, that all mankind are born with an instinctive tendency to virtue, which, were it cultivated and improved, would lead them to moral and divine wisdom, or to integrity of life and manners. These first principles are termed *ορμαι*, *αφορμαι*, and *αρχαι*, by Aristotle, and are universally acknowledged by almost all the ancient philosophers, who unanimously agree, that all vicious and wicked men are guilty, and *natural conscience*, which is preaching up virtue and happiness to the whole world, I also understand that principle of *common grace*, or those operations of God's holy Spirit, which are more or less knocking at the hearts of all men, and striving with all men, in aid of their *natural conscience*, to reduce them from the paths of vice and misery, and to bring them back to the paths of virtue and happiness, and fix them in the favour and enjoyment of God.

worthy of condemnation, for not following and obeying these better principles of their nature. *Aristotle* upon this subject expressly affirms, that tho' it be not in the power of wicked men, who are far gone in vice, and become habitual sinners, to reform themselves; yet they are nevertheless *inexcusable* and *worthy of punishment*—"As one, says he, that casts a stone: the stone is no more in his power after he has cast it—he cannot recal it again;—but before he cast it, he might have chosen whether he would cast it or not: so that he is justly liable for all the damage it may do. Just so, adds he, it is with unjust and intemperate men: it was once in their power not to have been such; and therefore they are such *willingly* and of choice;—but being once such, they have lost the power of being otherwise."—"For nature," says another heathen, "has furnished *all mankind*, at first, with certain *instinctive notions* and favourable opportunities, by the help of which they might have attained to the knowledge of truth, and the practice of virtue; but the generality having neglected these, hence it is that they acquire evil habits, and are confirmed in wickedness; having lost the power of discerning between *right* and *wrong*, *falsehood* and *truth*."

IT is not my present business either to *justify* or *condemn* this doctrine of the heathen philosophers, or to examine how far it is consistent with the doctrines of our holy religion: but this I may freely venture to affirm, that, notwithstanding our natural blindness, corruption and proneness to evil, yet there are certain natural principles implanted in us, which powerfully

call and incline all mankind to virtue and happiness. *Blind, dark and imperfect* as our understandings are, yet if they do but open their eyes never so little, they must *discern*, and be in some measure *charmed with*, the *beauty and loveliness of virtue*, and disgusted with the *ugliness and deformity of vice*. He must be uncommonly blind and stupid indeed, who cannot perceive that *sobriety* is more beautiful and excellent than *drunkenness*—that *humility and meekness*, are more amiable than *pride, self-conceit and furious passion*—that *blasphemy, knavery, adultery, falsehood, slander and perjury* are hateful and pernicious both in themselves and in their consequences—and that *honesty, fair-dealing, truth, chastity and integrity of manners* are ornamental in themselves, beneficial to society, and of good report among men. The very *contempt, misery and punishment*, which almost always attend *wickedness* even in this world, and the *approbation, pleasure and happiness* which accompany *good and virtuous* actions, is a loud voice of divine wisdom calling mankind to virtue and happiness—not to speak at present of the peace and pleasure of a good conscience, and the joyous approbation of one's own heart, which ever accompany the workers of righteousness—and those bitter inward stings of remorse which haunt and pursue the wicked wherever they go, and which will never wholly leave them, till they either drop into hell, or become wholly hard-hearted and insensible.

2dly. If we take the words of our text in a metaphorical sense, they may also point out to us the

voice of visible nature which is every where, and in all ages, calling to all mankind, and teaching them the great lessons of wisdom and virtue.

IN this sense, every part of GOD'S workmanship in the visible world, is a powerful preacher of righteousness to *Pagans, Mahomedans, Jews and Christians*. Thus doth "wisdom (even the manifold wisdom of GOD in the creation, *formation, preservation and government* of the material world)—cry aloud; she uttereth her voice in the streets; she standeth and crieth in the top of high places, by the way, in the place of the paths." If we do but open our eyes, and look up towards heaven, *there* we behold the most convincing proofs of the being of GOD, and the plainest signatures of his power and wisdom.—*There* we behold the visible heavens declaring to the eye and ear of reason, the glory of GOD, and the firmament shewing forth his handy works.—*There* we behold the sun, the moon and the stars, which his almighty hands have framed, moving on with incredible swiftness thro' the boundless space, with the utmost order and regularity—fulfilling the sovereign will of their Creator—preaching his power, wisdom and goodness to every rational inhabitant of this earth, in a language which all understand—and

" Ever singing, as they shine ;

" The hand that made us, is divine."

There we see day unto day uttering speech, and night unto night shewing us knowledge—we see day and night, summer and winter, seed time and harvest, observing their constant times and seasons, for thousands

of years, without the least variation. And these are *universal preachers*, who preach not only to *Jews* and *Christians*, or to people of one country or language—but to *all the world*—“There is no speech or language, says the Psalmist, where their voice is not heard; their doctrine is gone out thro’ all the earth, and their words to the end of the world (a).”
Again,

IF we go out to the place of the paths, to our gardens or fields, does not the same wisdom still meet us, and lift up its voice unto us?—Do we not there behold the unsearchable wisdom and power of GOD, as well as his providential goodness and care, in every *herb*, in every *flower*, in every *tree*, in every *fruit*, in every *beast*, *fowl*, *fish* and *creeping thing*?—How are these things made?—How do they grow?—How are they preserved and propagated?—How doth every seed produce its own herb, plant and tree?—And every beast bring forth its own kind?—What gives to every flower, fruit and root, its own peculiar generic and specific *form*, *colour*, *taste*, *smell* and *virtue*?—Why does one herb or tree suck poison out of the same soil, whence another, beside it, extracts pleasant and wholesome nourishment?—Why is one root or fruit *bitter*, while another, just beside it, is *sweet*, or *sour*, or *acid*, or wholly *insipid*?—Are not all these vegetables fed and nourished by the same *earth*, *sun*, *dew*, *rain* and *air*?—What then makes the difference in their *sensible qualities* and *medicinal properties*?—Can human wisdom account for

(a) Psalms xix. 1,—4.

this? Could human power or skill, produce or effect these things?—Must there not then be some *adequate cause* of all these *wonders* among which we live?—Some infinitely wise, powerful, good and every where present Being, who hath made this visible world, with all its parts and creatures, and who is continually at work in every place, supporting, sustaining and ruling it?—And who is this but the GOD and Father of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, whom we worship?—And what is the voice of all his works, and of all those discoveries of his power, wisdom and goodness which they exhibit, to us the children of men?—Is it not plainly this:—“O ye sons of men! wherever ye go; ye meet me! in all things which ye see and hear, ye see and hear me! in every thing ye taste and enjoy, ye taste and enjoy me! Why then do ye forget and neglect me? Why rebel ye against that reason and conscience I have given you? Wherefore do ye disregard and violate those laws which I have written on your hearts?—The sun, moon and stars; the herbs, trees; beasts and fishes; day and night; times and seasons; heaven, earth and sea; rain, clouds and stormy tempests—all, all nature and all her laws, every thing around you obey the laws which I have given them—Why do you not imitate their example?—Why will you abuse my goodness, and depart from me?—Why will you alone of all the creatures around you, revolt from the order prescribed to you, exorbitate from the sphere of your duty, and fly off from the center of your happiness?—Return, O ye children of men, from your sinful and destructive ways; return to the

paths of virtue and happiness; return to me who am the source of your beings, and the alone portion and rest of your souls!"

THUS are the *invisible perfections* of God clearly seen from *created nature*, being understood by the things he has made, even his eternal power and Godhead—and thus do all his works continually preach up piety and virtue to man—in so much that even the stupid and wicked part of the heathen, who have not learnt some measure of piety and righteousness from them, shall be without excuse. But

Idly. IF we understand the words of our text in their *plain literal meaning*—we must conceive of the wise man as describing those methods in which the *Jews* and many of the *heathen* nations were instructed in the lessons of divine wisdom.

GOD was pleased so to order it, that very few even of the heathen nations were without their teachers of wisdom. Many of their philosophers taught some excellent doctrines concerning God, and the duties which we owe to him, to our fellow creatures and to ourselves. And this kind of *theology* and *moral philosophy*, they did not only spread abroad in the world by their writings, but also taught it publicly in their schools, and at the gates and in the streets of great cities, where vast multitudes of people were assembled together.

A GREAT part of their wisdom also consisted in *parables*, and *wise and weighty sentences*, much like the proverbs of *Solomon*; such as the following—
 “ Know thyself.—Think of righteousness as thou

goest along the way.—Practise virtue in thy life and conversation.—Deceive not thy friend,” and the like; now, of these wise sayings, some were *engraven in their temples*, and attributed to *their gods*, because they were thought to surpass the wisdom of mortal men—and others were engraven on *pillars or statues*, and set up in common ways or public places, that travellers and all who passed might read as they run, and learn wisdom as they walked.

Now, *Solomon*, in the words of our text might refer, in part, to those public schools of philosophy among the heathens, and these other public methods by which the providence of God gave them opportunities of learning the lessons of moral and divine wisdom, and the great duties of life:—including, at the same time, those internal calls to virtue and happiness, from the *moral sense*, the *voice of conscience*, and *those motions and inspirations* of that divine Spirit, which perhaps was never wholly withheld from any of the race of lapsed man, unless by their wilfully and obstinately resisting his salutary impressions.

BUT the wise man, in these words, seems to have a peculiar reference to the public methods of religious instruction among the *Jews*. These had their public schools and synagogues, where the law of God was daily taught and expounded both to young and old. And not only was the divine law thus taught in public by the *priests, scribes, lawyers, and doctors* or *rabbies*, but also by the *prophets* who had it expressly in charge from God to deliver their messages and exhortations in the most public places of con-

course, and in the gates of their cities; where they were like to have the greatest numbers of hearers—to “ lift up their voices like trumpets; to cry aloud, and not spare, to tell the people of *Israel* their transgressions. Thus said the LORD unto me, says *Jeremiah*; Go and stand in the gate of the children of thy people, whereby the kings of *Judah* come in, and by the which they go out, and in all the gates of *Jerusalem*; and say unto them, Hear ye the word of the LORD, ye kings of *Judah*, and all *Judah*, and all the inhabitants of *Jerusalem* that enter in by these gates (c).

BESIDES; lest the *Jews* should forget the great things of their law, and that it might be next to impossible for them to forget them, they were commanded to have the precepts of it written and engraved on the posts of their gates and of their doors, and also on their *phylacteries* which they wore on their garments; that wheresoever they went they might meet the precepts of divine wisdom, and learn their duty as they went out, and as they came in, as they sat in their houses, and as they walked in their streets: “ These words, says the divine lawgiver, that I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up; and thou shalt bind them for a sign on thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes, and thou shalt write

(c) Jer. xvii. 19.

them on the posts of thine house, and upon thy gates (*d*).”—Not to add here, that the whole of their sacrifices and other ceremonial duties of religion were continual public lessons of divine wisdom. Well therefore might the wise man address the words of our text to the *Jews*—“Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets; she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the opening of the gates; in the city she uttereth her voice, saying, Unto you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men!”

AND if such were the calls of divine wisdom to the *heathens* and *Jews*—if so many and so various were *their* opportunities of learning the great doctrines and duties of morality and religion; how much greater are the advantages which *we Christians* enjoy? How much louder and more distinctly does the manifold wisdom of God call unto *us* in the clear light of this gospel day?—I shall endeavour to represent those methods which *divine wisdom* is using to reclaim us, and lead us in the way of virtue and happiness, in a variety of instances.

DIVINE wisdom listeth up her voice to us publicly—she crieth as it were aloud, and uttereth her voice in the streets, and in the top of high places, and that in the following ways, as

1st. By the works of her hands, which cry aloud to our understandings and convince our reason, that there is a God who has made us and all things, who sustains us and all things, and consequently, that we

(*d*) Deut. vi. 6,—19.

are obliged, as his creatures and subjects, to fear, admire, honour, worship, reverence and obey him according to all the discoveries of his will, whether by reason, conscience or revelation. The great book of *nature* is open unto us, as well as to the *heathen*, and that with peculiar advantages; as we know much more of the variety, wisdom and grandeur of the divine works than the ignorant heathen did. The sun, moon and stars are daily and nightly preaching righteousness to us. The light which they give us, instead of directing our feet in the paths of wickedness, should lead our thoughts to heaven every time we behold them, and impress us with great and worthy thoughts of the power, wisdom and goodness of their and our Creator,—and thus illuminate our souls with the rays of divine wisdom, as they enlighten our bodies by their natural brightness.—When we behold the sun, we should remember that “thus shall the righteous shine in the kingdom of their Father—yea, brighter than the stars, for ever and ever.”—If the sun and stars are such bright and glorious beings, how much more bright and glorious HE who made them, and taught them to shine.—Do they perform their courses so regularly: how much more ought we, who have reason and religion to guide us, and for whose use they were made?—If it is so uncomfortable to be without their light: how dreadfully gloomy, comfortless and distressing must be the everlasting *blackness of darkness* of hell and of the divine displeasure?—If their light is so cheering and exhilarating an object to our eyes and to our minds: how much more comfortable

and refreshing must the light of GOD's reconciled countenance, the unclouded splendors of the *sun of righteousness*, and the glorious and eternal brightness of heaven be to our souls?

AGAIN; if we turn our wondering eyes to the *earth* and *sea* and all their richness and fulness, how can we choose but to be filled with grateful thoughts of the goodness of that GOD, who hath made all these things for us, and given us the dominion over them, and fitted them for our use and enjoyment?—In this view of things, every creature preaches the goodness of our GOD, and calls for our admiration, gratitude and praise! GOD whispers to us, as it were, in the gentle breeze,—calls aloud in the tempest—and lifteth up his voice in still more dreadful accents in the lightning's forked glare, and the thunder's hollow roar. In this last "his voice," as the Psalmist observes, "is *terrible* and *full of majesty*," and should accordingly strike terror into the hearts of sinners, whom by a flash of lightning he can quickly consume, or destroy them by those stormy winds which fulfil his word. Again,

2dly. THE *providences* of GOD call aloud to sinners, and either cogently impel, or gently invite them to repentance.

WHEN famine, pestilence, sickness or war—when public calamities, or private losses and afflictions surround or assault us—then is GOD's voice known by the judgments which he executes on the earth. When sinners thus see the sad effects and ravages of sin, and these evident tokens of the divine displeasure

against our earth:—when they behold their fellow-sinners eating the bitter fruits of their iniquity, and carried off in their sins—or, when they themselves are thus suffering under the rod of a provoked and offended GOD—ought not these judgments, which are abroad in the earth, to teach the inhabitants thereof righteousness (*d*)?—Does not the wisdom of GOD lift up her voice and cry aloud to them, in these providences, to turn from their sins, and do no more foolishly, and to flee to GOD for refuge and protection, that they may not fall under the rod of the wicked?

NOR surely can it be denied that there is a winning and alluring voice in the merciful dispensations of the Divine Providence, calling sinners to repentance. Surrounded with undeserved comforts, loaded with forfeited benefits, environed on every side with long-abused mercies, protections and deliverances—followed by these through every successive period and vicissitude of life, under the provoking circumstances of ingratitude, contempt and abuse, *on our part*—these mercies renewed, and renewed, and renewed again, after breach of vows, promises and repeated solemn resolutions of amendment (as tho' the patience of GOD was never to be wearied, nor his anger to be provoked; but as if he were determined *ever* to wait to be gracious, and never remit striving with us, and heaping mercies upon us, until he has effectually overcome our obstinacy, and brought us to repentance)—what can be the language of this astonishing proce-

(*d*) Isaiah xxvi. 9.

sure, if it be not to call sinners to virtue and happiness?

THUS as GOD's goodness and long-suffering patience should *lead* us, so the strokes of his rod are calculated to *drive* us (if I may so speak) to repentance.

3dly. Is not GOD calling aloud to us by our bibles, by his SON, and by a preached gospel? Can we plead that the word of GOD, or the laws and conditions of his gospel are concealed from us?—We cannot, like the heathens, say that we have no written law of GOD—nor, like many Christians, that our teachers have taken from us the holy scriptures, which are the *key of knowledge*. The doctrines and precepts of heavenly wisdom are not confined to *private schools*, or *secret mysteries*, as they were in many places among the heathen. The great prophet and high-priest of our religion taught it *publicly*, in the *temple*, in the *synagogues*, on *mountains*, by the *sea side*, on the *house tops*, in the *streets*, in the chief places of *concourse*, in the opening of the *gates*, and in *secret* he said nothing which was not to be repeated openly (*e*). He also charged his *ministers* and *apostles* to proclaim his gospel publicly, on the house tops, and to let the light of their doctrines shine before all men (*f*).—They were to teach all nations; to teach publicly, and from house to house; to declare the whole counsel of GOD, and to keep nothing back which was within the limits of their extensive commission.—They had no secrets to keep, no *secret doctrines* to

(*e*) John xviii. 20.

(*f*) Mat. v.—x. 25.

propagate, nor any *secret mysteries* to celebrate; and *woe* was unto them if they did not teach *all* whatsoever their LORD commanded them, and preach the gospel to every human creature, and propagate its *glad tidings* and *holy precepts* to *all nations*, and if they were not instant in this work in season and out of season! They were to cry aloud, and lift up their voices like trumpets, and admonish, rebuke and exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine, and warn every man, and exhort every man, that, if possible, they might present every man perfect in CHRIST JESUS,—and say, in the name of the great GOD and his Son JESUS CHRIST—“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money: come buy wine and milk, without money and without price. 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*.—Behold I have given him for a witness to the people, for a leader and commander to the people.—Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our GOD, for he will abundantly pardon (g).” They were to preach repent-

(g) Isa. lv. 1,—8.

unto for the remission of sins to all nations, beginning at *Jerusalem*; and to say; "Believe in the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and ye shall be saved; repent, and cast away your transgressions, that ye perish not. Wash you, make you 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—and tho' your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (b)."—In a word; "they are ambassadors for CHRIST, as tho' GOD himself did beseech men by them, praying them, in CHRIST'S stead, to be reconciled to GOD (i)."

AND not only did GOD cry aloud unto sinners by the PROPHETS, his SON, and his APOSTLES; but he also procured that their *doctrines, calls and messages* should be *preserved in writing*, and dispersed among all nations, that every Christian country might not only have this gospel proclaimed *weekly* in their churches, but might also have the inestimable treasure of GOD'S word in their houses, that they might *daily* search it themselves, and teach it diligently to their children, and have it constantly in their mouths and in their hearts, as the *rule of their lives*, and the *charter of their heavenly hopes*.

THUS are the *prophets and apostles*, though dead, yet still speaking unto us—and our divine LORD and Master, tho' now in heaven, yet still calling unto sin-

(b) Isaiah i. 16,—18.

(i) 2 Cor. v. 20.

ners, as it were, from the throne of his glory, and inviting them to virtue and happiness. I may still add

4thly. THE voice of *reason*, of *conscience*, and of God's *Holy Spirit* join issue with the revealed word of God, and sometimes *whisper*, sometimes *call aloud*, to sinners to turn from their evil ways, and be happy.—By human understanding, by the light and law of nature, by the powers and faculties of reason, by the office of conscience, by the influences, motions and strivings of the Holy Spirit—by *all these* does God lift up his voice to the children of men, and recall them from perdition. The spirit of a man, is the candle of the LORD, and his advocate and solicitor in the human breast; so that wherever men go, they may hear a voice *within them*, saying, “This is the way; walk ye in it; turn neither to the right hand, nor to the left!”—Nor is the voice of conscience always a *still small* voice: it sometimes cries *aloud*, and lifts up its voice in *dreadful majesty* to the hearts of sinners, and makes them pay bitter sauce for their sweet and pleasant sins.

HAS it not often bitterly reproached thee, O sinner, and caused thee to hear its voice, and feel its power, even in thine inward heart; and told thee plainly that the way thou wast in would lead thee to perdition, and that God was angry with thee, and that judgment was waiting for thee—and caused thee to judge and condemn thyself, and to abhor and detest thine own doings!

AND when thou wouldest have gladly got rid of its importunities, and hast endeavoured with all thy

might to hush and silence its remonstrances, has it not even pursued thee into thy wicked company, or to thy bed and secret retirement, and loudly warned thee of thy guilt and danger?

5thly. AND to conclude: as I hinted before, GOD calleth to sinners, and wisdom lifteth up her voice, by *their own knowledge and experience* of the evil nature and fatal consequences of sin, both in themselves and others. It is a dictate of common prudence, that what we have once experienced to be *evil and pernicious*, we should shun and avoid for the future. And as our own experience should teach us this plain and necessary lesson, for we are equally bound in reason and prudence to learn this wisdom from the follies and miscarriages of others. If we saw our neighbour injured by a certain project, or bit and cheated by dealing with a certain man, ought we not in prudence to shun having any concern in such a project, or any dealing with such a man?—If we saw *thousands* entering on a certain bridge, and not one in an hundred going over safe, but the generality falling in and drowning, would we not if possible avoid going over such a bridge?—Now, to apply this; have we not in numberless instances, experienced the evil nature and pernicious consequences of sin in ourselves? Have we not found the fruit of sin, generally speaking, to be *shame and dishonour*, the loss of credit, friends and interest—and in many cases, a *diseased body and troubled conscience*?—Or, if we have been so happy as hitherto to have escaped this fatal experience, thro' a fortunate and happy freedom from the grosser and more

pernicious class of sins; yet have we not observed this in others? Did we ever know a notorious sinner to be *happy, honourable or respected?*—Did we ever hear the world speak well of such an one?—Did we ever know iniquity to prosper long; or its gains to go down to the *third and fourth generations?* We may indeed have heard sinners *boast of their wickedness*, and glory in their shame, in the hour of their intoxication, or amidst the gay and jovial circle of their dissolute companions; but did we ever hear them do this *in prison, on a death-bed, or under the gallows?*—On the other hand, did we ever hear a man or a woman repent of their pious, virtuous, or good actions, or reproach themselves for having been honest, chaste, sober, just, or charitable?—Have we never been forced to make a remark of it, that *benefit is the best policy, even in this present life, and that peace, honour, happiness and prosperity are generally the reward of righteousness even in this wicked world?*—That even that little which a righteous man hath, is better than the riches of many wicked?—Ask a poor, honest, pious man, if he would exchange conditions with the *richest rogue or most prosperous villain*—Ask a poor virtuous woman, if she would change conditions with a *royal or imperial whore*, and they would disdain the proposal, and the whole virtuous and right-judging world would approve and applaud them for so doing!

Is not this, then, a *loud call and a strong inducement* to virtue and piety; and does not wisdom cry aloud to the children of men, by this constitution of things, to turn from their evil ways, and pursue vice

ture, honour and happiness. But I now proceed to a brief

APPLICATION of the subject. And here I would close by one *short* and *obvious* inference (for indeed the subject is directly practical, and applies itself)—Has God taken such infinite pains to shew us the evil nature and consequences of our sins, and to lead us to true happiness in the way of virtue and true holiness?—Have we the book of *nature* and the book of *revelation*—the calls of *reason*, of *conscience*, and of *experience*—the voice of *Providence*, and the means and ordinances of *grace*—the terrors of *hell* and the hopes of *heaven*—all powerfully persuading and inclining sinners to shun the dangerous and destructive paths of vice, and to pursue happiness in the pleasant, peaceful and honourable way of virtue and holiness? What excuse then shall we have, if we continue in our sins, and fall short of eternal life?—Did the *heathens* know so much of the being, wisdom, power, justice, goodness and law of God, as shall leave them without excuse on the judgment day, if they continue in sin against this light; what then shall become of wicked and ignorant *Christians*, unto whom divine wisdom calls with a *stronger*, *clearer* and more *distinct* voice?—If the mere unassisted light of nature taught many of the heathen to love, fear and reverence God—to obey the voice of reason, and follow the dictates of conscience—to live sober, honest, chaste, temperate and virtuous lives—not to be passionate or revengeful under the greatest provocations—not to lie or swear for the greatest advantages—

to deal honestly, justly and truly with all men—and to hate and despise mean and dishonest actions of every kind—(and thus it has taught many of the ancient *Greeks* and *Romans*, and still teaches many of the modern *Chinese* and *Japanese* to do)—what then will be the just doom of Christian *adulterers*, *fornicators*, *thieves*, *drunkards*, *unjust dealers*, and *wicked liars*, who have an hundred times the means of knowledge and virtue which those poor heathens enjoyed?—We read their just and awful doom in some of the following verses, and may God dispose and enable such to consider it before it be too late!—

“ 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!”

S E R M O N XXIV.

The foundation of hell laid in wickedness;—or sinners self-prepared for destruction, from

ROM. ix. 22. last clause.

—*The vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.*

IT would be a *tedious* and, perhaps, *unpleasing* talk, to enter largely at present into the apostle's design in this *difficult* and *much disputed* chapter. It seems evident upon the whole, that, from the *fourteenth* to the *twenty-fourth* verse, he is shewing that GOD, being the sovereign LORD and rightful proprietor of his own creatures, may dispose of them and deal with them as seemeth good unto him—In particular, that he may chuse some peoples or nations, and confer upon them very distinguishing favours and privileges, to which they have no claim by nature or merit: and that, on the other hand, from among many criminals he may select some in particular to very great and exemplary punishments—while he may, at the

same time, shew *mercy* and *favour* to *others* equally guilty : in like manner as a *just* and *righteous king* may shew favour to *some malefactors* who are under sentence of death, while he suffers the extent and severity of the law to be executed on *the rest*.—As remarkable instances of this kind, he mentions the *seed of Jacob* who were peculiarly favoured above *that of Esau*, altho' both descended from one father and mother, and both were born at one birth.—And *this distinction*, he observes, was appointed to *Jacob* and *his posterity* before *he* and *his brother* were born, and consequently before either of them had done *good* or *evil* to *merit* or *demerit* any such distinction. And, accordingly, before they were born, “ God said, *Jacob* have I loved, but *Esau* have I hated,” i. e. I have *greatly preferred* the *former* above the latter, having designed many *peculiar favours* and *privileges* for the *posterity of Jacob*, which I have denied to *that of Esau*.—“ So then, as the apostle argues below at the *sixteenth verse*, it is not of *him that willeth*, nor of *him that runneth*, but of *God that sheweth favour*.” *Isaac* earnestly *willed* and *desired* that *Esau*, who was the first-born, should inherit the blessing—and *Esau* earnestly and eagerly *run* to hunt venison for his aged dying father, that he might obtain that blessing which he had profanely forfeited and sold for a morsel of pottage ; but God by his providence, so ordered it, in spite of the *willing of Isaac* and the *running of Esau*, that *Jacob* should have the blessing, and that the privileges and promises of the *Abrahamic covenant* should be conferred upon *his*

posterity, exclusively.—In the *seventeenth verse*, he gives an instance in *Pharaoh*, where, of various sinners, GOD appoints *one* rather than *another* to be a monument of special vengeance: “For the scripture saith to *Pharaoh*, even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that thy name might be declared throughout all the earth (a). i. e. GOD raised this wicked man to that height of grandeur in which he gloried, or (as some would have it) from the *plague of blains*, that he might the more exemplarily punish him, by overthrowing him and his host in the Red Sea; so that this remarkable judgment upon obstinacy and impenitence might be recorded for a *warning* and *example* to all future generations. And for this purpose “GOD is said to have hardened *Pharaoh’s heart* that he might not let his people *Israel* go;”—not that GOD did positively put any hardness or wickedness into the heart of *Pharaoh*—but, being already a wicked man, he left him to the *natural hardness* and *wickedness* of his own heart, and did not restrain him, that so he might make his destruction, an illustration of his power, and an *example of his just vengeance*.

BUT, as the *leading design* of the apostle, in this chapter and the following, seems to be to foretel the cutting off of the majority of the Jewish nation from the promises and blessings of the MESSIAH’S kingdom, and to *reconcile* the believing Jews to this dispensation, which was so little expected by them, and therefore so likely to stagger their faith,—the a-

(a) Exod. ix. 16.

posse proceeds to *illustrate the sovereign power of God* over his creatures, by that power which the potter has over the clay which he manufactures into earthen vessels of various qualities, and for various uses and purposes:—"Hath not, says he, the potter power over his clay, out of the same mass or lump; to make one vessel unto purposes of honour, and another unto purposes of dishonour?" And shall not the *great God*, who has infinitely greater power, right and prerogative over us, than any potter can have over his clay, deal with his own creatures as he pleases? May he not withhold his *undeserved favours* from one wicked man or one wicked people, and even inflict his judgments upon them, which they deserve; and may he not single out another wicked man, or another wicked people, and confer favours upon them which they have not deserved, without being blamed or found fault with by his creatures?

Who then can justly blame the *sovereign Lord of all*, if he is pleased powerfully to call some of the Jews to the light and privileges of his gospel, while he suffers the bulk of them to go on in their impenitency, and be cut off from his church, and punished with an exemplary destruction; and if, on the other hand, he is pleased to call the *Gentile nations* in their *blindness*?—What *unrighteousness* is there in all this? And "Who art thou, O man, who *repliest* and *objectest* against God, for this manner of proceeding! —" *What* then is it to thee? Or *what right* hast thou to find fault, if God, willing to manifest his wrath, and to make his power known, hath endured with

much long-suffering *the impenitent unbelieving Jews*; those *vessels of wrath* who are fitted and qualified for destruction? Is he to account to thee for enauring them so long, and yet at length for cutting them off, and for punishing them with an exemplary destruction, at what time, and in *what manner* he pleases; seeing they are *worthy of this destruction*, and have fitted themselves for it?—Or, on the other hand, *what is it to thee*, if he is pleased “to make known the riches of his glory, on the *believing Jews and Gentiles*, even those *vessels of mercy* which he himself, by the power of his own grace, has already prepared and made meet for glory;—even us, whom he hath called by his grace, not of the *Jews* only, but also of the *Gentiles*.”

It is worth our while here attentively to observe, in *what different language* the apostle speaks of the **VESSELS OF WRATH**, and the **VESSELS OF MERCY**. Of the *former* it is said, that *they are fitted for destruction*. Not that **GOD** fits them, or decrees them to destruction without their own evil deserts—but simply, that *they are fitted for destruction*, namely, by *their own unbelieving hearts and wicked habits and practices*.—So that it may be justly said of every sinner, every vessel of wrath, what **GOD** says of *Israel*: “O *Israel*, O sinner, thou hast destroyed thyself! Thou hast fitted and prepared thyself for destruction! Thou hast been the proper and efficient cause of thine own guilt, ruin and misery!”—Whereas, it is quite different with regard to the *vessels of mercy*. “These **GOD** prepareth for glory.” Their destruction is of

themselves, but in him is their help and hope found. The *destruction of a sinner* is of his own proper *desert and wickedness*; but the *salvation and glory of a saint*, is of the *power and grace of God*. "By grace we are saved, &c. The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through JESUS CHRIST our LORD (b)." This is a distinction which ought ever to be kept in our view to guard us from errors on the right hand and on the left: "That sinners themselves are *wholly to blame* for their own *guilt and destruction*; and that *saints* are wholly indebted to God for every thing good in them, and every thing good done, enjoyed or hoped for by them.

THE words of our text lay a just foundation for a doctrine which is little believed in the world, and little considered or regarded among Christians, namely, "That wicked persons are *naturally fitted, disposed and prepared for hell* before they enter into it; and that hell is not so much to be considered as a *place of punishment* arbitrarily decreed by God for the reception of sinners; as a *place and state* for which sinners have, in fact, *prepared themselves*: inasmuch that if we do but suppose them to exist in a future state, and to be turned into the company of other spirits of their own temper and principles, we shall actually find them already in a very dreadful hell, without considering them as suffering any other punishment or misery but that which will naturally flow from their *own consciences, principles and con-*

(b) Eph. ii. 8. Rom. xvi. 23.

passions."—Observe me well; I do not mean to say that the wicked shall have *no other torment or misery* than this. The scriptures every where inform us of a *positive and everlasting misery* inflicted by the *powerful and vengeful hand of GOD*—of *everlasting burnings*—of fire prepared for the devil and his angels, which shall never be quenched—of an *everlasting punishment* from the presence of the LORD, and the glory of his power, and the like.—All I mean is; that there is something in the *very nature of sin*, and in the *temper and principles of sinners*, and naturally arising from their society, together in a future state, which, of itself, will make a *dreadful hell*, and which *sits and prepares* them for an awful destruction.—In so much that the apostle may here well affirm it of these unhappy *vessels of wrath*, that they are fitted for destruction!—Mankind are but too apt to entertain wrong and unworthy notions of GOD's proceedings with the wicked, as resembling that of a *cruel tyrant* driving a parcel of miserable wretches into a perpetual dungeon of darkness and misery;—whereas the truth is, that *sinners*, as it were, damn themselves, and do *properly effect and work out their own misery*; thus *fitting themselves* for destruction. So that the *miserics of damnation* are more the *natural and unavoidable effects and consequences of a sinful life*, than any *positive decree, or arbitrary punishment* of GOD: in so much that little more is necessary in order to the effectual misery and damnation of a sinner, than that he should die in his sins, and his spirit enter into the society of other wicked spirits

like itself!—The doctrine which I shall therefore insist upon is this, namely,

“ THAT there is a *foundation laid for hell, for torment and misery, in the very temper, principles and passions of wicked persons, and in the society of spirits like themselves; so that the wicked, the vessels of wrath, may be justly said to be self-fitted for destruction.*”

THIS doctrine, by the divine assistance, I shall endeavour to *prove, illustrate, and make evident from the very nature and reason of the thing; and then draw some practical inferences by way of improvement and application.* And

1st. THERE is something in the very nature of wickedness itself which causes *misery and torment.* There is perhaps no general assertion more true and certain than that of the prophet; “ The wicked is like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up dirt and mire; there is no rest, saith my God, to the wicked^(c).” There are a number of our passions, such as *anger, wrath, fury, envy, malice, revenge, jealousy, uneasy suspicions, and the like,* which carry *much of hell and torment* in themselves; and if we should suppose them all to *rage and flame* in any one soul *continually and without controul,* we must needs suppose such a soul to have a most dreadful hell within itself, which would render it inconceivably miserable to all eternity. I confess indeed that there are a great many of our *other passions* and

(c) Isa. lvii. 20, 21.

vices which, at first sight, seem to have more of pleasure than of pain in them: such are *lust, unclean desires and actions, sloth, intemperance, luxury, gluttony, drunkenness*, and commonly all those which have their seat principally in the *body*, and which are termed *sins of the flesh, or lusts of the flesh*. But given *these*, altho' they may be *sweet to the taste*, yet, like the book in the revelations, they are *bitter as gall and wormwood* in the belly. If sinners indeed were *beasts*, this kind of vices might make them happy enough: but it is their misfortune that they are *men, human creatures*; that God hath given them *reason, a conscience* and some degree of *reflection* upon their behaviour—so that it must have cost them *much labour and pains*, and a *long course and practice of sinning*, before they are able to *stifle this remorse of conscience*, and to make it *an easy and pleasant thing* for them to go on in their sins. Reason and conscience, will every now and then stare the sinner broad in the face, and force a conviction of *his guilt and wretchedness* upon him. The remains of a *pious education, the principles of religion, or the fears of death and a righteous judgment to come*, will return upon him in his *sober, afflicted or thoughtful* moments, and create a *kind of hell of fear, dread, terror and anxiety* in his bosom. And this will frequently be the case while *any spark of reason, conscience or sober reflection* remains unextinguished in this soul, and until, by a *course of wickedness*, he has wholly numbed all the powers of his soul, and sinned himself *stupid*,

senseless and “*past all feeling*, having his conscience seared, as it were, with a hot iron (d).” Now,

Idly. LET us suppose, as the scripture assuredly informs us, that after death there is no *possibility* of *repentance*; that as death leaves sinners, judgment and eternity will find them; and that those who are *unrighteous*, shall be *unrighteous* still; and those that are *filthy*, shall be *filthy* still.—Let us suppose that sinners carry their *prevailing habits, passions* and *tempers* with them into the other world, and into the *society of other sinners* like themselves, and we will find the foundation of a very dreadful hell laid in the *very temper of their souls*, and in the *nature of their society*. Nay, a person, even in this world, may have much of the *temper and torment of hell* in his soul, and may come very near to the *temper and behaviour of a devil!*

WE may easily draw such a picture of the *depravity of human nature*, as, did it generally prevail, would turn this world into a *kind of hell*, and its inhabitants into a *society of devils incarnate!*—Let us suppose a man *wholly destitute* of the *love and fear of God*, and without any *restraint of conscience*, either from laws human or divine—suppose him *full of envy* at the *happiness and prosperity* of others, and to take a *kind of malicious pleasure* in the *pain and misery* of his neighbour,—suppose his soul continually boiling with the *passions of spite, anger, rage, ma-*

(d) Eph. iv. 19. 1 Tim. iv. 2.

lice and revenge; seeking every opportunity of murdering some of his neighbours, of stabbing and destroying the reputation of others, of stealing every thing he saw, and robbing every person he met.

LET us suppose also that this *human creature* had a heart so inflamed with *unclean desires* and *impure lusts*, as to be ready to perpetrate *Sodomy, bestiality* and *uncleanness* with every object of his filthy desires (so that no man's *wife, sister, daughter* or *friend* could be safe or secure within his reach)—let us also add to this, that he wallowed in *drunkenness, gluttony* and *intemperance*, thus wholly drawing his reason and *stupifying* his *conscience* in the sink of every kind of corruption—surely we can conceive of no more *vile, loathsome, hateful* and *wretched object*, than this—and if such a human being could be fitly compared to any thing in the universe, it must be to a *devil*:—such a creature wanting only the *power* and *liberty* of doing all the mischief which a *devil* can do—and only needing to be out of the body in order to be *as ugly, wretched* and *miserable* as a *devil* is!

AND, now, we have only to suppose that *all mankind* were such wretches as this, and we have this world turned into *hell*, and all mankind into a society of *bell-hounds, or devils incarnate*!—Hence therefore you may plainly see, how *wicked habits, principles, passions* and *tempers* in the souls of sinners on this earth, lays a sure foundation for their *future hell* of *misery* and *torment*. For

1st. As to those who are under the dominion of

the hellish passions of *malice, hatred, envy, rage, fury, revenge* and the like, they have at present (as I observed before) the *beginnings and foretastes* of a kind of hell in their breast; they feel something both of the *passions and torments* of devils, while these wicked tempers are *raised and enraged* in their souls.— But *in this world* they find many things to *calm and ease* these passions.—On some occasions they find means of gratifying these passions, and this *fills and quiets* them for a short season.—At other times they meet with *company, diversions, amusements* and other enjoyments, which turn their minds from the objects of these *uneasy, tormenting passions*, and this procures them a little ease and quiet. But, in *the other world*, when the soul is banished from the body, and from all the *pleasures and amusements* of this life, and sees itself *lost for ever*, and is surrounded with *black despair*, and driven into the everlasting society of other *wicked miserable spirits* like itself; then there will be nothing to *quiet or controul* these *hellish passions*, but they will *rage and boil* in the soul without controul to all eternity.—This herd of wicked spirits having *no means* to *sooth or gratify* their hellish tempers, will wreak their *spite and rage and malice* upon each other—and *play the devil* with each other for ever. And then their *own consciences*, setting upon them as *the guilty causes* of their own *wisery and torment*, and reproaching them with their *former folly and unbelief*, and continually *lashing them with a lively sense* of their *self-procured destruction*, will *compleat their hell*, and render their torment insupportable.

ldly. ALTHO' it cannot be supposed that men's *sensual* and *carnal* vices will go with them into the other world; (seeing it is inconceivable how *naked unimbodied spirits* should have *fleshy desires* or *carnal appetites* without bodies.—For instance, we cannot easily conceive how a *pure spiritual substance* should be inflamed with *lust, concupiscence*, or a desire of *meats, drinks* and *delicate and luxurious living*)—yet I apprehend it is easy to conceive that a soul which, in this life, has been made a slave to the body in carnal enjoyments and brutish gratifications, may become so tinctured and sensualized by the filthy body in which it lived, and by the filthy drudgery of carnal desires and inclinations in which it was wont to be employed, as to be capable of relishing no other enjoyments but *those of the flesh*,—and that, being wholly deprived of *those* in the other world, it may have a *continual fruitless tormenting* desire of returning back to its *sensualized body*, that it might act over its former enjoyments—and that *this fruitless unsatisfied desire* may make a part of its hell, by creating in it a *perpetual uneasiness*!—The rich man, when in the place of torment, was put in remembrance by *Abraham* of the *good things* which he enjoyed in this world;—of *his estate, pomp, and grandeur*; of *his purple, scarlet* and *fine linen*; of *his cups, companions* and *delicate and luxurious living*;—and there is no doubt but that a *lively and fruitless remembrance* of these things which sinners placed their chief love and delight in, and from which they are now banished

for ever, will make *one ingredient* in their everlasting hell. Again,

3dly: WHEN a company of such *guilty* and *wretched creatures* are chased into the *dark and gloomy abodes* of *everlasting horror and despair*—stripped of all their former *hopes, delights and pleasures*—banished from the merciful presence of God, and the regions of *light, love and blessedness*—possessed of *all their hellish passions, vicious habits and wicked tempers*—destitute of every remain of *moral or social virtue*—and seized with the *rage and fury* of *horror and desperation*, what else than an *eternal hell* of *horror, blasphemy and confusion*; of *curfing and tormenting themselves* and each other, and of *weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth* must naturally arise in such a society, so circumstanced?—Their own *wickedness* must naturally make their *hell*, and their *hell and torment*, joined with *despair*, must naturally *increase their wickedness!*

We say of a wicked family, or of a wicked *neighbourhood*, “*That they live a hell upon earth;*” and indeed there is more of truth and justice in this expression than is generally considered—seeing *such a life* bears a *great and striking resemblance* to the *life of devils and damned spirits*, both in its *guilt and torments*. But alas, altho’ this a *just*, yet it is but a *faint and inadequate resemblance* of the *guilt and misery* of devils and damned spirits:—for in the most wicked families or societies upon earth, there is *still some remains of moral virtue*—*some ease and respite* from *guilt and torment*:—they have their *rest-*

ful nights—their calm, tender and loving hours—their intervals of amusement and recreation; whereas, in the separate state of the damned, all are consummately wicked; all the hellish passions and wicked tempers of the soul are perpetually raised and enraged, and there is no respite day nor night, but the smoak of their torments ascends up for ever and ever.
I now proceed

III. Idly. To draw some practical inferences from this doctrine, by way of improvement and application.
—And

1st. HENCE we learn this important truth, that it is the *wickedness* of sinners, their *unmortified lusts and passions*, and their *indulged habits and practices of vice*, which lays the foundation of their everlasting hell; so that they are never *vessels of wrath*, or appointed by GOD to *wrath*, till they have as it were *prepared their own hell*, and *fitted themselves for destruction*. “Woe to the wicked, says the prophet, it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him (f).” “That which a man sows in this life, shall he reap in the next: if he sow to the flesh, he shall of the flesh reap corruption; and if he sow to the spirit, he shall of the spirit reap life everlasting (g).”—If, as the Psalmist says, the wicked are turned into hell, it is a *hell of their own procuring*, and a *destruction of their own seeking*—they only eat the miserable fruit of their own wicked ways, and are filled with their own devices. “For how can they who *plow iniquity*

(f) Il. iii. 12. (g) Gal. vi. 7, &

and *sow wickedness*, expect to reap any thing better than *vanity and torment* (b)?" The wickedness of sinners, therefore, doth not only incense the holy God against them, who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and urge him to inflict those endless miseries upon them, as the just reward of their desperate obstinacy and folly; but does also, by *its own natural tendency*, prepare them for, and sink them into, that wretched and miserable state which we call *damnation*.—So that if God should never damn the wicked, but only leave them their immortal existence, their *own wickedness* would damn them, and leave them everlastingly miserable; by having fitted and prepared them for a natural and necessary destruction: the misery of damnation being little else than the perfection and consummation of sin. Indeed it is *goodness and wickedness* which make heaven and hell;—inasmuch that if *goodness* were taken out of heaven, it would immediately cease to be heaven, and be overcast with the dismal shades of hell;—and if *wickedness* were banished out of hell, it would be hell no longer, but presently shine forth into a glorious heaven: for whatsoever *wickedness* reigns, there is *hell and damnation* in their necessary causes;—and whatsoever *virtue and holiness* reigns, there is the beginnings and principles of a glorious heaven. A wicked person, therefore, dying in his *wickedness*, and carrying his *wicked tempers and principles* into the other world with him, is in fact prepared for damnation,

(b) Prov. i. 31. xxii. 8. Job iv. 8.

and would be a dreadful hell to himself and his fellow spirits, if there were no devil to torment him; nor any positive punishment falling from GOD upon him.

2dly. I INFER from this doctrine the necessity of a *timely conversion and repentance, and a holy life,* in order to a sinner's escaping hell, and being prepared and made meet for a state of happiness in the presence and society of GOD and of holy angels and perfected spirits. You have seen that the *wickedness, the unmortified lusts and passions,* of a sinner, if carried out of this world with him, must necessarily create a hell for him in the next. Now there is no escaping of *this hell,* but by getting rid of *these wicked habits and tempers;*—and there is no getting rid of *these,* but by a *timely repentance and thorough conversion;*—and this repentance and conversion cannot, for ordinary, be the work of a *death-bed.* What? to *renew the soul;* to *change one's temper, principles, and nature;* to be created a-new in CHRIST JESUS to good works; to *put off the old man,* and *put on the new;* to be *renewed in the spirit of one's mind;* so as to love what we hated, and hate what we loved; to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of GOD;—to *make us a new heart,* and *lead a new life;*—to root out the old habits of vice, and to implant new habits of virtue, purity and holiness;—can this be the work of a *death-bed, of a few days, weeks, or hours?*—I deny not, indeed, but that the *power and grace of GOD,* with whom nothing is impossible, may be

able to change a sinner's heart and nature *in a moment*—may be able to *justify, sanctify, and make him meet* for the kingdom of heaven *in an instant*—but this would be a miracle, which we may not expect;—and God has given us no ground to expect it in his word—nor *any one instance of it*, but the *penitent thief*, and the best judges and interpreters of scripture imagine that even the penitent thief is no such instance.—Certain it is, that in God's ordinary way of dealing with sinners, their *repentance and conversion* is a *long and painful work*, which costs them often the *labour and care of many years*, before their *change is complete*; and their evidences for heaven *clear and comfortable!*

Oh then *how fatal, how awful* is the delusion of those who depend on a *few late prayers, and tears*, and God *have mercies*, for obtaining the pardon of a wicked life, for changing their corrupt nature, rooting out their wicked tempers and passions, and escaping that everlasting hell of torment and misery, of which they are the proper causes?—O, my friends, make sure of this great and important work before sickness and death come upon you, when you shall have no time to work the works of God—no space for repentance—but when a night of horrible darkness and despair shall spread its dismal shades around you, and engulf you for ever!

3dly, AND to conclude: would we escape hell ourselves, or wish to see our families and friends escape it? It behoves us carefully and diligently to root out of ourselves and them, *those wicked habits*

and principles which are the certain foundations of hell in all who are under their dominion. If men were but well persuaded that oaths and blasphemies, curses and imprecations, lies and dissimulation, was literally the very language of hell, surely they would tremble to pronounce them, or to hear them pronounced by their children or friends!—Were they but convinced that wrath and envy, malice and revenge, rage and fury, cruelty and unmercifulness, was the very temper of hell, and the practice of devils and damned ghosts, surely they would dread to feel these seeds of hell rising in their own hearts, or to see them growing up, and taking root and gathering strength in the temper and behaviour of their children and friends!—If we were convinced that knavery and dishonesty, deceit and dissimulation, gluttony and drunkenness, hypocrisy, uncleanness and filthy lusts, were the very seeds of hell, and certain forerunners of damnation in the souls of sinners, would we not tremble to find these black marks upon ourselves, or to see them upon our children? And would we not endeavour carefully to mortify, and root them out, before they shot their poisoned roots so deep in our souls, that either a bitter repentance, or an actual and everlasting hell, must be the consequence?—Every body who knows any thing of human nature, must be convinced that nothing is more difficult than to root old habits of vice out of a human soul.—The prophet even compares this task to an impossibility;—“Can the Ethiopian change his colour, or the leopard his spots? then may ye all al-

so do good, that are accustomed to do evil (i).”—
 Of what great importance is it then to correct these habits in youth; or rather, if possible, wholly to prevent them, seeing they are so difficult to be broken when they are once grown up with us, and confirmed upon us? And since it is so that these *evil habits* prepare the *vessels of wrath for destruction*, and procure them a *certain and necessary place* in hell, before they go thither; insomuch that as ever we hope to escape this place of torment, we must first get rid of these wicked habits by a true and thorough repentance: Tell me, is it reasonable that we should delay this repentance for one day longer? Is our eternal welfare to be trifled with? Are we able to dwell with devils and damned spirits, or to endure everlasting burnings? Oh then; let us seek the LORD while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let them return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy, and to our GOD, for he will abundantly pardon. Amen.

(i) Jerem. xiii. 23.

S E R M O N XXV.

The providence of G O D, in the long delay of the punishment of finners, vindicated, from

2 P E T. iii. 9.

The LORD is not slack concerning his promise (as some men count slackness) but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

THE belief of a G O D and of a providence is the foundation upon which all religion is built; for if there were *no* G O D, religion would be the most *groundless* and *absurd* thing imaginable:—and even supposing there was a G O D, yet if he were such a one as *Epicurus* represented him, a being who made the world, and so left it to be governed by chance;—a being who took no notice of the actions of his creatures; who neither took care of them, nor intended to reward or punish them, religion must be, to all intents and purposes, as vain and absurd a thing, as if there were no G O D at all.—And indeed to deny the providence of G O D; to deny his *natural* and *moral*

government of the world, is much the same as if we denied his very being:—for if there is an infinitely powerful, wise and good being, who has *made* the world, certainly he must *preserve* and *govern* it— if there is a God who has created us, and made us *reasonable* and *accountable* creatures, he must certainly be the *observer*, the *rewarder*, and the *punisher* of our moral actions;—otherwise it were impossible for us to vindicate the *wisdom* and *goodness* of God in creating the world, or in enduing mankind with such powers and faculties, as we find they have.— And therefore *Epicurus* and his followers, who asserted the *being of a God* and yet denied his providence, are suspected by many of the heathens themselves to have been at heart *Atheists*;—because these two truths, “that there is a God, and that he governs the world,” are so closely connected, that they must *stand* or *fall* together.

It is not my business at present, either to prove the being of a God, or his providence. These are truths plainly supposed in the scriptures, and which no Christian can either dispute, or deny. My subject only leads me to *clear*, *justify* and *vindicate* the providence of God from an objection which has been urged against it in all ages, by men of *Atheistical* minds. It has been allowed on all hands as a certain and undoubted truth, by those who acknowledge the being and providence of a God, that he is a most *pure*, *just*, *holy* and *perfect* being; a lover and rewarder of virtue, and of all virtuous and holy men; and a hater and punisher of vice, and of all wicked.

and ungodly men.—But, say some, if GOD is such a being, and if he governs the world in righteousness, “How comes it to pass that the *worst of men*, are frequently so *easy, prosperous and long-lived* in the present world, and the *best of men* so subject to *sufferings, calamities and disappointments*? How comes it that vice so often triumphs, and that virtue is oppressed? How is it, that wicked men so often *live and prosper*, even by their wicked designs, while the righteous are often reduced to shame, misery, and suffering in the very cause of virtue?—If there is a *just and righteous providence* which governs the world, would not *virtue* be always attended with *reward and happiness*, and *vice* with *contempt and misery*? And yet we find that things are often directly the reverse.”

THIS has been, in all ages, a great difficulty to good men; and bad men not being able to clear it up, have been tempted by it to *direct Atheism*;—rashly and hastily concluding, because they could not see the justice of GOD’s proceedings in the present world, that therefore there was *no GOD*, or *providence at all*;—and therefore *Simplicius*, a heathen philosopher—makes the tragedian cry out, when he saw his enemies prosper, “Shall I not dare to say that there are no gods, when those do prosper who have injur’d me?”

NOR has this been cause of *doubt and temptation* only to the *heathen*, but it also very much perplexed even those who were favoured with the knowledge and revealed will of the true GOD;—*J. b.’s friends*

would needs have it that he was a very wicked and hypocritical man, otherwise they thought GOD would never have suffered him to meet with so many *losses*, *crosses*, and *afflictions*;—and even *Job* himself complains of this as a *strange* and *unaccountable* thing;—“Wherefore, says he, do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power; their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes; their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of GOD upon them (*k*).”—*David* also, seems to have been greatly staggered by this temptation, as you may see from the whole of the *thirty-seventh* and *seventy-third* psalms—“I was envious, says he, at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked; for there are no bands in their death; their strength is firm; they are not in trouble as other men, &c.—Behold these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches, &c. (*l*).”—The prophet *Jeremiah* also felt the weight of this temptation—“Righteous (says he) art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee, yet let me talk of thy judgments: wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy, that deal very treacherously (*m*)?”—The same thing is complained of by the prophet *Habbakuk*, in a very pathetic manner—“Thou art of purer eyes, says he, than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity; wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wick-

(*k*) Job. xxi. 7,—9. (*l*) Psal. lxxiii. 3,—13.

(*m*) Jer. xii. 1.

ed devoureth the man that is more righteous than he (n).”—The *prosperity* and *impunity* of the wicked, having been therefore in all ages the greatest difficulty to account for in the providence of God, and one of the grand objections against the belief of it, it must be of great importance to clear up this difficulty, and to remove the ground of this objection—To answer this question, “If sin be the cause of misery; and if there is a just God, who governs the world—wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper, and wherefore are the generality of those happy, who deal very treacherously?”

THE apostle *Peter*, in our text and context, affords us a very proper subject for clearing up this matter.—Our blessed Saviour in the days of his flesh, had often foretold in a very *awful* and *solemn* manner the time of his coming to judgment; when he should bountifully reward all his faithful friends and followers, and pour out a dreadful vengeance on all his enemies;—and so we find the apostles often giving an awful description of that solemn and tremendous day; as that of *St. Paul*(o) “The LORD Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, &c.”—And that of *Jude*, *verse fourteenth*, “Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands, &c.”

Now, says *St. Peter*, there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts; and saying, “Where is the promise of his coming?”—The world is full of wicked men, of enemies to CHRIST;

(n) Hab. i. 3, &c.

(o) 2 Thes. i. 7.

—where then is that day of vengeance which he has so often threatened against such ungodly men? We can see no *signs* or *tokens* of this dreadful day, in which he said he would make his enemies his footstool, “For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation:”—the times and seasons are just the same as usual, and, for all that appears in this world, the *enemies* of this JESUS are as *happy* and as *prosperous* as his friends?—Thus, says *St. Peter*, will these wicked scoffers argue against the providence of GOD, and the power and promise of CHRIST—and “because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore will the hearts of the sons of men be fully set in them to do evil (q).”

“BUT beloved, says he, be not ye moved or drawn away by the foolish and deceitful arguments of these scoffers,—neither be ye ignorant of this one thing, “That one day is with the LORD, as a thousand years, &c.”—The time in which he delays the punishment of sinners, altho’ it may seem *long to us*, who are but of yesterday; yet it is but as a *moment* in his esteem, unto whom a *thousand years* appear but as *one day*, and who *sees* and *knows* the eternal duration of the sinner’s torments.—“The LORD is not, therefore, slack concerning his promise (as some men count slackness)”—altho’ he delays, for a while, to take vengeance on his enemies, and to reward his servants.—An old debt is not forgotten with him. In due time he will make it fully appear to the whole

(q) Eccles. viii. 11.

world, that both his promises and threatenings were punctually true;—and the chief reason why his right hand doth not instantly take hold of vengeance, and strike the obstinate sinner dead in the very acts of his transgressions, is, because “he is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

LET not, therefore, any take encouragement to continue in their sins from this delay of CHRIST’S *coming* to execute judgment upon his enemies; for altho’ he may seem to come *slowly*, yet he will come *certainly*—and the manner of his coming will be *very sudden, unexpected, and awfully surprising* to sinners; “For, adds he, this great and terrible day of the LORD’S vengeance will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up.”

HERE then you see, the apostle, as it were, designedly gives us an answer to this great objection against the divine providence, why GOD delayeth the punishment of evil doers, for ordinary, in this life, and often suffers them to enjoy outward peace and prosperity; while the righteous often suffer the greatest reverses of fortune:—and the chief reason of this is, because “he is long-suffering towards us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

I SHALL, therefore, by the divine assistance, first endeavour to lay before you some reasons which may

vindicate the providence of GOD, in delaying the punishment of sinners in this life,—and then conclude by a word of application. And,

1st. God forbears wicked men, and is long-suffering towards them, as an example of goodness propounded to their imitation, that they may thence learn not to be hasty in revenging their own injuries upon each other.

PLUTARCH, an heathen philosopher, has an excellent discourse upon this subject; “GOD, says he, forbears punishing wicked men for the present, not because he has not reason to punish them, but that he might take away the fury and violence of men in revenging their injuries on each other;—that they should not do it in *wrath* and *anger*—with as much haste and eagerness as they satisfy their hunger or thirst; or (as is too often the case) with as much fury, as a wild beast leapeth upon his prey;—but that men, says he, might learn to imitate the *gentleness* and *goodness* of GOD, whereby he gives the offender time to consider what he has done, before he proceeds to punish him. Now, says he, what can be more worthy of GOD, than that he should shew his goodness unto all, and by his forbearance of so many, teach the world more *meekness* and *gentleness* to each other; that so the *heat* and *violence* of men’s passions may be moderated.” How excellent and noble is this speech of a heathen! and how agreeable to the discoveries of GOD’s nature and will which we have in the bible.—He is there represented as the LORD GOD merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in

goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin (r).”—And our Saviour expressly calls us to imitate this forbearance and long-suffering patience of GOD;—“ But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you: that ye may be the children of your 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.—Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again: and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful, and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful (s).”—No injuries can be so great from one man to another, as GOD Almighty is daily receiving by the continual affronts and provocations of sinners, and yet we see he not only *bears with them a long time*, but also daily loads them with his benefits, altho’ they are evil and unthankful.—Now this wonderful patience of GOD we ought to imitate by *gentleness* and *forbearance* towards those who offend us, that, like him, we may be *slow to wrath*, and *averse to hasty and passionate revenge*.

2dly. ANOTHER reason why GOD bears long with the provocations of sinners, is, because he has them always in his power. “ There is no darkness or shadow of death, wherein the workers of iniquity can

(r) Exod. xxxiv. 6. (s) Mat. v. 44, 45. Luke vi. 35, 36.

conceal themselves from his omniscient eye; neither can any power screen or defend them from his omnipotent hand—he is able to crush his enemies with infinite ease, just when he pleases, and therefore as they are *at all times* and *in all places* equally within his reach, and subject to his power, it is a matter almost equal with him, whether he causeth his vengeance to take hold upon them *to day*, or “*a thousand years hence.*”

HUMAN judges are often obliged to *arrest*, *condemn*, and *execute* malefactors, as soon as they have them in their power; least they should flee away and escape the hand of justice. But it is not so with GOD. All his enemies are ever in his power, and therefore he is under no manner of necessity to take *hasty* measures and determinations for their destruction.

3dly. ANOTHER reason why GOD may spare some wicked men from punishment, is, that he may make them instruments of punishing others, and of magnifying his own glory in the world.—“Thus GOD raised up *Pharaoh*, and bore long with his provocations, that he might shew forth his power in him (t).” And so GOD calls the king of *Assyria* the *rod of his anger*, and the staff in their hand, says he, is mine indignation (u). He used and employed that wicked king as a *rod*, to chastise the wickedness and rebellion of his people *Israel*.—For the same reason we may suppose it is, that GOD spares and prospers all the wicked kings and tyrants upon earth, such as *Antiochus Epiphanes*, *Caesar*, *Alexander*, and the like—

(t) Rom. ix. 17. (u) Isaiah x. 5.

namely, as *rods* and *scourges* to punish the world for their sins.—These persons are to be considered as *instruments of the divine justice, rods of GOD's anger*, which, when they have accomplished the tasks to which they are appointed, shall be finally broken and cast into the fire.—Again,

4thly. ANOTHER reason why GOD may spare wicked men a while, is, that the divine providence may be the more remarkably observed in the manner of their punishment afterwards. Numberless remarkable instances of this kind might be given from history, wherein the providence of GOD has signally appeared in the death of wicked persons.—How long did the justice of GOD spare *Judas*, and yet how remarkably was he punished at last for betraying his master?—The *betray*er of *JESUS*, at length became his *justifier*, and then went and hanged himself in despair (v).—How long did the patience of *CHRIST* bear with the guilt and provocation of the *Jews*; “O *Jerusalem, Jerusalem*, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not (w);” and yet at length how dreadful was their destruction by *Titus Vespasian*, the Roman general, who caused many thousands of them to die the very same death, which they had causeless inflicted upon *Jesus*, their glorious and innocent king?

It is reported of *Salome*, who sought *John Bap-*

(v) Mat. xxvii. 4, 5. (w) Mat. xxiii. 37.

VOL. II.

Z

tist's head in a charger, to gratify her mother's malice; that being banished into *Gaul*, divine justice pursued her, and her head was cut off by ice, as a signal punishment for procuring the death of that righteous prophet!—*Antiochus Epiphanes*, king of *Syria*, after a long and cruel persecution of the *Jews*, as he was riding to *Jerusalem*, with a bloody design of putting all to the sword, both men, women and children, was arrested by the judgment of *God* upon the road, and was consumed by worms, a miserable spectacle of the divine vengeance!—*Julius Caesar*, after spilling so much of the blood of his countrymen to gratify his own pride and ambition, was himself stabbed by his own near relation, in the senate house of *Rome*, where he expected no danger!

THUS does the justice of *God*, after a long forbearance of wicked persons, often overtake and punish them, in so remarkable a manner, that we cannot help acknowledging the immediate finger of his providence in their punishment.—A very remarkable instance of which is recorded by *Plutarch* concerning one *Belsar*, who having killed his father in the most secret manner, thought himself secure from any possibility of being detected. However a guilty conscience became equal to a thousand witnesses against him: for being one night invited to sup with a neighbour, he arose in a great fury from the table, tore down a nest of young swallows who were chirping in the roof of the house, and trampled them to pieces on the floor; and being asked with some emotion by his host, wherefore he exercised this unprovoked barbarity upon these little

innocent birds who had taken shelter under the roof of his house, and therefore were intitled by the laws of hospitality to his protection—he answered with a consternation which discovered his guilt—“What? Did you not hear them accuse me of killing my father!”—Upon which, being apprehended, he confessed the crime, and was accordingly executed. Such strange ways does providence use, to shew us how watchful it is over human concerns, even when we may imagine it sleeps the most. Again,

5thly. ONE of the chief reasons why GOD spares wicked persons, is, that they may have time to become better.—This is the reason particularly assigned in our text—“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise (as, &c.) but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”—And to the same purpose Saint *Paul* argues; “O man, says he, despisest thou the riches of God’s goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance (x).” And so at the *fourteenth* and *fifteenth* verses of this chapter—“Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless: and account that the long-suffering of our LORD is salvation.”

EVERY day which is added to the sinner’s life, ought to be considered by him as a *space for repentance*; as the exalted Redeemer speaks of a wicked person in the church of *Thyatira*, “I gave her space

(x) Romans iv. 5.

to repent of her fornication, but she repented not (y).⁷ And while God is thus lengthening out the lives of sinners, and giving them space of repentance, he is at the same time beseeching them in the most kind and importunate manner, not to abuse his patience; but to improve this space of repentance in laying hold of his mercy:—"To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts—as I live, saith the LORD God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?—Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.—Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon—Wherefore do you 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. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions, so iniquity shall not be your ruin (z)."

MEN, in their punishments, generally look no farther than the mere satisfying of their revenge, and that makes them pursue those who offend them with so much *haste* and *eagerness*: but as God is carrying on a design of grace in the world, and therefore aims at the *cure* and *amendment* of all those who are not in-

(y) Rev. ii. 21. (z) See Ezek. xviii. 30. xxxiii. 12. Isaiah lv. 2, 7.

curable; he, for this purpose, gives them *a time to reform in.*

WERE the Almighty to cut off every sinner in the very acts of his sins, who then could be saved?—What room would there be left for the exercise of his grace?—What opportunity for the sinner's repentance?—Hence you see both a *gracious* and *necessary* reason, why the divine patience waits long upon guilty sinners, before his right hand taketh hold on vengeance:—"He is long-suffering towards us, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."—He tries all methods with us; *wooës, intreats, beseeches* us to lay down the weapons of our rebellion, and return unto him, and be reconciled with him, before he proceeds to the last extremity.—He is slow to anger; loath to punish; not willing that any should perish; has no delight in the death of a sinner; but had rather the wicked would turn from his way, and the unrighteous man from his thoughts, and repent, and live:—he delighteth in mercy, and judgment is his strange work (a)."

IT is owing to this long-suffering patience in God, that there is any sinner out of hell; for all have offended, and come short of the glory of God.—*David, Solomon, Manasseh, Mary Magdalene, the penitent thief,* and millions besides, owe their *present* and *eternal* blessedness to this? Had we seen *Saul* persecuting the church, and thirsting for the blood of holy *Stephen*, and the other followers of CHRIST, we would no doubt have passed sentence against him, and

(a) If. xxviii. 21.

judged him worthy of death, and the eternal vengeance of GOD.—And yet we find that GOD's long-suffering patience waited upon him, and, out of a violent persecutor, made him a zealous preacher of the gospel of CHRIST, and an instrument in saving multitudes of souls?—What wretches were the murderers of the blessed JESUS, and how worthy of the divine vengeance? And yet we find GOD waited upon them, and *three thousand* of them were converted by the first sermon of *St. Peter, Acts ii.*

WHAT abandoned sinners were many of the Corinthians; “ Adulterers, fornicators, idolaters, and yet we find that thro' the forbearance of GOD, and the means of grace, they were washed, they were sanctified, they were justified, in the name of the LORD JESUS, and by the Spirit of our GOD (b).” I might add further in the

6th PLACE, THAT altho' GOD spares the persons of wicked men, yet he does not altogether defer their punishment. When we see wicked men in *health and outward prosperity*, we are apt to think them *happy*; but we do not see the *inward pain and anguish* of their minds, arising from a sense of guilt. “ Cannot we say a person is punished, says *Plutarch*, while he is in prison, and has his fetters on, 'till his execution comes? Or that a man who has drank poison, is dying, while he walks about, till the cold comes to his heart and kills him? If we deny, says he, that all the horrors of wicked men's consciences are any part of their punishment, we may as well say

(b) 1 Cor. vi. 2.—1 Es.

that a fish that has swallowed the hook is not taken, because it is not cut in pieces or fry'd :—so it is, adds that excellent heathen, with every wicked man :— he has swallowed the hook, when he hath committed an evil action, and the point of it is continually galling and pricking his conscience, unless he can vomit it up by repentance and amendment." Indeed wickedness is a fury which continually haunts and lashes those who delight in it, and leaves still behind it secret gripings of conscience, and self-condemning thoughts, which must in a great measure disturb and destroy every present pleasure and enjoyment.—So true is that declaration of the prophet—"The wicked are like a troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast forth dirt and mire ; there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked (c)."—So that altho' God does not immediately execute his vengeance upon sinners in this life ; yet he suffers them even here, to eat the fruit of their own doings.— Their own wickedness corrects them, and their backslidings reprove them ; so that they have as it were something of the foretaste of hell, in the gripings and forebodings of their own guilty consciences (d).— But to conclude in the

7th AND last place—God forbears wicked men, because there is a time coming hereafter, when he intends to punish them. The *prosperity* of the wicked, and the *sufferings* of the innocent in this life, is one of the strongest moral arguments we have for the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards

(c) Is. lvii. 21.

(d) Jer. ii. 19.

and punishments :—for if there is a God, who loves virtue and hates vice, he will certainly reward the *good*, and punish the *wicked*; but we see that he does not always do so in *this world*; therefore there must be *another world*, and a *future state*, in which he will do it!—This is the highest vindication of Divine Providence, as to the *prosperity* of sinners, and the *afflictions* and *distress* of good men in this world,—namely, that this is not the *proper season* and *place* for the open execution of justice. This world is not the *place of judgment*, but of *trial* and *probation*—and therefore God spares the wicked in this life, that he may reserve them for a fair and open trial on the day of judgment, for the greater vindication of his honour, and manifestation of his justice to the world :—and therefore “ he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead (*e*).” —What then altho’ God bear with the wicked a few years in this life, after using all means to reclaim them, in vain and to no purpose? Does this argue that they shall never be punished?

BECAUSE a condemned malefactor is not killed in prison, will he therefore argue, that he will not be put to death, on the day appointed for his public execution?—So it is with the impenitent sinner; he is the prisoner of divine justice, and altho’ God is now sparing him, and giving him space for repentance;

(*e*) Acts xvii. 31.

yet if he continue obstinate and impenitent, his judgment lingereth not, and his damnation slumbereth not; he "is reserved unto the judgment of the great day, when the LORD JESUS CHRIST 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: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the LORD and from the glory of his power (f)."—What little reason have we therefore to be envious at the foolish, when we see the prosperity of the wicked,—when GOD has assured us "That the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction, and that they shall be brought forth, as the prisoners of justice, to be punished, on the day of wrath (g)."—"I have seen the wicked, says *David*, in great power; and spreading himself like a green bay tree, yet he passed away, and lo he was not: yea, I fought him, but he could not be found.—The transgressors shall be destroyed together, and the end of the wicked shall be cut off.—Surely thou didst set them in slippery places, thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation as in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors (h)."—"Knowest thou not this of old, says *Zophar*, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment: tho' his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds, yet he shall perish for

(f) 2 Thes. i. 7, 8, 9. (g) Job xxi. 30. (h) Psal. xxxvii. 35, —38. lxxiii. 18, —19.

ever, like his own dung: for what is the hope of the hypocrite when GOD taketh away his soul (i).”

IMPROVEMENT.

1st. FROM the whole we may discover the *excellent wisdom* and *wonderful contrivance* of divine providence, even in such of its proceedings, as, at first view, look dark and doubtful, and are therefore abused by wicked men to the worst purposes. The *prosperous* state of the wicked in this life, GOD's infinite patience in bearing with, and his slowness in taking vengeance on them (while the righteous often lie under heavy calamities and sufferings) has tempted many to deny the very being and providence of a GOD, and has much perplexed the minds even of his own people; and yet when we come to examine this matter closely, we find it most agreeable to the *wisdom* and *goodness* of GOD, a strong vindication of his providence, and an excellent argument for the immortality of the soul and a future state of rewards and punishments. We are too apt to judge of GOD by *ourselves*, and wonder that HE is not of the same mind and temper that we are of.—Hence, because we find within ourselves a *malicious revengeful* temper, which disposes us to take hasty vengeance upon *our enemies*, we imagine that GOD should have the same disposition towards *his enemies*; by this means we are apt to form *mean, wicked* and *unworthy* notions of *God*, as a *passionate revengeful* being; not considering that “as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his

(i) Job. xx. 5. xxvii. 8.

thoughts than our thoughts (*k*).”—“Thou thoughtest, says GOD to sinners, that I was altogether such an one as thyself; but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes (*l*).”—What a wretched mistake is it, to imagine that the most holy and wise GOD, is of the temper and disposition of polluted sinners? And yet this is too often their vain imagination, and the fatal cause of much of their error and folly. They think GOD *likes* and *approves* their conduct, because they *like* and *approve* it themselves; and therefore when the ALMIGHTY crosses their inclinations, they are apt to think they are hardly dealt by, and greatly injured.

WHEN a village of the *Samaritans* would not receive CHRIST and his disciples, because they seemed to be travelling to *Jerusalem*, the breasts of the disciples were filled with indignation and revenge, and they were immediately for commanding fire to come down from heaven to destroy them:—but CHRIST, who well knew the wickedness of such a hasty revengeful spirit, rebuked them, and said, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of (*m*).” But now if we could raise our minds above our own *passionate* and *revengeful* tempers, and consider GOD as a *most wise, holy, just, merciful* and *perfect* being, who does all things in *weight* and *measure*, we should soon see abundant reason why he is *slow to anger*—of *long-suffering patience*—and why he, for ordinary, de-

(*k*) Isa. lv. 8. (*l*) Psa. l. 21. (*m*) Luke ix. 52,—56.

lays the punishment of wicked men in this life—and reserves them to the judgment of the great day.

2dly. How vain and foolish is it for sinners to imagine that, because God spares them, and perhaps prospers them, for a few years in this present world, therefore they will finally escape his righteous judgment?—They see that “since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation:” They see that as it fares with the righteous, so it fares with the wicked, and that both have the same lot in this life:—they see that the providence of God deals much in the same manner with the just and the unjust, the clean and the unclean, the temperate and the intemperate, the believer and the unbeliever, with him that sweareth and him that feareth an oath, in the present evil world, and therefore are apt to imagine that *all* are *equally* loved of God, and shall be *equally treated* in another world.—Nay, they sometimes see the wicked flourish and prosper, while the righteous are afflicted and tormented; *Dives* feeding sumptuously every day, while *Lazarus* is lying full of sores at his gate; and hence, “because sentence is not executed upon an evil work speedily, therefore, the hearts of the wicked are fully set in them to do evil.”—But O! how dreadfully shall such find themselves deceived and disappointed in that day, “When God shall judge the earth in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; and when he shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whe-

ther it be evil (n).”—Then it will be found that long credit has not cancelled the debt of presumptuous sinners; that altho’ their punishment was long delayed, yet it will not be neglected;—“That the LORD is not slack concerning his promise, &c.” But that the reason of his patience with sinners, proceeded from his long-suffering kindness, not being willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

3dly. LET us, who are sinners, learn to make a proper use, and a wise improvement of God’s patience towards us. And,

(1.) LET it teach us a *meek* and *patient* temper towards those who have injured and offended us. We are daily provoking the most high God, and yet he is *bearing with us*, and *waiting long and patiently* for our reformation and amendment.—He hath all his enemies entirely in his power, and could every moment take a just and dreadful revenge upon them; and yet he not only bears with their provocations, but is daily loading them with his benefits.—Let us therefore learn to imitate God in this *patient* and *merciful* disposition: he delights not in the death or destruction of *his* enemies; neither ought we in that of *ours*:—he is not of a *hasty, passionate, malicious* temper towards *his* enemies, neither ought we towards *ours*:—he loves his enemies, wishes them well, does them good for evil, and patiently waits for their reformation; how just is it therefore that we should

(n) Acts xvii. 31. Eccles. xii. 14.

imitate him in this generous and merciful temper, in obedience to our blessed Saviour's command—"Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you: that ye may be the children of your 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 (c).

(2dly.) AND to conclude, let the wonderful patience of GOD with ourselves in particular, effectually lead us to repentance. Why is it that we are yet spared in this world, while multitudes, not more guilty than we, are now suffering the vengeance of eternal fire?—Wherefore is it that the patience of GOD has born with many of us, in a course of sins and daily provocations, even till manhood and old age? Is it because that we have not deserved death and destruction long ere now? No certainly;—"It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, even because his compassions fail not"—and he continues our unworthy lives, chiefly upon this account, that we may have a space for repentance.—Why is every drunkard, every profane swearer, every unclean person, in a word, every presumptuous impenitent sinner among us now out of hell? Can any other reason be given, than that in our text; "That GOD is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any of us should perish, but that all should come to repentance; that he is waiting patiently upon us, to see whe-

(c) Matth. v. 44, 45.

ther we will yet bethink ourselves, and turn from our wicked ways and come unto CHRIST that we may have life!—And shall we still continue to weary out his patience and provoke him to cut us off in our sins, and appoint us our portion with hypocrites?—Shall we never learn these plain truths, “That if we believe not, we shall be damned, and that except we repent, we shall all likewise perish (*p*)?”—Shall we squander away the little uncertain space of our repentance in filling up the measure of our iniquities—and, instead of considering that the “riches of GOD’S GOODNESS, and forbearance and long-suffering kindness should lead us to repentance, shall we still continue, after our hardness, and impenitent heart, to treasure up unto ourselves wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of GOD (*q*)?”

WHAT shall come of us in the end thereof, if these arguments of the divine goodness cannot prevail with us to break off our sins by a true and unfeigned repentance, and return unto GOD thro’ JESUS CHRIST?—What shall we do? Whither shall we look at the hour of death, and on the day of judgment, if we will not *now* be persuaded to mind the things which belong to our peace, before they are hid from our eyes? Can we hope that the LORD will always bear with our provocations, and that there will be no end of his patience?—No certainly; there is a day coming (and GOD only knows how near it may be to all

(*p*) Mark xvi. 16. Luke xiii. 5. (*q*) Rom. ii. 4, 5.

of us)—when there will be no more sacrifice for sin, and no more place for repentance; when “they that are holy must be holy still, and they that are righteous must be righteous still, and they that are unjust must be unjust still, and they that are filthy must be filthy still (r).” Let us therefore, without farther delay, be persuaded to seek the LORD while he may be found, and to call upon him while he is near. Amen.

(r) Rev. xxii. 11.

S E R M O N XXVI.

The simplicity and folly of sinners, and
G O D's earnest importunity in re-
claiming them, from

PROV. i. 22, 23.

*How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity,
and the scorers delight in their scorning, and
fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof:
Behold, I will pour out my spirit upon you; I
will make known my words unto you!*

THE reproof and admonition in my text, are re-
presented as pronounced by divine wisdom to
sinners.—That natural reason and conscience, which
God hath placed in every man's breast, and every ex-
ternal revelation which God has made of his law and
will, whether in the scriptures of the Old Testament,
or by his Son and apostles in the New, are all con-
tinually preaching this doctrine to foolish transgres-
sors.

IN a word, we have *here*, from the twentieth verse
to the end of this chapter, one of the *plainest, noblest*

and *fullest* declarations of GOD's kind intentions to sinners—of the methods and pains which he takes to win and reclaim them—of the little good effect which these means have with the generality—of their *wilfulness* and *stubbornness* in their sinful courses—and of their *just* and *dreadful* condemnation in consequence, and the reasons of it.

IN the words of our text, we have three things worth observing.—1st. CHRIST's reproof to sinners—How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?—2dly. His invitation of them and authoritative command to return from their evil ways—Turn ye at my reproof. And, 3dly. Their encouragement, Behold, I will pour out my spirit upon you; I will make known my words unto you.

IN what remains of this hour, it shall be my endeavour by divine assistance, to consider and illustrate these three particulars—and then apply the whole to our practical use and improvement.

1st. THEN, we have here a reproof to sinners, given by CHRIST, who is GOD's *incarnate wisdom*, confirmed by the whole word of GOD, which is his *revealed wisdom*, and enforced by our reason and conscience, which is *the candle of the LORD in our breasts*—or *that wisdom* which he hath implanted within us.—And here *two things* demand our attention.—1st. The *character* of the persons whom wisdom here reproveth;—“they are *simple ones*, who love simplicity;—*scorners* who delight in scorning, —and *fools*, who hate knowledge.—And, 2dly.

The *reproof* or *expostulation* which wisdom uses towards these persons:—"How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, &c."—Both of these I shall briefly consider.

1st. As to the *persons* whom wisdom here reproves, they are of three sorts—which we may suppose comprehend and include *every kind of sinners*—(1st.) They are "*simple ones, who love simplicity.*" Sin really shews a great *weakness of the understanding*, as it leads sinners into the most *foolish, unreasonable* and *destructive* courses,—engages them to slight and throw away the most substantial blessings, *present peace* and *everlasting happiness*, and to run upon *certain misery* and *destruction*, *wilfully* and *of choice*;—and therefore sinners may be justly termed *fools*, or *simpletons*.—And accordingly the scriptures often represent them as *blinded, bewitched, deceived*, and led away captive by the devil and their lusts—as *knowing nothing, considering nothing*—as *foolish*, and *brutish*, and *without understanding*—as having their understandings darkened, and as *slaves* and *servants* to those very lusts which war against and destroy their souls!—Are not these then the *properties*, and is not this the *conduct*, of fools?—of *simple ones*, who are easily *beguiled* and *imposed upon*, and who act *exceeding stupidly* and *foolishly* against their own honour and interest; and who (upon this account) deserve to be despised, and are hard to be reclaimed?—For how exceeding hard is it to deal with a fool, or to reclaim and correct him, or to teach him knowledge!—"Although, says the wise man, thou shouldst

pound, or bray, a fool in a mortar, with a pestil, yet will not his foolishness depart from him (a). And a reproof entereth more into a wise man, than an hundred stripes into a fool (b).” And it is probably for this reason, that a *fool* is but another name for a *sin-ner* in the scriptures.

AND, *not only* are sinners *fools* or *simple ones*, in this sense of the word; but (what is worse) they *love their simplicity*; they are fond of their *folly*, and think it the *greatest wisdom*; which makes their case in a great measure *desperate*, as well as *despi-able*!—They think themselves *wiser than GOD*, and prefer their *foolish* and *simple* course of life, to that *wise* and *excellent* course of life which his *wis-dom* directs, and his *laws* prescribe.—They think *virtue* and *holiness* is *folly*; and *vice* and *wickedness*, the *only true wisdom*:—they *love simplicity* (as we have it in our text)—*are fond* of their foolish notions of good and evil, of their foolish prejudices against the ways of GOD, and think they are never so wise, as when they are doing *foolish* and *wicked* things; sporting themselves in their own deceivings, and flattering themselves in their own wickedness. —And this is the reason why they *scorn reproof*, and *hate knowledge*, and *will not hear* the words of instruction, *nor hearken* to advice, because all this seems *foolishness* to their *perverted minds*, and *dark-ened understandings*. Again,

(2dly.) ANOTHER sort of sinners whom wisdom here reproveth is “*scorners who delight in scorning.*”

(a) Prov. xxvii. 22. (b) Prov. xvii. 10.

—Not only *proud* and *disdainful* persons who delight in *despising* and *bestoring* all who are about them;—who are *self-conceited*, and think themselves *the only persons* upon earth, and that wisdom will die with them:—not only *vain, witty* people, who banter all mankind, and make a jest of all who come in their way, thinking themselves intitled to *laugh at*, and *ridicule*, all their fellow-creatures *as fools*, from an opinion that they themselves are the *only wise* and *faultless* persons upon earth.—*These* are not the *only scorers* meant here;—but more especially the *scorners* and *ridiculers* of *virtue* and *religion*, those who make a mock at sin, who scorn to submit to the *truths* and *laws* of CHRIST, and to the *reproofs* and *admonitions* of his word—and who take a pride in *running down* every thing which is *sacred* and *serious*.—Such are *Atheists*, *infidels* and the *profane* of every kind, who, in the *pride*, *spite* or *wantonness* of their hearts, set up *religion*, its *ministers*, *laws* and *ordinances*, as the object of their profane buffoonery and ridicule—laugh at death, judgment, heaven and hell; jest with sin, and sport with damnation!—*These* are *the worst* of all those *scorners*, *who delight in scorning*:—wretches, who, as the Psalmist describes them, “are corrupt, and speak wickedly—concerning oppression they speak loftily—They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh thro’ all the earth (c).” Concerning *such*, the Psalmist gives a strict charge to all who *honour* GOD and love their souls, that they

(c) Psal. lxxiii. 8, 9.

would shun their society:—"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners; nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful (*d*)."—*These* are a kind of sinners, who are *most hateful to God*, for whom he hath prepared *peculiar judgments*, and of the reformation of whom *there is little hope!*—It is said of God, that he "scorneth the scorers, and that judgments are prepared for them (*e*)."—The same wise man tells us, "that the scorner is an abomination to men;—that he neither *beareth*, nor *loveth reproof*, nor *findeth wisdom*, and that he is, humanly speaking, *irreclaimable*; "He that reproveth a scorner, getteth to himself shame; and he that reproveth a wicked man, getteth himself a blot.—Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee; reprove a wise man, and he will love thee (*f*)."

(3^dly.) ANOTHER sort of sinners whom wisdom here reproveth, is "*fools who hate knowledge.*" He had before mentioned *simple ones, who loved simplicity, and despised knowledge*;—but now he mentions another kind of fools or transgressors who *hate knowledge*. By these we are to understand that kind of *proud and stubborn sinners*, who not only *neglect* or *scorn* and *undervalue* religion; but who go farther, and even *hate, oppose* and *persecute* it. It were well if some wicked persons would be contented with *neglecting* and *despising* religion themselves—but this will not do with some;—their malice and enmity a-

(*d*) P^sal. i. 1. (*e*) Prov. xix. 29. (*f*) Prov. ix. 8, 9.

gainst virtue and holiness *prompts them, and pushes them on to oppose and reproach* it in others, and to endeavour to destroy its credit and interest in the world.—They hate *religious knowledge, instruction and reproof* themselves:—they say of the ALMIGHTY, “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways; for what is the ALMIGHTY that we should serve him, or what profit shall we have, if we pray unto him (g).” —And not only are they the enemies of religion *themselves*, and have a rooted hatred and aversion to serious godliness,—but they endeavour that others should hate it too, and labour to destroy others as well as themselves. “Such are those who reproach their neighbours for going to church;—and for a *strict and holy observance* of the sabbath—and who would attempt by silly and senseless objections, to scare *poor, well meaning people* from doing their duty, from coming to the LORD’S table, from instructing their children, keeping up the worship of GOD in their families, and the like—and who would have all the world to be as *ignorant, as careless, as ungodly, as wicked and profane* as themselves.”—These are the fools which *hate knowledge and instruction*, and who do not *choose the fear of the LORD*;—who are enemies to GOD, to his kingdom, his honour and glory in the world—and who are doing the devil’s work for him, without any wages, or hope of reward!—For if the devil was to appear in human shape, he could not do more against the glory of GOD, and the salva-

(g) Job xxi. 14, 15.

tion of men, than such persons do; altho' perhaps they think nothing of the matter!—But again,

2dly. We may here observe *the form* of Wisdom's reproof to these sinners:—"How long ye simple one's will ye love simplicity? and the scorner's delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?"—How long will ye do so?—This form of expression implies the three following things. 1st. That the God of heaven *desires the conversion and reformation of sinners, and not their ruin.*—If God were not *earnest* with sinners *to reform and be happy*, he would not *thus expostulate* with them:—a plain proof that he hath no pleasure or delight in the destruction of his guilty creatures;—that he willeth not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, and that he would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth?

2dly. It implies that he is *much displeas'd with their obstinacy and long delays*, in returning to him, that they might secure forgiveness and eternal life:—"How long ye simple ones will ye love simplicity? &c."—What? (as if God should say)—Are ye not weary *yet*, of your sinful courses? Have you not *yet* gone on long enough in the broad way of iniquity which leadeth to destruction?—Have you not *yet* got your fill of sin, and brought weight enough of guilt and condemnation on your souls?—Do you find *the devil and your lusts such good masters*, that ye are not *yet weary of their service*?—Have you not *yet* affronted and provoked me enough, nor enough griev'd my spirit,—nor put me off with a sufficient num-

ber of *refusals* and *delays*?—Is it not *yet* time for you to think of returning to the paths of duty and felicity—to think of making peace with me, and obtaining my pardon, and securing your everlasting happiness? Or must you go on still a little longer—and try my patience still a little more—and render your repentance still a little more bitter and difficult—and run the risk of dying in your sins?—O ye simple ones, how long will ye go on to love your simplicity?—ye scorers, how long will you delight in your scorning? And,

3dly. THE words of the reproof imply, that God is *still waiting to be gracious* to sinners, and is *still ready* to reason the case with them, and to refer the matter to their own reason and judgment. “How long ye simple ones, &c.” (As if God should say,) Is it *prudent* or *adviseable* for you *thus* to stand out against my repeated calls and offers?—I am still waiting to be gracious to you, after all your provocations, if you will but now at length hear my voice, and consider your ways, and repent of your sins, and believe in my Son, and sue to me for mercy.—This is my *royal proclamation of grace* to you—“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD (b).” —But must my patience *always* wait upon you?—Is it *never* to be wearied out?—Must I *continue* *always*, to *stand* and *knock* at the door of your hearts without hopes of finding admittance?—*How long* would you have me *wait* on your delays, or *bear* with

(b) Isaiah lv. 7.

your provocations?—*How many years* have I come seeking fruit upon you, and find none?—Do you imagine that death will *never* come, and that the day of my vengeance will *never* take place?—To day then if you will hear my voice, harden not your hearts.—Seek me while I may be found: call upon me while I am near!—Boast not of *to-morrow*—depend not on *some future time* of repentance, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.—Consider that the *time is soon coming* when my tender mercies will be shut up in displeasure.—When the ax of death shall be laid to the root of the trees; and when every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit (every sinner which bringeth not forth the fruits of righteousness and repentance) shall be cut down and cast into the fire of hell (*i*); where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. “O then how long ye simple ones, &c.”—I now proceed to consider

Idly. WISDOM’S invitation of sinners to return from their evil ways, that they may not perish, but have everlasting life:—“Turn ye at my reproof.”

How *strong, piercing and emphatical* are these words of GOD!—Almost every word is full of *life and emphasis*.—*Who* is it that thus calls?—Why the *great GOD*; the *dreadful majesty of heaven*!—at whose word heaven obeys, and hell trembles!—who speaks not in vain to any of his creatures, but rebellious man! who, by a single word, made all things, and who, by a single word, can turn all sinners into

(i) Matthew iii. 10.

dust, all this world into a flame, and all rebels into hell !

To *whom* does he thus speak ?—to worms of the dust ; to sinners ;—to his own creatures, who depend upon him every moment !—In *what manner* does he speak ?—Both in a way of *majesty* and *mercy*.—It is an *authoritative command* of the great King of kings to *his creature* and *subject, man*. “ Turn ye at my reproof.” As if he had said, “ I command you, at your peril ; as you regard my authority ; as you fear my power and dread my vengeance, *go not on a day longer* in your sinful courses—*walk not a step farther* in the way which leadeth to destruction ; but turn ye at my reproof.”—It is also an *invitation of mercy*. —“ Turn ye at my reproof.”—q. d. “ I beseech and *conjure* you, as you regard your own souls and everlasting salvation—I earnestly intreat you, as you would escape everlasting misery, and obtain life and happiness eternal—make a stand, and ponder your paths, and consider your latter end, and return unto me and live. Oh ye simple ones who love simplicity, ye scorers who delight in scorning, ye fools who hate knowledge, and ye sinners of every kind, I beseech you to consider that the way you are in will lead you to ruin—*those lusts* and *evil practices* which are now so sweet to your taste, and in which you so much delight, and run on in so greedily, will *turn into gall* and *bitterness* at the last, and will end in *death* and *eternal misery* ;—therefore be persuaded to turn at my reproof, ere death and judgment fix you in an unchangeable state of torment !

B b 2

“TURN;”—the word is *small*, but *full of meaning*; it implies the great and important work of an effectual conversion, repentance, or reformation of a sinner—a work which every sinner must of necessity perform, who hopes to escape everlasting misery, and obtain everlasting happiness. “Turn”—i. e. “Return from the love and practice of all known sins, to the love and practice of all known virtues and duties—return to your *right minds*—return through CHRIST, to GOD, from whom you have gone astray in your sinful courses—and, in him, return to the ways of *virtue*, and *peace*, and *comfort*, and *purity*, and *holiness*.” The prophet has expressed this duty *in a few words*—“Let the wicked for sake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the LORD (k).”—And the apostle in many different places—of which take the two following—“Deny all ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and live godly, righteously and soberly, in the present world, looking for the hope of glory (l).”—And again—“Having, brethren, so many great and precious promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of GOD (m).”

“TURN ye at my reproof, says GOD.”—When, therefore, my friends, were prove your sins, and exhort you to repent and turn from your wicked ways—you should regard it as the *reproof of GOD*, (who says, “Turn ye at my reproof.”—And not of us his ministers and messengers, who are only the echo of GOD’s

(k) Isaiah lv. 7. (l) Tit. ii. 12. (m) 2 Cor. vii. 1.

voice speaking unto you.—It is not therefore *our reproofs* and *admonitions* you disregard; but the *reproofs of God*. And alas! if you regard not HIS reproofs, what hope is there that you should regard *ours*!—What wonder if sinners slight and disregard their feeble and sinful fellow-creatures—when they will not hear GOD, nor turn at *his reproof*!—But I proceed briefly to consider the

III. THING proposed; namely, *the encouragement* here given to sinners, to attempt this return. Those simple ones who love simplicity, and scorers who delight in scorning, and fools who hate knowledge,—and indeed *all sinners* who have been long accustomed and habituated to their lusts and evil courses, find it a *hard* and *difficult* thing to *turn* from their sins, and to return to GOD and to a life of virtue and holiness. It is, to them, “like the Ethiopian’s changing his skin, and the leopard his spots (1).” —They know not *how* to bear the thought of quitting their beloved lusts (which have been so long their delight) and breaking with their sinful companions—and cutting off right hands, and plucking out right eyes, and denying themselves—and following the doctrine and example of CHRIST.—And even if they should be brought to *see this necessary*—and to *resolve upon it*; yet they find themselves under a *moral impotency* of changing their mind and life. They feel *no power in themselves* for this work—their mind and inclination is *set against it*;—they have *no delight*, and can find *no pleasure* in the ways of

(1) Jer. xiii. 23.

holiness.—It is like death to them to pray, or consider, or resist temptations, or shun evil company, or read, or meditate, or set themselves heartily to change their lives, or do good. Hence, after a few *fickle resolutions*, and a few *slight trials*—they begin to despair, and to fall back again into their *sinful ways* and wicked customs.—Now GOD gives all needed encouragement to such:—“ Turn ye, says he, at my reproof; and behold I will pour out my spirit unto you—I will make known my words unto you.” “ As if GOD should say, Honestly make the trial, O sinner! Help thyself, and I will help thee. Set thyself to do what thou canst, with a humble dependence upon the strength of CHRIST, and I will set in with thy endeavours, and assist thee, and work in thee, and with thee, to will and to do that good, which, without my grace, thou couldst not perform.” “ Up, and be doing, and GOD shall be with thee.” Endeavour to *turn*, and *convert thyself*, and GOD will effectually turn and convert thee. Be not weary in well-doing; do not *fail* or *despair*, or *draw back* from the way of duty, and GOD will assuredly *meet thee in it*, and help thee by his grace.—Wait upon him with patience and prayer, and he will assuredly bring it to pass.—“ Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is GOD which worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure (m). Here we may observe, (1st.) That the *author* of this *grace* and *help*, is the *Holy Spirit of GOD*:—“ Behold, I will pour out my Spirit unto thee.”—I will pour it

(m) Philip. ii. 13.

out in abundance, like water; it shall wait upon thee and upon all sinners, in every duty and ordinance of grace, so that whoever thirsteth for it, and seeks it by faith and prayer, may freely partake of it, and welcome:—"Ask, says the great purchaser and dispenser of this spirit, and ye shall receive: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. (n)."

(2dly.) We may here observe, that the means of this grace is the word of God:—"I will make known my words unto you."—Not only speak them to you, or cause them to be read or preached to you—but I will make them known unto you—cause you to understand the scriptures—to know and perceive the great truths and doctrines of religion, in such a manner as to believe and obey them, and to see and taste their excellency and sweetness. It is the Spirit of God, my friends, which alone can let us into the practical and saving knowledge of the scriptures, and which can cause us to read, hear, learn, believe, meditate and obey them in such a manner, as that we may become wise unto salvation.—If therefore, we would indeed turn at God's reproof, let us implore the Spirit of God to be poured out upon us—and be constant in reading the scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith in JESUS CHRIST.—Let us most earnestly pray, that God "would pour

(n) Luke xi. 9, 10.

out his Spirit upon us; and would make known his words unto us." But I now proceed to some improvement and

APPLICATION of the subject—and first—we may hence observe the *prodigious* and *unaccountable blindness, obstinacy, and perverseness* of foolish sinners in resisting so many calls, reproofs and admonitions from the living GOD—especially when it is considered that the voice of all these calls, reproofs, and admonitions, is *mercy and love*—that the tenor of the whole is to *prevent our destruction*—to warn us to *do ourselves no harm*, but return to *our GOD, our rest, our life and our happiness*.

If you saw a man running headlong over a cliff, or upon the point of a drawn sword, or the mouth of a loaded cannon—and should apprize him of his danger, and call to him to turn, as he valued his life—would you not think him *desperate and bereaved of his senses*, if he laughed at your reproof, or refused to observe it!—And yet what is this to the *madness and desperation* of foolish sinners, who, altho' God Almighty assures them that their sins will totally damn them, soul and body, to all eternity, and earnestly intreats them not to destroy themselves—but to turn from their wicked ways, that they may live and not perish—yet *they set at nought all his counsel, and will none of his reproof*; seeming desperately bent, at all events, to *disobey his voice, reject his mercy, provoke his vengeance*, and run upon certain damnation! Is not this (as the wise man terms it) *the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and*

madness (o). And what must we think of the *blinding* and *bewitching* nature of sin, which brings poor deluded sinners to this sad pass? That the whore-monger, the drunkard, the liar, the dishonest man, and sinners in general, would sooner renounce salvation, than renounce their favourite vices.

2dly. SINCE this is the case of sinners—how great a blessing should we esteem it, that GOD is *still waiting upon us*, and following us with his *calls* and *reproofs*, and offering us *his Spirit* to renew our wicked hearts, and subdue our headstrong lusts and passions—and *his word* to lead, instruct, and direct us in the way of life and salvation.—Saying—“How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?”

O how wonderful is the patience and goodness of GOD to such wicked and ungrateful creatures as many of us are, that he does not cease to be our reprovcr and instructor—and take away the abused means of grace from us, and withdraw the motions of his grieved Spirit from our hearts, and suffer us immediately to fall into that hell which we so richly deserve: but that he is *waiting* for our repentance and amendment, and calling us to *turn and live, that he may have mercy and abundantly pardon?*—And oh! how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation, and if we still go on to harden our hearts against his reproofs?—Consider, my hearers, and bear in mind that awful declaration of Solomon, the divine and inspired preacher—“He, that being often reprovcd, hardeneth his

(e) Eccles. vii. 25.

neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy (*p*).” And now let me address myself,

(1st.) To young persons of both sexes.—My young friends, you seem in general very forward in coming to hear God’s word. God and yourselves only know *with what intentions, or for what ends* you come,—but we would willingly hope and believe the best—that you come with some *serious views* to the *glory of God*, and the *salvation of your own souls*. You certainly know in the general that you have souls to be saved, or lost—and that these souls are exceeding precious to you—that they must live for ever, even after your bodies are laid in the dust—and that they will be either *happy* or *miserable for ever*, according to *your life and behaviour* on this earth.—You cannot surely be ignorant that you have been *born sinners*—i. e. that you have brought into this world with you, *sinful natures*, and that you have *committed numberless sins* since you have come to the years of reason, and that unless you have these sins *pardoned*, and your natures *changed*, and your souls *renewed, converted and made holy and virtuous*, you can never go to heaven, or be happy in the life to come; but, on the other hand; must be *extremely and eternally miserable!*—You must needs know that you are *mortal creatures*—that you cannot live always—and that you may die very soon.—But good LORD! what will come of you, if you *die without pardon*—if you die *unconverted*—if you die *in your sins*?—What will come of you, if you die

(*p*) Prov. xxix. 1.

without true faith in CHRIST,—without true love to GOD—and without true holiness of heart and life? —Why, if you would read your bibles, they would tell you your *sad fate!* CHRIST himself would tell you—“that if you are not converted and born again, you cannot enter into the kingdom of GOD.”—“That if you believe not in him, ye shall die in your sins.”—“That if you repent not, you will perish;” and that he will say unto you, on the judgment day; “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels (g).” And therefore the apostle would beseech you “to abstain from youthful lusts.” “And the wise man would beseech you to seek the GOD of your fathers, and to remember your Creator in the days of your youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh when you shall say, you have no pleasure in them.”—Will you not therefore be inclined this day, to hear *this powerful and compassionate* call of GOD? “How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and the scorner delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit upon you: I will make known my words unto you!” How do you know if you shall ever live to hear another such call from GOD—and if you refuse this, how do you know if he will give you grace to comply with the next? And if you should harden yourselves against GOD’s calls, and not turn from your sins at his reproof, and set in earnest about religion—what think you GOD may be provoked to do

(g) Mat. xxv. 41.

unto you? Hear what he says just below my text—
 “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. Then shall they call upon me, but I will 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.”

2dly. As to you who are grown up to the state of men and women, and who are settled in the world—when you were young, you used to excuse your sins and follies, and promise to take religion into consideration, when you arrived to your present stage of life! You cannot now certainly *plead youthful lusts*; or that you are *yet too young* to think of your souls—to turn from your sins, and to prepare for eternity! What then is there now to hinder you from *hearing and attending* to the call of GOD? GOD has been waiting on you *thirty or forty years*; and must he still *wait longer*?—If so; how long must he wait?—Set a time, and say; when will you begin to seek GOD’s favour with all your heart, and renounce his enemies, and prepare for heaven?—Will it be *to-morrow*? Will it be *next year*? Will it be *ten years* hence?—Thou fool, how knowest thou, but that this very night thy soul shall be required of thee? How knowest thou what shall be on the morrow, or

What a day may bring forth—much more *one* or *ten* years?—Hast thou not yet learned that thy life is but a vapour?—But suppose you live *ten* years, are you sure that you will then turn to GOD? Are you sure, that after provoking and slighting GOD so long, he will then give you his grace and spirit, without which you cannot turn? Are you sure that *ten* years hence it will be easier for you to repent?—Or do you see people always become *better*, as they become *older*?—What if you *become worse*, and repentance becomes *more difficult*; which will certainly be the case, if you continue unconverted?—“O then, how long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity.”

3dly. AND to conclude;—my aged friends, who may still be in a Christless and unconverted state—what shall I say to you? Had I tears of blood at command, I could weep them over your gray and hoary heads!—I beg thee, O aged sinner, whoever thou art, for GOD’S sake and for CHRIST’S sake, to consider that there are yet but a few sands in thy glass; and that the graves are opening for thee?—The shadows of the evening are drawing on, and hast thou still the work of the day to begin? O man, O woman, lose not an hour longer!—Every day is now to thee worth more than ten thousand worlds, if thou knewest how to improve it!—Too, too, long hast thou set at nought all GOD’S counsel, and refused his reproof—too long hast thou neglected thy soul and eternity. What therefore thou doest now, thou must do quickly.—There is no room, no pretence for delays.—To day, therefore, if thou wilt hear GOD’S

voice; harden not thy heart.—To day begin to repent bitterly of thy sins, accept of CHRIST by faith, and set thyself to seek pardon and salvation with all thy feeble strength. “How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn ye at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit upon you; I will make known my words unto you!”—And to quicken thee in this; hear thy doom, if thou refusest: “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: therefore I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as defolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will 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.”

S E R M O N XXVII.

The just doom, and awful destruction,
of obstinate and impenitent sinners,
from

PROV. i. 24,—31.

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. Then shall they call upon me, but I will 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 the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.

IN the twenty and twenty-first verses of this chapter, we have the Wisdom of God lifting up her voice, and calling aloud to sinners. In the twenty-

second and twenty-third verses, we have the substance of her message, or the purport of her call.—She upbraids them with *their folly, simplicity and obstinacy*; invites and urges them to return at her reproof, and promises that, in case they will honestly attempt it, she will give them all needed aid and assistance—she will pour out her spirit unto them, and make known her words unto them.—And then, in the words of our text, we have the *doom* of sinners pronounced in very striking and awful language, in case they will not hear the calls of Wisdom, and turn at her reproof.

HERE GOD himself speaks, and threatens to take a dreadful vengeance on impenitent, irreclaimable sinners, who have slighted and despised the urgent calls and intreaties of his grace:—“Because, says he, I have called, and ye have refused,” &c.

I HAVE always looked upon these words, as some of the most dreadful and alarming in the whole book of God;—and I have often wondered how a habitual impenitent sinner can read them, or hear them read, without *fear and trembling!* Sure I am, if any such can, it must proceed either from *unbelief, or stupidity!*—I really enter upon the explanation and illustration of them with a kind of inward horror and concern of mind, while I consider that I am pronouncing the dreadful doom, perhaps of myself, and of numbers of my fellow-creatures—and among the rest, perhaps of those too, whose souls I wish as well as my own.—But I enter upon this task with the more comfort, in hopes that the

The good Spirit of God would so fet it home on our hearts, as to make it the means of preventing us from this destruction!—We are daily casting the gospel net *with this hope*, and we trust that the good God will not suffer us to labour wholly in vain—but that he will give us, at least, some few souls for our reward, and rescue some of his poor creatures from the dominion of sin, and the punishment of devils!—May the good Lord hear, and grant this wish!—Amen.

God; by his wisdom, having called sinners to *repentance*, *punishes* as it were, for a while, to see what effect the call has; to see whether they will turn at his reproof;—he *hearkens* and *hears*; but they speak not aright (a).—And therefore he proceeds and goes on to tell *obstinate sinners*; what will be in the end thereof; and what will be the consequence of their neglecting and despising all the means and methods of his grace. . . . And here we have

First, The provoking nature and circumstances of their crime stated.—And, 2dly; The awful sentence of judgment which God pronounces against them.

THESE I shall distinctly consider, and then apply.

1stly. THEN, we have the *provoking nature* and *circumstances* of their crime stated:—“Because I say, God, 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;—and again, For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord;—” (a) Jer. vii. 24.

—they would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof.”—Here then is the charge which God himself draws against impenitent sinners—and the reason why judgment shall be given against them, on the great day. Their crime, in short, is no less, than *obstinately and contumeliously rejecting CHRIST, and the offers of his grace, and refusing to submit to the terms of his gospel*—which would have saved them both from the curse of the law, and the dominion of sin, and made them the obedient subjects of God’s moral government, and the happy objects of his eternal love! And here we have all the aggravations of this crime represented in very *moving and emphatical* language—as.

1st. GOD condescended to *call upon them*; to warn them of their danger.—He called by his works, by his providences, by his word, by his Son, by his Spirit; by his prophets and apostles, by the ordinances of his gospel, and by reason, conscience and experience;—by all these ways, did he call sinners.—Nay, he *stretched out his hand* to offer them mercy, and that they might, as it were, *take hold of it* to help them out of their miserable condition:—but they *refused*—and *no man regarded*. They acted as tho’ they scorned to be beholden to him, and as tho’ they despised both his calls, and offered assistance. Some were *careless* and *never minded it*;—never took any notice of what was said to them; others were *obstinate*, and tho’ they could *not avoid bearing the will of CHRIST*, yet they gave him a *flat denial*:—“*He called, but they refused.*”—

They would not have this man to rule over them—they were in love with their folly, and would not be made wise—they were obstinate to all the methods taken to reclaim them. GOD stretched out his hand *in mercies bestowed upon them*—and when this would not do, he stretched it forth *in corrections*—but *all in vain*;—they neither regarded *the declarations of his mouth*, nor *the operations of his hand*. The *stretching forth of the hand*, is not only used in *giving gifts*, and *inflicting corrections*—but is also a gesture used by pleaders and orators, who would gain the attention of their hearers, or make some signal proclamation of judgment or mercy—thus *St. Paul* began his excellent speech and defence (*b*) by stretching forth the hand—and thus GOD is represented as addressing his people—“ I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people—a people that provoke me to anger continually to my face (*c*),” (to shew with what *vobemence* and *earnestness* of persuasion GOD calleth sinners to repentance.) The same also is implied by GOD’s *calling to sinners*.—Thus GOD complains of the same obstinacy of sinners, and threatens them with deserved judgments; “ Therefore will I number you to the sword: because when I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not (*d*).”

2dly. GOD condescended to *reprove* and *counsel*

(b) Acts xxi. 40. (c) See Is. lxxv. 2, 3. (d) Is. lxxv. 12. See also to the same purpose, Isa. lxvi. 4. Jer. vii. 13. Ez. viii. 18.

them;—*reprove them for doing amiss*—and *counsel them to do better*. He often expostulated the matter with them—and said—“Come now and let us reason together,—why will you die, O house of Israel—as I live, I have no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked, but rather that they should turn from their ways and live—O Israel, what evil have I done unto thee, and wherein have I grieved thee; testify against me!—O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thy help—take words with thee, and turn unto the Lord.”—These, my brethren, are *wonderful condescensions* in the great God to sinners of mankind; and evident proofs of love and good will.—But mark the *contemptuous and unworthy manner* in which obstinate sinners receive them:—“But ye set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof.”—And this same charge God reneweth against sinners at the 30th verse—“They would none of my counsel: they despised all my reproof.”—We need only read over these words, to observe the *contemptuous and provoking manner* in which customary sinners abuse this goodness, and trample upon this authority, of the great God:—“They will none of his counsel; and they despise all his reproof.”—Shocking and astonishing insolence of an impenitent heart!—Thus we find him complaining of rebellious Israel:—“But my people would not hearken to my voice, and *Israel* would none of me (e).”—No wonder then if he rejected such a people; “So I gave them up unto their own hearts lusts,

(e) Psal. lxxxii. 11,—13.

and they walked in their own counsels.”—And yet hear how his bowels yearn over them—“O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!”—Thus do sinners set at nought all God’s counsel, as not worth heeding—and will none of his reproof; as tho’ it were beneath them to be reprov’d by him; or, as tho’ they had done nothing worthy of reproof, and were too wise and good to be counselled.—Nay; they reject his counsel *with disdain*—call reproofs, *reproaches*, and take them *heinously ill*: So *Jeremiah* complains: “To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear? Behold their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it (f).”

3dly. GOD exhorted them to submit to the government of *right reason* and *religion*,—but they rebelled against both—and were as the horse, and as the mule which have no understanding (g).—*Reason* could not rule them; *for they hated knowledge*: neither would they be governed by *religion*; *for they did not choose the fear of the LORD (b)*.—They hated the light of divine truth which would have shewed them their errors; because it would have discovered unto them the evil of their ways;—“For they who do evil, hate the light, neither come to the light, lest their deeds should be reprov’d (i).”—They hated to be told that which they could not bear to know.—They chose to walk in the way of their

(f) Jer. vii. 10. (g) Psal. xxxii. 9. (b) Ver. 29.

(i) John iii. 20.

heart, and in the sight of their eyes.—They were pressed to set God always before them; but they chose rather to cast him and his fear behind their backs; because the fear of the Lord would have disturbed them in their evil courses. Such, my brethren, is the *charge* of God against impenitent sinners; which having seen in all its blackness and aggravation—we shall be the less surprized at the “awful sentence of judgment which he pronounces against them.”—And this is the

II. THING here proposed to our consideration.—Let us therefore, my brethren, *bear and fear* this dreadful doom of impenitent sinners, whom God’s *mercy cannot reclaim*, nor the powerful voice of his wisdom, call home from their wanderings!

AND whilst thou hearest and attendest to this word of God, tremble, *O my soul*, lest thou also shouldst be found among this unhappy number of sinners, and lest this word should be pointed against thee!—“Because, says God, I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded &c. (k).”

SUCH is the *dreadful and ruinous sentence* of the *wicked*.—They would not submit to God’s *righteous government*, and therefore must certainly perish under his *wrath and curse*, and the gospel itself will be able to grant them no relief.—They would not take the benefit of God’s *mercy*, when it was offered to them, and therefore shall *fall justly* as victims to his *justice*—according to that alarming declaration of the

(k) Prov. i. 24,—32.

wife man; "He that being often reproved, hardeneth his neck; shall suddenly be destroyed; and that without remedy (l)." But that I may treat this matter a little more distinctly,

1st. In the present life sinners are often *in prosperity and secure*; they *live as ease, and set sorrow at defiance*.—But this *hope and joy of the hypocrite* are but for a moment.—There is a time certainly coming when they shall be *seized with dreadful terror and consternation*, "When fear shall come upon them as desolation, and their destruction as a whirlwind, and when wrath and anguish shall come upon them."—"The LORD, who hath made all things for himself, hath made the wicked for the day of evil (m)." "The wicked is reserved to the day of destruction; they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath (n)." "Surely God hath set their feet in slippery places; he casteth them down into destruction: how are they brought into desolation as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors (o)."—"We unto the wicked; it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him (p)."—"I will choose their delusions, saith the LORD, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not.—Therefore will I also deal in fury; mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and tho' they cry in

(l) Prov. xxix. i. (m) Prov. xvi. 4. (n) Job xxi. 30. (o) Psal. lxxiii. 19. (p) Isa. iii. 11.

mine eats with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them.—Behold I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape; and tho' they cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them—neither shall the gods whom they have served be able to save them at all in the time of their trouble (g)."

IN the words of our text, the *fear* and *calamity of the wicked* are expressed as coming upon them with *great certainty, speed, and surprize*.—It *will come*.—It *will certainly come*.—It will come as a *thing unexpected*.—It will come *with great terror and consternation*;—and, by its coming, it will *utterly confound and destroy them!* What a group of dreadful images, to paint this *black and dismal* day of the wicked's destruction!—(1st.) The calamity of sinners *will come*;—sickness *will come*, and those diseases which they shall apprehend as the very arrests and forerunners of death.—Troubles will come, *in mind, in body and in estate*, which shall *awaken their fears*, and convince them of their folly in putting far from them the thoughts of God, and of a future judgment!—(2dly.) Their calamity will put them into *a great fright*.—"The sinners in Zion shall be afraid, and fearfulness shall surprize the hypocrites." That *wicked life* which they once *delighted in*, and *those judgments of God* which they *once laughed at*, will now fill them *with fear*, and this fear shall be their *continual torment*. Death, the king of terrors, shall stare them in the face, and cause them to trem-

(g) Isa. lxvi. iv. Jer. xi. 11. Ezek. viii. 18.

ble. "The light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall not shine—the snare is laid for him in the ground, and a trap in the way.—Terrors shall make him afraid on every side, and brimstone shall be scattered on his habitation:—he shall be driven from light unto darkness, and chased out of the world:—a dreadful sound is in his ears, and in prosperity the destroyer shall come upon him (r)."

(3dly.) ACCORDING to their fear, such shall their punishment be. Their fears shall not disappoint them—"Their fear shall come," says the wise man—i. e. the judgment they were afraid of, shall come upon them to the uttermost.—It shall come as *desolation*, as a *mighty flood*, bearing all down before it, and sweeping away all their *false and deceitful hopes*.—It shall be *their destruction*; involving them in *total and final misery*.—And this their destruction shall be as a *whirlwind* which suddenly and forceably breaks down, tears up and destroys every thing in its way.—And then,

4thly. THEIR *misery* will be *hopeless*, and their *fear* turned into *black despair*: "*Distress and anguish shall come upon them*." The pit they fall into, has *no bottom*. There is *no way, no hope* of escape, from that dark fiery region which divine justice has appointed, as the place of their everlasting abode; so that *distress and anguish* must needs seize upon them, in that *dark, and dismal prison*, where there is *wEEPING*, and *wailing*, and *gnashing of teeth*; where their

(r) Prov. xv. 21.—xviii. 5, 21.

worm dieth not; and their fire is not quenched. And this is no more than what *Saint Paul* has told us shall be the reward of evil doers from a righteous God, on the day of the revelation of his wrath:—"Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil (s)." *(s)*

2dly. In the present life, God *pities the folly of sinners*, and his Son even *weeps over their obstinacy and chosen ruin*:—But then it is said, "He will *laugh at their calamity*." They now laugh at God's counsel, and mock at his judgments, and he will then laugh at their misery and distress. Sinners have their laughing time now—God, will have his then. Good men are now ready to weep at the folly and wickedness of thoughtless sinners, who are bringing everlasting misery upon themselves, and laughing at the terrors of the Lord; but it is said "the righteous will then laugh at them (t)." And well they may, since God himself is here represented as *laughing at their calamity*, and *mocking when their fear comes*.—This is spoken after the manner of men. When we have warned any person of his danger, and earnestly exhorted him to shun any harmful course which might bring misery upon him—and if this person, instead of regarding us, should *mock our advice*, and *laugh at our counsel*;—such a person loses all claim to our pity, and we have a right to laugh and mock in our turn, when the misery is come upon him, which we seriously warned him against.—So it is with God ~~and~~ for sinners, properly speaking, he is not capable of

(s) Rom. ii. 9.

(t) Psalm li. 6.

laughing or mocking; neither can he be delighted with the misery of his creatures—yet it is but just, that, when they have outlived the day of his grace, he should shut the bowels of his compassions against them; withhold that mercy from them which they have so long abused, and suffer them to eat the fruit of their own doings.—And altho' now he is ready to hear their prayers, and willeth that they should not perish, but come to repentance;—yet the case will then be quite changed.—As a just Judge, he must pass sentence of punishment upon them; and as a righteous God, he must be pleased with the justice and severity of this punishment.—So that, altho' they shall then call upon him, yet shall he not answer, and altho' they shall seek him earnestly, yet shall they not find him.—Now the door of mercy is open, and God is calling to sinners, and reaching forth his hand to pluck them in—but they will not answer him, nor come unto him.—But then this door will be shut, and they shall cry in vain, “LORD, LORD, open unto us.”—He will not answer, because when he called, they would not answer.—All the answer then shall be,—“I know you not; depart from me ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels (u).”

THOSE who now slight God, and hate to come to the place of his worship, and will not bow the knee before him in family or secret prayer, will then seek him earnestly; but they shall not find him; because they would not seek him when he might have been found, nor call upon him when he was near (v). How

(u) Mat. xxv. 41. (v) Isaiah lv. 6.

pitifully did the *rich man* beg but for one drop of water when in hell, and yet was denied?—No: that is a time of *vengeance* and *retribution* to the wicked.—God will then deal, as a *just, righteous, and severe judge*.—He will then ease himself of his adversaries—his eye shall not spare, neither will he have pity; but will *shew the whole world* what a regard he had to the *honour of his laws*, and the *truth of his threatenings*; and what a *dreadful thing* it is for sinners to *despise and abase offered mercy*, and to fall into the hands of a *living and an avenging GOD!*

3dly. SINNERS are now bent upon *their own way*, and fond of *their own wicked schemes*, and *evil devices*.—No persuasions can now turn them from these.—It is in vain that the *wisdom of God*, or the *reason of man*, calls upon them to abandon those ways and devices.—Their own wisdom is best, and God's wisdom is reputed as folly, and nothing regarded!—Well; be it so,—the time is now come when they shall be *filled with their own devices*.—They shall eat the fruit of their *own way*, and taste how sweet the consequences of sin are.—*Their wages* shall be according to *their work*;—and as was *their choice*, such shall *their doom be*. They prayed for damnation, and now it shall overtake them.—They delighted in cursing, and now it shall come upon them—they would not draw near to GOD, and now they shall be banished far from him—they delighted in the devil's service, and in the company of wicked persons, and now they shall be shut up with devils and damned spirits for ever, and suffer with *him whom they served*,

and with *them whom they loved*!—"Be not deceived, says the apostle, 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 (*w*)."—"The backslider in heart, says the wise man, shall be filled with *his own ways* (*x*)."—If sinners perish therefore, they may thank themselves for it, and can justly lay the blame on no other.—The way they are in, is *their own way; their own device*.—They have chosen it *themselves*, and therefore cannot think it hard if they are suffered to *eat the fruit of their own doings*—and if God should choose their delusions and punishments for them, as they have chosen their rebellions against him.

4thly. AND to conclude; sinners are now apt to value themselves on their *worldly prosperity* and *their liberty to sin*:—but both of these will then aggravate their misery. "The turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them."—(1st.) Sinners are apt to boast of *their liberty to sin*;—they boast that their tongues are their own, and that none can controul them;—they are pleased that they can turn away from God and get clear of the restraints of religion; that they can shun public and private worship, and neglect the duties of morality and religion, and that the laws cannot take hold of them, nor is there any to make them afraid: but this *turning away from the call, command and reproof of God*, shall be the very thing

(*w*) Gal. vi. 7, 8. (*x*) Prov. xiv. 14.

which shall slay them. The remembrance of it shall cut them to the heart, and cause them to *curse and re-proach themselves* for ever, for thus *abusing and perverting the liberty of their wills*.—(2dly.) Their prosperity in their evil ways shall destroy them. They prospered, perhaps, in the way of their sins; enjoyed *health and strength and success* in their evil courses.—And hence because judgment was not executed speedily on their evil works; their hearts were the more set in them to do evil (y).—And hence they flattered themselves in their own eyes, until their iniquity was found hateful—and encouraged and hardened themselves more and more in the course of their sins; vainly imagining that there was no difference between the righteous and the wicked—and that both would have one lot in the next world, because they fared much the same in this.—Such then is the doom and sentence of the wicked, whom God's calls of mercy cannot now reclaim. Let us now briefly

APPLY the subject—And, O blessed God, is it needful to bring this awful subject still *nearer and closer* home to the hearts of sinners?—But how shall this be done?—By nothing *effectually*, but by *thine own spirit*, which, in the words of our text, has laid down *so plain and so dreadful* a representation of their guilt and misery! Let thy good Spirit then set in with the word preached, and agreeable to his sacred office, convince us of sin, of righteousness, and of a judgment to come—Amen.—And,

(y) Eccl. viii. 14.

1st. LET us seriously enquire, my brethren, whether *this guilt is ours*, and consequently *its dreadful punishment*. It is a certain truth, that whoever of mankind have not obeyed the call of GOD, and complied with the terms of CHRIST'S gospel, whatever their *character, profession, or hopes* may be, are still, in some degree, under the guilt here expressed, and subject to the condemnation here described. There is a certain measure of *meetness and qualification; a standard of gospel fitness*, which is necessary in all who would shun future misery, and attain any, the lowest degree, of the gospel salvation—and below which, every soul must necessarily come short of it, and finally perish.

IT is in vain for the *habitually sinful* to imagine that *they may and will* be saved, *they know not how*, without repentance, or any moral fitness for that state.—Such will be convinced, when it is too late, that they have been under a *sad deception—a deception the more astonishing and unpitiable*, in that they would not have thus befooled themselves in the smallest matters belonging to their temporal interests. The smallest earthly blessings are not to be expected but in the way of *care, design, industry and diligence*.—No man in his senses can expect to reap without sowing; or to reap a different kind of grain from that which he has sown.—To imagine that habitual sinners may be saved *without repentance and amendment*, is a supposition which involves in it the *greatest absurdities*, and even *blasphemies*.—It implies that GOD is *neither just nor true*,—that he makes no difference in the

moral characters of men—that there is no future state; at least no future state of rewards and punishment: or, if there is, yet that God rewards and punishes *in an arbitrary manner*, without any rule of judgment, or any regard to the moral characters of his creatures—a thought worse, and more derogatory to the honour of God than *Atheism* itself!—Nay; it not only renders the scriptures absurd and incredible;—but supercedes the necessity of all revelation, and makes null and void every mean of virtue and religion, both natural and revealed. For, if it will finally fare *with the wicked*, as *with the righteous*, and if *they both* shall have *one lot*; then *virtue* and *vice* are but empty names, and CHRIST preached and died in vain—and all the self-denial and mortification of religion is the greatest absurdity—and he who enjoys most *sinful pleasure* and *gain*, and can *escape present punishment*, is, upon the whole, the *wisest* and *happiest man*!—But far be this *barrid, blasphemous* imputation from God, and from the constitution of his moral kingdom! God shall *sooner cease to be*, than *to be just and true*—or than to be a *lover* and *rewarder of righteousness*, and a *bater* and *punisher of obstinate and irreclaimable vice*, in his moral, human subjects!—And sooner shall the pillars of heaven be shaken, or the everlasting mountains be removed from their foundations, than *that truth* fail, which is built upon the following declaration; “Say ye to the righteous that it shall be *well with him*:—wo unto the wicked, it shall be *ill with him* (z).”

(z) Isa. iii. 10, &c.

HAVE we then, my friends, chosen that better part, which shall never be taken from us? Have we ceased to do evil, and learned to do well?—In a word, have we complied with the call of GOD, and turned at his reproof?—Have we wrought the great work of GOD, in *believing on his Son*, and *submitting to the terms and conditions of his gospel* (a)? If so, then *happy are we*, and it shall be *well with us*.—As sure as GOD *liveth and is true*, our everlasting happiness is *secured*, and we shall, in due time, reap a glorious harvest, if we faint not, and become not weary in well-doing; but continue patiently and diligently in this good way, looking for glory, honour, and immortality.—And if so; then are our natures in some measure changed; our hearts and dispositions purified and sanctified; our supreme love set upon GOD and his CHRIST, and the bent of our hearts upon purity and holiness?

BUT is the state of our case widely different from this?—Have we been hitherto in a state of *indifference towards GOD*, and CHRIST, and the *great things of eternity*?—I say *in a state of indifference*—for I will not suppose, in this place, that we have been the most criminal of sinners—I will not suppose, “our hands imbrued in innocent blood, or our bodies defiled by the adulterous embrace—I will not suppose that blasphemy or perjury has polluted our tongues—or that theft or robbery have defiled our hands!” I say, *a state of indifference*; because;

(a) John vi. 29. Mark xvi. 16.

not to love GOD and his CHRIST, is really to hate them;—not to mind the things of our peace, is really to neglect them;—not to believe in CHRIST, is really to reject him;—not to accept the offers of the gospel, is really to slight them;—and not to obey its commands, is really to rebel against the sovereign authority. To be *indifferent* therefore in the matters of religion, is really to be *irreligious*; and will effectually damn us, without any other sin!—Nay, the *want of a true faith alone* will do this: for CHRIST himself hath declared, “that he who believeth not, shall be damned; and that he who believeth not the Son, (i. e. submitteth not himself by faith to his gospel) shall not see life; but the wrath of GOD abideth on him (b)!—What then can it avail us, that we are *not the greatest of sinners*; if we be not *true and sincere Christians*? To come under the condemning sentence of GOD, is a *serious, an awful thing*, even altho’ our condemnation should be less aggravated than that of many others! But,

To return: is this our case? While GOD hath called; yea while he hath called *loudly and frequently*, by his word, by his Spirit, by reason and conscience, by ordinances and providences—have we refused?—While he hath long been stretching out the hand to us, with the *most precious promises*, with the *most inviting offers*, and with the *most winning earnestness and importunity of address*, have we continued to disregard him?—Nay; have we added

(b) Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 36.

contempt to neglect, setting at nought all his counsel, and despising all his reproof—hating his knowledge, and rejecting his fear?—Or, in other words—notwithstanding all the calls of GOD, and means of virtue and grace we have been favoured with—are we still in a state of impenitence—still without grace, and void of an interest in CHRIST?—And are we resolved to continue such?—Then *mark our certain doom!*—I need describe it in no other language than that of GOD himself—nor can I find any other words of GOD wherein the description is more dreadful and alarming, than those of our text—words (good GOD preserve us from their dreadful import) loaded with the deepest horrors!—words which shake the very foundations of my soul, while I pronounce them with my lips!—“GOD also will laugh at *our calamity*; he will mock when *our fear* cometh:—when our fear cometh as desolation, and our destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when deep distress, and heart-rending anguish cometh upon us. We shall call upon him, but he will not answer: yea, we shall seek him earnestly, but we shall not find him: for we shall eat the fruit of our own way, and shall be filled with our own devices!”

IF GOD is not a liar, such will be the inevitable doom of every *unbelieving, impenitent* sinner, who hath not attained to a gospel meekness, for the heavenly kingdom.

2^{dly}. FROM this plain and honest representation of the future misery of the ungodly, we may in-

for *the mercy and goodness of our God*. This may seem a paradox; but it is a great truth. I have proved to you on former occasions, that future misery is not so much the arbitrary *appointment of God*, as the *natural consequence of a sinful life*—that an habitually wicked soul cannot be truly happy in any place or state—in a word, that wickedness in a great measure creates *its own congenial hell*, as virtue, purity and holiness create their *own heaven*. If this then is the natural constitution of things, that wickedness sinks as naturally into misery, as a stone does to the common centre of gravity—and that without conversion and holiness, no sinner can see and enjoy the holy God; how great a mercy should it be esteemed that God hath plainly and faithfully pointed out this constitution of things to us in his word?—that he hath not left sinners to any uncertain conjectures about their future state; left them to partial, flattering, self-deceiving hopes, to which the wicked heart is naturally prone; but hath plainly warned them what the issue of a wicked and impenitent life will be?—Malignant tongues have even abused and rejected the gospel itself, for revealing *those terrors of the Lord*, and repeatedly urging them upon the consciences of sinners—and have spared no kind of abuse against those preachers who dwell much upon these terrors!—Mistaken men! How groundless and unreasonable are their slanders!—Are these future miseries of the wicked *certain and unavoidable*, and would they have them concealed? Would they have

no warning given of the evil to come—especially when the *kind intention* of all these warnings, is to lead sinners to repentance?

WOULD we tax that neighbour of cruelty who should rouse us from our midnight slumbers, and kindly inform us of the approach of a mortal enemy, or that our houses were in flames, that we might flee from the impending destruction? And shall we tax the blessed GOD of cruelty, for forewarning sinners of the evil to come, lest they go into the place of endless and insufferable torment? Shall the highest instance of divine love and mercy, be reproached with cruelty, by those very wretches, whom it is designed to snatch from everlasting burnings? Let it be remarked that the parables and discourses of the compassionate JESUS, abound more with descriptions of the future misery of the wicked, than the whole of the scriptures besides—and shall he, who shed his vital blood for the salvation of sinners, and who wept tears of pity over those whom he could not reclaim—shall he be suspected of cruelty towards mankind; of raising groundless terrors and panics, in the breasts of sinners; or of tormenting them before the time? Far be such an injurious thought from our hearts concerning the blessed JESUS, as to misconstrue and reproach one of the highest effects of his love to sinners, as a kind of groundless and wanton cruelty!

3dly. AND to conclude; altho' such is the end of the wicked, yet it is not so with the righteous:—“Who so hearkeneth unto me, saith Divine Wis-

dom, shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil." With the punishment of obstinate wickedness, we have the reward of true repentance, virtue and piety—that the wicked may be induced to turn from their evil ways and live. All who submit to the instructions of wisdom, may be assured of security and happiness.—(1st.) They shall dwell in safety. "They shall dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty; secure in the protection of his providence, the enjoyment of his favour, and the guidance of his grace (c)." They may indeed be subject to evils, but they shall not fall by them—they may fall by death, but it shall not triumph over them; they shall conquer and triumph even when they fall (d). Nothing shall be able to do them any real injury; but all things shall work together for their good (e).

(2dly.) THEY shall not only be secure from evil itself, but even from the disquieting fears and apprehensions of it—they shall be quiet from the fear of evil. They shall have the pleasures of a good conscience, and the comforts of a joyful hope; so that tho' the earth should be removed, yet shall they not fear. They shall not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day: nor for the pestilence that walketh by darkness: nor for the destruction that wasteth at noon-day (f).—Nay they shall rejoice in the testimony of a good conscience; rejoice

(c) Psal. xcl. 1,—4. (d) Rom. viii. 37. 1 Cor. xv. 5,
 (e) Rom. viii. 28. Psal. lxxiv. 11. (f) Psal. xci. 5, 6;

in tribulation; rejoice in faith; rejoice even in the absence of all earthly good things (*g*).—Such is the honour, the happiness, and the exceeding great reward of all those who fear the LORD, and who submit to the instructions of Divine Wisdom. To which honour and happiness may GOD of his infinite goodness, advance every soul, who hears me this day; and to his name shall be the everlasting praise of this great salvation. Amen.

(*g*) 2 Cor. i. 12. Rom. v. 2, 3. 2 Tim. i. 12.—iv. 8. Hab. iii. 17, 18. Job. v. 19, &c.

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