

RELIGION OF THE BIBLE,

IN

SELECT DISCOURSES,

BY

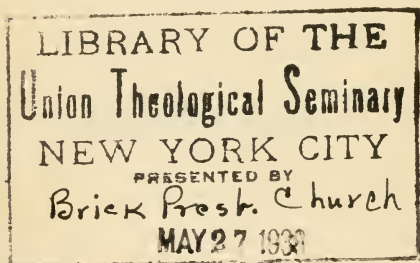
THOMAS H. SKINNER.

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This Volume

IS RESPECTFULLY PRESENTED,

BY THE AUTHOR,

TO

THE MERCER-STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

AS AN EXPRESSION OF HIS

PASTORLY CARE AND AFFECTIONATE REGARD.

PREFACE.

I HAVE entitled this book, "RELIGION OF THE BIBLE," not because I would intimate that there is nothing of much importance contained in the Bible, which is not expressed in these few pages; nor that the *kind* of religion, which the Scriptures teach, is not elsewhere to be found in the writings of men; but merely because I think, that what of religion the book does contain, has been drawn directly and exclusively out of the Bible, coincides with it in teaching, spirit, and purpose, and has that authority, at least, for its warrant and its defence.

If I have attained my end, the reader will find in the pieces composing this volume, nothing incongenial with the spiritual feelings and sympathies of all true Christians; nothing which will not, if he is a spiritual man, tend to his advancement in spirituality; and if he is a worldly man,

tend to make him a spiritual one. It is earnestly hoped, that in perusing the book, he will not once find his thoughts conversant with a subject, which he himself will regard as a matter of doubtful disputation, or as among the uncertainties of religion, or as pertaining to those peculiarities, whether of doctrine, practice, or spirit, which have given Christians different names, and have divided them into contending schools and sects.

Let it not be presumed, however, from what has now been said respecting the sort of book which I have intended this to be, that I wish to be thought averse to a strictly *doctrinal* mode of treating religious subjects. If the book is adapted to make this impression on the judicious reader, I can only say, that my convictions of what should be its intellectual character, have not had justice done them by my endeavour. The subject matter of the book I am sure, demands, what I understand by the doctrinal strain of discourse, in a præeminent degree. It is not when its theme is controversy, but certain and fundamental truth,

that religious discourse should be most distinguished by discrimination, exactness of statement, clearness, order, and strength of reasoning, as well as by pungency and earnestness. I am aware also that excellency of discourse on such a theme, requires in its author not only a high order of intellect, but eminent spirituality: and when I think of this, I cannot but be humbled at the vast disparity between the importance of the topicks here discussed, and the treatment I am capable of giving them.

Nor do I wish to be thought of the opinion, that all discussion of points in dispute among Christians, is unlawful, or unnecessary. The *ordinary* teaching of the ministry, should, I am persuaded, have little to do with disputes. IF ANY MAN SPEAK, LET HIM SPEAK AS THE ORACLES OF GOD. It is a "point of great inconvenience and peril to entitle the people to hear controversies, and all kinds of doctrine. They say no part of the counsel of God is to be suppressed: so as the difference which the Apostle maketh between

milk and strong meat is confounded : and his precept, that the weak be not admitted unto questions and controversies, taketh no place."* If, nevertheless, Christians will discuss their differences with becoming moderation, and so that earnest endeavours be still used to keep the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace, there doubtless are times and places in which they may do so, without sin, and, perhaps, to edification. Where, however, the business directly in hand is that of saving men, earnestness and skill in conducting that great work, will, as far as possible, preclude the intrusion of controverted points.

I have been induced to give these discourses to the public in their present form, from the fact that though they have been before *printed*, the most of them have scarcely been *published* ; and particularly with the hope that I may by this means, speak more frequently, in their private habitations, to those accustomed to my voice in the house of God.

* Lord Bacon.

The discourses, with one or two exceptions, have not the form of religious addresses spoken to an assembly, and are not introduced as such addresses commonly are, by sentences from the Bible serving as mottoes or texts. To suit the character of the publications in which they appeared, they were originally thus printed ; and it was not until this reprint of them was nearly completed, that I began to regret, notwithstanding the prejudice which seems to be prevailing against discourses so composed, that they were not remodelled into the ordinary homiletical style. I have given the texts which I would have selected, had this regret been prevented by earlier reflection, in the table of contents.

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RELIGION OF THE BIBLE.

I.

SPIRITUAL RELIGION.

THERE are three kinds of religion among those who call themselves Christians. Of one kind it were well if the world were destitute. Excepting by the observance of religious rites and solemnities, it does not distinguish the lives of those who practise it from the lives of irreligious men. It is the form of godliness without its power : the religion which would serve at the same time two masters ; would join light and darkness, Christ and Belial, believers and infidels together.

There is another kind of religion which has been called the middle path of Christi-

anity. It is the religion manifestly of the generality of those who are considered Christians. It embraces, besides a profession and the observance of ordinances, a belief of the doctrines, and an irreprehensible outward conformity to the duties of the Gospel. But it falls short of the privileges of the Gospel ; not including those lively hopes and anticipations, those holy joys and sorrows, that sensible intercourse and fellowship with God and Christ, that enrapturing communion with the Holy Spirit, that vivid and permanent earnest and assurance of Heaven, which the Gospel warrants and encourages in every believer.

A third kind of religion is that which does include these peculiar experiences. We would designate it *Spiritual Religion*. It is a religion which can be satisfied with nothing merely external, however blameless and fair. The offering up of prayer and praise, meditation in the Scriptures, attendance upon ordinances, liberality to-

ward the poor, the utmost exactness and irreproachableness of life — these do not meet its demands, unless there is correspondent sensibility and life in the heart. There must be a feeling of the Divine presence ; a relishing of the Divine excellence ; a heart-assured persuasion of the Divine favour and complacency. God must be enjoyed ; or there will be disquietude of soul, as in the Patriarch, “ O that I knew where I might find him ;” and in the Psalmist, “ as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.” If the light of God’s countenance ceases at any time to shine upon the soul, the darkness which then covers it no outward prosperity can dispel ; its sorrows nothing can alleviate. No loveliness, no excellence remains, when the heart cannot taste the excellency of the knowledge of Christ. No satisfaction is taken in the intercourse of the dearest friends when the returns of grace from the Holy Comforter are sus-

pended. The visible world is a waste wilderness when the world unseen is clouded or remote. There is no peace, no pleasure in life, when there is no sensible relish and delight in God and divine things.

The difference between this last kind of religion, and those alluded to above, is very apparent in examples of each. Every one sees a striking difference in the piety of such men as Leighton, Baxter, Edwards, Brainerd, and Martyn, and that of the mass of those who bear, and are not supposed to dishonour, the Christian name, Dr. John Mason Good, the distinguished and excellent author of the "Book of Nature," said, on his death bed, "I have taken what unfortunately the generality of Christians too much take — I have taken the middle walk of Christianity. I have endeavoured to live up to its duties and doctrines, but I have lived below its privileges." The men first mentioned were not content to pursue what is here called the middle

walk of Christianity. Their religion was strictly and eminently *experimental and spiritual*.

This kind of religion has greatly the pre-eminence above every other in many respects, some of which will be briefly considered.

I. It is *Scriptural* religion. The religion of the Scriptures is the fruit of the Spirit, which is "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance;" embracing frames and dispositions of soul more agreeable to that lively and affectionate religion of which we speak than to any other. Manifestly, likewise, is this sort of religion most congenial with the view of holy living, given us in the Scriptures, when they speak of it, which they constantly do, as walking with God; having fellowship with the Father and the Son; communing with the Spirit; walking after the Spirit; walking in the Spirit; walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort

of the Holy Ghost. — It is most accordant also with those passages which call upon the saints to delight themselves in God ; to rejoice in the Lord ; to rejoice in him always ; and which represent them as having peace with God, and the love of God shed abroad in their hearts ; as having the witness of the Spirit with their own spirit ; as walking by faith, not by sight, looking more at the things of the unseen world than at things which address themselves to their bodily senses. — It is, moreover, most like the religion of Scripture characters ; as of Enoch, and Noah, and Abraham, who walked with God ; of Moses, and Samuel, and David, and Elijah, and Daniel ; of the Apostles and the first Christians also, as far as their history has been written in the Bible. The religion of these men who are held up to us as patterns and exemplars, was eminently a vital, affectionate, spiritual religion. They conversed closely and delightfully with God, and lived habitually under the light of his

countenance, and in the sensible enjoyment of his love.— But especially was the personal religion of Christ of this kind ; all whose plans and principles, ways and movements, discourses and doctrines, made it manifest, that his heart, and spirit, and will, were constantly one with the heart and spirit and will of God.

II. It is the most *rational* kind of religion. If the things of religion are not merely imaginary, they ought in fitness and reason to command the whole heart, and rule the whole inner and outer man. If they are real, they are comparatively the only realities ; all else is shadow and illusion. If the God of the Scriptures, and the objects revealed to us in eternity do indeed exist, well may the prophet pronounce the world and its affairs to be less than nothing in the comparison. Such objects then, so transcendently important in themselves, ought to have a correspondent influence on our character and conduct. And what is

such an influence? If that Being who is the infinite fountain of all being, who made me, and sustains me every moment; who, in all the glory of his infinite perfections, “compasses my path and my lying down,” and is ever with me; the Being on whom my happiness wholly depends, and from whom my last sentence is to proceed—if he has that influence on me which his character and relations to me ought to exert, shall I not always be in his fear; shall I not always dwell in love to him; and rejoice when he smiles upon me, and be troubled when he suspends the communications of his favour? Towards such a Being, so related to me as God is, do I not express a *reasonable* affection when I exclaim, in the ardent language of the Psalmist, “whom have I in Heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.” If I have any love at all for such a Personage, and one so related to me as Christ, ought I not to be constrained by that love,

as Paul was, to live and die to this infinite benefactor—making it my whole duty and happiness to serve and enjoy him? And what would be the result upon my heart and life, of a *reasonable* operation of the Gospel upon them? What manner of person should I be in all holy conversation and godliness, if my example were a just transcript of the great truths of the Gospel? That religion has been thought by some to be the most enlightened and reasonable, which has least to do with the affections of the heart; but never was there a more manifest mistake. Reasonableness in religion is absorption of mind and heart—the whole man ruled and overborne by the transcendent importance and glory of the objects of religion. For a man to pretend to be religious, and yet be cold and backward in the concerns of religion, and contentedly uncertain whether the infinite objects which it discloses may not be adverse to his eternal happiness—this is not rea-

son, but the supreme of inconsistency and stupidity.

III. It is spiritual religion alone in which the human mind can find *sensible and satisfying enjoyment*. True religious enjoyment consists in a heartfelt complacency in God and divine things. There is indeed a feeling of quietude arising from the regular discharge of moral duties, and the routine of religious observances, which is not spiritual joy or peace, but the fruit of predominant self-righteousness and fatal delusion. It implies a great abiding spiritual apathy and thoughtlessness; for if sensibility were awake, and thought intelligently exercised on the person's habitual course of life, a general worldliness of spirit would be seen to pollute and vitiate the services of religion; and then these services, instead of yielding hope and comfort, would conspire with other things to work fear, and doubt, and misery, in the heart. — There is, however, a hope of Heaven different from that

of the self-righteous, which springs from reflection on the general tenour of our conduct, regarded as an evidence of our spiritual character and state. This probably is the hope of the mass of professed Christians. We speak not against it, except by lamenting that it should be made so generally the measure of spiritual enjoyment. What is the amount of positive happiness that a hope of this kind yields? It is not the *assurance* of hope—the living, refreshing, soul-elevating hope of the first Christians. It does not preclude doubt, but only despair. It leaves its subjects uncertain of their state. They are not *sure* of their calling and election. The Spirit does not so “witness with their spirits” but that they remain halting, hesitating, trembling, in respect to their final sentence; or if not trembling, wondering that they do not, amidst their want of satisfying evidence. Such is the general feelings of professed Christians, in respect to their character

and prospects for eternity — and such, or worse than this, must necessarily be the feeling of all who do not cultivate and exercise a spiritual religion. Nothing but a sensible, living, joyous intercourse with God and Christ and the things of the Spirit, can wholly displace anxiety or even torment from the heart. Without this there may be self-complacency, there may be delusion, there may be negative hope mingled with fear; but a soul-satisfying evidence of present acceptableness in the sight of God, and of ultimate admission into the joys of his kingdom, there cannot be, without the pleasurable consciousness of the reality and excellency of heavenly things. This consciousness is a witness that cannot be resisted; it is itself the earnest and foretaste of eternal life, and can no more co-exist with doubt, than the consciousness of an outward world can co-exist with hesitation as to the reality of such a world. Let a man *feel* habitual love to God — let him feel the

peace of God in his heart — let him feel the Spirit of Christ living in him — let him have conscious delight in the truths and promises of the Gospel, and he will then enjoy evidences of his state, which will displace every doubt, and yield him “glory begun below.” If therefore we would have a religion full of comforts and pleasures, a religion which will yield us solid satisfaction, let us fix our minds, not on that customary religion which rests in periodical services and outward strictness, but on a religion of intimate, sensible, living communion and intercourse with God.

IV. This is the only kind of religion which *perceptibly advances the soul in the life and likeness of God*. They who sensibly commune with God, and keep their hearts alive to the excellency of divine things, from day to day, cannot but become more and more assimilated to those glorious objects. These objects operating upon susceptible and affectionate minds, must

make upon them their own impression and image; and that image must at length become too resplendent in the spirit and life, to leave it doubtful whether there has been progress and growth in grace. Men of spiritual religion, therefore, must be advancing, as time passes, toward the measure of the stature of a perfect Christian. In their views, feelings, and conversation, they must be rising nearer and nearer to "the just made perfect." The beauty of holiness must be gradually brightening upon them, and their affinity and relationship to Heaven must be becoming increasingly manifest. It must be so, by the very laws of such intercourse, as they maintain with heavenly objects; and that it is so in fact, no one can be ignorant. These men, of whatever country or age, do advance in moral worth and loveliness, as they advance in years. Time invigorates them in all the principles, and beautifies them in all the graces of holiness. Even while "their

outward man perishes" — while the animal vivacity and vigour of their earlier years decay, "they are renewed in the inward man, day by day." Was it not thus with all the spiritually-minded, whose names we have mentioned, or of whom we have ever read or heard? But the same cannot be truly said of men of other kinds of religion. They are, in regard to religion and holiness, little better at one time than at another. Take them when you will, in the middle of life, or in old age, they are not, as far as man can see, much improved in spirit. Their hearts do not seem to be much more in Heaven; their affections do not appear to be more spiritual; their devotedness to God and his interests does not seem increased. Call to mind instances of the customary sort of religion — think of those whose religion is of this kind, and consider whether these remarks are not exemplified in their conduct. Do they present themselves to our thoughts as Christians advancing in the

life of God? Are they evidently holier men now than they were some years ago? Do we feel more confident of their final salvation at this moment than we did when they first professed conversion? Is it more certain now — more certain to themselves or to any others — that they will be saved, than it was then? Alas, it is well if the probability of their final salvation is not diminished. Professed Christians who have not a spiritual and affectionate religion, often degenerate, but seldom improve. It is not merely praying, or reading, or hearing, that profits the soul, but *just feeling* toward the objects with which the soul converses, or should converse, in prayer, reading, and hearing. These exercises are nothing, except as *sensibility of heart* pervades and animates them. It is by this sensibility, that God and our own spirits come into union and fellowship. It is by this, that our souls mingle with the invisible things of the sanctifying Spirit. Two lifeless masses are

not more inoperative on each other, than the unseen world on the human character, if sensibility toward that world is wanting. We may speak, and read, and think, but we shall never be made better, if we do not *feel*.

Now when we remember what the Scriptures teach concerning the essential progressiveness of true grace in the heart, that it is as the little "leaven which leaveneth the whole lump;" and join with this the fact, that professed Christians who are not spiritual in their feelings, do not visibly advance in the divine life, can we rest satisfied with a religion like theirs? Is it by any means certain that their religion will save the soul?

V. Spiritual religion is far more *useful* than any other. Usefulness depends on three things, — power, readiness to use it, and using it in a proper manner; and no kind of religion includes these things in so eminent a degree as the spiritual religion of which we speak. — There is more

power in this than in any other sort of religion. Knowledge is power in religious concerns as well as every other; and there is no religion so favourable as this to the acquisition of divine knowledge. Men may be led to pursue such knowledge by curiosity, ambition, and other motives; but the attainments so made will be superficial, when compared with the illumination shed down from the Holy Spirit into the mind and heart of the spiritually discerning and inquiring Christian. How sure and substantial, how deep and enduring, is the knowledge of the spiritually-minded, in comparison with theirs who know every thing in speculation only. And ordinarily their knowledge is greater, as well as of a better kind. They meditate more in the Scriptures, they reflect more, they pray more, and the relish for divine things which inclines them to do so, makes them quick of spiritual understanding, and thus becomes the means of a more rapid growth

in divine knowledge than would otherwise be possible. And as the religion of which we treat joins to greater knowledge, greater grace and holiness, which likewise is the highest kind of power, it must, in respect to its intrinsic strength and efficiency, be incomparably superior to every other.

But not only have the men of this religion more strength, they are also more *disposed to use their strength* than others. It is a false notion of spiritual-mindedness, that it inclines men to a secluded and inactive contemplative life. It had not this tendency in Christ and his apostles, or the prophets; the influence of whose mighty labours is felt over the world to this day. Spiritual-mindedness is nothing but a living and efficient benevolence, duly awake and active. From the secret place of the Most High, in which it dwells, it looks abroad upon the sensual world with a self-sacrificing, self-devoting compassion, like that of our blessed Saviour; and is ever ready to

go forth, in his spirit and strength, to every work of faith and love. Customary religion, and even principles of natural goodness, have led men to practise some forms of benevolence ; but it is spiritual-mindedness that has cared for the bodies and souls of men on the largest scale, and has wrought miracles of mercy and love, the record of which will endure longer than the sun and the moon.

But the religion here recommended is pre-eminent, as we have already said, not only in power and in aptitude to use that power, but in the *excellence of the manner* in which it uses it. It is both in labours more abundant, and in wisdom and propriety of action more perfect. It does its work aptly, skilfully, prudently, with a spirit congenial to its ends ; a spirit of meekness and love, and dependence on God. In the highest instances and sorts of benevolent labour, men of little spirituality would not find themselves in their proper element.

The unsuitableness of their spirit and manner would make their work irksome, and mischief might be the result. How much out of place do such men find themselves under remarkable effusions of the Holy Spirit; when the accessions to the happiness of the universe are as the "clouds, and as when doves fly to their windows." It is spirituality alone that can make men as "polished shafts" to the consciences of their fellow-men at such seasons. It is only this, indeed, which can ensure a right and successful way of fulfilling any of the offices of the holiest and noblest order of well-doing.

These things demonstrate the superior usefulness of the spiritual kind of religion. Observation also confirms this conclusion. One spiritual Christian in a church is often more useful than a hundred ordinary professors. How many hundred Christians of the common kind would be required to make, in point of usefulness, one Baxter, or Edwards, or Martyn. These,

it is true, were men of powerful minds ; but it was their superior spirituality that made their power the means of exalting the ages in which they lived. There were other professed Christians of minds as powerful and of learning as great as theirs, who did very little toward advancing the cause of holiness in the world. If then we would pass our days in the most useful manner — if we would give the church and our generation the greatest reason to bless God for our existence, let our religion be of the spiritual kind.

VI. This kind of religion will *best sustain us under evil*. He who is accustomed to converse affectionately and delightfully with God — to lay open his heart to the influence of His “excellent glory” and of eternal objects, will acquire a capacity of enduring evil, altogether peculiar to himself. His frame of spirit, and the blessedness of that intercourse, make him in a manner invulnerable to evil. The day of trouble to the

man of the world is insupportable, because, besides the evil of his unholy spirit, he has no counterbalancing good in prospect. Past prosperity cannot be recalled ; the future is unknown, and may be worse than the present. The unspiritual, unexercised professor of religion, too, may not be prepared for that day : the hope which now supports him may fail him then. He will then need other evidences of the divine favour than those on which he is accustomed to rely ; evidences which may not be afforded him then, as they are not sought for now. But the spiritual Christian is not thus forlorn in heart when his time of trial comes. The feeling toward God expressed by the Psalmist, "whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee," having been habitual with him even in the days of prosperity, he will not be desponding and heart-smitten now ; for God, his chosen portion, remains the same, and his delight in God is the same

also : and how small a loss can befall that person, how little can he be injured by any calamity in the whole creation, whose happiness was not in the creation, but in its infinite Author. Besides, if there is a man to whom the Father of compassion will show himself *especially* gracious in the hour of need, that man, doubtless, is the spiritually-minded Christian. Who is an heir of the promises, if he is not? Whom, if not him, does God love and delight in? There may be room for doubt whether other sorts of professed Christians, — all other sorts, — may not be deceivers or deceived; but who doubts *his* piety who lives a spiritual and heavenly life? Such persons are assuredly the children of God, whom God will not forsake in times of trouble. The night of their affliction shall be as the brightest and best of their prosperous days. They shall glorify God in “passing through the fire;” their end shall be peace, and they shall depart, leaving mankind impress-

ed with the certainty, that whoever may find their hope of ultimate happiness disappointed, these men were more fit for heaven than for earth, and “have passed through the gate into the city” of God.

These are some of the considerations which show what manner of persons we all should be who call ourselves by the name of Christ. — But there is one *objection* which we fear will weigh more with some persons than all these considerations, however solemn and conclusive : it is, that the religion we recommend *is not a practicable one*. It may do perhaps for a very few peculiarly favoured and peculiarly situated persons, but it will not answer for the generality of mankind — it is too refined, too elevated, too difficult a religion for the mass of the people. It is not, we suppose, the import of this objection, that this is a different religion from that which the Scriptures teach. The scriptural certificate to this religion we have already presented. If there is a

religion on earth that corresponds to the very religion of the Bible, it is unquestionably this. Other religions may not be scriptural, but no one can doubt whether this religion is either scriptural or true. The evidences of its genuineness are like the sun's meridian beams. The conscience of the world decides that it is genuine — the religion of the Bible — the religion of God — the religion which God has revealed to man as the sure way to Heaven. But has God bound his creatures to an impracticable kind of religion? Or has he prescribed a religion for all the world, which cannot be practised by more than one man in a million? It is obvious that if the objection means that the religion which, beyond all others, has the best claim to be received as the religion of the Scriptures, is strictly, and in plain truth, an impracticable religion to the bulk of mankind, the objection is profane and reproachful to the divine goodness and wisdom, and can hard-

ly find a welcome lodgement in any other than an unholy breast. No ! the fact that this religion is practicable by one man, proves it to be practicable by any and every other man. If any one man has ever exemplified this religion, the matter is at rest : *man* may exemplify it : it is a religion for man, and a religion which *every* man is bound to exemplify. It should be considered by those who make this objection, that they are limiting, not merely the physical capability of man, but the resources of the Holy One Himself. The question as to practicability — the true question is, not whether I, in my own strength, shall succeed in practising this religion, but whether the Spirit and grace of God can enable me to practise it.

We are not required to do any thing in reliance on our own strength, which truly would fail us, even for the exercise of a good thought. On the contrary, we are warned against self-confidence, as the cer-

tain way to be ruined, and are directed to Him for strength in whom it hath pleased the Father that “all fulness should dwell;” and certain it is that destruction awaits us, if we do not go to Him, and put our exclusive trust in the provision made for us in Him. The question is this, is there not a sufficiency for us in all the fulness of the Godhead? Can we not do all things included in this religion “through Christ strengthening us?” Is there a man on earth whom Christ cannot strengthen to live the life of a spiritual Christian? Let this be demonstrated—let the arm of the Almighty be shortened—and then may it be affirmed that the religion we contend for is not a practicable religion. The truth is that the generality of professed Christians never strive for, never aim at, this kind of religion. It is not in their hearts deliberately to purpose and intend that this religion shall be theirs. They content themselves with what is customary; and that, for the most part,

is to be as religious as expediency or personal convenience may dictate. What labours, what pains-taking do they practise, to keep themselves in the love and fear of God all the day long? What care do they exercise not to grieve the Holy Spirit? What aspirations of soul have they for eminent holiness of heart? What forgetting do we see in them, of the things which are behind; or what reaching forth unto those which are before? What mortifications of the flesh; what fastings and watchings unto prayer do they practise? Who then are they that pronounce spiritual Christianity to be impracticable, but those who have never put it to the test of experiment? It must be confessed, that if professed Christians will not try and intend to live spiritually, they cannot live so. Paul could not have lived so without deliberate purpose and constant effort.

Still, some will think that although spiritual religion is the best and safest kind, yet

as the more common sort may suffice, they will content themselves with that. But does not this savour more of a low and calculating selfishness, than of that spirit of regeneracy which instinctively pants after entire freedom from sin, and entire conformity to the image of God? Have those persons any true holiness who desire no more than may answer to keep them out of the world of wo? But is it certain that the common sort of religion *will* suffice? Who feels certain of it? Have the professors of that religion an assurance of their salvation? Their hearts answer, No! Has the world any assurance of their salvation? All men stand in doubt—and it is indeed a doubtful matter. St. Paul thought he should be a cast-away if he did not keep his body under and bring it into subjection. Do these professors of religion practise such discipline on themselves, that their souls may not be lost? Who would stand in their souls' stead? In the infinite concerns of religion,

no uncertainty, no suspense of mind ought to be tolerated, if it can possibly be prevented ; and prevented it may be, by giving due diligence to that end. And the needful diligence in this case is not more than men generally employ to secure worldly things. But shall men—shall professors of religion, use more diligence to secure to themselves things that perish in the using, than to lay hold on eternal life ? Are such men Christians ? Must we not tremble at the question !

Thus irresistible and overwhelming, are the arguments for **SPIRITUAL RELIGION**. Should we venture upon any other ? Destitute of this kind of religion, is there a man living who, for a thousand worlds, would take our place at death or judgement ?

II.

SPIRITUAL JOY.

EXPOUNDING the rule of duty to those who have violated it, tends in the first instance, if they have ingenuous minds, to exercise them with sorrow, but that sorrow ends in joy. The children of the captivity, who by warrant from the king of Persia, returned to the land of their fathers, had for a long time been destitute of spiritual instruction, and almost as a matter of course had fallen into spiritual insensibility and unconcern. But they were somehow led to gather themselves together, as one man, to hear the word of God;* and Ezra the Scribe, with certain Levites, his assistants, read in the

* Nehemiah 8: 1.

book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused the people to understand the reading. The effect was,—an illustrious instance of the heart-melting power of divine truth,—a deep sense of sin in the entire assembly. *All the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.* An unusual spectacle in this hardhearted world! An immense concourse of men all in tears before God on account of their sins! Well might the ministers of religion hasten to fulfil the commission, *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.* It is needful that sinful men should sorrow, but there is nothing desirable in sorrow on its own account, and God works it in his chosen, only that by means of it, he may open a fit channel into their breasts for the consolations of his Spirit to flow in. Hence Nehemiah the Tirshatha, and Ezra the Priest, the Scribe, and the teaching Levites, dismissed that great assembly of mourners with these gracious words: *This day is*

holy to the Lord your God : mourn not, nor weep : go your way, eat the fat and drink the sweet, and send portions to them for whom nothing is prepared ; for this day is holy unto our Lord ; neither be ye sorry, FOR THE JOY OF THE LORD IS YOUR STRENGTH.

As is the sorrow of a penitent heart, such is the nature of the joy to which it leads. Both are the fruit of the Holy Spirit. There are joys of a different kind. There is a natural joy which one feels after escaping out of great danger, or being unexpectedly blessed with worldly good. There is also a religious joy which springs from mistaken impressions. These are not the joy of the Lord ; they are but for a moment ; they pass away, and leave the heart void, desolate, and despairing. The joy of the Lord, the same which fills the eternal mind, is the only joy that meets the desires and exigencies of any rational being. To all rational minds, of God, angels and men, there is but one true happiness. Angels are not

happy, and men are not happy, unless they share the happiness of Him who is over all, blessed forever. With Him is the fountain of life ;—not a rill, not a drop of bliss in the universe, which that fountain does not yield. They who go elsewhere for happiness, wander into boundless deserts, where all is drought, and burning winds, and vast desolation. What is the exhilaration of the animal spirits, what mere intellectual delight, what the pleasures of sin, the utmost indulgence of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, to that immortal spirit in man which bears the image, and pants for the blessedness of God? How can a man be called happy, when almost every thing belonging to him that raises him above the brute, is either wholly portionless, or is tantalized with what is no more suited to its nature, than shadows or dreams to sustain the bodily life?

And now what is this joy of the Lord? It is joy arising from the same causes, ter-

minating on the same objects, and yielding the same results as that which the infinite Being himself possesses, without measure. Its spring is holiness ; its objects are the divine perfections and works ; its results are the various forms of true beneficence and kindness. It is the joy of holy love ; of complacency in God and goodness, and of benevolence to his creatures. It is delight, sensible and satisfying delight, such as forms the boundless and fathomless ocean of heavenly beatitude. As existing in sinners of mankind, its precursor ordinarily, as has been intimated, is holy sorrow ; and its medium is a living union with Christ, by faith. It is, as shared by them, the purchase of the Saviour's precious blood, and the fruit of the renewing influence of the Spirit of God.

Our object, however, at present is not so much to describe this feeling, as to show the power of it, as a practical principle. The joy of the Lord is **OUR STRENGTH**. It

is the spring of our greatest efficiency for good ; the great mover and inciter of the soul to holy action and achievement ; the sustainer also of our energies in accomplishing our benevolent undertakings ; what, above all things keeps the mind going cheerfully forward in its spiritual efforts and adventures, and bears it on without fainting or weariness to a successful issue of its struggles and conflicts. We propose to offer a few remarks in illustration of this sentiment.

Joy is the achiever of almost every good or noble thing which is done under the sun. There is nothing like it to make the spirit of man erect, resolute, persevering, patient, and indefatigable. Almost universally, where there is great labour, at least available labour, there is also great mental delight. The exceptions do but confirm the general principle. Men may be impelled to labour by ambition, by necessity, by fear, by avarice ; but unless their labour

becomes itself delight, what great thing, or noble thing, or what thing worthy of their pains, do they ordinarily accomplish? Consult the sons of the muses, the toilers at deep investigation and exact analysis, the makers of those books,—the best products of human labour,—that come forth into the community like living luminaries to pour the light and heat of mind through ages to come: Consult all successful artists, jurists, statesmen, merchants, and agriculturists; and you will find, that these several classes of labourers are held to their respective sorts of work, mainly by the chord of sensible delight or pleasurable interest in the object of attention. Who would anticipate brilliant success from any course of exertion in which the man went forward under some other impulse than that of lively interest in his work? Where there is no delight, the heart will not be found; and what can a man do in one sphere, when his heart is in another? But we need not

enlarge on this point. All men see it, feel it, perfectly understand it. It is responded to at once from the breast of every one.

Now, our remark is this, that the principle is as true in its application to man's moral agency, as to his physical or intellectual. It is joy, for the most part, that makes men industrious and indefatigable in the fulfilment of moral claims and undertakings. This is the great principle of Christian attainment ; of holy zeal and enterprise in the people of God. Why should it not be so ? Would it not be surprising and unaccountable to find it otherwise ? Should we not ask with wonder, how is it that a principle which holds good in every other department of rational agency, should fail in this department ? Are the laws of nature violated in the spiritual kingdom ? No ; reason requires us to believe that this is the very sphere in which, above all others, the efficiency of this influence is discovered. The influence itself

exists here in a far nobler kind, than any where else. The joy of the Lord is as far above all other kinds of joy, as holiness is better than other kinds of excellence. The just conclusion is, that the effects of this joy are proportionately superior ; the conclusion of common sense, confirmed by the universal testimony of Scripture and experience. It may however be useful, to enter somewhat particularly into an examination of the tendencies of this feeling ; to inquire, in several instances, into the ways in which its efficacy is exerted and discovered.

We observe then, in the first place, that joy gives life and spirit to all the mental powers and operations. A delighted mind is full of brightness and alertness, finds action easy, has all its faculties at command, and exerts them with intensity of application. Under the vivifying effusions of joy, imagination awakes, perception becomes acute, the range of observation is enlarged,

judgement is invigorated, memory is sharpened, taste refined, the whole soul, in short, is instinct with the spirit of intellectual life, and waits only for the orders of the will, to put forth its utmost energies, and to accomplish the highest results of which it is capable. And the will itself is in a great degree, influenced, if not determined by joy. It is when men have delight in the things about which their volitions and purposes are conversant, that they form bold and firm resolutions; then it is that they decide freely and promptly to enter upon courses of mental exertion, of which perhaps the thought would not have occurred to them in the absence of joy. We offer no proof of what we now affirm, but make our appeal directly to human consciousness. No one who reflects on the history of his own mental states and operations can call it in question. To every one the matter is as certain as consciousness itself. Nor is it inexplicable. Happiness is the

ultimate end of rational being. All sentient being indeed, of whatever nature, languishes and pines when kept back from the final end of its existence; it is, on the other hand, in its state of greatest perfection, when it perfectly enjoys that end. It is so with the mind of man; joy is its ultimate end; in possession of that end, all its faculties are in their best condition. We only add, if other kinds of joy have an invigorating influence on the mind, much more must that incomparably higher joy of which we speak.

Again, as this feeling imparts such life to the mind itself, so does it brighten by this means, the objects of intellection. Its influence in this respect is sometimes as if a new sun had been created to irradiate the world in which mind moves. You yesterday read Milton with a wearied heart, and fell asleep over the sublime glories of his page; this morning you perused the same page with a spirit refreshed

by sweet and sufficient sleep, and you were amazed and overpowered, by its wondrous creations of fancy and taste. The world of faith, the world revealed in the gospel, a short time since, when you endeavoured to think upon it, with a soul almost dead to spiritual excellence, was nearly as the region of emptiness and darkness ; now, when the spirit of a revival sheds its life through your bosom, that world of invisible glory eclipses the world of sense, and absorbs the powers and sensibilities of your being. What was the Holy One to you, some weeks ago, when you pretended to worship Him, with a dull and worldly heart ; what is He now, when a joyful sense of His excellency draws from your breast the ardent exhortation to those who know nothing of your blessedness, to taste and see that the Lord is good ? What a difference in the character of the Saviour at present, from what He seemed to you then ? The whole Bible, the whole subject

of religion, how immensely different. Yet the whole of this difference is the result of spiritual delight in your own mind. The joy of the Lord then, is it not your strength? If you had an angel's powers, what could you do with no distinct views of the objects with which those powers are conversant?

Attend, next, for a moment, to the influence of spiritual pleasure on the performance of devotional exercises. Who is it that has grown weary of his closet, his Bible, his domestic altar, the meeting for prayer, and the solemn services of the Sabbath? Could you inspect the heart of such a person, is it probable that you would find it the abode of much religious enjoyment? Do you think it would be possible to discover any thing in such a man's heart, to justify his saying with the spiritually minded Psalmist, one day in the courts of the Lord is better than a thousand? No one, I am sure, could believe it possible. A deserter from the throne of grace, a neglecter of

devotional duties, is one who takes little or no delight in the performance of those duties. To him who has heavenly joy springing up in his mind, the sanctuary, the place of social prayer, the closet, the solitary walk, will be the gate of heaven. Such a man will be inclined to pray, not merely thrice, nor even seven times a day, but to be praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit ; to dwell in the secret place of the Most High, to abide in the tabernacle of the Almighty continually. The spirit of devotion never tires, while the joy of the Lord is its prompter. Day and night, it can continue its aspirations and outpourings of affection. It has no content in shortness, in interruption, in lifeless exercises. No ; the joy of the Lord lifts the heart up to heaven, and keeps it there, communing with holy angels, with the church of the first-born, with the spirits of just men made perfect, with God the Judge of all, with Jesus the Mediator, and with his most precious blood of sprinkling.

We will now advert, in few words, to the influence of this grace on other gracious states of mind. We refer not to the indirect influence which it exerts upon them, by promoting the mind's spiritual intercourse with their objects ; by inclining it to heavenly meditation and prayer ; but to a direct and necessary connexion between this and other holy feelings. All the gracious affections, being of the same family and intimately allied to each other, exert a reciprocal influence on one another, promotive of each other's strength and growth ; but there appears to be a pre-eminence in the friendly power of joy upon its sister graces. The reason seems to be, that joy, being the end of all the heavenly affections, when this feeling connects itself with them, they must of course be more vigorous than in any other circumstances. Let us illustrate in a few instances. Love often *exists* apart from joy, but it seldom *flourishes* apart from it. It is when the heart finds delight in

loving, that it loves with great intensity and enlargement. Then it is that it gives itself away to the beloved object, and as it were loses itself in it. Hope too is fed by joy; joy, in this world, being the earnest and foretaste of the object of hope. The full assurance of hope is always the effect of joy reigning in the soul; it can come from nothing else; no external evidence can produce it; it cannot be gained from inference, or any witness without; no, it is the beginning of heaven, the peace of God which passeth all understanding; this it is, that displaces every doubt in the soul, and fills the mind with certainty respecting its eternal blessedness;—joy does it, and nothing else can. Faith likewise rises and approximates to vision, when joy gives it wings; for when the things believed are at the same time rejoiced in, how can it be otherwise than that faith in the reality of those things should amount to the utmost confidence and boldness? How also does

the relenting of the heart in view of sin and the mercy of God abound, when the soul turns her eye to these objects, after being melted into tenderness, and sweetness, by a rejoicing sense of the beauty of holiness? We could add to these instances, if it were necessary; but they are sufficient. It is exceedingly manifest, that it must give zest and strength to every good feeling of which the mind is capable, to have that feeling attended with conscious delight, and such delight too as the joy of the Lord, the very joy of the supreme and blessed God.

Let us next notice how nobly this feeling of spiritual delight can bear up the mind amidst assaults of outward affliction. Through these assaults must all make their triumphant way, who at last gain entrance into the world of rest. *As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.* Here it is that strength is demanded, and what in these

circumstances imparts strength like this holy joy? Hope and faith are indeed needful, but it is joy commonly which gives faith and hope their strength. Unattended by joy, they may stay up the mind in some sort, amidst these seasons of storm and darkness; they may keep it from sinking into the deep waters of despair, but they may not do even this without a great inward strife. Many a saint going through the floods of trouble in the mere exercise of hope and faith, has meanwhile trembled in himself, lest by failing to retain these supporters, he should perish in the passage. But how is the scene changed at once, when the light of heavenly joy springs up in darkness? What can any floods or fires of tribulation then do, to hinder the mind's steadfastness, and swift progress in its upward course to God? These trials seem to assist rather than hinder it on its way. How matchless the efficacy of this divine joy! It enlivens faith and hope, and all the

other heavenly affections. It is as if omnipotence itself had entered into all the feelings of the mind. The mind becomes more than a conqueror. The very violence of fire is quenched ; and sometimes, as in the case of the martyr, the fiercest flames, under the influences of spiritual joy, not only lose their peculiar power, but become an instrument of ease, as the dying martyr found the flames were to him a bed of roses. This may savour of mere ardour to the externally strict religionist, but he is not set to judge in this case : we appeal in verification of what we have said to the Scriptures of truth, and the history of the church. It has been fulfilled in thousands of real examples of whom the world was not worthy.

The power of this feeling, as evinced in its resistance to *the influence of worldly good*, is a further commendation of it. It is this influence, far more than that of outward affliction, which tries and ensnares the spirit

of man. Indeed, what is it that constitutes the bitterness of affliction, but its abridging or destroying our enjoyment of the world? Were we wholly dead to worldly good, small would be the power of affliction to disturb us. It is this then, the world's influence, that forms our grand encumbrance. Here is the great adversary of our souls. Here is what gives all other temptations their strength. It is this which gives the great destroyer himself all the advantage he has against us; which enables him to reach our spirits, with his wiles and darts of perdition; and which makes us his willing captives and vassals. What then can most effectually secure us against the enchantment and tyranny of this present evil world? Whatever that is, it is more to be desired than all things in the universe besides; he who has it, would be a madman to part with it for the treasures of creation.

What then is this priceless treasure? It

is unquestionably a happiness higher than that which the world has to offer. The human mind, by the nature God has given it, evermore seeks enjoyment. Since its sad perversion, by the original apostacy, it looks for enjoyment to the visible and outward world. That world besets it, with its ensnaring temptations, at the commencement of its existence, and works in it the fatal delusion that in worldly good lies the supreme blessedness. This gross delusion, the grand difficulty to be overcome in recovering the mind to the dominion of virtue and truth, can no otherwise be disarmed of its controlling influence than by the presence and experience in the mind of a better happiness than the world can give. We appeal for confirmation of this remark to human consciousness in all the generations of mankind. Many means have been employed to break the world's power in the heart; the world's deceitfulness has been set in the strongest light; the terrors

of eternity have been set in array against the idolatry of the world ; the utmost power of motive and persuasion has been exhausted ; and to what result ? The understanding has been convinced, resolutions have been formed, vows have been made, seclusion from the society of men has been tried, but the world's pleasures have been secretly loved, and if they have not been returned to, with increased eagerness, the effects of forced mortification and abstinence have been worse, if possible, than those of indulgence itself. For levity and smiling deceit, and contemptuous indifference to divine things, there has been an exchange of disdainful self-righteousness and grave formality and bitter misanthropy. No, never has the influence of the world been truly excluded, or even interrupted, except where the mind has been conscious of having within itself a joy superior to any which can be obtained from created and temporal things. And what is such a joy,

but that whereof we speak? Besides this, and creature-joy, there is no other. Here then is the one thing needful for the effectual resistance and banishment of the spirit of the world, the strength of all temptation, and of the tempter himself.

This is the world's vanquisher, and how easy, how perfect is its triumph. The heart takes a farewell of the world, a glad and rejoicing farewell, a farewell final and everlasting. Why should it not? Does he who eats at the table of a king care for the beggar's crumbs? The man who walks at large enjoying the sweet influences of God's work's, and exulting in the consciousness of being an illustrious family's boast, or a nation's benefactor, does he envy the fancied greatness of the naked maniac chained to the floor of his cell? No more can he who tastes the joys of the Lord, long, while he does so, for the low pleasures of the world. How can he be tempted by appeals to ambition, whose

ambition is already fixed upon higher honour than that of any throne in creation ; or by appeals to the love of possession, who is by enjoyment at this moment, the heir and possessor of all things ; or by appeals to the love of pleasure, whose spirit is drinking of the pure river of the water of life ? The joy of a renewed soul, when it first sees and adores the beauty of the divine character, what a poor recompense would the wealth and the glory of a thousand creations be to that soul for the loss of what it then feels. Oh ! there is nothing so much needed, in order to invest Christians with the mild glory of a heavenly conversation, as this frame of soul. Were this sacred feeling habitually dominant in their breasts, how would it adorn them in the eye of God and man, in all the beauties of practical spirituality ? Holiness to the Lord, would be inscribed on all their secular actions and pursuits ; they would be in respect to care for the body as the fowls of heaven for

their food, or the lilies of the field for their clothing ; in room of a fretted and peevish spirit under the bitter disturbances of life, they would have enduring meekness and quietness ; instead of aiming by covert measures at self-promotion in the church, there would be brotherly love, in honour preferring one another ; and instead of that spirit of mutual contention and concision which has ever been the reproach of the Christian name, there would be the keeping of the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace. Oh, this is the greatest desideratum for the times in which we live ! Have what we may, be the signs of the times more animating than they ever have been, let revivals be more and more multiplied, there will not, there cannot be, the needful improvement in Christian character and temper, until God in his mercy shall send abroad the spirit of holy joy in the hearts of his unfaithful, unworthy people.

Again, notwithstanding the advancement

of this age on former times, in respect to liberality and labours of love, there will never be what we judge needful in these grand respects to the conversion of the world, until the time comes for the more general effusion of this spirit upon the church. The joy of the Lord is our strength, for making what we deem to be the requisite sacrifices and exertions for the universal spread of the gospel. We have more than enough of treasure in our hands, but we have no heart to use it for the purpose in question. We admit that we ought so to use it; we confess this to one another; we confess it in prayer to God; we lament over our parsimony; but we still lavish our possessions on our lusts, or hoard them for the ruin of our children; and reluctantly give, it may be, the fraction of a tithe, to aid in pouring the glorious light of Christian hope over the wide world of heathenism. Appeals on appeals, the year round, are rung in our ears from every quarter of the earth. We

are plied almost daily with a system of strenuous solicitation ; the universe of motive is searched for materials of persuasion ; but still, the mass of Christians, having ears to hear, hear not, and having hearts to perceive, yet, in this matter of giving for the spread of the gospel, they do not understand. That it is a privilege and a mercy to be allowed to contribute any thing for the furtherance of this object, is to them a mystery indeed : they cannot even comprehend the extent of *duty* here : they are wearied beyond their patience by incessant calls for aid ; and after all is done, the burden of the expense of carrying on the great enterprise, to which Christians have by profession and covenant devoted all they have, is borne chiefly by a few.

Can we be ignorant of the cause of this insensibility to sacred obligation in the christian church ? Do we not see what it is that makes members of the church so merciless towards the souls of their perish-

ing fellow-men? Is it not palpable that the joy of God's salvation is wanting in their own hearts ; that they take little or no lively pleasure in the things of the Spirit ? If their own hearts were but moderately expanded, with this pure feeling, they would not be able to shut up their compassions from the wretched children of darkness, who, by myriads a day, are dying without hope. It must verily be so ; the Christians of this age have generally but little happiness, little sensible delight in God. They are not, as to any feeling of blessedness, happy Christians. They have little communion in spirit and feeling, from day to day, with the Head and members of the heavenly church. The first touches of this joy would break asunder every cord of avarice, and open wide the heart and the hand for beneficent action. There seems to be a tendency in all delight to incline us to liberality. Hence, those who solicit our favour, prefer making their approaches to

us, when our mood of mind is happy. But this joy is the very life and strength of benevolence ; it is the parent of all good ; the source of every stream and drop of blessedness in creation. Let it enter the heart, and covetousness is gone out of it, by the same necessity by which darkness flees before the beams of the sun. See how its contrariety to covetousness showed itself in the first converts to the cross of Christ : What solicitation did they need to induce them to give for the extension of the gospel ? They gave all they had, and who can suppose that they could have had as much pleasure in appropriating it to themselves, as they enjoyed in parting with it, for the good of the common cause ? Instances of the like kind, in individuals at least, are not wanting in modern times. Such instances our recent revivals have supplied. The joy of the Lord is the strength of revivals ; and who knows not that revivals are the church's only hope,

both for the means and the men by which the world is to be converted ?

Assuredly, we want nothing else to replenish the treasury of the Lord, and supply all requisite resources, but that the hearts of Christians should cease to be so void of that sensible enjoyment of God, with which they should be always full. Had the church but that fountain within herself to draw from, rivers of treasure, if needed, would be at her command ; and she could supply at once, the very ends of the earth, with the means of salvation. She would have a missionary in spirit in each of her sons and daughters. It is this blessedness I speak of, which looses the tongues of Christians, and makes them eloquent in teaching every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, that knowledge of God and Christ which is unto life eternal. Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, said the mourning Psalmist, then will I teach transgressors thy ways.

It would wing their feet for swift journies through the length and breadth of the earth, and the glad tidings of saving love would spread from land to land, and be heard in every island, every hamlet, every dwelling on the globe before the present generation has passed away.

And finally, we are not sure, that if the joy of the Lord pervaded the christian church, to the degree to which it might, and by all means should extend, the work of saving the world *would not go on of itself*, almost without labour. Certain it is, that in that condition of things labour would itself be joy; but may we not believe, (now that Christianity is no stranger in the earth, but has for eighteen hundred years, been giving infallible proof of her celestial descent, and her continued connexion with the place of her origin,) that the necessity for patient and agonizing effort, if the church were in the state supposed, would be superseded?

Heaven then would in a sense come down to earth ; the tabernacle of God would be with men ; and mankind would know and see the place of happiness ; and would they not also by the grace of God, through the operation of that new spectacle, be drawn thitherwards as of themselves ? The nature of man still inclines him after happiness. The disappointment of six thousand years has not abated the strength of this indestructible propensity. Who can tell, but that such a sight as the general church of Christ, filled with the joy of the Lord, would, under the divine blessing, determine that propensity to its proper end ? That it is of all things the best adapted to have this effect, is certainly a good reason for supposing that the Spirit of grace, who is also the Spirit of fitness and order, would prefer it before any other instrumentality. For our own part, we cannot but think it would do more in a few years, independently of labour, than the labour of many

ages without it. It would make the church a wonder in the earth. The mountain of the Lord's house would stand upon the top of the mountains ; it would be illuminated with divine glory ; its lustre would outshine that of the sun ; it would enlighten the world ; the remotest nations would see it, and would not all nations flow unto it ?

The world hitherto has not regarded the church as the seat of blessedness. It has had too little reason thus to regard it. Religion, by old report, is happiness ; but it is religion as contained in books, not as dwelling in the hearts or as shining out in the examples of its professors. With comparatively few exceptions, since the primitive times, the lives of Christians have misrepresented the spirit of their religion. The world have judged it a sour, unhappy, gloomy spirit ; and they have not wanted occasion to do so. They who have called themselves Christians have seemed little happier than others. The great majority

of them have practically declared their religion a gloomy thing, by going to the world itself for pleasure. Of the rest, the generality seem to pass through life, either with just enough of interest in religion to keep their membership in the church ; or in a cold perfunctory preciseness ; or in austerities which make religion identical with penance ; or in a forced driving zeal, which bespeaks more of fierceness than calm heavenly peace and joy. A few of noble exceptions indeed there have been, but to the world's eye these exceptive cases have commonly been lost, in the multitude of their gloomy or earthly minded brethren.

Has not the church been the dwelling-place, rather of doubt and fear, than of sensible delight in God ? Is it not the way of even the best of her members to be habitually questioning in themselves whether they be not reprobates, instead of exulting in the full assurance of hope ? Besides, has not the church been almost continually

a scene of contention, and confusion, and bitter wrath, a dread and terror, rather than a charm to the world? Oh, let it not be said that the experiment of what may be done to save the world by the influence of a general example of spiritual peace and joy has yet been tried. Enough has been ascertained to encourage the highest expectation; the successes of the first Christians, the fruits of the individual examples of such blessed men as Baxter, Flavel, and Edwards, beget the greatest confidence as to what would be the result of experiment; but the experiment remains to be made. Come the day when it shall be in full operation. Hope is fixed on the appearance of that period, and that it will appear, can there be a doubt? Have not the prophets declared it? The Lord in his compassion cut short its delay; make Jerusalem a rejoicing, and so a praise in the earth; give to all Christians, in answer to the prayer of Christ, that unity of soul, in which the

Father and the Son are united to each other, the unity of divine love and joy. Then shall our unhappy world learn the error of its way, forsake the broken cisterns of sin, and come to the Fountain of living waters.

These considerations make it manifest that none of those who call themselves Christians, ought to live so much as one day, or one hour, except when taking their rest in sleep, without the feeling of spiritual delight, potentially at least, in their hearts. It should suffice no member of the christian church, to maintain a conversation externally irreproachable, to live in honesty and in credit with mankind, and to observe the stated times and services of religion ; no, not even, if in addition to this, he sets an example of liberality. This is but a low standard of religion, and no man who has any just concern for the cause of God in this world, or for his own salvation, can content himself with it. A man may live

in this manner, and live in darkness, in coldness, in fear, respecting his own soul; and his fear may be realized. Every Christian on earth ought to be a specimen of the happiness Christianity is adapted to impart; a reflector by example of the light of heavenly joy. He ought to be not only a conscientious, a devout, a liberal Christian, but a happy Christian also; happy in God and the spirit of heaven, all the day long. He owes it to the cause of his Saviour, to himself, his family, his brethren in the faith, the world of mankind, to live a serene, cheerful, and heavenly life. This is plainly a just inference from the preceding remarks; and it is an inference which divine authority confirms. To rejoice in the Lord, is a command urged with great earnestness upon all Christians. Scripture is exceedingly strenuous in its mode of enforcing this command: *Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice.* What has been said may show us that

there is a sufficient reason for this requirement; and is it not strange indeed, that Christians, whose characteristic spirit is submissiveness to the divine will, should scarcely seem to blame themselves for an habitual disregard to it? What more could God have done, than he has done, to give his people grounds and occasions of joy? Has he kept his glory out of their view? Has he not shown himself good enough? Could he have loved them more than he has done? Could he have made greater sacrifices for their sakes? Could he have gone to greater lengths to win their complacency, than to give up his own dear Son, for the ransom of their souls? Could he have added a greater blessing after that, than to send down his Spirit to dwell with them forever? Could he have been more explicit and more full in his assurances of kind feeling and tender love? Could he have given them better promises, or spread before them brighter prospects, or called

them to greater privileges, or to a more honourable service? Has not God seemed in all his dispensations and doings towards his people, to have had distinctly in his purpose, that they should want nothing which infinite love could supply, to call forth their joy and gladness of soul? When by his Apostle, he lifts up the voice of authority, commanding them to rejoice in the Lord always,—can they be justified in replying to him, we have no causes for joy; the state of mind required demands an object suited to produce it, and no such object has been presented to us?

There are, it may be thought, *subjective* difficulties in the way. But can it be that there are insurmountable difficulties of this kind, when obligation to rejoice is in full force upon the mind? Who can believe this? Surely nothing but mental insanity, or such a condition of the body as sets aside self-control, in either of which cases, obligation ceases, can be a just apology for

not exercising holy joy. So abundant are the promises of divine grace, that if we are not straitened in ourselves, we may be able to keep up a calm and cheerful and heavenly frame of spirit in any circumstances of worldly discomposure which do not produce a real derangement of intellect. The triumph of some Christians over such circumstances has been complete ; nervous debility, severe sickness and pain, and the very agonies of dissolution have not been able to keep them from rejoicing in the Lord. If any feel incredulous in respect to this matter, let us ask them to consider whether if they walked as closely with God as did Baxter, or Paul, or Enoch, they would be likely to retain their present doubts. Alas, we destroy the health of the body by our reckless way of treating it, and then make bodily indisposition an excuse for keeping the soul in darkness and leanness and spiritual distempers.

The plain truth is this, that what hinders

our joy is allowed sin. The power of sin to do this is great. This little hand, said Whitefield, placing his hand near his eyes, as he was preaching in the field, while the glorious sun was flooding creation with his beams, — this little hand hides all the lustre of the sun from my eyes; and so a little sin may involve the soul in darkness, though the spiritual world be all bright as heaven itself. But should we therefore be content to live in darkness, or set ourselves with more resolution against all forms, and degrees of sin? The latter is the course of duty, and is it not also the course of wisdom? Is it idle to ask the question, What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness? Why is it, we do not understand, that our only concern in this world is to keep a guileless spirit, a conscience void of offence? Alas, that we should suffer such things as love of lucre, or of pre-eminence, or of sensual pleasure, or jealous and envious

and irascible feelings, to rest in our bosoms, and stay there from day to day, and week to week, and month to month, in the place which should be ever sacred to the gracious affections ; in the temple of the Holy Ghost ! Alas, that we should be so infrequent, so cursory, so cold in prayer ; so seldom in fastings, so formal and lifeless in the duties of the sanctuary : that we should be so uncircumspect in speech, so little intent on walking in the Spirit ; in all the pursuits of life, so regardless of the great principle of Christian morals, which demands that we do all things, even to eating and drinking, to the glory of God : that we should have so little fellowship, (might we not rather say, such disagreement ?) with Paul, in his purpose to do but this one thing all his life long, — forgetting the things behind, and reaching forth to those before, to press towards the mark, for the prize of his high calling ? Here is the secret of our want of religious joy, of our spiritual doubts and

fears ; and also of our readiness to justify them. But shall such things vitiate and set aside the law of Christ's kingdom before recited, *rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice ?*

No, this is as irreversible as any other statute of the eternal realm. It has been given out, not to be neglected, but obeyed. It is the duty of all Christians to rejoice evermore, and the importance of their fulfilling this duty, no tongue can fully tell. Immortal souls, in countless multitudes, have gone to an undone eternity, in consequence of its not having been fulfilled ; the salvation of the world still lingers from the same cause ; for want of holy joy in the church, all the means of grace in operation are comparatively ineffectual ; the triumph of the gospel is kept back, on this sole account ; and the gloominess and sadness of Christians, keep up a sort of rejoicing among the spirits of darkness.

III.

DOING GOOD.

PART FIRST.

THAT portion of mankind who acquire distinction and influence, ordinarily choose to themselves some profession or course of life, in which they think they can exert themselves to the best advantage. Some prefer the life of a soldier ; some devote themselves to politics ; some to science and literature, some to the arts, some to trade, and some to the sacred interests of religion. Of those who take the last as their appropriate calling, a part labour in the field of intellectual theology ; a part choose a life of prayer and contemplation ; and a part employ themselves in works of active goodness.

Had men, previously to our Lord's appearance in the flesh, been called on to consider how he would probably occupy himself while an inhabitant of our world, different anticipations, doubtless, would have been conceived on that subject. While he had not as yet lived among men, there was room for a diversity of opinion as to what probably would be the manner of his life. Some we know were prepared by their tastes and their hopes to conclude at once that he would be a great military commander, and would fill the world with the fame of his battles and his victories. Some doubtless would have expected that he would take chief rank among economists and statesmen. Some would have thought all pursuits unworthy of him, but those of philosophy and learning. And some enamoured themselves of sacred science, would have deemed it reproachful to a person of such high and intelligent sanctity, to suppose that his pursuits would be

any other than those of a retired and laborious student and commentator of the inspired writings.

His life on the earth is now past. The Word has been made flesh, and has dwelt with men ; and how he spent his days, after his entrance into public life, we are particularly informed. A summary of the account which has been given us, is contained in the simple declaration of the sacred historian, *that he went about doing good*. He found himself in an afflicted and needy world, and he devoted himself to works of mercy. Mankind about him were ignorant, and he taught them ; they were depraved, and he reclaimed them ; they were in sorrow, and he comforted them ; they were diseased, and he healed them ; they were oppressed, and he delivered them. He performed these offices of benevolence, not only indirectly by the agency of others, but by his own personal and indefatigable labours. He did not fix himself in one

place, and require those who needed his aid to find him out, and come to him, and wait his convenience ; but led an itinerant and migratory life, seeking out spheres and occasions of beneficent action, by exploratory and pedestrian journeys. He passed in this manner, not a portion only, but the whole of his public life. Nothing could divert him from this course ; — not ungrateful neglect from the objects of his kindness ; not his deep personal necessities ; not the greatest providential discouragements ; not unrelenting persecution and constant peril of life. He met unkindness, opposition and danger in every form ; he met them unmoved ; and having lived for man, he closed his peculiar course by ascending the cross as his substitute, and dying to redeem him from the guilt and the curse of sin.

In this manner did Christ pass his days on earth : who would previously have concluded that such would have been his way

of life? Yet here let us ask two questions: First, was it not a manner of life which became him? On this point there can now be but one opinion. The whole world must give the question an affirmative answer. Whatever might have been thought before, now that we know what our Saviour's life was, it appears so manifestly becoming the purity and elevation of his character, in all respects, that we would never think of bringing any other mode of life into comparison with it, as proper to be pursued by him. The life then of Christ, was such as became him. The other question is, Was it such, as, in their measure, and making due allowance for difference of relations and circumstances, would become his disciples? Although we are well aware that this question is already answered also in the affirmative, by the conscience of the reader, we do not deem it needless to set forth the evidences on which an intelligent answer to it must rest.

Let us, however, to prevent mistake, premise one explanatory remark. Possibly the reader has already raised in his own mind, inquiries like the following : How can I imitate the life of Christ ? I have not his resources, and his powers. He had no domestic cares and responsibilities. It is impossible I should be all the time directly occupied, in what are called works of beneficence. I shall, moreover, deny the faith, and be worse than an infidel, if I do not make provision for myself and my household. These things are indeed so ; but let them not be perverted. Be it, that you cannot do as much good, or spend as much time in works of direct beneficence, as did your Lord and Master ; you can put yourself absolutely under the law of beneficence ; and make doing good the grand object of your life ; and while faithful in accomplishing that object, to the duties of your calling, and the claims of domestic relatives, you may give the entire

remainder of time and substance to deeds of active goodness ; and thus may you have the whole of life stamped with beneficence. The extent to which men can employ themselves in direct offices of beneficence, varies with different persons. Some must give almost their whole time to providing for their families or themselves. Some can spare several hours of every day ; and some have their whole life at their disposal, and can devote themselves absolutely to works of mercy. All, however, can live under the control of the beneficent principle ; all can be actuated by that principle, and not merely by blind instinct or cold responsibility, even in domestic duties and labours ; all, in this way, can make the whole of life one scene of beneficent action. The demand is, that every Christian be, to the extent of his ability, a practical philanthropist ; be such in his heart, such in his closet, such in his family, such in his neighbourhood, such in the

world ; in short, that he make doing good to his fellow-creatures, however related to them, the distinct object and purpose of his existence on earth. This is the demand ; what Christian, with the consent of his own conscience, can resist it ? Let us now prosecute the subject.

I. It is one of the known ends of Christ's living and acting in the presence of his disciples, to show them by his example how they ought to live, and how they must live, if they would make good their claim to be regarded as his sincere followers. He left them an example, that they should follow his steps. Peculiar as his way of living was, he went before them in that way as their exemplar and leader. They saw in his singular life of beneficence, what commanded their wonder, their confidence, their worship ; but they also saw **THE PATTERN** to which their own lives should be conformed ; a pattern shown them expressly for their imitation. We

would say this with emphasis, because it seems to have almost escaped consideration. It has been commonly thought that Christ should be imitated by his disciples, in his meekness, patience, gentleness, and other passive virtues ; but has it been the general opinion that they should also resemble him in that course of self-denying beneficence, the fulfilment of which furnished the occasions of his exercising these qualities ? If Christians have been resigned under the bereavements and trials which are common to man, they have been commended as being like their Lord. We do not deny the justness of the commendation, as far as there is ground for it ; but simply ask whether the resemblance should hold in nothing more than the manner of meeting common providential discipline ? Should it be limited to, or chiefly consist in the passive virtues ? Christ was contented, meek, unresisting, prayerful ; and so should be his disciples. But Christ also lived not

for himself, but bare the sorrows and afflictions of man, and gave his strength and life to works of active goodness: Should not his disciples do the same? Where do we learn that his example in this respect, was not set to be imitated? It has been admired; it has been greatly praised; why should it not have been followed?

II. It is the universal conviction, that such a life as that of our Saviour's in such a world as this, is the highest and best which can be lived; and hence the unquestionable fitness between his life and the perfection of his character. But this shows demonstratively that Christ's mode of life should be chosen by his followers. Had it not been his design to show them by *his* manner of life, what *theirs* should be, yet they could not intelligently and seriously reflect on that specimen of living among men, without feeling a conviction that they ought to imitate it. It is unquestionably the best mode of spending life, and the ra

tional nature of man inclines him to what he knows to be the highest and best. The desire of perfection, however far he may be from perfection itself, is inwrought in his being. Let a man do a thing, and then find that he might have done better, and if true to his nature, he will regret that he did not perform the better deed. Let him have a greater and a less good before him soliciting his preference, and he will do violence to himself if he does not choose the greater. The perfection, therefore, of our Saviour's life, instead of being a reason why it should not, is the highest possible reason why it should be imitated by his followers. And of the force of this reason they cannot but be sometimes conscious. As they look upon that life of perfect beneficence, the very law of their being prompts them to imitate it; and if they decline, or just in so far as they do decline, that law condemns them for doing so: And many a professed Christian passes

his lifetime under a consciousness more or less vivid, that he is hastening to the retributions of eternity with the sentence of this law in full force against him. How many members are there of the christian church, who while they live for self-advancement or self-indulgence, and cannot help remembering how different from theirs was the life of Jesus Christ, know better than if an angel's tongue had told them, that there is no way of justifying their mode of passing away their days. They may not reflect very definitely on the subject; but the subject though kept at a distance, and in the shade, has a face of terror to their hearts, and haunts them in the night season, and sometimes troubles them amid the activities and pursuits of the day.

III. That Christ's way of living in this world should, as far as practicable, be chosen by his followers, is the natural inference from the essential conformity, the spiritual oneness, which, according to Scripture,

subsists between them and him. They were from eternity, predestinated to be conformed to his image, and this, their high election, is made sure in the day of their second birth, when they are taken out of the corrupt human mass, and fashioned into the likeness of the great Refiner and Purifier himself. Now what should be hence concluded respecting their external conversation and behaviour among men? Like Christ, in spirit or the inner life, shall they be unlike him in the manner of their outward life? Let due allowance be made for remaining imperfection and the weakness of the flesh; still there is substantial oneness with Christ in the inner man of the heart, and shall there not be substantial oneness with him also in conduct and external developement? Is natural expectation in this case groundless? Is the connexion here dissolved between the cause and its effect? Must we not adhere to the rule, *by their fruits ye shall know them,*

though by doing so, we should be obliged to admit that the malignant remark of infidelity is true, that there are no such persons as Christians on earth?

IV. That the life of Christians in this world should, like that of their Lord, be a life of beneficence, is a conviction which must at once seize any mind, that with a just idea of Christian character, associates a recollection of the real state of the world. There was nothing arbitrary in Christ's choosing the mode of life he pursued; and, there is nothing arbitrary in the requisition that Christians should imitate it. The example of Christ was but true virtue developing itself fitly in the circumstances in which he found himself when his dwelling was with men. It was a form, which holiness, carried out into just action, in such a world as ours, naturally assumes. Holiness is benevolence; but how can benevolence with eyes to see, and ears to hear, and feet to walk, and hands to help, refrain

in such a world as this, from active and self-denying exertions to do good? Whether we might innocently give ourselves up to quiet contemplations, or private indulgences, or projects for increasing our personal possessions, if we were among a race of sinless and happy beings, we need not inquire; but can we pretend to benevolence, and live for any such purpose, while we have our residence amidst such scenes and circumstances as those in which we are passing our days? Too few even of Christians appear to be aware of their circumstances. How little do any of us reflect that we cannot go abroad into the streets without passing by some habitation of beggary, of disease, or of death; or what is worse, of ignorance and crime, where benevolence might be doing works of goodness, at which angels would renew their songs of praise? While we are sitting together in the sanctuary, or rejoicing in the society of our friends, or pursuing our

gainful business, how seldom or how slightly do we think that men not far distant from us, are groaning life away in want and distress, in dungeons and in chains ; and that widows and orphans, paupers, prisoners, and others ready to perish, far and near, and all the world over, are by their deep necessities crying aloud for our pity and our assistance ! And more heart-rending still, that nearly the whole world are lying in the chains and under the curse of sin ; and generation after generation are led captive of the great destroyer, at his will, into the prisons of eternal death ! But should Christians be thus unmindful that it is in such a world they have their dwelling ? If nothing could be done by them to alleviate human wretchedness, they might well forbear beneficent effort, and live for other purposes than to do good to men. But as this is a world of hope as well as of sorrow, and as we have, through the bounty of Providence and the sacrifice of Christ,

ample remedies for both the temporal and spiritual ills of man, where is our benevolence, if we do not exert ourselves to make full proof of these remedies? Must it not astonish the holy angels to see benevolent beings in our circumstances unemployed in doing good? Is it strange that in these circumstances our Saviour should have devoted himself to works of mercy and compassion? Where is the vigour of piety in the church, when but here and there can a Christian be found who lives only to be useful to his perishing fellow-men, and he passes too often for little better than a well meaning enthusiast?

V. As the will or main purpose of God concerning his people, in all that he has done and is doing for them, by his Son, his Spirit, his servants, his word and ordinances, and his high Providence, is their sanctification or personal holiness; and as holiness in such circumstances as ours naturally takes the form of **BENEFICENCE**,

it is evident that what God is chiefly intent upon, in all things respecting us, is that our life should be a life of active goodness.

But we are not left to learn this by inference. The Scriptures declare it expressly and with the strongest emphasis. It is the import of that saying of Christ, the saying not so much of his lips on any one occasion, as of his whole ministry and appearance among men,—“it is more blessed to give than to receive.” What else too is the import of our being created in Christ *unto good works*; and of Christ’s giving himself for us, that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people, *zealous of good works*; and of that superlative praise which every part of Scripture conspires to bestow upon the very life of which we speak; prophets, apostles, and louder than all the rest, Christ himself, joining in the inspired chorus of commendation? And above all, what is the drift and meaning of that grand

prediction of our Saviour,* *that acts of beneficence will be the test and touchstone of eternal destiny, at the last great day?* Has not God spoken decisively enough as to what it is, he would have his people employ themselves about, during the short season of this mortal life?

VI. It is a high argument why all Christians should make the life of Christ the model of their own, that it is only by means of practical beneficence on their part that Christianity can advance among mankind. That it is the design of its author that this divine religion should become universal, and that it will in fact become so, should be no more doubted than that it is true, and is alike needful to all men. Further, that it is to become universal by the instrumentality of Christians themselves, is as certain as the truth of any fact or doctrine which it contains. But *the precise sort of instrumental influence* which Christians should

* Matthew xxv.

mainly rely on for its propagation, seems not to have been well understood or well considered since the gospel's primitive triumph. That triumph was, under the divine blessing, the achievement, not of discussion, or controversy, or intellectual labours, but of active goodness. Christians,—not the Apostles only, but private Christians of both sexes and of every condition,—in accordance with the last solemn charge of their Lord, devoted themselves collectively and personally to the spreading of Christianity over the world. And what was their plan for carrying the work on? They had no plan but such as the living spring of benevolence in their own breasts suggested to every one; the plan of holy love longing to honour its great Benefactor, by living, and if needs be, dying as he did, for the present and eternal well-being of mankind. They had none of our means and facilities for combined action; no press, almost no books; (the Christian faith, it

has been truly said, is not unknown to have spread all over Asia, ere any gospel or epistle was seen in writing ;) no connexion with, no countenance from the State ; no opportunities even for free intercommunion among themselves ; no patronage but that of heaven ; no impulse of sectarian zeal ; no motives of personal advantage. They went individually to work, under the influence of one spirit, — that spirit in their Saviour, which made him such a martyr in the cause of man. It is granted and should not be overlooked, that there were imperfections in the first Christians ; they had their personal faults ; there were errors, too, among them ; their doctrinal faith, in some very important points, was imperfectly defined, and in others it was erroneous ; they were annoyed by philosophical speculations ; some of their great teachers held notions which, had they lived in other times, would have subjected them to excision from the church. But they abounded

in that charity which is the end of the gospel, and is better and more enduring than faith; they loved one another, and they loved and lived for the welfare of their fellow men. And marred as the record of their acts is by various sorts of blemishes, it is, as a whole, so brightened and sanctified by the accounts it contains of their matchless beneficence, that the annals of the world furnish no parallel to it. How pleasant would it be, were there time, to collect in one view, the evidences of their strange philanthropy; but we must not stay to attempt this; let us only call to mind the success of their mode of evangelism. The world in requital for their self-sacrificing charity, accounted them as sheep for the slaughter, and pursued them with fire and sword, and every means of death and torture; but the influence of their beneficent spirit could not be overcome; it prevailed over whatever was adverse among themselves; it covered the multitude of their

imperfections ; it turned the very violence of the world in their favour ; and their religion, after three centuries of bloody persecution, became the religion of civilized man. Their mode of spreading Christianity should be adopted in our day. It is the appointed mode, the best mode, the only adequate mode. It should be adopted forthwith throughout every part of Christendom. Some seem to think that Christianity cannot spread until our theology becomes purer, and our biblical literature is improved ; some suppose the reformation of civil government and men's notions of human rights an indispensable preliminary. Some ascribe the general stagnation of the gospel to one thing and some to another ; but whatever of truth there may be in the opinions of different persons on the subject, the main difficulty is palpably manifest. Let reformation proceed as fast as possible ; whatever is wrong in theory or practice, in church or State, should be cor-

rected; but let all be reformed, and reformed perfectly, that needs reformation; still if Christians do not, as once they did, give their own selves to the work of the Lord, and by individual examples of active goodness, by living and labouring in their own persons for the temporal and eternal welfare of mankind, make their light so to shine before men, that they *seeing their good works* may glorify God, we should not think that the conversion of the world is drawing nigh. So Scripture in many places* teach us; and so should we conclude from our own reflection. It is not enough that we support societies for reforming and enlightening mankind; this we may do and yet individually be specimens not of self-denying beneficence, but of luxurious and splendid living; we must all, male and female, old and young, make doing good in the world the purpose of life, the

* Matthew v. 13, 14, compared with 16. 1 Peter ii. 12. John xv. 8, etc.

object of existence. The world may be adequately supplied with the Scriptures and other books ; with schools, and churches and preachers ; but all will not suffice. The general unbelief of men will never be overcome while Christians themselves seem in truth unbelievers, as they always will seem in the eyes of the world, while their lives are not those of active beneficence. Their religion demands such lives of them, and demands this so strenuously, that how they can sincerely believe it themselves, and live so much like others, the world cannot be made to comprehend. Let them insist as they please that their principles should be judged of irrespectively of their practice, the world will not yield to them here : they must have deeds, not professions ; examples, not precepts ; charity, not knowledge. The doctrines of our religion must put on the living forms of love, and move to and fro among men in these winning forms, and demonstrate their di-

vinity before the eyes of all, by fruits of goodness after their own kind. The doctrines, — that men are exposed to endless miseries, — that Christ died to save them, — that they must, in order to be saved, repent and believe the gospel, — that the things of this life are vanity, and eternity alone worth a serious thought, — that death is followed by the judgement, and the judgement by doom in hell or heaven, unchangeable and everlasting — these simple doctrines must assert themselves not in books and creeds only, but in correspondent practice; and no practice is correspondent, the world will always think, short of a life devoted to the business of saving men.

IV.

DOING GOOD.

PART SECOND.

VII. IT is thought by some, as has been already remarked, that Christianity can never prevail till our theology is improved. "Our interpretation of Christianity," it is said,* "may be good, and may be pure enough for private use; it may be good in the closet, good as the source of the motives of common life, and good as the ground of hope in death, and yet may be altogether unfit for conquest, and triumph." We shall not controvert this supposition. Let it be assumed that our interpretation of Christianity is so unfit; that "indefinite mis-

* Fanaticism, p. 514.

conceptions affecting the divine character and government, or that certain modes of feeling, generated in evil days and still uncorrected, exist and operate to benumb the impulsive and expansive energies of the gospel." Be the fact so;—it is a conclusive argument in favour of that improvement in our practical religion on which I am insisting. If the world must wait in its sin and ruin, until our theological views be corrected, we should be at the business of correcting them with all possible diligence. But how are they to be corrected? Is there any room for hesitation in giving an answer to this question? How is our theology, our interpretation of Christianity, to receive the needful improvement? By revising the ancient systems of divinity, comparing them with the modern, and framing other systems under the advantages of greater light, and a purer philosophy? By philologoical studies, and the application of juster hermeneutical principles in explaining the sacred

text? By a minuter analysis of subjects, by free discussion, by controversy, and debate? By the multiplication of books, and writers, and theological schools? Without meaning to say aught against such expedients, we cannot but ask, if these be the means on which we must chiefly rely? How much longer then must the world remain perishing for lack of vision? After trying such means more than a thousand years, behold Christians still without a sufficiently pure theology; divided, and angrily contending among themselves about doctrine; some anathematizing and seceding from others; and new sects and theories multiplying almost daily. Has the right way been followed in order to attain and propagate just views in theology? We might pause in our reply, if a voice from heaven had not put the reply into our lips. A mistake, a strange mistake has been made. The light of true knowledge in divine things, shines with greater purity and bright-

ness, not in the cloister of the recluse, the study of the scholar, the groves of philosophy, the halls of sacred science, but in the open and wide field where active goodness performs its journeys and its labours. On that field assuredly, more than any where else on earth, rests the sunlight of spiritual truth. There, is to be found *the light of life*, in which heavenly minds rejoice, the light of God's countenance, the illumination of the spirit, — that which alone deserves to be called light. He it is who best knows the truth, and will know it more and more, who doeth the will of God. It is not he who studies or thinks, but he who loveth, that knoweth God, for God is Love. If Christians would cease their unseemly strife among themselves, and subject their hearts and minds to the dominion of holy love ; — that is, if they would put the truth, as far as they know it, into just practice ; — they would forthwith find themselves walking in the light, and all would soon be

light, both in the church and in the world. Let no one think this an extravagant or an idle remark. It will bear to be reflected on. Let the first principles of the gospel,—that men are ruined sinners, that Christ died to save them, that by repentance and faith in Christ they may be saved, that the renewing Spirit has come, and that God waits to give effect to Christian prayer and pains ;—let these first truths live and flourish, instead of being almost disowned, in the lives of Christians ; and what a commentary on our general Christianity would then be furnished ; what obscurity would be removed from the Scriptures ; how soon would philosophy correct its mistakes, and repent of its vain self-reliance ; the watchmen would see eye to eye ; the confusions and contradictions of ages would be gone ; the sun of heaven would rise on the earth ; and the waves of spiritual knowledge would roll from land to land, like waves of the mighty deep.

Yet let no one misunderstand us, as intending by these remarks to discourage intellectual labours; far otherwise is our object. Our meaning is, that these and all other labours in the life of a Christian, should be developements of **CHARITY**, the fruit of the beneficent principle. Paul studied and wrote, as well as journeyed and toiled, night and day, in direct efforts to save men; but he sought to save men, not less diligently for his deep meditations and divine manuscripts; nay, these meditations and manuscripts themselves, were the direct product of the same spirit of beneficence which suggested every undertaking of his life, and carried him triumphantly through it. We mean that it should be with every Christian in this respect, (teacher, pastor, missionary, as well as private church member, male and female,) exactly as it was with Paul the Apostle. If they think, if they write, if they speak, the beneficent principle must guide their thought, their pen, their tongue; and in

all the rest of their life, it must be too notorious to be questioned, that they live in no form for themselves, but for the good of mankind, and the glory of God. We mean that it is only where and while it is thus with Christians, that there is any hope for much improvement in sacred science, from any efforts and arrangements which they may make to that end. Let theology be cultivated, however elaborately, apart from labours of love, the end for which all Christian truth was revealed,—apart from self-denying exertions to save men,—apart from the effusions of the Spirit and the scenes of revivals, and it will be a theology, an interpretation of Christianity, to be anathematized as another gospel,—the wisdom of an aspiring philosophy, invested with the garb, and claiming the sacredness of the Gospel of Christ, in order the more effectually to subvert and explode it.

VIII. Whether we must have a purer theology or not, before Christianity can tri-

umph, there can be no doubt that there must be a general and a great improvement in Christian character; and what is the way to effect this improvement, is an inquiry, inferior in importance to no other that can occupy the attention of Christians of this age. To give the true answer to it, is to propound the doctrine we are enforcing. — Two plans for improving Christian character, have been tried; one aiming to accomplish the object more directly, the other more indirectly; one, rather by leading the mind to introverted thought upon its own imperfections and wants, and to immediate and self-stimulated reaches after higher attainments; the other rather by turning the mind's regards to things out of itself — things adapted to enlarge and exalt it, by their intrinsic excellence. The one in short, relying chiefly on a life of meditative abstraction and devotion; the other, on a life consecrated to offices of active goodness. On the first plan, the cloister,

the still and peaceful closet, is the chief sphere of effort ; on the second, the wide and evil world, where all is suited to put living virtue to the test, and excite the beneficent principle into constant exercise. The former of these plans has been adopted by the recluses and pietists of all ages ; the latter was the plan of Christ and his first disciples. The latter unquestionably is the true plan. It accords with the genius of vital religion. The first pulsations of divine life in the soul of a Christian are pulsations of the beneficent principle. That same pure love which he then begins to exercise towards God, whom he does not see, spontaneously flows forth also, in affectionate desires and kind actions towards his fellow-men, whom he does see ; and he cannot but long that the new and divine joy of which he is conscious, should be shared by every creature under heaven. What course now should be taken by the new born child of grace, to attain to a full

and large developement of the spiritual affections and powers? Should he shut himself out from all intercourse and connexion with a dying world? or devote himself to the salvation of that world? By doing the first, would he not stifle the very breath of the spiritual life, and make it impossible for him ever to become a full grown and vigorous Christian? By doing the last, and continuing as he begins, he would always retain the first simplicity of his spirit, and become, certainly, a specimen of Christian manhood and strength, which the eyes of all saints in heaven and earth, would rejoice to behold. This we know from express and manifold testimonies of Scripture* would be the result; and it is not difficult to understand *how* the result, under the divine blessing, would come to pass. Self-consecrated to doing good, as the end of his existence upon earth, the excellency of his chosen object of life, must

* 2 Peter, i. 8, etc.

by a law of his being, be continually and more and more imprinting itself on his heart, and thus, after a while, he cannot but acquire great elevation of character, and be a man of God. He will as a matter of course, we might almost say of necessity, avoid those things which commonly hinder growth in grace, and mar God's likeness in the soul. He can take no part in religious contentions, the great bane of spiritual improvement; or in those philosophical refinements and subtilties, which work doubt and corruption in the mind. He has no time to give to those idle conversations and companies, which grieve the Holy Spirit, and pollute the conscience. In the best manner possible, he has armed himself against the insidious invasions of avarice, and the pride of life, the irascible passions, the impure affections, and all those fleshly lusts which war against the soul. The purpose for which he lives, raises him too near to heaven, in the tone and cast of his

spirit, to admit of his being much annoyed by these temptations. We hardly need add that it also exposes him most advantageously to the influence of whatever tends to elevate and ennoble the soul. — He will be led by his object of life, more constantly than any other man, to consult the sacred Scriptures; and he will consult them in a manner better adapted than that of the most minute philologist, to inform him of their true meaning, and bring all his faculties and feelings under their sanctifying power. This results from the coincidence of the end for which he lives, with the end, — the just spirit and scope, of the Scriptures. As they were given not to afford materials for criticism and comment, but that the man of God might be thoroughly furnished unto *good works*, he who abounds in such works, learns by experience the true meaning of Scripture; and what knowledge is equal to that gained by experience?

Besides, he who pursues a life of beneficence, is constantly *obeying* the truth; and of all modes of inculcating truth on the heart, obedience to it is the most efficacious. It is, as it were, an impersonation of truth, giving it a shape and a body, which, better than any sermon, shows what it is; and being done by the man himself, it being his own action, that truth manifests itself by, who has equal advantages for understanding and feeling it? Such a man is all the while preaching to himself, and preaching with a power which an angel's tongue might not be able to exert.—And he stands before all others, too, in the exercise and benefit of prayer. His daily consideration of the state of the world, his personal intercourse with human want and wretchedness, gives him constantly new matter for prayer, makes him particular and minute in his requests, and sincere and importunate in his manner of preferring them; and his seasons of devotion,

instead of being passed in supplications about his own wants and comforts, and these perhaps, for the most part, perfunctory and insincere, are like those of Christ and the first Christians, which we read of in the Gospel and in the Acts. Time forbids that we should pursue this amplification. Enough has been said to show that it is not in the still and shady recess, but abroad in the habitations of men, in the haunts of misery and guilt, amidst privations and sufferings, not self-inflicted, but incurred in doing good, that the formative influences exert themselves, which make Christians after the pattern and standard of the primitive times. Who can think that such a character as that of Paul or John, or the Blessed Jesus, the true exemplar of all who bear his name, might have been formed any otherwise, than amidst efforts and sufferings for the good of mankind? There are in our day a Gutzlaff and a few names more, of great hearted Christians ; and in

what circumstances have these persons acquired their unwonted conformity to their Lord? Let us give good heed to the answer: "In labours more abundant; in journeyings often; in perils of waters; in perils of robbers; in perils by the heathen; in perils in the wilderness; in perils in the sea; in weariness and painfulness; in watchings often; in hunger and thirst; in cold and nakedness." Never did, never can, a life of contemplation make such men as Gutzlaff, and Martyn, and Brainerd. We shall lament in vain over the imperfections in Christian character, while Christians content themselves with their present style and standard of living. All our censures and complaints; all our lectures on prayer and fasting; all our associations for spiritual improvement; all our measures and contrivances of reform, will be in vain, until Christians can be induced to rise out of the dust of a self-seeking, and self-indulgent way of life, put on the garments

of love, and make works of active goodness their business under the sun.

IX. We might omit to mention, as an argument to a life of beneficence, *that it is of all lives the happiest*, if we merely had respect to the happiness which Christians themselves would find in this way of living. But there is a vastly higher reason why this consideration should be urged. Christianity will not triumph while Christians individually and collectively remain as they are, and since the primitive times, have been, in respect to happiness. Christianity in document is peace, joy, blessedness itself; need we say what for the most part Christianity is, and has been in this respect, in the lives of its professors? So long as the world shall see Christians disquieted in spirit; corroded by earthly cares; at variance among themselves; harassed by misgivings and fears respecting their own salvation, and apparently finding little or no pleasure in the services of their religion

and the promises and prospects which it sets before them — so long as the Christian church presents such a spectacle to the world, its testimony and its labours in behalf of Christianity, will be of small avail. The reason lies deep in the nature of man.

As the unhappiness of Christians arises from the faintness and indefiniteness of the divine image in themselves, and as this proceeds from their not exercising the grace given them, in courses of beneficent action, a life of beneficence would cure the evil. It would abolish the effect by removing the cause. It would fill Christians with the peace of God, by nourishing and strengthening the life of God in their souls. But it would contribute to their happiness also, in a more direct manner. There is often unspeakable joy in the mere exercise of the beneficent principle. It is more blessed, many times, to give than to receive, in the very act itself of giving. But it is the fruit of the action that yields

the greatest blessedness. He who performs a work of true benevolence, opens for himself a fountain of pure joy, which will continue to flow when the heavens and the earth are no more. Even if the work be eventually unavailing to him or them for whom it was done, it will not be so to the doer. God's word and power, are the security that he shall be blessed, and blessed forever in his deed. What delight must this consideration of itself give to the man who lives only to do good? He has, however, other sources of joy. His beneficence is not in vain in respect to the objects of it. God is with the man who gives himself to works of goodness, and adds to those works, an effectual blessing. And what joy can be compared to his, who, as he works, finds almighty goodness working with him, and giving him success; the hearts of widows and orphans singing for joy; the disconsolate comforted; the broken-hearted healed; poor and degraded

families raised to respectability and peace; captives and prisoners rejoicing in their chains, if not delivered from them; the dead made alive again; the lost found; is it possible for the human mind to know joy like his, whom God makes the means of results like these? The great German astronomer had a strange ecstasy of delight, after making his celebrated discovery:—"Eighteen months ago," said he, "I saw the first ray of light, three months since I saw the day; a few days ago, I saw the sun himself, of most admirable beauty. Nothing can restrain me. I yield to the sacred frenzy. I dare ingenuously confess that I have stolen the golden vessels of the Egyptians, (alluding to the ideas of Ptolemy on the same subject,) and I will build of them a tabernacle to my God. If you pardon me, I rejoice; if you reproach me, I can endure it; the die is thrown, I write a book to be read, whether by the present or by future ages, it matters not. It can

wait for a reader a century, if God himself waited six thousand years for an observer of his works :” — A most remarkable instance of pleasure in intellectual pursuits. But yet a mere flash, and of an inferior kind, compared with the pleasures of beneficence. Those pleasures are of a celestial refinement, and endure, and increase, until they become an ocean of eternal joy.

X. We will terminate these remarks with a single suggestion more. *He only lives for eternity who lives a life of beneficence.* Other men may obtain perhaps the pardon of their sins, may themselves be saved, as it were by fire, while their works are burnt up. The man of active goodness and he alone, is using his present faculties and possessions, so as to make them positively productive to himself in the end. The provision which men make for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof; their efforts to raise themselves in worldly society, to become great and renowned, and

to lay up treasures on earth; their very meditations and prayers, which are not the fruit of the beneficent principle, transmit no good influences, as far as themselves are concerned, beyond the grave. The results of all other human doings, as to their authors at least, either terminate with the brief day of this life, or follow them into eternity as sources of pain. All, all is gone, as to their authors, when their authors themselves pass away hence. What, as to their authors are all the great acquisitions and achievements of the mighty dead, who did not spend life in doing good? The great writers of ancient and modern times; the Homers, the Maros, the Tullys, the Shakspeares, the Miltons, the Bacons, what as to them, except in so far as doing good was their business, are the products of their genius and labour? They are gone where their splendid or profound performances can avail them nothing. Their works have not followed, and never will

follow them. Soon also their works themselves will perish. Who then in sober truth is now living wisely for himself? Who is the prudent man, that foreseeeth the evil and hideth himself? Who is laying up for himself a good foundation against the time to come? Who is it that with any self-consistency, can censure the spendthrift, the reckless profligate, as a waster of time and strength and substance? Is man truly an immortal being? Is there another life, and a judgement after death? Is there truth in the Bible? Is the religion of Christ no fable? That is the question on which this argument turns: Give that question an affirmative answer; and all, all are wasters, — wasters of whatever they are, or have, — who are not using whatever they have and are, so as to glorify God by doing good to man.

It is not impossible that some will deem the strain of these remarks high wrought

and visionary, — the fruit of ardour rather than intelligence, of enthusiasm more than good sense. To those who are disposed to think thus, we would observe, that though it would doubtless be as unavailing as it would be unbecoming in us to say a word in vindication of our own sobriety of mind in this discourse, we have certainly a right to expect that our readers will show themselves sober-minded in judging of the considerations which have been set before them. We have a right to request, and do respectfully and earnestly request, that they review these considerations one by one, and specify which should be discarded as defective in logic or in strength, and wherein thus defective. Or, if they prefer doing so, let them take the sum and conclusion of the whole, our main position, and set it aside, if it can be done, by conclusive counter-evidence ; or at least let them adduce against it, one definitely expressed objection. Let them mention

one good reason why the life of Christ and the lives of his followers should not be alike stamped, in their respective measures, with active beneficence. This surely they are not unreasonably requested to do, before they discard the subject on the pretext, that there is more of heat in it than light, more of passion than judgement. — This, however, they know they cannot do. They may object to the position on other grounds; on the ground that it makes true practical Christianity a rare thing in this world; on the ground that it implicates the church in deep guilt and reproach; on the ground that it casts a gloomy shade over their own hopes and prospects for eternity; but not on the ground that it is not sufficiently fortified by evidence, or demonstrably true. They may dislike, but they cannot disprove it. It is the doctrine not of man, but of Jesus Christ. They contend, not with the sentiment of an individual, or a sect, but with that only true and safe religion

which the Son of God came down from heaven, lived and died to propagate among men.

If the reader has had the impression during the process of these remarks, that however incontrovertible and important their main position, the task of enforcing it was injudiciously undertaken, as being well nigh hopeless, Let us say, that we are not unapprized that there are apparently strong reasons for the impression he has felt. We have indeed asked ourselves the question, Will a single man be persuaded by any thing we can say, to make Christ's life on earth the model of his own? It has not been thought necessary to do this in order to be a Christian; it is in fact done by almost no one; a very different notion of practical Christianity has been common; and whose mind will be changed by our remarks on this subject? But we could not refrain, on the other hand, from asking ourselves also questions such as these: Is not Christianity destined to triumph?

Are the irreligion and idolatry of mankind to be always so nearly universal? Shall the church always pray to no purpose, — *Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?* But by what means shall this prayer be answered? Will it be done by miracles? Will it be done by philosophy and speculation and writing? Will it be done by controversy and contention, and by multiplying secessions and sects? Will it be done by religion in creeds and on parchment, however widely diffused? Will even preaching do it, if the doctrine of Christ be not illustrated by a correspondent life on the part of his disciples? Is it not the persuasion of all who earnestly expect the conversion of the world, that a great change, a change adapted to arrest general attention, and produce general conviction, will take place in the common way of living among Christians? Are not some already anticipating such a change? Has not prep-

aration been made for its commencement? Nay, are there not indications that its commencement is about taking place? Should we then be faithless on this subject, or believing? Is not God in the midst of his people with the residue of his Spirit? Is he not able to reach and enlarge their hearts? Can he not fill them with faith and the Holy Ghost, as once he did? Can he not, as once he did, make them epistles of Christ, and send them abroad every where to shed living light, and lift up their living voices, amidst benighted and dying men? Why should we be despondent? Away, our unbelieving fears! Let us lift high the standard of Christian living, and summon all professed Christians with a bold and strong voice to conform their lives to it. We have their principles, their conscience, their covenant with us. We have their God and their Saviour on our side. Let us then affectionately tell them the truth. Let us rebuke their conformity to

the world, with all the love, but also with all the pungency which we can command. While they enjoy, as they have a right to do, their ceiled houses, their domestic delights, their honours, and their other good and pleasant things, let us not refrain to remind them of their relations to him who had not where to lay his head ; and to the world around them lying in sin and ruin ; and of their solemn engagements and vows to follow the footsteps of their Lord, and to live and die as he did for the salvation of mankind.

Finally, if the reader should admit his obligation and his responsibility, but deny his *power* to live as Christ did among men, we would ask him to consider what he means by this denial. — If by a deficiency in power he intends a deficiency in himself apart from, and independently of Christ, let him retain and cherish this conviction ; but let him not rest upon it as a sufficient excuse. He is not required to enter on

the course set before him, relying solely, or relying at all, upon himself. On the contrary, he is in the strongest terms warned against doing so : — “ Cursed be the man who trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm.” The only resources on which he is called to depend, are the infinite resources of grace in Jesus Christ. Does he mean to say that these are not adequate ? If this be not his meaning, let him abandon his plea, and confess himself, in respect to power, as well as wisdom and righteousness, complete in Christ ; and being thus complete, let him forthwith exercise himself in the strength of God his Saviour, to exemplify his Saviour’s spirit in a life of active beneficence. Let him do this, or show what right he has to assume the name, or indulge the hope of a Christian.

V.

CO-OPERATION WITH GOD.

EXERTIONS for extending the gospel among mankind have been steadily increasing for more than thirty years ; but the conversion of the world still lingers, and the souls of men at the rate of twenty millions a year, pass to their eternal doom without the knowledge of a Saviour. To resolve this appalling fact into the sovereignty of God, no more exempts Christians from responsibility for it, than the same short way of explaining all the miseries of time and eternity, exculpates those accountable agents whose voluntary conduct is the procuring

cause of those infinite evils. God governs his moral kingdom, not by direct interpositions, or isolated acts of power, but by fixed principles or rules of conduct, obedience or disobedience to which, is optional to the subjects of his empire, and the consequences of obeying or disobeying which, are not ordinarily precluded, by deviation, on his own part, from his stated mode of administration. Hence impenitent transgressors "eat of the fruit of their own way;" and hence also, the just results of negligence and unfaithfulness on the part of Christians, however disastrous, usually come to pass. When men, by refusing to observe the unchangeable ordinances of infinite wisdom and goodness, bring ruin upon themselves or others, what propriety or relief is there in referring the natural effects of their inexcusable disregard of duty, to the sovereign pleasure of God? God does indeed sit in the heavens, enthroned over creation. His foreknowledge, his counsels,

and his plan, comprehend all his own works, and those also of his creatures ; yet not so as to interfere either with the freedom and responsibility of his creatures, or with equitable variations in his own distributions of reward and punishment, of co-operative or corrective power, according as the conduct of his creatures may demand the one or the other. The times and the seasons God reserves in his own power ; and because he is infinitely wise and good he will do nothing, whether in judgement or mercy, out of time ; yet this does not hinder, but that if his creatures would fall in with his provisions and commands, he would take a very different course in his providential dispensations from that which, on the whole, it becomes best for him to pursue, owing to human perverseness and disobedience. God would not employ himself in sweeping the world from age to age with the besom of destruction ; he would not delay for thousands of years

those promised effusions of his Spirit which are to send peace as a river, and righteousness as the waves of the sea, over the face of the whole earth, if he were not, so to speak, laid under a necessity to do this, by the refusal of his people to hearken to his commandments.

Christians have not been ignorant of God's arrangement for converting the world. They have known that the settled plan of Heaven respecting this great work, demands, that the knowledge of the gospel be universally diffused, that it be diffused by Preaching, and *that Preachers are eminently the gift of God, and are to be obtained from him BY PRAYER.* That these are fixed principles of the divine government in reference to this matter, is as well known in the Christian church, as any doctrine or precept of Christianity. Such has been, such is, and such will be the divine order in this case. God is a rock ; his work is perfect. He does not revoke, he does not relinquish

what he has once announced as his established rule of operations, in any department of his dominion. Christians know that his plan for evangelizing the world, requires them to seek the needed supply of preachers by prayer ; they know, but they have most imperfectly fulfilled what it requires at their hands. The natural consequences of their neglect have not been hindered. For almost eighteen hundred years mankind have been going without holiness, and of course, without hope, to eternity, at an average of not less than twenty millions a year. Only the mind that fills eternity, comprehends the evil involved in such a result : yet the tremendous result has followed, and will continue to follow, while Christians refrain from falling in with the divine arrangement. It cannot but be, that God regards this immense evil, with just such emotions as perfect knowledge of it, is adapted to produce in a perfectly benevolent mind ; but still, in infinite goodness,

he permits it, since worse than even this evil, would be any deviation from the order, which with his eye open upon all the secrets of futurity, he thought proper to adopt. This is not a subject for speculation ; it is no more to be disputed than that God is a truly benevolent being. As well call in question the reality of the past or the present, as this affirmation. It is the affirmation of a fact, and a fact which to every Christian should be a principle of life. We ought not stand wondering why God has adopted such a plan, or scrutinizing into the secret reasons of the divine determination, or giving heed to any suggestion of an evil heart of unbelief ; but take to ourselves the reproach of past delinquency, and coincide forthwith and forever, with the unchangeable counsel and purpose of the Most High. As soon should we attempt to arrest the course of nature, or contend with the elements, or evade the consequences of rushing into the fire, or plunging

in the sea, as doubt the goodness of God's moral enactments, or hope to avert the penalty of resisting them.

Not that we are required to be submissive, even in such high cases, to mere arbitrary power. "We are not to think the matter determined as it is, in all such cases, by mere will and pleasure, *without a reason*; which were an imagination altogether unworthy the supreme wisdom: but that there are reasons of mighty force and weight; or certain congruities, in the nature of things themselves, obvious to the divine understanding, which do either wholly escape ours, or whereof we have but very shallow, dark, conjectural apprehensions; as he that saw men as trees; or as some creatures of very acute sight perceive what to us seems invisible. And yet these occult and hidden reasons and congruities, have been the foundation of constitutions and laws that hold things more steadily than adamantine bands, and are of more stability

than the foundations of Heaven and earth.”* The submission demanded is but an exercise of confidence in infinite wisdom and goodness.

We are most impressively instructed as to our duty in this matter, by a passage in the life of our Saviour. When on a certain occasion he lifted up his eyes on the multitudes around him, it is said, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd. The compassion of Him who came down from Heaven to die for a lost world, was not a feeble principle, and it was not now without its appropriate manifestations. Yet what steps did he take for the relief of perishing men, destitute of all means of salvation? He could easily have supplied the requisite means, by a direct exertion of almighty power. He at whose bidding the worlds arose out of nothing, could have done this ; but an arrange-

* Howe.

ment respecting all such cases, had been adopted by the divine will, and his compassion, though large and mighty as his infinite mind, was in absolute subserviency to that arrangement. He would not indulge that compassion, by departing from the divinely appointed way of obtaining the means of grace. He could have died for these multitudes ; he did in fact die for them, but though for their sakes he did not count his life dear to himself, he would not violate the order of God's moral kingdom. He turned to his disciples, and devolved upon them the responsibility of procuring *by their prayers*, what the exigencies of these men, and of countless thousands in no better condition, so urgently required : 'The harvest, he said, is plenteous, but the labourers are few ; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.

And this was but one exemplification of a principle which uniformly controlled the

conduct of our Lord. He would work no miracle, he would in no way interfere with any principle of the divine government, to relieve his own necessities however extreme. Stones would have become bread at his command, but though he had been forty days without food, he preferred a continued endurance of hunger, to employing any mode of removing it, not coincident with the appointed provisions of the divine goodness. The amazing sorrows of his last hours were, with distinct knowledge of them all, preferred by him, to the slightest infringement of the divine economy concerning himself: *Not my will, but thine be done.* What lesson was ever so enforced, as that nothing is so much to be deprecated as setting aside the established order of the divine proceedings? How unreasonable has been the hope of Christians, that God would supply the necessary number of the heralds of salvation, or prevent the natural consequences of a deficiency, when because of

their criminal omission to comply with his requisition, he could not have done so, without abandoning a procedure approved by infinite wisdom and goodness, and published as a fixed principle of his administration ?

Important as are the reformatations which have taken place in the church, little in the way of improvement has been effected, compared to what remains to be done. What enlightened spiritual man would not, in the midst of all the favourable changes and advances of these times, hail with exceeding great joy, the dawn of the era for the fulfilment of that saying, "Behold, I make all things new?" Even what has been reformed needs reformation still. O for a radical reform in the feelings of Christians in respect to their personal obligations and responsibilities, particularly as touching the present subject. If the results of faithfulness on their part would have met completely the wants of mankind, the defi-

ciency both in the character and the number of the ministry, from age to age, measures, from age to age, the extent of their unfaithfulness ! And then, what beings in the universe are so deeply involved in blame as the followers of Christ ? — This view of the subject gives impressions of the general imperfection of Christian character, which cannot but lead to the profoundest self-abasement ; and it will therefore, it is to be feared, be generally unwelcome, and perhaps be strenuously resisted. But yet it seems impossible to deny that it is the just view. Either Christians are thus unmeasurably in fault, or an imputation appears evidently to rest on the Divine Character. Let the matter be closely investigated, and the just result be laid to heart. Is it not, in sober and palpable truth, a direct impeachment of God's self-consistency and sincerity, to allege, that though he has sworn by himself that he has no pleasure in the death of any man, though he has

made an atonement for human sin by the sacrifice of his own Son, though on the basis of that wonderful atonement he has required an offer of salvation to be made to every creature, though he has prescribed the means by which that requirement is to be fulfilled, though he has appointed the prayers and sacrifices of Christians as the proper pre-requisite to the obtainment and operation of those means, and finally though he has urged Christians to offer their prayers, with an earnestness and force of persuasion which only infinite benevolence could have prompted, still, when no difficulty has been in the way on account of failure on the part of Christians, He himself has failed to grant the necessary instrumentality, for the accomplishment of his own great paramount design? Whatever reproach may be cast upon Christians by adopting the opposite of this conclusion, hesitation to adopt it is manifestly irreverence towards the great and dreadful God.

Let God be true, but every man a liar. The real fact in this case ought to be proclaimed throughout the churches, though the effects should be universal consternation and despair. Had Christians aspired to the just standard of their duty, the true dignity of their calling, had they complied with the divine arrangement and thus fulfilled the indispensable conditions of divine wisdom and goodness, that boundless compassion of God which spared not for man's sake his only begotten Son, would doubtless long ago have supplied the world with the ministry of reconciliation, to the needful extent, and filled it with the light of the knowledge of his glory.

Is it improper to ask, why has not something been done to produce in the Christian church a just sense of the fact and the evil of the delinquency in question? Amidst all the benevolent operations and enterprises of the age, has not this delinquency been unlamented, and almost overlooked?

What zeal has been shown, what bold measures have been employed, to supply what has been wanting here? What rousing appeals have been made, what loud alarms have been sounded, what expensive agencies have been sustained, what mighty eloquence has lifted up its thundering voice, throughout the Christian world, in order to awaken attention to this prime defect; to overwhelm the public mind with a sense of its true enormity; and to effect a reformation at this deep seat of evil—a reformation which would have almost superseded the necessity of further reforming efforts? An excitement by such means has been produced in favour of many benevolent designs, the results of which may be partially seen, in our flourishing institutions of religion and learning, and our various projects for human improvement; but is there not cause to fear, from our unrebuked unconsciousness of dependence on God, and our allowed negligence in calling on the Lord

of the harvest himself, to send forth labourers into his harvest, that these institutions and projects rather than his own almighty arm, are our chief reliance for the accomplishment of the great object of desire ?

It is hoped that it will not be thought amiss, to inquire further, whether our *small success* does not also indicate on what ground our hopes are mainly resting ? Our success, it is true, would be an ample reward for ten thousand times more labour than we have bestowed, and our praises should ascend to God evermore, for what he hath graciously wrought by our means ; but still we cannot but see that the work of spreading the gospel comparatively lingers in our hands, and it is high time that we had searched out the reason. It is seasonable and meet, that we inquire among ourselves, and inquire of the Lord, why it is, that now, after Christianity has been eighteen centuries giving proofs of its divinity, and the civilized world owns its truth,

millions of Christians with the mighty aid of the press, and of extensive combinations, and of a moral machinery scarcely susceptible of improvement, are yet, after a lapse of thirty years, but little more than preparing to do, what the first feeble disciples of the cross in the same period, under the greatest outward disadvantages, to a good degree accomplished." They ventured on the undertaking amidst almost universal scorn and persecution, as Peter, upon the boisterous waves, in a dark and stormy night, to go to his master ; relying for success not on their own resources, nor any visible or assignable secondary causes ; but on the promised unseen supports of the universal Preserver ; willing to abide by any issue which might result from such absolute, self-renouncing trust in Him. They first waited at the throne of grace, in united, importunate, incessant prayer, until they were "endued with power from on high," and then, full themselves of the

Holy Ghost and of faith, they sought additions to their number, of men similarly endowed ; and thus they advanced against the powers of darkness in the strength of God, conquering and to conquer, until the fruits of their meek and beneficent triumphs overspread the face of the world. They depended both for means and success on the Spirit of God ; and the reality and extent of their dependence, were proved by a boldness and daringness and force of movement, of which self-reliance, or the countenance of princes and potentates, would never have suggested the conception. Is it uncharitable to suspect that the confidence which they reposed in the invisible arm of the Almighty, is misplaced by modern Christians in the power of the pen and the press, in the patronage of the rich and the great, in our noble associations of benevolence, and in the progress of the mind and of science ?

There is at least irresistible proof that

too little reliance is placed on the immediate influences of divine grace. Here it may not be irrelevant to advert to the degree of interest which is ordinarily taken in the monthly concert meeting for prayer. That degree of interest is certainly, to some extent, a decisive test of the nature of the impression existing in the minds of Christians, in respect to the utility of prayer, in carrying forward the work of evangelizing the world. The existence of such a concert shows that united prayer is understood by the church to be one of the means which God has designated for the conversion of the world; but judging from the manner in which that concert is observed generally by Christians, the conclusion can scarcely be avoided, that it is depended upon as a means less than almost any other. The complaint has been long made, and hitherto made in vain, that there is no religious meeting, statedly attended by Christians, which they attend so reluc-

tantly, and in such small numbers. What a strange announcement this, concerning a race of Christians who have professedly undertaken the business of extending the gospel through the earth ! If the reason be that ministers take but little pains to make the meeting interesting and profitable, what is this but additional proof of a most deplorable insensibility in all concerned, to the efficacy of prayer ? How can the inference be resisted, that in the business of saving men, prayer is really deemed by Christians of but very small consequence ? The anniversary of a benevolent society is commonly an animating occasion : it sometimes draws together an assembly which there is no room large enough to accommodate ; but our meetings for prayer, and especially that meeting which by common consent of Christians of almost every name, is appropriated exclusively to the business of praying for the world, are marked by dulness, and coldness,

and gloominess, and fewness of numbers ! Is not this a most afflictive, most alarming fact, to those who are aware that not benevolent associations however important, but the outpouring of the spirit of prayer, is the appointed precursor of the millennium ? Alas, may it not be that while we stand rejoicing at the increase and strength, and enlarging operations of these noble societies, the Spirit of the Lord may have secretly blown upon them in his wrath, as he did for a like reason upon the splendid temple and ritual service of the Jews, because, they, rather than Himself, are depended on for the salvation of the world ? May not all our bright prospects from the benevolent character of the age be overcast, and another and darker age of infidelity succeed, and the world be afterwards converted by a generation of Christians who like those of the primitive church, shall go forward to the work, renouncing all trust in an arm of flesh ; and with their lives in

their hands, throw themselves, in the exercise of such boldness as led Peter to step out upon the angry waves, on the unseen agency of the Holy Spirit, looking to that agency by urgent and ceaseless prayer, to grant whatever resources of grace, or talent, or treasure, may be requisite for the accomplishment of their high purpose ?

Though the remark may seem almost to trespass on delicacy, yet faithfulness to the great interests of God and man seems to require it to be made, that another test of the spirit of the church in reference to the point before us, is afforded by *the prevailing measure of ministerial attainment and faithfulness*. It is not to be doubted that the general character of the ministry, compared to that of the preceding age, is much improved ; but still, if there be a correspondence between the church's prayers and endowments in this respect, her deficiency in the feeling of dependence on God for the supply of ministers of the gospel, is

unquestionably great. The existing ministry, however superior, are manifestly far below the standard which the exigences of these times seem to hold forth to all aspirants for the sacred office. The order of ministers needed for the conversion of the world, is one formed exactly and in all respects, — except inspiration and the power to work miracles, — on the apostolical model. The same work substantially is to be done now, which was undertaken by the apostles; and men as full of the strength and the graces of the Holy Spirit as they were, are apparently as indispensable. It is only when the appropriate business of the church is misjudged of, that a doubt on this subject can be indulged. If that business were to keep up religion to the low common level to which it has attained among men, ministers of the common stamp might suffice; but to pervade the immense wastes of heathenism with the genuine spirit and influences of Christianity, — to have the

gospel sounded throughout the countries of Europe, throughout China, Hindoostan, Burmah, Persia, Arabia, the coasts and unexplored recesses of Africa, and all the forests of America, and islands of the ocean, as it is in the most favoured parts of our own territory, — to achieve this end, men of the same spirit are wanted, as those who under the direct commission of Christ, preached the word of salvation with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. Few such men, however, are now in the field. We have intelligent men, and pious men, and laborious men; but the work to be done demands men filled with all the fulness of God; men like Paul, or Brainerd, not needing, from the abundance of the divine communications to their souls, to consult with flesh and blood; nor to depend on the sympathies of their brethren, but ready always to go, solitarily, if need be, into any desert part of the earth, trusting for support in Him who feedeth the young ravens when they cry. Such men, with few ex-

ceptions, the church has not obtained ; and is it not equally true, *that such men the church has not sought ?* If with just impressions of the magnitude of the work to be done, and absolute distrust in her own capabilities, she had lifted her hands to the Source of all power in heaven and earth, and by strong cries and supplications, had pleaded with Him for ministers of the apostolical spirit ; this age, which so many remarkable events and movements seem to designate as the set time for the general triumph of the gospel, would not, it is probable, be so much a stranger to such ministers. The church, straitened in herself, has had no just views of the immensity of her Lord's resources. Her faith, her desires, and her expectations have been proportional to her views. She has appeared to be afraid of excess in her requests, when in fact she has comparatively asked nothing in the name of Christ. Why should she not prepare herself to receive a ministry as large

as the wants of man, and as excellent as that of the apostolical age? Let it not be thought incredible, that such a ministry will yet be seen on the earth. The world is to be converted, and converted principally by preaching, and by preaching adapted to accomplish the mighty result; but the ears of men will never hear such preaching, until the primitive love of Christ and of souls, the primitive self-denial, the primitive simplicity, boldness, gentleness and zeal, return to the ministry. How slow is the course of the gospel, for want of preachers so replenished with grace, by the unction of the Holy Spirit. We have seen that in the midst of the unparalleled doings of these times, the cause of salvation may remain almost at a stand: nay, at the very centre and spring of action, there sometimes seems to be a backward movement. At best we struggle on, amidst mingled triumphs and defeats, hopes and fears. Not so advances the cause of evil,

the work of destruction, among the souls of unevangelized and unconverted men. Is there never to be a change? Is there no help, no way to accelerate the work of recovering mercy? There is a way. Let Zion awake and stir herself up to take hold of the almighty hand of God. Let her sons and daughters array themselves in those shining garments of salvation, which made first Christians the wonder and the light of the world; and night and day let them assemble themselves together, and also let them often kneel down apart and in secret, and give the Hearer of prayer no rest, until He send forth a ministry numerous as is wanted, and with qualifications such as were granted at the first. Here is the "door," the only door "of hope." Let the heart and the hands, and the imploring cries of the church be incessantly lifted up to heaven. Let our benevolent associations proceed on in their respective spheres of effort: but let it be ever and

vividly kept in mind, that all they can do is to *prepare channels for the streams of salvation to flow in*—channels to be filled by those outpourings of the Spirit, which God bestows in connexion with the labours of the living ministry ; and ordinarily, in proportion as that ministry shares the appropriate spirit of their sacred calling. The associations of benevolence, instead of diminishing, have vastly increased the necessity for a ministry of the highest excellence. They have but prepared the way for the influence of such a ministry to be exerted to the greatest possible advantage. They have exceedingly multiplied arguments proper to be used in prayer for such a ministry. Truly, if ever there was a period when the whole Christian world, should be down upon their faces before the throne of mercy, imploring with all the importunity, and boldness, and perseverance of faith, a race of ministers, each full of the Holy Ghost, as was Barnabas or

Paul, that period is the one which is now passing over us.

And it is perhaps the brightest of all the tokens for good now in the prospect of the church, that God seems to have undertaken to humble his people before him in such supplication. He is manifestly teaching them by the signs of the times, that it is exclusively in his own power to furnish the ministry requisite for the evangelization of the world. He is lifting up a voice on this subject which grows louder and louder continually, as if he meant that it should at last be heard. At a time when a general excitement in respect to the propagation of the gospel, unprecedented since the days of the apostles, exists in the church ; and when means are in operation with direct reference to that object, of unexampled number and excellence ; and when the general condition of the world favours its accomplishment as it has never done before,—at this most remarkable juncture,

overwhelming evidence is given, that all hope for man must perish, if there be not by some agency provided, an adequate supply of ministers of the gospel. Not from one place or another, but from all quarters of the earth, testimony multiplies daily, that amidst the greatest possible facilities for converting the world, a greatly increased and more devoted ministry is indispensable. This testimony comes to us, not indeed as the Macedonian cry came to the apostle, in a supernatural vision ; but in a manner not less affecting or decisive as to its purport. It is a real sound which flies round the land and rings in our ears all the day long. Send us preachers, is the universal, ceaseless demand at home and abroad. It comes from more than a thousand of our own destitute churches ; it comes from the cities, from the wilderness, from the islands, from the uttermost parts of the sea, from tracts until lately unknown to civilized man ; and what deserves spe-

cial remark, it is echoed and urged with chief earnestness, by all the benevolent associations: These, the best of all human contrivances for ameliorating the moral state of man, are loudest in proclaiming the world's dependence, under God, on the faithful labours of the ministry of reconciliation; nay, they proclaim their own dependence on these labours, confessing, in terms which cannot be misunderstood, that their operations would be fruitless, and must speedily terminate, if preachers should be denied them. Behold what an attestation to the unchangeableness of the divine arrangement. "Forever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations." Long ago it was established, that the ministration of the gospel by the living voice of preachers, should be the instrumental influence of saving mankind; and that ancient decree yet stands; and God, in these last days, hath by his providence, given such a signal

proclamation of it as a still existing rule of his empire, that it can hardly be longer disregarded. If one thing, now, were done by the church, the redemption of the world would be at hand ; and it will be wonderful indeed if it be not done : The cry for ministers which sounds so loudly and so complainingly in her own ears, should by general consent be turned into prayer and sent up to heaven. And shall she longer forbear to do this ? Shall she stand, and hear that unusual cry, and feel no inclination to direct it to the ear of Him from whom alone help can come ? She has indeed been trying some efforts of her own to meet the great demand ; and surely she ought to do what she can by personal sacrifices and exertions : but is it not surprising that faintness of heart does not seize her, while in the midst of all her labours in this department, the imploring supplication for ministerial help, still comes up into her ears, louder and louder every moment, from

every part of the wide world; instructing her that the results of all her endeavours are not even as a drop of the bucket, compared to what the wants of a dying world require? An impression seems to be extending, that sooner or later, a change will take place, *in some unimaginable manner*, by which the great desideratum will be supplied; and the church seems in some sort reconciled to bear her burdens, and continue her incompetent struggles, as she has been wont to do, in hope of that extraordinary intervention; but will there never be an end to her dulness of understanding in this matter? While she restrains prayer to God, should she not utterly despair of an intervention, which as far as can be seen, cannot occur in the absence of prayer, without contravening the settled plan of infinite wisdom? An intervention, an extraordinary intervention, is doubtless needful; and such an intervention may be hoped for, when the appointed means of

obtaining it are employed : Why are not those means at this moment in operation ?

The standing concerts of prayer, ought perhaps to be admitted as proof, that an increased impression as to the necessity for prayer, has of late been made on the churches. But it is of the highest importance that Christians do not overrate their arrangements and proceedings in respect to prayer. It is greatly to be feared that there is much erroneous judgement on this subject. Several stated concerts would seem to indicate that prayer is deemed important ; yet how often has a general observance of a day or an hour been agreed upon, and the feeling that originated the agreement, been almost exhausted in that incipient step ; so that at the recurrence of the consecrated season, the place of prayer has been visited, not by thronging multitudes, with the spirit of lively and fervent supplication, but by a reluctant few, and by them perhaps, under the impulse of

conscience and a cold sense of responsibility, to offer for the salvation of the world the abomination of lukewarmness and formality.—O what proof of a want of dependence on himself, and of a conviction of the availableness of prayer, must such observances be, to Him whose eye is ever fixed, not on the outward show of things, but their intrinsic truth. Must it not be a cause of constant heaviness and sorrow of heart to every one, not under the general infatuation, that our concerts for prayer, of all other occasions of concourse among Christians, should have the very last place in the esteem of the church? It is impossible to lament too deeply this portentous fact. In vain does the spiritually minded man who justly appreciates it, endeavour to find relief under its depressing power, from the other good omens of our times. This single fact in the scale adverse to the church's triumphs, outweighs whatever may be in the opposite scale. Let not Chris-

tians trust too much to the growing activity and number of our benevolent institutions, while our concerts for prayer are so neglected. Rather let them take the alarm, let them tremble, for fear of what may yet come to pass. While no more interest, no more life, can be infused into the manner of performing the duty of prayer, all is doubtful. This cloud in their prospect, may yet overspread the heavens, and burst in desolation, which centuries may not repair.

Amidst then, those urgent and constantly multiplying demands for labourers, with which their ears are incessantly assailed, will Christians still give themselves up to the temptations of the flesh, and forbear to lift their cry to the Lord of the harvest? Were it not a most mysterious species of infatuation? Might it not be well asked, What mean they to pretend to be engaged in seeking the world's conversion? Why do they not abandon the enterprise of evangel-

izing mankind? Why do they not dissolve their benevolent associations, and recall their missionaries, and cast the commission of their Saviour away, declaring its fulfilment impracticable, or undesirable? Nay, why do they not abjure the very religion of Christ, and abandon themselves, as well as the heathen and the whole race of man, to despair? Surely it may be, in consistency and with good reason, insisted, either that these things be done, or, that *they who make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.*

No reason is apparent, why a reform should not forthwith commence. — Let the past be characterized as it may, by coldness and neglect, neither the present nor the future, ought or need to be, on that or any other account, similarly distinguished. The end of averseness to prayer in the church, is at hand. A time is doubtless coming, when, as it was in some of our

seasons of refreshing a few years since, the place of meeting for prayer, shall have more attractions than the eloquence of any mortal's, any angel's tongue; and why should not the present be the date of that period? Why will not every true Christian in the land, make a covenant with himself to change his life in this particular? Why will he not separate and sanctify himself, with direct reference to a different course for the time to come? Why will he not call to mind how Abraham, and Moses, and Elias, and Daniel, and Paul, and above all how the Blessed Jesus *laboured in prayer*; and resolve in God's strength to pray in the same manner? Oh, what an amount of beneficent power would our closets and concerts exert upon the eternal destinies of our world, if they should henceforth be such scenes of importunate and wrestling supplication? What wonders of grace would be witnessed in our churches, what accessions would be made to the sa-

cred ministry, what an impulse would be given to the cause of missions, what brightness would be shed upon all the prospects of the church?

It is amazing to a man of heavenly sympathies, that Christians should need anything else to keep them praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, besides the knowledge of the fact *that prayer has power with God*. To be assured, as we are most emphatically in the Scriptures, that intercession is as truly influential on the proceedings of the divine administration, as on those of civil or domestic government among ourselves — is not this enough to keep the church incessantly in a praying posture of mind, to make each individual Christian intent on redeeming every moment of life not required by other duties, for the exercise of secret or social intercession? How much is it to be longed for, that Christians should lay their hearts open to the influence of scrip-

tural inculcation on this subject? On what subject has the Spirit of inspiration poured forth such fulness of emotion, of illustration, and of argument? As if all depended on producing a just impression on this point, and as if to produce such an impression here, was of all things the most difficult, the energies of the divine word are concentrated and borne home upon the heart in order to effect the important result. All the laws of intercession as exercised among men, are appealed to, as being of yet greater force, in respect to our prayers to God. The multiplication and character of the petitioners, agreement among themselves, importunity, confidence, and perseverance, in urging their application, are specified, and with wonderful earnestness enforced, as increasing our prospects of success. And now, unless we would make Scripture unmeaning, or capable of misleading us, what hence must we conclude, but that it is truly owing to a want of the spirit of

prayer in the church, that the world remains under the bondage and curse of sin? This is the fact; and it is a fact which ought to overwhelm the church in self-reproach and sadness of heart.

VI.

P R A Y E R.

PART FIRST.

WHAT PROFIT SHOULD WE HAVE, IF WE PRAY UNTO
HIM ? — Job xxi. 15.

THE utility of prayer, which, according to this Scripture, wicked men dispute, the present discourse humbly attempts to demonstrate. This might be quickly done, by showing that God requires men to pray ; for God, being infinitely perfect, cannot prescribe a useless or vain service. Consent, however, to the utility of prayer, so obtained, would be grounded on the presumption of its usefulness, not on the vivid perception of the intrinsic evidences of its utility. The former kind of consent is not the most desirable. The heart is never completely and permanently won to truth,

but by the perception of its inherent excellence. When we have convinced men that God has required any thing, they are bound to admit its excellence or utility. But before we can effectually commend it to their joyful concurrence, their complacency and love, we must present to their minds the proofs of its essential excellence. This is what we now propose to do in relation to prayer.

Two things let us premise : First, that we speak only of *true* prayer ; not the prayer of formality, nor of enthusiasm, nor of selfish anxiety ; but that prayer which, through the mediation of Christ, offers up the heart's desires unto God with repentance, and faith, and true submission. — Secondly ; that in nothing which we say concerning the inherent tendencies and the influence of prayer, do we intend an exclusion of the Holy Spirit's agency in this exercise, although we no where distinctly mention it. The object of the discourse

requires no reference to that agency ; it being an examination, not of the nature of the Holy Spirit's operation, but of the product thence resulting. These things premised, we remark, that the utility of prayer is comprehended, — *In its direct tendency to improve the human character : in its counter-acting influence on whatever tends to injure that character : in its efficacious influence on whatever is favourable to it ; and, in its persuasive influence on the great Source of blessedness himself.*

I. Prayer, more than any other means, is adapted, in its own nature, to improve all the powers and properties of the human soul.

Without a countervailing influence, the soul of man will always acquire the character of the objects with which it has intercourse. If those objects be great, they will leave the stamp of greatness ; if good, the stamp of goodness on the soul ; — the stamp of littleness on the other hand, if the

objects be little, and of baseness, if they be base.

Again, the soul is more or less strongly impressed with the image of objects, accordingly as it contemplates them more or less directly and intensely. He who regards a thing through the medium of historical information, will be less affected by it, than he who with his own eye sees it; and he who looks at an object closely and minutely, will have a deeper and more exact impression of it, than he who casts towards it one or two glances.

Experience thoroughly confirms these observations. Look the world over, and find the individual whose mind and moral character do not correspond to the objects about which his thoughts and affections have been most employed. Is there any truer proverb, than that "he who walketh with wise men shall be wise, and the companion of fools be destroyed?" To know what a man is, it is necessary but to know

what company he keeps, what persons and things he has chosen to be familiar with; and as his familiarity with them has been greater or less, so it is certain that he bears, more or less perfectly, their image, whether good or evil.

But if these remarks be incontrovertible, so likewise is the utility of prayer. Prayer is an exercise of the soul. It expresses the state of the soul in intercourse with God. With God, did we say? Most certainly so: It is to no other than God, supremely Good and Glorious, that the soul elevates herself in prayer — elevates not only her intellect, but her conscience, her affections and sympathies — her whole immortal and ethereal self; — not to speculate — but to adore — to commune — to breathe out her love, and desires, and longings, into the very bosom and heart of the High and Lofty One. What mode of intercourse more direct, more intimate, more affectionate, or better adapted to acquire the image of the Object?

But let us consider the nature of this high intercourse more particularly. The different parts of prayer require correspondent acts and affections of mind, which comprise the substance of all moral excellence, and which prayer, by frequently calling them forth, tends, beyond every thing else, to invigorate and mature. — Prayer is adoration. And when are the divine perfections so likely to expand the soul with the ardours of holy love and delight, as when brought distinctly before her eye in this heavenly employment? The philosopher may be indevout, while he traces these perfections in the frame of nature; and the theologian may coldly speculate and discourse concerning them as exhibited in Scripture. But he who fixes a firm and single eye on God in prayer, and dwells on one attribute and another with adoring admiration, will not be long unconscious of that pure flame, in which are blended all the elements of virtue and happiness. —

Prayer is confession of sin : And when is sin more apt to melt the heart into the soft relentings of godly contrition, than when carefully recounted to Him against whom it has all been committed, with a spirit awed into reverence and submission by the pure majesty of the Divine Presence ? You may speak lightly of sin, when your words are directed to the sinful ear of a creature like yourself ; but get you into some solitary place, and set the Lord distinctly and immediately before you ; and spread out your offences before His undefiled eye ; and under His pure and piercing gaze, lay your heart and life open ; — and we see not how you are ever to become repentant, if your sorrows do not then begin to flow forth. — Prayer is supplication for mercy, grounded upon the blood of Christ, and the promises, which in him are yea and amen : And if ever the heart hath advantages for becoming all subdued and possessed by the sentiments and feelings which

these wonders of divine love should excite, it is now. Men may speak to one another of these subjects with as little sensibility as they feel towards common things: but when the soul collects herself, and comes, and, convinced of her guilt, stands trembling and pleading before her great Judge, and tells him of his professed clemency and graciousness, and how his own Son hath loved her, and how he himself hath said and sworn that for his worthy Son's sake, he will withhold no blessing from any humble contrite suppliant — what a resistless tendency hath all this to transfuse the soul with confidence, and faith, and full assurance of hope. — Prayer, finally, is thanksgiving for favours received: And sure, if ever gratitude unfeigned and unextinguishable do glow in a mortal's breast, this is the occupation in which the ethereal passion is generated and nourished. You may be reminded that goodness and mercy have followed you all the days of your life,

and look around you upon a thousand witnesses of the divine benignity still compassing you about ; and your heart still be but little awake to its numberless and everlasting obligations. But not so, if, in a secret interview with your Father in heaven, you yourself tell over to him some few of the countless mercies which his hand hath been incessantly bestowing on you, since you first became the object of his providential and gracious care. Thus does it appear, how the various excellencies of holy character are instrumentally produced and promoted by means of this exercise : and it would appear more convincingly, if the time permitted more detail.

Now as it hence results, that a man who lives a prayerful life, must be a man of transcendent loveliness and worth, we might be fairly required to subject our conclusion to the decisive test of fact and example. And we need not be unwilling to abide the trial. So much was the life

of Enoch a life of prayer, so much did he acknowledge the divine presence, so intimately did he converse with his Maker at all times, that the Scripture, giving a brief description of this ancient prophet, declares, that he “walked with God.” And so estimable and spiritual did that man’s character become, that God, seeing the world was not worthy of him, translated him to heaven, that he should not taste of death. And of Elias, another singular example of prayer, it is also testified, that the Lord took him up into heaven, not by death, but by a whirlwind. And who knows not that in every age the best and brightest of men have been those who approached nearest to these illustrious patterns of prayer? At this present time, there are persons of but inferior parts and accomplishments, who by reason of great prayerfulness, transcend, in moral worth, professors of high distinction and splendid gifts. Religionists, however exalted, who are not

often with God in prayer, are but little profited themselves by all their privileges; and but little profitable to others by all their intercourse with them; but contrary-wise, being persons of prayer by character, and not in fact, are stumbling-blocks to many; and are the principal causes of this world's incredulity in regard to the efficacy and usefulness of prayer. Great therefore and unparalleled is the direct tendency of prayer to improve the human character.

II. Its utility is further manifest, we next remark, in its counteracting influence on whatever tends to injure that character.

If a thing proves its excellence by its own good tendency on what it directly exerts itself upon, it proves it still more by resisting and overcoming what has a contrary tendency — a tendency to counteract and neutralize the good it aims to accomplish. If a man show me friendship by coming to me with favours and benefits, he shows it further by defeating the designs of certain

enemies who intend to rob me of them, as soon as I get them into my possession.

Now there are many things in this world always acting upon the soul with a most debasing and ruinous tendency ; and there are no means of overcoming this tendency so efficacious as prayer.

To speak first generally : There is an influence in worldly things so hostile to the things of the Spirit of God, as sometimes to make these latter things appear like empty shadows, or cunningly devised fables ; and the mysteries of the everlasting Gospel are as the superstitious stories which frighten credulous children ; and judgement and eternity, heaven and hell, are words, by which crazed or criminal imaginations have expressed their fictions of happiness and horror. It needs no demonstration, that this is an influence utterly subversive of all religion and virtue — adapted to brutalize man's rational nature ; and of course, if there be a future

state in fact, to involve him in all its untold terrors and torments. Nor need we stay long to show, to what vast extent this baleful influence hath full and domineering ascendancy over infatuated mankind; how, though there be few professed skepticks and scorers, there are but a few whose lives do not preach skepticism from beginning to end; — which *practical* skepticism is, to all terrible intents, as bad as any other. Now to overcome this influence, there is no other way than to have the soul brought under a strong impression and bearing from spiritual things. By the very laws of mind, one impression or frame of spirit cannot be permanently displaced but by the introduction of another; and that other never can be generated, but in the presence of its appropriate object. Of necessity, therefore, must the things of this world sway and debase the human mind, so long as the things of the invisible world do not exert themselves upon it. You

must be exposed to the action of unseen things, or remain in unworthy bondage to things which are seen. You must be in such circumstances, that the spiritual glories of God and Christ, and the promises and threatenings of Scripture, may pour their peculiar influence on your heart, or else you must remain the slave of mammon, and sordid drudge of the flesh.

Now it is almost unnecessary to remark, that there are no circumstances in which these objects are so nearly approached and so deeply felt, as when the soul solemnly betakes herself to the exercises of prayer. We grant that reading, and hearing, and conversing about divine things, rightly managed, may make profitable impressions, and should by no means be omitted. But there are thousands that read, and hear, and converse, and though some feeling may be generated, it passes over their minds as the little circles, produced by the falling pebble, pass over the surface of the

smooth water. If those persons could be persuaded to try the influence of true and fervent prayer, they would find it more availing. Retired from the world, shut up alone with Him who dwelleth in secret, kneeling in his awful presence, fixing the heart for communicating and receiving, speaking to him, and not of him merely; Oh, this brings the unseen world into view, and casts earth into shade and emptiness; this takes importance and reality off from temporal things, and puts those qualities on eternal and spiritual things; this places the soul on the verge of eternity, and subjects her to the beams, and breezes, and blessed visions of heaven. Here there is hope of her losing her skepticism and worldliness. In these circumstances this world hath little power; and it were not surprising, if he who habituates himself to an exercise like this, should soon have his conversation more in heaven than on earth, and his walk more with God than with men.

But it may show yet more forcibly the counteracting power of prayer, to consider its operation in some particular instances of its resistance to the world.

The world then, we all know, tends to make the sons and daughters of men light-minded; and levity is no ornament of man's rational being; nor is it at all suited to our condition in a region full of dangers, and lamentations, and arrows of death; neither is it compatible with our present or our eternal well-being. But how can levity stand before prayer? Books and sermons may be unable to contend with it. You may tell us of those who let no day pass without running through a chapter, and no sabbath pass without a visit to the house of God, and yet have just as much of this world's vanity in their hearts, and gaiety in their looks, and giddiness in their lives, as other people. Further, we have heard professed christians gravely reason in defence of worldly levities, and reason themselves into

a persuasion that they are, to say the least, innocent; and with this persuasion, they have freely gone into them, and led their unthinking offspring along with them in the wildering path. But what if these persons would but seek in prayer to know the way of duty? What if they would try, whether they could keep the spirit of levity at the throne of grace, or get leave of Him, who sitteth thereon, to be guided by that spirit? What if they would go to their Father who is in secret, and ask his blessing upon their intended indulgences? Or what if, after leaving their gay companions and diversions, they would go and tell Him of the way in which their time and faculties had been employed, to see whether it would be sanctioned by the uplifted light of his countenance! How could levity endure such an experiment? How manifestly must a man of true prayer be a man of pure and permanent sobriety; serene and settled, and cheerful without lightness.

Again, the world often fills the bosoms of men with avarice and ambition; under the former of which they make haste to be rich, and under the latter to be great; under either, or both, to be undone; since the love of money is the root of all evil; and since they have no heart to believe the gospel, who receive honour one of another.

Would you then regard that as a useless thing, which has a tendency to eradicate these base passions from the hearts of men? But if men would give themselves to prayer, they would soon cease to be the slaves of these passions. Prayer would quickly dethrone and banish these guilty usurpers of dominion over the immortal minds of men. If men would acknowledge God in all their ways, God himself would be their ruler and guide; and his Holy Spirit would hold the throne of their hearts. If, before they undertake their plans and enterprises, they would submit

them, with the calmness and seriousness of pure devotion, for the approbation of Him, on whom they depend for success, how many of them would they relinquish, and with what moderation would they prosecute the rest! Seest thou a man hurrying, and scrambling, and scuffling for the pelf or the praise of this world? Assuredly thou seest a prayerless soul; professor or not, he is a prayerless soul:—one who, if he deals at all with God in prayer, deals with him only so far as to mock and insult him? A praying man knows too much concerning the true riches, and the honour which cometh from God, to discover such miserable infatuation for the things of an hour. To such a man it matters little, whether he rank with this world's rich or poor, its mighty or its mean. Riches cannot exalt, nor poverty depress him; honours cannot elate him, nor reproaches break his heart. He dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High, abiding un-

der the shadow of the Almighty; afraid neither for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day.

Once more, the world is full of blinding and infatuating influences, whereby the ears of men are turned away from the truth and are turned unto fables; and some have one doctrine and some another; while the ungodliness of others takes occasion from the variance, to renounce all religious opinions, and to hold every thing pertaining to God and another world uncertain, unsettled, and incapable of ever being placed on any sure basis: Such confusion and doubt hath human depravity engendered in a world to which God's oracles have been given for a guide and directory in the way of truth! Nevertheless, men must be extricated from this labyrinth, as they would be either sanctified or saved. As salvation is inseparable from holiness, so is holiness from the belief of the truth. They have pleasure in unrighteousness

who believe not the truth; and against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, the everlasting wrath of God is revealed from heaven.

Yet they plead the impossibility of knowing what is truth. The Bible cannot satisfy them; books cannot satisfy them; sermons but multiply their difficulties; and what are they to do? The Eternal Source of truth hath informed them, that they would arrive at certainty, if they would but cease their rebellion against God. "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine." It is nothing but the spirit of disobedience that subjects any man to the domination of heresy and delusion. But not to enter on the proof of this, in its universal scope, we affirm, that obedience to God, in the single article of prayer, will prove a sure touchstone of truth, and an impregnable defence to the soul against all the innovations of ruinous opinions and dogmas. The soul in prayer

stands too near the Fountain of light and truth to be invaded by the fatal infections of error. Her temper, in this exercise, is incongenial to every thing in error's likeness, and shrinks away from its polluting approach, as modesty recoils from the approach of impudence. Nothing certainly but pure truth is capable of being either relished or expressed by the spirit of genuine prayer. For the spirit of such prayer is the spirit of humility and submissiveness, of heavenly sincerity and holy love; and how, with such a spirit, can any falsehood have agreement? On such a spirit light will be poured from all nature, as well as from the Providence, and Book, and Spirit of God. And hence the common observation, that good men always think alike in prayer. Nor is prayer an unthoughtful business. Much of intellect, as well as feeling, is breathed forth in true devotion; nay from almost every true prayer an epitome of the gospel might be extracted.

Wherefore nothing is more unfounded than the pretence of not being able to come to the knowledge of the truth in the midst of this world's jargon of opinions. There is a sure and an easy way; nor is the existence of that destructive jargon resolvable into any thing else, than the world's forgetfulness of God, and known character for prayerlessness. Let no one question it, that prayer universally tried, would unite the whole world, substantially, in the same mind and judgement, nor leave any man doubtful as to an essential article of faith. Thou that hearest this announcement, art, perhaps, an unsettled, unhappy skeptick; yet desirest not to be so, and hast long tried to convince thyself. Thou hast read; thou hast disputed; and thou hast listened, in hope that thy doubts might be dissipated. We will not question that thou hast done all this; but full well we know, there is one thing thou hast not done. Thou hast not disinterred thy

heart out of this world's pollutions and vanities. Thou hast been living in the spirit and in the ways of them who fear not God. It hath not been thy daily delight to enter into thy closet and shut thyself in from all earthly society, and then bow down thy spirit before His presence who seeth in secret. Hadst thou done but this, thou wouldst not have been now a tired wanderer, near eternity's dread brink, with a mind full of doubt, void of fixed hope, aching with ungratified desire, and anon shivering with apprehension of what may yet befall.

VII.

PRAYER.

PART SECOND.

III. THUS have we considered the influence of prayer in counteracting the debasing and soul-destroying tendencies of the world. There are other tendencies favourable to the soul's welfare, and we now wish to show briefly the efficacious influence of prayer upon these.

We begin with the Word of God. That word is, in its unresisted applications to the heart, quick and powerful, and as the fire and the hammer which breaketh the rock in pieces. It is perfect, converting the soul; sure, making wise the simple; right, rejoicing the heart; pure, enlightening the eyes—but the time would fail us

to repeat a small part of what Inspiration hath spoken in its praise. It is nevertheless powerless independently of prayer ; for, however great its excellencies, prayerlessness will either keep them out of view, or turn them into deformities and stumbling-blocks. What are the beauties of the rainbow, or the beams of the sun to the blind man ? And who more blind, though voluntarily so, than the prayerless soul ? What was the glory of the only begotten of the Father to the earthly-minded Jews, when He dwelt among them, full of grace and truth ? And what also, are the wonders of Truth and Wisdom in sacred Scripture, to those who are so swayed by an obstinate will, that they cast off fear, and restrain prayer to God ? Depravity can see no beauty in holiness ; and who are depraved, if not the prayerless ? When such persons have read the Bible till they have it in all their memories, what are they better ? Which hath the greater charms in their

eye, God's truth or their riches ; salvation or the pleasures of sin ? We have known of such great readers, who seemed to have learned by their researches, how to cavil and blaspheme, or to play the bigot or the fanatic — such miserable fruit of their labour came of their not mixing prayer with it. Even the renewed find prayer still indispensable to a profitable meditation in Scripture. Remaining pollution will blind their eye, if the anointing of the Holy One be not constantly sought ; and therefore, though the sacred pages lie open before them, and though they have once been truly enlightened to understand them, they shall not, without unremitted prayer, continue to behold the wonders of God's law.

But the Bible is not the only book that may profit the soul of man. There are profound treatises on every subject of theology and morals, in which treasures of light and learning are contained for the edification of mankind ; and here, where

man speaks to man, what can hinder the acquisition of benefit by the diligent student? Without meaning to discourage deep study, let me rather ask, what can hinder its resulting fatally, if prayer be restrained? It matters not what the subjects of human thought are, if intellect alone be conversant with them—if the other faculties of the soul—the conscience, the will, the affections,—be not duly exercised, the reign of depravity, instead of being overthrown, is established. And the danger is not imaginary, that in deep and retired studies these other faculties will not be proportionately engaged. Those pastors know this, whose souls are kept in an almost constant stretch of thought, in order to get food, intellectual and spiritual, for their flocks, that else would starve for lack of knowledge. Many think their lives easy, and their labour well rewarded, if they are just kept out of want: but these know little of mental travail; which, in our

case, while it is all for the profit of others, greatly endangers our own spiritual state. We have to think so much for them, that often we have hardly time for prayer ; unless we think and pray at once ; and yet nothing but prayer can keep our thinking from withering up the life of our personal godliness. — Study, in short, will much advance the soul, if it be conducted with a prayerful spirit ; but if prayer be slighted, while study accumulates knowledge, it also genders spiritual leanness and impotence ; and it is well if it prove not a savour of death unto death at last.

Thus, also, as to the divine ordinance of public Preaching — that ordinance by means of which more hath been done for man's spiritual interest, than by all other means beside. A man may make his boast of having the ablest minister in the land, and of hearing habitually the most clear and pungent discourses that the human tongue hath ever pronounced ; and yet the good

of every sermon may be lost to that man, for want of the spirit of prayer in his hearing. For what though the seed be the best, and be sown with the greatest diligence, if it fall upon hard-beaten, or stony, or thorny ground? Now there is no other way of preparing the ground of the heart for the seed of the word, than prayer; and no other influence but that, which prayer draws down upon the soul, can make that seed vegetate and yield fruit. A church-going man, who is not also a man of prayer, has no better reason to expect spiritual benefit from the ordinances of grace, than a husbandman has to expect a harvest, who plants his grain, and leaves his field an unfenced common. It is he who enters his closet before he comes to the house of God, and prays in secret, before he takes his place in the public assembly, and keeps still praying while the word is sounding powerfully in his ear, and forgets not another retreat to his private chamber after

dismissal from the courts of the Lord — this is the man who grows, and thrives, as every one ought, under the ministrations of the word.

The same necessity is there for prayer, to make Providential dispensations available to the advancement of man's salvation. For though adversities have a tendency to draw him away from the idolatry of the world, and mercies should lift his affections to their glorious Source, yet all experience testifies, that the former will only sink him into sullen melancholy or fretfulness, and the latter infatuate him with pride and self-sufficiency, unless he keep near to God in the exercise of prayer.

Thus, besides ennobling man's soul, by its own proper and direct influence ; and keeping other influences from injuring it, by resisting and overcoming them ; prayer is of this further utility, that it makes all favourable influences secure of their end. And now, whether, taking these things to-

gether, there be not good reason to esteem prayer useful, none we think can doubt, except those who are resolved not to be convinced.

IV. But all the truth on this subject has not yet been told. Prayer has another bearing — another kind of influence, than any which hath yet been considered. It has an influence, not only upon ourselves, and upon all the means and second causes, which tend either to our injury or advantage, but upon Him likewise, to whom it is addressed — upon the mind and conduct of God himself.

So, most obviously, are we taught in holy Scripture, especially in those winning words of Christ — “What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things unto

them that ask him?" For what are we to gather from this and many parallel texts, if the only influence of prayer is that which it exerts either directly or indirectly upon ourselves? Is it consistent with any just rule of interpreting language, to give this, or any thing compatible with this, as the meaning of passages which represent God as bestowing benefits *in answer* to earnest supplication for them? How *in answer* if the supplication hath no influence to procure them? Is it not clear, that any rendering of these passages, which admits not that prayer has in some way a persuasive influence on God, is a wresting, — not an explaining, of Scripture, — adapted to make men heartless and cold in an exercise which should never be otherwise than fervent.

Look at scriptural examples of prayer. When Jacob, after wrestling in this exercise till break of day, still refused to cease without a blessing, how far was he from

supposing that the only influence of prayer was that which it had on his own mind? Did those effectual prayers of Moses, which turned away wrath from rebellious Israel, even after God had threatened to destroy them, exert no influence except on Moses himself? Were those prayers of Elijah, which availed to shut, and afterwards to open heaven, without all influence, except on Elijah's own heart? And what shall we say of Abraham's prayer for Sodom? or Daniel's for Jerusalem? or that of the first Christians, which brought an angel down from heaven for St. Peter's enlargement? or, indeed, of any prayer in behalf of others,—if the influence of prayer is confined to those who offer it.

And why should it be thought inconsistent with the infinite perfection of God, that he should be influenced by prayer? It is surely agreeable to God's perfection to love righteousness and hate iniquity,

and give due expression of that love and hatred by distributing equal rewards and punishments. As well deny the being of God, as make him indifferent to holiness and sin. But true prayer is holiness, and prayerlessness is sin. In him then who prays, God discerns something excellent; something which, consistently with his perfection, he may approve and reward. In him who does not pray, God discerns something evil and hateful; and which, therefore, must draw forth his abhorrence and indignation. Just as a prodigal son, who asks forgiveness of his father, presents, in his penitent and submissive spirit, a reason why his father should receive him to his arms; — a reason it may be, that prevails; while another unreformed prodigal, who implores no forgiveness, presents no such reason, and receives no such favour.

But does not this doctrine make God changeable? Not more so, we first reply, than God's being influenced by the obsti-

nacy of sinners suddenly and without remedy to destroy them; and by the holiness of his people, to smile upon them with complacency and loving-kindness. But wherein, let us ask, consists the unchangeableness of God? Not in his being always entirely destitute of moral feeling; but in his feelings always alike towards the same objects in the same circumstances. God, doubtless, has perfectly pure and proper feeling toward all things. But all things being eternally present in his view, he is eternally, and always in the same degree and manner, affected by them. The prayer that forms a reason for his showing favour at this moment, has always been before his infinite mind; and before it with all its present persuasive influence.

Nor is there any conflict between our doctrine of prayer and that of the divine purposes. The purposes of God embrace all events, and embrace them in that very order in which they occur in time. If, in

the order of actual occurrence, prayer always precedes the bestowal of blessings, it precedes it agreeably to the order of the divine purposes. If, in the purpose of God, prayer eternally stands present as the immediate condition of his favour, it were inconsistent, if things were not so, in event.

It does not appear, therefore, that we speak otherwise than soberly and truly, when we say, that prayer hath power with God. There is nothing in the word of God, nothing in his nature, nothing in his purposes, to discourage the hope of prevailing with him by prayer. Far, infinitely far different is the fact. Hath the hungry child encouragement to hope he shall not ask his parent, in vain, for wholesome food? The most affectionate parent would sooner give such a child a stone for bread, or a scorpion for a fish, than the Father of mercies refuse his Holy Spirit to them that ask him. There is not in the

universe a being, who compared with God, hath any susceptibility to the influence of prayer. What emanations of love hath it drawn from his heart ! What blessings of goodness from his hand ! His mightiest acts have been achieved in answer to prayer. "What terrible judgements have been averted ; what mighty armies conquered ; nay more, the very course of nature changed — the sun himself arrested — by the power of prayer !" — Who can assign the limits of that power ? Who can tell what influence prayer hath had on the government of God in this world ? But since all the parts of God's empire are united, its influence has travelled beyond earth's boundary, and is now exerting itself, and will exert itself for ever, on the far distant tracts of creation.

While we muse on this, Oh, how refreshing and invigorating is the recollection, that at this present period, the smoke of the incense of prayer is rising up to heaven

day and night from a thousand oratories in the four quarters of the Globe ! Assuredly the time draws nigh of the restitution of all things. What wonders shall the arm of God presently achieve in fulfilment of the desires of his saints. Away fly all obstructions to the universal spread of Christian truth. Away pass the infidels and scorners of the day to their own proper places, and the Gospel of the kingdom becomes the glory of the nations, and the earth resounds with “ Alleluia, Salvation ! ” Transporting scene ! and yet is it not possible, that some man may read all this, and without gainsaying it, remain unapprized of his private concern in the blest contemplation ? We would put thee in mind, then, inconsiderate brother, that the end of reading and hearing is practice ; and that thou wilt be but a despiser of divine counsel, if thy life henceforth be not a life of true prayer. It depends upon thy conduct concerning prayer, how it is to fare with thy soul for-

ever. It depends upon this, whether thou find in God a friend or an enemy; and of course, whether all things shall work together for thy good or thy ruin. It may not, indeed, depend upon thy praying, whether the ordinary fruits of the divine bounty shall be bestowed or not. God's sunshine and rain are given to the praying and prayerless; and even blasphemers and atheists riot on his exhaustless beneficence. But prayer makes this difference — that while temporal blessings become as wings, with which a praying man soars to his eternal rest; they become as millstones about the necks of the prayerless, with which they will be sunk down in the deep of eternal despair. "I will curse your blessings," saith he who gave them — "yea, I have cursed them already, because ye lay it not to heart to give God the glory." Whether thou prayest or not, a smooth full tide of prosperity may float thee along for a season; but a storm is gathering; and soon

the current will turn against thee ; and if thou art not a man of prayer, the proud waters shall overwhelm thee, and thy prosperity be thy destruction.

Nor can we suppress the apprehension, that thine own soul will not be the only victim of thy negligence in this prime regard. Thou standest not separate and aloof from all the rest of the sons of men ; but sustainest towards them relations through which, of necessity, thou exertest some influence, hurtful or happy, on their eternal condition. Art thou one in authority ? Thine inferiors regarding thee, perhaps, not only as higher, but as more knowing than themselves, learn from thy prayerlessness, that to cast off fear and restrain prayer to God is no crime, no disgrace, and of no ill consequence — under which delusion thou art leading them on to the perdition of ungodly men. — Art thou a parent ? Then thine doubtless is one of the families that call not on the

name of the Lord ; and from all the exalting influences of prayer thine offspring, by thy fault, are withheld. And will they not, by the same means, be also withheld from grace and the inheritance of life ? — Art thou a member of the church ? Thy remissness in prayer exerts a secret influence to make the courts of Zion desolate, and her ways to mourn ; and to take out of their places, or obscure the brightness of her golden candlesticks. — Art thou a minister of God ? Thousands may go away to wail forever in the prisons of darkness, because thou givest not thyself to the exercise of prayer. By that one neglect, thy thoughts are sensualized, thy discourses robbed of unction, thy walk before the saints made a snare and scandal, and all thy ministrations sadly marred and misdirected, if not utterly perverted. The prayerless man perisheth not alone in his iniquity.

A word, at parting, to the saint—the

man of faith in Christ. Great, beloved brother, and manifold are thy privileges ; but what we now would humbly call upon thee to bear in constant remembrance, is, the power which thou, all impotent and helpless as thou art in thyself, can exert through prayer. The feeblest of saints can chase a thousand — can put ten thousand to flight — can overcome the world — can elevate himself to higher honour than earth can give or appreciate. There is a kind of omnipotence in prayer ; as having an influence on him who is Almighty. But why do we put thee in mind of this ? Not because we would have thee inflate thyself with pride ; but because we remember that the spirit of prayer is altogether benevolent. Its power is unto the destruction of nothing but sin and its fruits. Its power hath the same scope and aim with that Glorious Being on whom it depends. Pure prayer's first accents are, "hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom

come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven." Faithful brother, man of prayer, — a man who hath power with God, — forget not, we beseech thee, what, by means of prayer, thou art capable of accomplishing. The world's conversion hath not yet been achieved. Means, with that great end in purpose, have been long in operation, and have recently been much increased. What those means are, thou knowest; and their powerlessness, independently of God's blessing, thou knowest also. We remind thee again of thy privilege, as endued with the spirit of grace and supplication. For Zion's sake, then, hold not thy peace, for Jerusalem's sake rest not, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth. There is neither dulness in the ear nor weariness in the arm of God. Both almighty strength and boundless mercy are awake and alert, to make full and swift return to any righteous man's effec-

tual fervent application. And the divine glory is still pledged to make the dominion of truth and grace universal and complete : Of the prophecies promising that triumph, not a jot or tittle can fail to be fulfilled ; unless God can cease to be God, or the Scriptures cease to be his word. And the souls of men have not become less excellent than when Christ counted not his blood too precious to be given for their ransom. Nor are they less liable to be lost, or liable to less than an everlasting perdition. And shall the knees of the saints be soon wearied, and the breath of their prayers be stifled ? Oh, let them lift up their hands, and pour forth their cries, till they cease to have their dwelling in the land of prayer.

VIII.

THE SABBATH.

IT has often been observed that the Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue, REMEMBER *the Sabbath Day to keep it holy*, does not appoint or institute the Sabbath; but rather proves incontestably that it had been instituted before that commandment was given. It supposes the previous separation of the day to sacred purposes, and enjoins the due observance of it, as *having been* so separated. The Sabbath, in fact, was made not for the Jews, nor for any age or nation, but for *man*, with whose existence it wants but a day of being coeval. Man was made on the sixth day; on the

seventh, God having finished the heavens and the earth and all the host of them, *rested* from his glorious work, and therefore *blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it*. We here find the period of the institution of the Sabbath, and *the law*, which made its observance a part of the duty of man. God's blessing and hallowing the seventh day, was not his imparting any essential sanctity or blessing to the day itself, as if a portion of time were a conscious intelligence, but was his appointing it to be a day of peculiar utility to mankind, and so to be observed by them in a sacred manner. The day was sanctified and blessed, not on its own account, but man's, for whose sake all days and the creation itself were subordinately designed: and God's *resting* on that day did not import that the work of creation, however vast, had wearied the Almighty, but that having accomplished it, his mind reposed in what he had done with entire satisfaction, as a worthy, though

inadequate, exhibition of his infinite perfection; the record of which fact, in the volume he has given us as our rule of practice, is at once a most powerful enforcement of the duty of keeping the Sabbath, and a most illustrious example of the manner in which that duty should be performed.

II. What practical regard the Sabbath received from mankind before the giving of the law of Moses, the brief history of those times does not inform us; but that it had been observed by the holy men of that period, may be gathered from several intimations; and that its observance was obligatory when the law *was* given, is clearly evident, as we have remarked already, from the *language* of the precept concerning it: which would not have commanded the Israelites to *remember* to keep the Sabbath holy, if a Sabbath had not until that moment been appointed.

III. And now, since the Sabbath was no

peculiarity of the Jews' religion, but was made for man almost as soon as man himself was made, why should it be supposed that *with the abolition of Judaism, the world was deprived of the earliest expression of its Maker's provident love?* The passing away of the ritual of Moses, no more involved of necessity the abrogation of the Sabbath, than the abrogation of marriage, or of prayer, or of any other holy service, not belonging peculiarly to that symbolical institute. If the new dispensation *does not unequivocally disown a Sabbath*, the world has no more cause to think this divine ordinance disannulled, than that God has disannulled the covenant respecting the day and the night, or the seasons of the year.

IV. The importance of keeping the Sabbath, *not as pertaining to Judaism, but to essential and indispensable holiness*, is manifest from the Jewish Scriptures themselves. The fact that we find a precept enjoining the observance of the Sabbath, *among the*

ten commandments, those unchangeable laws of the moral kingdom, which though registered in the Mosaic code, were written on the heart of man when he was created, and were gloriously distinguished from the carnal ordinances designed for the Jews only, by being proclaimed out of the midst of fire, with God's own voice, and written on tables of stone, with God's own finger, seems to intimate the keeping of the Sabbath to be no part of a mere ceremonial service, which, after awhile, was to cease and pass away, but a branch of that substantial holiness, the necessity for which remains the same through all the changes and circumstances of man's condition. This accords with the voice of the prophets, who while they speak of mere ceremonial observances as being in themselves of no use, and as proving a snare if confided in, as was too commonly done, insist largely upon the keeping of the Sabbath, *as comprising virtually the whole of practical re-*

ligion, and as arbitrating the character and destiny of man. “If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable ; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words, then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord, and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.” When or where has God so spoken in regard to any merely ceremonial service ? The due observance of the Sabbath, here has promise of the divine complacency in its highest degrees, and it is clearly implied, that this complacency will be withheld from the violators of the Sabbath. Behold the grand importance of this appointment, and how they reproach it, who by making it vanish away with the ritual of Moses, place it on a level with that shadowy institute.

V. Nor do the Scriptures of the old testament merely distinguish and set apart the Sabbath, in this manner, from the peculiarities of the system of Moses ; they also decisively witness to *its outliving that system, and passing after its dissolution into the last and more glorious dispensation of the gospel.* After God had said by the prophet Isaiah, (chap. lvi. 1.) “ My salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed,” — revealed as it was under the gospel, — he added, “ blessed is the man that keepeth the Sabbath from polluting it ; and keepeth his hand from doing any evil.” Why is the observance of the Sabbath commanded in this connexion, but to intimate its eminent congeniality and oneness with the simple spirit of the evangelical economy ? In the next verses, a place in God’s house, and a name better than of sons and daughters are promised to persons, who, by the Jewish ritual, were excluded from the congregation of the Lord : “ *Neither let the son of the*

stranger that hath joined himself to the Lord, speak, saying : The Lord hath utterly separated me from his people : neither let the eunuch say, behold I am a dry tree : For thus saith the Lord, unto the eunuchs that keep my Sabbaths — even unto them will I give in my house and within my walls, a place and a name better than of sons and of daughters :” —

A time of course was referred to, when the Jewish ritual should be superseded, as it was, by the new dispensation ; but the utmost stress is laid upon the observance of the Sabbath, as *at that time* indispensable. For the persons spoken of were to be blessed as above mentioned, only *as keeping God's Sabbaths, and choosing the things that please him.* The prophet proceeds in the following verses, to extend the fulness of the divine favour to “the sons of the stranger,” the Gentiles indiscriminately, of whom it is written, “even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer ; their burnt-

offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people." Yet was it as, "keeping the Sabbath from polluting it," that this mercy was to be shown to the Gentiles. The Sabbath, therefore, is plainly declared in the Old Testament, to be a perpetual ordinance, the observance of which would be required under the most solemn sanctions, of those who should live in the times of the gospel.

VI. It was agreeable to **THE REASON OF THINGS**, that such a difference should be made between the law of the Sabbath, and the ritual institutions of the Jews. Those institutions being typical, — mere shadows of good things to come — became unprofitable and unmeaning, when the antetypes, the good things themselves, appeared. It was expedient they should come to an end; but not so the Sabbath. What called for that appointment at first, calls as urgently

still. A Sabbath was never more proper in itself, and surely never more needed than now. Has it ceased to be desirable or right, that mankind should rest from labour, one day out of seven, that they may give themselves to holy meditations and services? Why has this observance become improper and unreasonable? And if still reasonable and proper, why should the Divine law which first required it, have been annulled by the gospel?

VII. But the plea not of *reasonableness* only, but also of *necessity*, may be urged in favor of the continuance of the Sabbath. Such high ground in this argument had, perhaps, been untenable, *if man had not fallen*. Though a Sabbath, even in that case, would have been proper and useful, perhaps it would not have been indispensably necessary to mankind. Possibly they might have kept themselves in the fear and service of God without a Sabbath. But could *the fallen race* have dispensed with

one? As far back into the past as our knowledge reaches, the Sabbath is seen to be the grand instrument of whatever holiness has at any time existed amongst men. Need we say what has been the character of those portions of the human family which have had no Sabbaths amongst them? Need we describe the moral state of the heathen nations, and what those nations have always been? What did France become when she abolished the Sabbath? What would quickly befall this country, distinguished as it is by intelligence and virtue, if the Sabbath should cease from among us? When would this earth become the habitation of righteousness, or be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the seas, if the observance of the Sabbath should be henceforth discontinued? To allege that Christianity abrogated the Sabbath, is to make Christianity inimical to itself; to make it disarm itself of the only means by

which it can prevail; to make it an unwise — a preposterous, self-ruining system; — adverse to the fulfilment of prophecy, an enemy of all righteousness, the corrupter and destroyer of mankind. The direct aim of Christianity is the world's complete reformation; its transformation into the likeness of heaven. With such an object in view, it were natural to expect that it would remove out of the way whatever had restricted spiritual privilege, and impeded the universal extension of the true religion; but that it would repeal the law of the Sabbath, or abate in the least, the sanctity and sacredness of that mightiest instrument of moral influence, were no more to be expected than that it would publish an intention of defeating its own purpose, and the highest and all-commanding purpose of Providence.

VIII. What then has led some men to think that so strange a thing was done at the introduction of Christianity? There

are men of this opinion; men who cannot deny the utility, nay the *necessity* of a day of rest, when the rites of religion should be solemnized; but who do deny that the sacred observance of the Sabbath is now obligatory upon the world, as a matter of divine commandment. What is it that has led them into this, as it seems to us, *self-confuting* belief? Self-confuting, we cannot but regard it, because if the excellence, the necessity of the day be granted, it surely is not also true, that God has withdrawn from it the protection of his authority, and invited men to despise it *by revoking that ancient law*, which gave it all its sacredness. What has originated this opinion? Does the gospel say, anywhere, that the Sabbath had come to its end? Did Christ show any disregard to this hallowed institution? He did indeed claim to be Lord of the Sabbath, but he exercised his authority over it, not by destroying, but by rescuing it from the abuses of

the Pharisees, who seem to have held, that man was rather made for the Sabbath, than the Sabbath for man. Though Lord of the Sabbath, he set us a perfect example of observing it; he kept it holy himself, according to the commandment, and in all his instructions concerning it, he assumed its sanctity as a thing unquestionable and unnecessary to be proved. Did the Apostles of Christ, the anointed ministers of the new dispensation, either by their practice or their teaching, make void the law of God, in regard to the Sabbath-day? The history of their conduct represents them as always keeping the Jewish Sabbath, along with other Jews; and in all their writings there is not the slightest hint, that to sanctify the Sabbath was no longer a part of the religion of man. Paul does indeed censure the Galatians for observing days and months, and times, and years; and he also cautions the Colossians against being ensnared by false teach-

ers, who would *judge*, that is, condemn them for not conforming to their own anti-christian principles, in respect of meats and drinks, of holy days and new moons, and Sabbaths; but he says nothing in these places against the law of the Sabbath, but only witnesses against a spirit of self-righteousness, directly the reverse of the whole tendency and design of the gospel. The Pharisees, as appears from our Saviour's discourses, held to great abuses of the Sabbath, of which they made high merit; these abuses the Judaizers,—children of the Pharisees, who would be also called Christian teachers,—laboured to introduce into the apostolical churches, along with many other like things, belonging to the same system: And Paul, jealous for the purity of the gospel, would secure his converts against the designs of these men. But not a sentence has either he or any other apostle, written to signify the abrogation of the fourth commandment of the Decalogue. On the

contrary, *by their manner of quoting the Decalogue*, which they often do quote in confirmation of their doctrine, the Apostles manifestly inculcate the unchangeable obligation of every precept it contains. For while they refer for such a purpose, to that document, *without stating an exception*, they clearly admit the authority of one part of it, as much as another, and do in this way, virtually republish the fourth commandment as a branch of the law of Christ.

IX. *But a change has taken place as to the day*, and this to some persons has involved our subject in difficulty. We wish to bring the sanction of the fourth commandment *in favour of our Sabbath*, although the Sabbath which existed when that commandment was given, was the seventh, and ours is the first day of the week. True; but that circumstance makes nothing against us. The Sabbath in force when the fourth commandment was given, was the seventh day, but that commandment did not make

that day the Sabbath. The Jews had received another law, appointing the seventh day as their Sabbath, the record of which occurs in the 16th chapter of Exodus, among directions respecting the gathering of the manna. The fourth commandment given afterwards, requires the previously designated day to be kept holy, not by designating the day, but by requiring the Sabbath, *whatever that day was or might be*, to be so kept. It does determine that the day shall occur as often as once in seven; but whether that day is to be the first, or the seventh, or any other day of the week, it does not determine. If, at a period subsequent to the publication of the Decalogue, a law had been given to the Jews, changing the day, the fourth commandment would have required the sacred observance of that day; provided it was made to occur, one day in seven, the next day after six working days; the only legislation we find in this commandment as to time. If

then *the change of the day made under the gospel*, was made by *due authority*, the sanction of the fourth commandment does at this moment enforce the observance of the Christian Sabbath.

X. How then was the change effected? By the Apostles themselves, in a manner specially marked with wisdom. They did not unnecessarily awaken Jewish animosity on the subject, by giving out a formal precept in respect to the change, but guided by that Holy Spirit, whose will they executed, they prudently observed themselves, and required their converts to observe, the first day of the week, the day of their Lord's resurrection; not forbidding at the same time, the observance of the seventh day. That this was the manner of the change, appears clearly from the latter part of the New Testament, which, while it relates instances of their keeping the Jewish Sabbath, informs us that their own religious assemblies, were from the beginning

of the new dispensation held on the first day of the week, which, as being the day of Christ's glorious triumph over the powers of darkness, was called *the Lord's Day*, the most honourable style which could have been given to it. Nor was the appointment of the Apostles unattended by decisive and most signal proofs of the Divine approbation. What religious meetings were ever so marked as theirs, by the tokens of the Divine presence? How could the Jewish converts question that they were obeying the will of God, by yielding themselves to apostolical direction, in this high case, when that direction had so clearly the sanction of Heaven? Thus it was that the transition took place. The seventh day was not legislated upon, but left to the natural course of things, while the high importance attached to the first day, by apostolical practice and command, and the concurrent attestations of the Holy Spirit, secured it paramount, and very soon exclu-

sive attention, as the divinely designated Sabbath of the Christian Church. If to any one, this account of the change seems less evincive of that Divine authority which we plead for it, than a positive law would have been, directly annulling the former Sabbath and substituting the present, such a person, perhaps, does not duly consider what unnecessary evils might have originated from this peremptory measure, operating upon strong Jewish prejudice already elicited in too many forms against the infant Church of Christ. Nor does he bear in mind how inconsistent with God's wonted gentleness and indulgence towards *harmless* prejudice, would have been that abrupt and violent way of proceeding. If, as we have shown, the original law requiring a Sabbath to be observed was unchangeable, and if the Apostles of Christ, acting under a Divine commission, observed, and required Christians to observe, a different day from that which had been kept by the Jews, the evidence of a Divine warrant for

the observance of that day is complete ; and why exact evidence in another form inconsistent with the genius of the Divine government ?

XI. Such is the proof that a change was duly made : And now if we consider the reasons for a change, the *propriety* of the measure will be seen ; and it will appear that there would have been cause for skeptical wonder if it had not taken place. The ancient Sabbath commemorated the creation of the world ; but *the new creation* is so much more excellent than the former, that God, speaking by the prophet Isaiah, says, — “Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind.” Shall no day then be observed in commemoration of this creation, but the old Sabbath, which brought the first creation into mind every seventh day continue to be kept ? Shall the less receive perpetual celebration, and the greater none at all ? But the Jews kept their Sabbath, in memo-

ry not only of the creation, but of their own emancipation from Egyptian bondage, as we learn from the repetition of the Decalogue in chapter 5th of Deuteronomy. "And remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord thy God brought thee out thence, through a mighty hand and by a stretched-out arm ; *therefore the Lord thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath-day.*" Now shall Christians keep a Sabbath which commemorates the Exodus of the Israelites, but none in celebration of their own and the world's redemption from eternal bondage to sin and Satan ? Was it not therefore expedient that there should be a change of the day, — a change which, while it served to keep the world mindful of the most glorious of all events, our Lord's resurrection from the dead, did not preclude due meditation of those other two events which the Sabbath formerly commemorated ? Christians on their Sabbath may and should still

refresh their minds with holy recollections of the creation, and of Israel's deliverance out of Egypt. It is fit and natural that they should do so ; it is still *the Sabbath* which they keep ; an institution first designed in honour of those events, which it should still call to mind, though it now have chief reference to another. But while the Christian Sabbath may yet subserve the purposes of the Jewish, the Jewish could not answer the end of the Christian. On every account therefore, a change seems to have been expedient ; and in this, as in other things, God commends to our understandings as equitable and wise, what he enacts and ordains as law to his kingdom.

XII. The result therefore is this : that the original law of the Sabbath, designed to be unrepealable and perpetual, and not at all affected by the change of the day, which took place at the beginning of the new dispensation, as was expedient and proper,—that law of the Most High,—is at

this day in force over all the sons of men ; and the Christian Sabbath is not an institution resting on the authority of men or of custom, or *allowed* because convenient and useful to society, but is an institution strictly *Divine* ; appointed by Divine command, and guarded by all that is sacred and terrible in the majesty of the eternal King. — And has he not placed before the eyes of men sufficient tokens of the sacredness of this institution ? Do not his blessings and his curses, actually dispensed, proclaim aloud the divinity of the Christian Sabbath ? If the moral history of Sabbath-breakers, whether individuals or communities, and if the moral history also of those who keep the Sabbath from polluting it, could be fully recited, what would be heard but the thunderings of the Divine indignation against the former, and the breathings of the Divine complacency and delight towards the latter ? There is no truth, however perfectly revealed, that

men may not remain ignorant of, if they will not consider its evidences ; they may thus remain insensible to the very being of God ; and they may in the same manner remain doubtful whether the Christian Sabbath is an institution which God claims for his own. But if they would listen to the testimony of facts in respect to this matter, they would find it impossible to retain a shadow of incredulity.

XIII. Having evinced the sacred character of the Sabbath as a perpetual ordinance of God, *the right manner of keeping it is also ascertained.* If the Christian Sabbath were a matter of mere expediency and convenience, originating in the common agreement of the first disciples, and having nothing but long custom to entitle it to reverence, there would be room for various opinions, as to the way in which it should be observed ; and perhaps the laxity on this subject for which some contend would in that case be defensible. If con-

venience were the author of the Institution, why should it not also be *the rule of its observance*? And that being admitted, recreation and even secular labours, might be entirely consistent and commendable. But if there has been no repeal of the law of the Sabbath, if no change has been made, except simply to substitute another day, then whatever degrees of spirituality were formerly included in the sanctification of the Sabbath, are included in it still; and the prophet Isaiah is an authorized preacher to us on this subject. *If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord honourable, and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words,*—this will fulfil the commandment concerning the way of observing the Sabbath. It comports with the design and spirit of the day, as our Saviour has taught us, *to do good*, that is, to

do works of mercy, on the Sabbath ; which proves the lawfulness of the Sunday-school system, and of the labours of the ministry ; but to make the Sabbath the season for pastime and sensual indulgence, is to profane the holy day of God ; and though temporal penalties are not now the consequences of such iniquity, there is an invisible eye which sees it, and there is an invisible hand which will punish it ; and better that the Sabbath-breaker were now stoned to death like him of old, than bear what awaits him when the day of vengeance comes. — Recreations, it has been said, ought to be allowed to one class of the people, — those who pass the week at labour in the cities ; but the question is, does the law of the Sabbath permit them ? If that law is against them, then to maintain their propriety, is to make God tyrannical, and to aim to depose him from the government of the world. Besides, who does not see, that excursions for recreation imply the

labours of many hands, and the making a merchandise of the day?

XIV. It is not in God's behalf only, but man's equally, that we contend for the perpetuity of the law of the Sabbath. The highest interests of this world are involved in the observance of the Lord's day. Abolish that day, and the light of the world is quenched, and its hope perished. Religion is gone, virtue is gone, freedom is gone,—all is gone, that now constitutes the elements of human dignity and happiness; and the overthrow of the world itself, hastens to its period. Especially is the hope of our own country bound up in the Sabbath. Where the people exercise the sovereignty, government must be corrupt, if the people be so, in exact proportion. Does it need then the gift of prophecy to foretel, that if the holy Sabbath be not sustained in these united, happy, and exalted States, our free institutions will fall, and our fair and glorious civil fabric, the

hope of other nations, sink into ruin with the republics of ancient days? And who that considers that our territory is capable of sustaining not less than three hundred millions of men, and the influence which a virtuous and free nation so populous, would exert upon the world, can avoid feeling as if the heavens had lost the sun, at the thought of such a nation becoming a mass of moral putrescence in the earth? What then is patriotism, if it be an enemy to the Sabbath of the Lord? A name, a boast, a lying vanity. Give us not the patriotism which loves our country in word and tongue: Give us not the patriotism which passes off the love of glory as the ruling passion of the patriot: But give us that patriotism which stands by the holy Sabbath, bearing up that real pillar of the State, amidst the scorn and contradiction of men, who have no eyes to see the indissoluble connexion between *the ruin and the irreligion of republics.*

IX.

RESTRAINTS ON DIVINE INFLUENCE.

“IT may be observed, that from the fall of man to our day, the work of Redemption in its effect, has mainly been carried on by *remarkable communications of the Spirit of God*. Though there be a more constant influence of God’s Spirit always in some degree attending his ordinances, yet the way in which the greatest things have been done, *has always been*, by remarkable effusions at special seasons of mercy.”* Was that the way in which the greatest things had been done, from the fall of man to the day of Edwards? And would a

* President Edwards.

Christian philosopher hence infer, that *remarkable effusions of the Spirit, at special seasons of mercy*, would cease to be the chief means of promoting the work of Redemption; and the future be, in this respect, wholly different from the past? This inference, as applied to the period from Edwards until now, would to all observation be contradicted by fact. Things have proceeded since the time of Edwards, as they had done before; and why should we expect they will proceed otherwise in time to come? Rather, should we not expect that “special seasons of mercy,” times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord, which have been so greatly multiplied in our age, will become yet more and more frequent, until there shall cease to be intervals between them, and they shall run into one another, and flow together, in one long and still spreading revival, which shall result in the conversion of the world?

“It has been inquired whether a more

gradual dispensation of the Spirit, were not better than these sudden outpourings? But we have been accustomed to feel that God is the best judge in this matter, and that man cannot make a revival either gradual or sudden. When he gives us drop by drop, we are thankful: and when the cloud of mercy above bursts and pours down a flood at once, we dare not request him to stay his hand; we cannot but exult and rejoice in the exuberance of his mercy. Nor can we perceive how it is possible that 800,000,000 of souls, or any considerable part of this number, can be washed from their sins, within the most distant time to which the millennium can be deferred according to prediction, by single drops falling in such slow and deliberate succession as should not excite the fears, and should satisfy the prudence of some apparently very good men. We doubt not that greater revivals than have been, are indispensable to save our nation and to

save the world, by giving universal and saving empire to the kingdom of Christ; and as clouds thicken and dangers press, we look for them with strong confidence, and with the increased urgency of unutterable desire.”*

It cannot, we think, be reasonably questioned that Revivals of Religion are our only hope for our country and the world. But there is a question relating to this subject which ought most deeply to interest every benevolent and every patriotic heart, especially at the present day, namely,—How may Revivals be hindered or promoted? They are the effects of the gracious influences of the Spirit of God, but yet we know by observation, that usually, they are neither granted nor withheld, except in connexion with an agency exerted by Christians, adapted to procure or preclude them. This is precisely what we should expect from such passages of Scrip-

* Dr. Beecher.

ture as the following: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way; take up the stumbling blocks out of the way of the people." "Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway, gather out the stones." It is the province of the Holy Spirit to revive the work of God; but it is the province of Christians to prepare the Spirit's way by removing obstructions to the free operation of his reviving power. What are such obstructions, it is our present object to show.

If it were not out of the just range of our purpose to advert to the opposition of the world to Revivals, we might dwell long on this topic; for, averse as the spirit of the world is to ordinary exemplifications of the spirit of the gospel, it is friendship itself towards these, compared with what it often becomes, when inflamed by the prevalence of powerful Revivals of Religion. Nor is

this surprising, since there is nothing which presents the spirit of the gospel in such perfect and intense hostility to worldliness. But Christians are not answerable for the world's opposition to Revivals; nor can they hinder it. Nor can that opposition much hinder the progress of Revivals. Let Christians but take due heed to themselves, that they give the world no occasion for opposition, by mismanagement or otherwise, and men may scoff and rail as they please; the effusions of the Spirit, we may hope, will, by such means, be rather increased than restrained.

The obstacles to revivals proper to be noticed here, maybe comprehended in these four divisions: *Those which arise—from the character of the Christian world at large; from the character of the Ministry; from the character of Particular Churches; and from the character of Former Revivals.*

I. A spiritual survey of the state of the general church, cannot but make the im-

pression on every enlarged and intelligent mind, that the followers of Christ, of almost all denominations, are chiefly engaged about other business than that which *ought* to absorb their attention. That business, unquestionably, is the salvation of men, the conversion of the world. This was the business which brought Christ himself into the world, and which, when he was about to leave the world, he committed to the hands of his disciples, of all generations, as the high purpose of their existence. His first disciples, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith, entered on this work, and spent their lives and their all in performing it. They planted churches in almost every part of the civilized world. But nearly eighteen centuries have elapsed since they fell asleep, and there has been scarcely, until of late, any enlargement of Christianity beyond the bounds to which they carried it ; while within these bounds it has been, for the most part, in a state of the most

deplorable infirmity, or monstrous perversion. The reason is, that succeeding generations of Christians ceased from the work to which the first disciples devoted their lives, and gave their chief concern to doubtful disputations about religious philosophy, and ecclesiastical forms, and other sectarian objects. Christians have recently had a partial awakening from this mighty infatuation, but partial it truly is. Any one who will lift up his eyes, and look in the spirit of Christ, over the length and breadth of the church, even at this day, will see the vast multitude of its members engaged about almost every thing rather than fulfilling the unrevoked command of their Lord, "to teach all nations, and preach the gospel to every creature." Some, under the sway of the spirit of sect, are striving to build themselves up in great strength and dimensions, and would fain draw down fire from heaven, to burn up those who do not fall in, and build with them. Some are

labouring hard in angry controversy, supposing nothing to be a more worthy object of pursuit than the confutation of speculative errors on all points of divinity, larger and less. Some vex their own spirits not less than those of other men, night and day, in trying to detect all descriptions of heretics and deceivers. And some like the Zidonians, are “at quiet and secure,” caring for nothing more in religion, than the decent and dignified observances of ordinances. These most certainly are the greatest of all hinderances to Revivals of Religion — the mighty mountains which stand in the way of the Church’s enlargement. They are raised and kept up by the Church herself, neglecting her proper work, and wasting her strength and her resources about things of questionable propriety, or at least, comparatively of very small moment. It is not denied that church-purity and church-order, as subservient to the salvation of men, are important ; but

when these things are made the supreme concern, the symmetry and beauty of Christian character, give place to the odious forms of sectarianism, and the Holy Spirit of God is grieved and quenched. Heresy, in every shape is unlovely ; but when Christian brethren, who ought to be one, as Christ and the Father are one ; tender of each other's good name, and glad of each other's advancement as each of his own ; ever praying for one another ; ever labouring, and suffering, and rejoicing together, as having one common and indivisible interest : when these, of all creatures the most closely allied in brotherhood, instead of living together in unity and love, treat each other as if unity were a disgrace and a crime, censuring and denouncing one another before the world, impeaching each other of dishonesty and evil designs, without any regard to Christ's counsel, (Matt. xviii.) as to the mode of proceeding in such delicate cases ; striving with all bit-

terness and fierceness of spirit to hinder each other's usefulness, and destroy other's work : when Christians thus carry themselves towards Christians, as alas, even ministers are at this day and in this country doing to a great and still increasing extent, they are doubtless answerable for greater mischief, a more hurtful heresy than universalism, socinianism, or any other false doctrine on earth. This, though apparently laid to heart by almost no one, is truly the most deplorable of evils. While it remains, we labour in vain to remove other evils. Error, infidelity, superstition, imposture, idolatry, worldliness, vice, and crime, in all their forms and degrees, fed and fattened from this fountain of death, will continue to flourish in the earth, in despite of all our zeal to destroy them. Revivals themselves, however multiplied, will fail to convert the world, if they do not remove this barrier to the progress of the gospel. For according to the prayer which

Christ offered for his disciples just before his death, unity among themselves duly manifested, is the just and necessary means of the world's conviction that Christ is its anointed Lord and Saviour.

II. The chief instrumental cause of the good, and the evil, in the Christian world, is to be found in Ministers of the gospel. They are, as they have always been, the greatest friends, and likewise the greatest adversaries, to Revivals of religion. Revivals have become so common, are productive of such benign results, and are in such esteem among all the best churches in our land, that few ministers of any evangelical denomination are now to be found among their open opposers. But not a few, it is to be feared, are still secretly doubtful, if not more than doubtful, as to their desirableness; and in their conduct in respect to them, proceed rather on the supposition that they *may be* of God, than on the heart-felt and cherished convic-

tion that they are. Now such ministers cannot be relieved of the responsibility of being opposed, in spirit and in practice, to Revivals, by their silent and negative course concerning them. To have no positive faith in Revivals, is to be averse and contrary to them. Revivals are so big with great consequences, so instinct with life and power, that they cannot be the object of attention, without moving the mind one way or another, without being hated where they are not loved, dreaded where they are not desired, though peculiar circumstances of expediency may repress positive expressions of aversion. Such ministers not only will do nothing in favour of Revivals, but amidst studied silence and reserve, will do much against them, both in their preaching and their intercourse among their people. Can the preaching of men be otherwise than essentially hostile to Revivals, who are not without doubts whether Revivals are not the

work of man, or perhaps of man and Satan united? The state of mind which dictates such a strain of preaching, cannot but dictate a coincident strain of conversation. Direct unfriendliness may not be intended; but it will be exerted, and exerted in the most decisive and effectual manner.

But ministers who fully believe in Revivals, and pray and plead for them as the best of God's works, may still be *practically* opposed to them. It is proper here to use much caution, but great plainness of speech is not less important. It cannot well be doubted that the character of the ministry in this country has been in some respects improving. The glorious Revivals of this day speak well for the ministry. But yet it is too clear that some of the chief hinderances to Revivals are to be sought for among them. They have improved, but the room for improvement is still so great, that they should continually forget the

things which are behind, and press forward still towards those which are before. Let even our most simple minded ministers reflect, as before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Judge of quick and dead, upon the general strain of their preaching. What is its object? To earn or sustain a high reputation in the church? or to keep in favour with their people? or to beat down theological antagonists? or merely to recover this world to Christ, to save the souls of men, to help saints on their heaven-ward way, and to bring sinners to immediate repentance? The spirit of Revivals, unquestionably, admits of no object in preaching, but this last. Let a man stand up in a season of refreshing from the presence of God, and attempt to preach with any other object in view, and though he should speak with the tongue of an angel, his discourse would be as "vinegar upon nitre" to the subjects of the heavenly influence. Let ministers, even our very

holiest ministers, consider also their general manner of life, and see whether that has no influence on Revivals of religion. In their plans of action, in their daily reading and thinking, in their prayers in the closet, their prayers in the family, their prayers in the church, in their private walks and conferences with individuals, in their general mode and style of living, in the habitual temper and frame of their minds, — have they nothing quite uncongenial with the spirit of a Revival; nothing with which that spirit cannot coalesce; nothing which they must reform, before they can have good reason to think themselves fit instruments for the Holy Spirit's use in Revivals? Ministers, it is to be feared, have, in too many instances, misapprehended or perverted the doctrine of the Spirit's agency in producing Revivals of religion. They have seemed to think, not only that the Spirit must work, but work *miraculously*; not with, but against means; not by

employing instruments suited in their own tendency to bring about the desired end, but only such instrumental influence as He must resist and overcome, or be himself defeated, — a deplorable error, which appears to have so inwrought itself into the religious philosophy of many, that a miracle almost seems necessary to deliver them from its power; and yet so palpably an error, that the infatuation which keeps them in subjection to it, is a mystery. There is no law of nature more invariably followed than that, in Revivals of religion, cause precedes effect, appropriate means are used to attain ends. There is in these noblest of God's wonders, a peculiar and admirable exertion of the Divine power, but they are not *miracles*; and so to conceive of them is to be blind to their true excellence, and to the obligations and responsibilities in which they involve Christians, and especially ministers of the gospel. Let any just account of a genuine

Revival which has been given, be intelligently examined, and it would be an astonishment never before heard of, if no instrumental causality could be discerned, suited in all respects to produce the precise state of things related. The history of the day of Pentecost, given in the second chapter of the Acts, contains indeed the record of a miracle, and that miracle answered its purpose ; but that purpose was not the Revival, but the fitting and furnishing of the instruments of the Revival for their work. The men who, on that day, “were pricked in their hearts,” and fled for refuge from a sense of guilt to the blood of Christ, had no other emotions than such as the spirit and discourse of the disciples of Christ were adapted to excite. And so of all the other early successes of the gospel. See the ministers of those days, sacrificing their all, and without thought of their life, giving themselves wholly to prayer and the ministry of the word ; night and day, publicly,

and from house to house, warning every man, and teaching every man, and that with tears; striving according to His working, who wrought in them mightily; and say, whether their success *was without an appropriate instrumentality*. The like connexion between means and ends is equally observable in the narratives of modern Revivals. There are unusual triumphs of the gospel, and there are measures on the part of the ministry and churches not less unusual. Why is it that many ministers do not understand this matter? Why do they stand wondering that the gospel is so restrained; that there are so few conversions; that the effusions of the Spirit are not every where descending? There is nothing to be wondered at, but that ministers should be looking for Revivals, while they themselves are strangers to the spirit of Revivals, and are so living from day to day, that Revivals would be almost miracles, if they should take place.

It needs the example of such a man as David Brainerd, to show ministers what manner of spirit they should be of, if they would exert no influence unfavourable to Revivals of religion. He went alone into the midst of a savage people, and though ignorant of their language, was there but a short time, before a Revival occurred by his means, as remarkable as any of those which have since succeeded in our land. That Revival was a wonderful work of the Holy Spirit, but it was the effect, instrumentally, of a spirit and labours on the part of Brainerd exactly calculated to produce it. Let ministers study such an example to learn whether they have a right to the appellation of Revival-men. How many are there now bearing, and it is supposed worthily bearing, that appellation, who, under the light of such an example, would cast themselves into the dust before God, as, in the present state of their minds, opposed to Revivals; and by such prayer

and fasting, and deep dealing with the Searcher of hearts, as Brainerd was wont to practise, seek a fresh humiliation of soul,—a fresh renewal and quickening in the spirit of their minds.

III. To obstacles arising from the character of the ministry, there are correspondent obstacles in the character of the Particular Churches of which they have the charge. — The churches of our land, in reference to Revivals of religion, are variously distinguished. In some, the great, the rich, and the fashionable of the world, have so much the control, that no calamity would be more unwelcome to them, than a special outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Others are, in their own conceit, too enlightened and liberalized, to be capable of what to them appears, such pure fanaticism as a religious Revival. Others are not unwilling that sudden and extensive awakenings should prevail in the churches that desire them, but for themselves, they prefer

the gradual and ordinary influences of the Spirit. Others deeming no spirit so excellent as zeal for orthodoxy, are afraid of the influence of Revivals on their old standards of faith, and so hold them in suspicion, if not in worse esteem. Others on the contrary, overpowered by the spirit of party, long for nothing so much as an increase of numbers, and set themselves against true Revivals, by contrivances designed to awaken their assemblies into a great animal excitement, as a fruitful means of proselytism. It needs no proof that particular churches, of each and every one of the classes now alluded to, are but so many masses of obstruction to those remarkable displays of saving power, which we intend by the phrase, Revivals of religion. We do not deny to these churches, the right of true membership in the general body of Christ; nor are we without the hope that the advance of gospel light in this day, especially by means of

Revivals, will soon exchange their opposition to these richest of God's gifts, into earnest desire for them ; but it was impossible in thoroughly searching out obstacles to Revivals, to overlook the existence or the state of such churches.

But now let us look at churches of the other description — such as are not characteristically adverse to Revivals of religion, — in these also, mighty hinderances may be found. Some of them are composed of diverse materials, part old and part new ; part, on various accounts opposed to Revivals, and part earnestly desirous of them ; giving rise to conflict and alienation, in respect to the use of Revival means and proceedings, and thus effectually excluding Revival triumphs and blessedness. Others of the churches now referred to, have advanced so far in reformation, under the power of the spirit of the age, that they welcome the using of means for a Revival to a certain extent, but not all the needful

means, and none of them perhaps, with the requisite urgency. They will favour the proper kind of preaching, as far as doctrine is concerned, but not apostolical closeness of application and plainness, and boldness, and directness of appeal to the conscience of every individual hearer. Or if they will endure such preaching, they will not endure the after methods of particular inquiry and prayer, by which the favourable impressions of truth may be brought to a good issue before the tempter has time to efface or prevent them. These things are too much like pulling men out of the fire, and taking the kingdom of heaven by violence, to be endured by many half-awakened churches. In some churches other difficulties exist. They are not unfriendly either to Revivals of religion, or to the requisite instrumentality; but an unhappy difference between them and their pastors, or personal disputes and contentions among themselves, are a root of bit-

terness which poisons, in respect to them, the wells of salvation. Or they are churches that have long neglected discipline, and their vigour and fruitfulness are impaired, and the influences of grace withdrawn from them, by means of the pestilential example of scandalous members. Or they are churches, with whom, whatever may be their professed attachment to Revivals, the Holy Spirit has a controversy, because they refuse to come up to the help of the Lord by their cheerful concurrence in works of love; taking little interest in those high projects of benevolence which distinguish this age, and which will not fail, by God's blessing, to convert the world, if duly sustained by Christian faith and liberality.

There are yet other churches not free from obstructions. They have been distinguished as scenes of Revivals, and have now no objection to Revivals, and present

no manifest hinderance to them in their external state. They are supporters of the benevolent societies; they have not neglected discipline; they have no contentions; they are favourable to the most pungent strain of preaching, and all the appropriate means of Revivals, and it may be, maintain in some sort, the use of those means; but they have backslidden in heart, they have left their first love; and while all is well in respect to outward action and profession, there is a weariness, a faintness, a secret indisposedness towards the work of the Lord, in the spirit of the people, and they do in some measure *force themselves* in their Revival operations. Now such a state of things, is no more a preparation for a Revival of religion, than a state of open opposition to a Revival. Nay, there is something peculiarly repugnant to the very spirit of true religion, in this constrained and heartless show of zeal. Its only tendency is to hardness of

heart, both in its subjects and in its objects. Perhaps in no circumstances, is the work of spiritual induration in saints and sinners, going on so rapidly as when a church puts forth great vehemence in action, without proportional vehemence of true love,—the overflowing of gracious affection in the heart. All force is hurtful to the human mind, and chiefly so in matters of religion, where freedom has her throne and the glory of her empire. The free Spirit of God cannot but resent such injurious violence as an insult to Himself, whose cause it pretends to be subserving: and withdraw himself from a people who have kindled a strange fire in his temple, and have assumed the province of the Divinity, rather than that of his dependent and helpless worshippers. Such churches, therefore, should not glory over others, but rather strive to abase themselves lower than all others, in the sight of God and man. Let them esteem themselves, as they truly are

in their present spiritual state, not as favourable, but eminently adverse, to a genuine outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Let them remember from whence they have fallen, the tenderness, softness, and fulness of their affection in former Revivals; and how their words and their works in those days, were as flowing streams from a redundant fountain: and by renewed humiliation of spirit, let them regain their former gracious elevation, and do their former works, and then may they confidently hope and expect that the Holy Spirit will descend upon them again, as rain upon the mown grass, and as showers that water the earth.

IV. The remaining class of hinderances embraces those which arise from the character of Former Revivals.

Though the advances of the kingdom of Christ have always been chiefly by means of Revivals, as Edwards has remarked, yet manifold imperfections have mingled themselves in these benign products of the Spi-

rit of grace, and in the whole history of Revivals we shall in vain seek for one entirely faultless. We shall here extract from the work of Edwards on Revivals, a passage, for whose length we make no apology, notwithstanding the familiarity of our readers with that work; since we deem it at the same time so seasonable and of such diamond value, that there can be no danger of its being read again without interest. “The weakness of human nature has always appeared in times of great Revivals of religion, by a disposition to run to extremes, and get into confusion; and especially in these three things, — enthusiasm, superstition, and intemperate zeal. So it appeared in the time of the Reformation very remarkably; and even in the days of the Apostles. Many were exceedingly disposed to lay weight on those things which were very chimerical, giving heed to fables.* Many, as ecclesiastical history informs us,

* 1 Tim. I. 4. & IV. 7. 2 Tim. II. 16, 27. & Titus I. 14. & III. 9.

fell off into the most wild enthusiasm and extravagant notions of spirituality, and extraordinary illumination from heaven beyond others ; and many were prone to superstition and will-worship, and a voluntary humility, giving heed to the commandments of men, being fond of an unprofitable bodily exercise, as appears by many passages in the Apostles' writings. And what a proneness then appeared among professors to swerve from the path of duty, and the spirit of the gospel, in the exercise of a rash, indiscreet zeal, censuring and condemning ministers and people ; one saying, I am of Paul ; another, I am of Apollos ; and another, I am of Cephas. They judged one another, for differences of opinion about smaller matters, unclean meats, holy days and holy places, and their different opinions and practices respecting civil intercourse and communication with their heathen neighbours. And how much did vain jangling, disputing, and confusion pre-

vail through undue heat of spirit, under the name of a religious zeal.* And what a task had the Apostles to keep them within bounds, and maintain good order in the churches? How often do they mention their irregularities? The prevailing of such like disorders seems to have been the special occasion of writing many of their epistles. The church, in that great effusion of the Spirit, had the care of infallible guides, who watched over them day and night; but yet so prone were they, through the weakness and corruption of human nature, to get out of the way, that irregularity and confusion arose in some churches where there was an extraordinary outpouring of the Spirit to a very great height, even in the Apostles' life-time, and under their eye. And though some of the Apostles lived long to settle the state of things, yet presently after their death the Christian church ran into many superstitious and

* 1. Tim. VI. 4, 5. 2. Tim. II. 16. Tit. III. 9.

childish notions and practices, and in some respects, into a great severity in their zeal."

Revivals in times less remote, have been attended with similar evils ; and thus from the beginning, while antecedent outpourings of the Spirit have in some respects favoured, they have also in other respects tended to hinder those which followed. From the intermixture of bad with good in Revivals of religion, many have been induced, most unreasonably and culpably, to stand in doubt of them, and many more to come forth in open and active hostility against them. Making no allowance for human frailty, they seem to have concluded, that a work of the Spirit, though the subjects of it are depraved creatures, must be perfectly disconnected from all accidental perversion ; as if there were no medium between a state of unmingled sin, and a state of absolute perfection, and as if no one could be a saint, who is not already immaculate. But it would not be

proper here to dwell on the weakness and perverseness of the opposition made to Revivals on this ground; it is only for us now to bear in mind, that such opposition, however unreasonable, is real, is extensive, is hurtful, and will be continued doubtless, while the occasion of it remains. Let the friends of Revivals then, as much as lieth in them, labour, if possible, to put an end to this opposition, by removing its occasion.

The great increase of Revivals of religion within the last few years, has given good opportunity for discovering, both how perversion may arise, and how it may be avoided; still no one can be ignorant of defects and blemishes in the best and least exceptionable of recent Revivals. Mistakes remain to be corrected; wood, hay, and stubble, to be removed. Let us not stop in the course of improvement, but lament over, and endeavour to reform whatever is amiss; that if possible, our good

may altogether cease to be evil spoken of, and Revivals of religion, the chief of our hopes for a perishing world, become as pure as it is practicable to render them by human wisdom and watchfulness.

X.

THE FIRST LAST, AND THE LAST FIRST ;

OR,

THE PARABLE OF THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD.

Matt. xx. 1 — 15.

A REFERENCE to the circumstances which seem to have suggested this Parable, will assist us in expounding it. Christ had been remarking in a very serious manner, on the danger of riches, a striking exemplification of which had just occurred, in a young Ruler's going sorrowfully away from him, upon discovering, under the light of his teaching, the incompatibility of the supreme love of wealth with the love of God. One of the Apostles, on hearing these unusual observations, seems to have congratulated himself and his brethren, that they were

obnoxious to no danger from attachment to worldly things. “We have left all and followed thee, what shall we have therefore?” The reply of Christ was in the highest degree encouraging to all who had renounced the world for his service. “Verily I say unto you, that ye who have followed me, in the Regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel: and every man who hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, for my name’s sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.” But though no self-denial exercised on Christ’s account shall pass unrewarded, it is a sentiment wholly inconsistent with the spirit of humble piety, that any rewards conferred by Him on mankind are properly merited by them, or that He is not perfectly free from all the restraints of strict justice, in dispensing his infinite

favour ; and to repel this sentiment, which is so apt to associate itself with our hopes of heavenly recompense, Christ subjoined to his promise of munificence to his self-renouncing followers, the deeply significant Remark, so often repeated by him on other occasions, *that many who are first shall be last, and the last shall be first.* Nor did he now content himself with merely making this Remark ; he dwelt upon it at much length, and then reiterated it, that he might if possible, fix it immovably in the minds of his disciples. Our Parable is altogether employed in its illustration. The design of this Parable is to set this Remark forth in such a manner that no room might be left for either ignorance or contradiction. Not only is the Parable connected with the Remark by the word “for,” but at its close, the Remark is a second time introduced thus ; “so” — that is, as illustrated by the Parable, — “the last shall be first, and the first last ; for many be called, but few chosen.”

We, therefore, know the just scope and purpose of this Parable. It is to state and defend this procedure of the divine administration, **THE LAST SHALL BE FIRST, AND THE FIRST LAST.** It is particularly as exemplified under the gospel, as appertaining to “the Kingdom of Heaven,” that our Saviour here considers it. His doctrine is, that in God’s dealings with mankind, according to the gospel, the rule and discipline of Christ’s empire,—the administration of Heaven,—many who are last shall be first, and the first last :—many, first, in the distributions of nature and providence, shall be last, under the distributions of saving mercy ; and on the other hand, many last in the former distributions, shall be first in the latter.

That the last who are to be first, and the first who are to be last, are last and first, in respect not to *moral character*, but to the distributions of Nature and Providence, must be admitted ; otherwise, God does

not always render to men, in his final dealings with them, according to their measures of personal holiness or unholiness;—to affirm which were to impeach the moral perfection of the Deity, and to contradict the explicit testimony of Scripture.

It is also to be observed, that the procedure is not said to be a principle of the divine government, invariably adhered to; but what *frequently* takes place. *Many* who are first shall be last. It is sometimes the case that the first in natural powers and external advantages, are also first in the graces of the Spirit and the blessings of Heaven; but it is often the reverse. This is the doctrine of the Parable in its general form.

This doctrine is first *stated*, and then *defended*, in the Parable: we shall consider both its statement and vindication.

I. The fact itself, that in God's dealings with mankind under the gospel, many who

are last shall be first, and the first last, is thus presented in the Parable.—A certain householder, or master of a family, would hire labourers into his vineyard. He accordingly went out early in the morning, and hired some; agreeing to give them a penny, the customary wages, for a day's work. Others he employed at nine o'clock, three hours after; promising them what should be right. Others he engaged at twelve o'clock; others at three; and others again not until five o'clock in the afternoon;—agreeing to give them all a reasonable price for their work. At the close of the day, he directed his steward to settle with the labourers, beginning with those who had been hired last, and proceeding inversely until he came to the first. This was not all: every labourer received *the same wages*. They received a penny who had wrought but one hour; and they but a penny who had borne the burden and heat of the day. Such is the parabolic statement of the

subject. Thus it is, that under the gospel, many who are first shall be last, and the last first. As the labourers who had worked twelve full hours had to stand by, and see their fellows all settled with first, and paid more than their due ; and when at last their turn came, were not paid on the same scale of generosity, but strictly according to a just agreement, and so received but a penny, the same that had been given to those who had been but a single hour in the vineyard ;—so, in many cases, does God deal with men, according to the spirit and principles of the gospel.

Such is the instruction of the Parable ; let us now see how the matter stands in actual and constantly occurrent exemplification. How appears the doctrine before us, in the light of facts and experience ? Many who are first shall be last, and the last first,—so said our Saviour, and his word has been fulfilled in reference to the following particulars.

Rank, or condition of life. Persons on this account distinguished, are certainly among the first, but how often are these first last, and how often are the last in rank, first under the dispensation of saving grace. Few men of worldly distinction have part with Christians, and those who have, commonly fall far behind many an unnoticed believer, in all the excellencies and privileges of Christian character. When the great of this world become spiritually minded, their conversion is apt to be spoken of as a prodigy, and one hundredth part of some obscure widow's self-denial, would pass in them for unparalleled religion.

Wealth. The last here are sometimes first, and the first are commonly last. But few rich men ever become truly religious. It is affirmed in Scripture, and verified by fact, that the pursuit of riches is exceedingly incongenial with the pursuit of holiness. Men intent upon wealth, so involve

themselves in worldly schemes and enterprises, that thoughts of religion and eternity can scarcely find a welcome lodgement, for an hour, in their minds. And if rich men, or men seeking riches, do become Christians, they rarely attain eminence in piety. Much more notice is taken of religion in rich men than in poor. A little religion passes for almost a wonder in a rich man. The man who with an income of ten thousand a year, gives fifties or hundreds at a time, in the cause of holy charity, has the praises of his liberality sounded through the land ; yet a poor widow who contributes her daily sustenance, and fasts a day in consequence, though her contribution is only two mites, gives in the sight of God, greater proof of liberality and piety, than all the wealthy of this world together, who after all their giving, have still an abundance in their hands. Most manifest is it, that the rich of this world, are commonly among the poorest in hea-

venly treasure. On the other hand, hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to those who love him? There are, God be praised, illustrious exceptions; but, in general, the first in respect to riches, are last, and the last in this respect, are often first in God's dealings with mankind for eternity.

Understanding, learning, and natural gifts and accomplishments. The oracles and princes of this world's wisdom, are generally last in the wisdom which cometh from above; and the weak and foolish of this world are often first. To philosophers, orators, poets, historians, statesmen, economists, the things of the Spirit of God, for the most part, are foolishness; while men of but common faculties and little cultivation, are refined and elevated into the very likeness of God, by what they discern of the excellency of those things. It suits the pleasure and purposes of the Almighty

Sovereign to hide the things into which the angels desire to look, from the wise and prudent of the world, and to reveal them unto babes. Not many wise men after the flesh are partakers of the heavenly calling; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise. In respect to understanding and learning, then, the last are often first, and the first last.

Religious advantages. Many with the best means of grace never come to repentance, but rather grow hopelessly confirmed in hardness of heart; while others with nothing but their Bibles, become accomplished and eminent Christians. Many congregations, with the ablest preaching and the best and most abundant privileges, increase only in worldliness and stupidity, while feeble and destitute churches, that hear a sermon but occasionally, are refreshed with the visitations of God's reviving Spirit. Capernaum, Chorazin, and Bethsaida, the cities in which Christ did

the most of his mighty works, are in the day of judgement, cast down to a deeper perdition than other places; while towns and villages in the ends of the earth, where some humble missionaries have been preaching the gospel with stammering tongues, rise to the highest spheres of everlasting blessedness. Religion, it is true, prevails commonly in proportion to the pains and prayers of ministers and Christians; but it is not so always. The last in advantages are often first in grace, and the first are often last.

Reputation for piety. Persons of no standing, even for outward virtue, are sometimes preferred in the election of God, before men of the highest standing in the church. The first in profession are the last in salvation. Publicans and harlots go into the kingdom, before chief priests and elders of the people. A malefactor repents and is admitted into Paradise; while scribes and religious teachers

are denounced as serpents, a generation of vipers. The greatest professors of religion are not unfrequently the greatest of sinners: first in pretence, last in principle; first in show, last in substance; first in the church on earth, last and lowest in the church above, if not in the prison of eternal despair.

Confidence of good estate. Many who profess to know that they are Christians, are disowned and condemned by Christ as workers of iniquity; while others who are prone to question even their best motives and intentions, are welcomed to the highest joys of his kingdom. The first in self-conceit are last in the estimation of God, and the last in the former respect, are first in the latter.

Religious exertions and anxiety. Among those who are deemed inquirers, the last are often first, and the first last. True inquirers, indeed, always find in proportion to their diligence in seeking: but it is not

so in all who are called inquirers. Many are ever learning, who never yet come to the knowledge of the truth. Many seek for months and years, who never find at all; while others awakened to reflection but yesterday, have already repented, and been forgiven. Many make a Saviour of their exertions, while others discover at once the folly of such a course, and immediately yield themselves into the hands of Jesus Christ. Persons of amiable dispositions and manners, of regular attendance on ordinances, of frequent convictions, of severe mortifications, pass life away, becoming no better, but worse and worse, to the last; while men of profane lives are subdued by the power of divine grace, break off their sins by righteousness, and press instantly into the kingdom of God.

Such are some of the actual exemplifications of that saying of Christ, which may be proposed as the Moral of this Parable, — Many that are last shall be first, and the

first last. Thus is it often in God's dealings with men under the gospel. Let this suffice for the exhibition of the doctrine. Next let us attend to,

II. *Its vindication.* This is the object of the second part of the Parable. The labourers who had wrought the whole day, upon finding that no more wages were intended for them than had been given to those who had wrought one hour, murmured against the good man of the house, saying, — These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal to us who have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong. Didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way. I will give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? — So the last shall be first, and the first last. The procedure is liable to no valid objection.

Let us consider the manner in which it is here defended. Nothing could be more solid, more convincing than the household-er's reasoning with the complaining labourers. It is perfectly logical. It is so simple that a child cannot but comprehend it, and so obviously conclusive, that no one can even offer it resistance. Apply this process of reasoning to the procedure of the divine administration before us. It consists of three distinct arguments.

The first is, that the *procedure does no wrong to those whom it does not benefit*. What though the first be last, if they are not thereby injured? If no promise is broken, no contract left unfulfilled, no claim left unsatisfied, no reasonable demand left unanswered, no principle of equity or justice is violated. This is the fact, in regard to the administration of God, under the gospel. The Sovereign Judge and Disposer of all, is not, in the present case, unrighteous. He maintains perfect equity, as

really as the householder in the Parable, when he gave the labourers their penny according to agreement. What creature can complain against him, on the ground of not being honestly and equitably dealt with? They who are made last, are not thereby treated with arbitrary rigour or cruelty. They cannot say with truth, that they are dealt with hardly. Is that servant hardly treated, who receives from his employer the full amount of just wages for which he agreed to serve him?

If the matter rested here, and not a word more could be added in defence of the Divine Government, every murmuring tongue would be condemned. Why reply against the sovereign pleasure of God, when confessedly it does no creature any wrong? But this is not all that should be said: God not only does his creatures no wrong; he shows them, even the unworthiest of them, the most amazing kindness. Those who are translated from the first place to the

last, are still debtors to his infinite mercy. Let it be considered how they came to be first at all; first in rank, in possessions, in knowledge, in religious advantages, and preferment. Are they no way indebted to God for these distinguished privileges? Who made them first in these respects, or what have they which they did not receive? If they would be themselves just to their Maker, they would ascribe to his sovereign goodness not only their being in any respect first, but their existence for one and every moment out of the world of despair. The matter is carried far enough in the Parable to answer our Lord's purpose,—to show the wickedness of murmuring; but it is not carried as far as it might have been. God does no one wrong, but all have done him wrong, to an immeasurable extent. These first and greatest favourites of his providence, are among the first in enmity to his interest, in rebellion against his government. They do not

sustain toward him the relation of faithful labourers to an employer. This the Parable does not mean to assert ; it is against all Scripture and all conviction. Mankind, even the very best of the race, have, of themselves, or otherwise than as disposed by Divine grace, rendered no service to God, and have no claim upon him for any thing but his just indignation. The greatest recipients of his bounty have perverted all his gifts to purposes of evil. These men of high condition, of riches, of learning and genius, of distinction in religious privileges, and other peculiar blessings, have forgotten him, disowned him, set up rivals against him, and aimed to subvert his dominion. It had been enough to say that God has done them no injury, but the truth is that by their pre-eminence in sin, they are justly exposed to the severest indignation of God. Where now is ground for murmuring? That these first should be last, and the last first, what is this, that it should give occasion for complaint?

The second argument is, that in this procedure *generosity is exercised only at its author's expense*. While the householder was just to the first, he was generous to the last, and his generosity cost no one any thing but himself. The murmuring labourers, therefore, had reason of complaint on no ground. They could not complain on their own account, for they received all they were entitled to. They could not complain on account of any other; for no other was injured more than themselves by the liberality shown to their fellow-labourers. The householder had given away his own property, and was it not lawful for him to do what he would with his own? What had it been to them, had he thought proper to give their fellow-labourers his whole estate? If a man choose to make large presents to some poor family, what were that to his workman, who had received just wages? Would it not be thought insufferable waywardness and intermeddling,

in any person to censure and complain against his neighbour for being liberal to some object of charity? Who thinks of even asking questions in such a case? Who would not resent such questions as officious? Men do as they please with what belongs to them, and will not bear to be called to account by any one. And may not God, without being liable to interrogations or censure from his dependent creatures, do what he pleases with what belongs to him? If he injures no one, while he shows special favour to some, if what he bestows is strictly his own, may he not bestow it as he pleases, without giving cause of offence?

This argument is of greater force in its application to the Divine proceeding, than in any other application of it. God's right to *his own*, is higher than any creature's to what he may claim as belonging to him. God owns all things in a stricter sense than a creature can own any thing. Every

creature, as well as every possession of every creature, belongs to God more absolutely, than even the members of one's body or the faculties of his mind belong to him. When men speak of their right to do as they please with their own, they speak extravagantly and sinfully, unless they mean to be understood in a qualified sense. Their own, in strict truth, is not their own, so much as God's, whose will they cannot disregard in the use they make of their possessions without injustice and dishonesty. Men are but stewards of God's substance, and the time is at hand when they must give a strict account of their stewardship. If then they deem it an indignity for their fellow-men to find fault on any account, for any use they make of what they call their property, is it not a higher indignity to God, for any creature to find fault with him, for doing as he pleases with his property? Every man holds it his prerogative to give all his

possessions away, if he pleases, to any person or persons whatsoever; and who shall interfere with his exercising that prerogative? And may not God give away as much of his own as he pleases, and to what persons he pleases, without being liable to murmuring and complaining from his unworthy and guilty creatures? If he chooses to make the last first, to exalt the lowest and meanest of mankind above the greatest and the highest, by his munificent benefactions, may he not with perfect rectitude exercise such generosity, since it is at the expense of no other being? If, in making the first last, he does not injure them at all, but gives them all their rights, complaining is excluded; and it is also excluded when he makes the last first, since in doing so, he graciously bestows what is absolutely his own, and not another's.

The third argument in vindication of this procedure, shows it to be yet more inexcusable to reply against it. It traces ob-

jections to *a spirit of malevolence* : “ Is thine eye evil because I am good ? ” Why malignant either toward me or my beneficiaries, because I show them this kindness ? A good temper is gratified and pleased to see others happy, even if it have no personal share in the happiness. An ingenuous mind has a sincere and a lively joy in the happiness of others. It is a wretched perverseness to become ill-natured and envious at instances of generosity, merely because *self* has no interest in them. The exhibition of goodness, no matter to whose advancement, should command the complacency and praise of all. To have an evil eye, because the advancement is another’s, is shame and misery.

Applied to the Divine conduct, this argument is of peculiar power. Shall men complain while others receive favour from God not granted to themselves ? God does them no wrong in withholding favour from them, while he shows himself good

and worthy of universal love, in bestowing it on their fellow-creatures. Ought they not to praise him for his goodness? Ought they, because of it, to indulge malignant feelings both to him and their promoted fellow-men?

There is a speciality in this case, which should not be overlooked. The Parable does not express all that might have been truly said. It states enough to answer our Lord's purpose; but we are elsewhere taught, what we also know from observation and experience, that there is one thing which immensely enhances the criminality of this censure of the Divine administration. *The favour which a part receive, is what the others do not desire.* The labourers in the Parable had not the offer of any thing more than they received; but mankind have the offer,—an offer made to them not only with sincerity, but with the greatest possible earnestness,—of all the blessedness of heaven. God is willing that

all men should stand as high in the joys and glories of his eternal kingdom, as their natures and faculties will admit. He is intent upon the happiness of men, and if any are not ultimately happy, forever, and in the highest degree, the reason is their own contempt of the Divine mercy. They who are displeased with God because he shows the riches of saving goodness to some of their brethren, are persons who up to the present moment, are despisers of his grace, — incorrigible rejecters of his great salvation. That renewing and sanctifying mercy which he shows to others, they are so far from desiring for themselves, that they labour to secure themselves against its influence; as if to be its subject were the greatest of calamities. And yet they are offended both with God and their fellows, because their fellows are made partakers of it. Where can a parallel be found to this perverseness? If it were favour which was not even offered to them, they should re-

joice that it was given to others; to be offended on that account, while it would be theirs too, if they did not most obstinately reject it, is an iniquity without excuse or palliation.

REMARK. *We have in this Parable, a defence of God's sovereignty in the exercise of saving mercy, from the mouth of our blessed Lord himself. That sovereignty is, with much impressiveness, asserted in the memorable sentence, the last shall be first, and the first last, for many be called but few chosen. It is constantly, and in the strongest terms, taught in Scripture. Why dost thou strive against Him! for he giveth not account of any of his matters. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy; and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost. Who hath saved us, and*

called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ before the world began. Let not these inspired testimonies be hastily passed over, but let them be reverently thought upon, and their grave import be laid to heart, in view of the hastening retributions of eternity. The high destinies of man do depend upon the will which gave creation existence, and controls all its changes, whether in heaven or on earth. Man's free-agency and accountability, the riches of the Divine compassion toward him, and his natural competency to avail himself of them, and all the earnestness and urgency with which he is entreated to exert his powers in his soul's behalf, and the absolute necessity of his exerting them, leave it still a truth,—a truth which cannot and should not be concealed or evaded,—that if any man be saved, he is saved from first to last, of the good pleasure of God; or, in the

more forcible words of St. Paul,—*not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God who showeth mercy.* The fact that our Saviour himself, on so many occasions, and so boldly, announced this great truth, and that he has formally given a vindication of it in this Parable, is sufficient proof that it ought not to disappear from the preaching, or the standing confessions and apologies of his servants.

It may be that the reader finds little complacency in this doctrine. It surely concerns him however to be on the side of truth, and especially of a truth so solemn in its bearings on his own eternity. If he has any difficulties with the subject, he should wish to have them taken out of his way. Let him remember that his having difficulties with it, so far from making aught against this object of his dislike, is rather proof to him that he is contending with the Divine counsel, since the Parable itself presupposes a peculiar obnoxiousness

in its lesson, to the contradiction of mankind. Why are the complaining labourers introduced to distinct notice, but to set forth the spirit of the world as exercised with this subject?

If it be an unwelcome subject to the reader, let him consider whether it should, or whether in reason and soberness, it can be so. Many things might be urged against his distaste of it. It might be shown from a consideration of the character and spirit of mankind, that if any of the race be saved, it must, of necessity, be in an exercise of God's self-moved mercy. If God be influenced at all by what men themselves, in a moral respect, are or do, he would be influenced not to save, but to destroy them. In his pure sight, all men are sinners; and their works, even the best of their works, except as rendered otherwise by grace, are sinful. If any repent, he gives them repentance; if any come to Christ, it is because of the secret attractions

of his Spirit; if any are saved, it is by their being first conquered and subdued to the dominion of holiness and truth. But not to insist on this and many other considerations, let the objector think within himself, whether he has any more cause for being disaffected toward the perfect sovereignty of God's saving mercy, than the labourers in the Parable had to complain against the householder, for his generosity to their fellow-labourers. Let him reflect again on the spirit of those complainers, and ask himself whether he has a better spirit toward God and goodness, than they are represented to have had toward their employer.

If the reader be disturbed by his being as dependent on THE DIVINE WILL, as he must feel himself to be, if he does not discard our Lord's teaching in this Parable, let him remember that the dependence, the sense of which is so painful to him, is not dependence on tyranny, or selfishness,

or caprice, or fate, but dependence on pure goodness and unerring wisdom. The will, by whose decisions he must abide, is guided by a knowledge, a sense of fitness and propriety, and a benevolence, which are absolutely perfect. The reasons of its decisions may not be discoverable; but reasons for them there are; and they are reasons which are as weighty in themselves as they are in their influence on the Divine Mind.

It is often said that our subject is inexplicable; and that it is hence needless to employ one's thoughts about it. No satisfaction is to be expected; no consistent solution of the matter can be given. — For what purpose, then, did Christ speak this Parable? Is there no force, no pertinency, no conclusiveness, no intelligibleness, in the reasons by which he would here silence the murmurs of mankind? Does not the subject, as here set forth, commend itself to reason, to conscience, to whatever

is intellectual and true in man? However unsatisfactory may be the explanations of others, shall that of our Saviour be held insufficient? Is it not simplicity itself? He has no deep theory, no subtle discriminations, no elaborate reasoning ; but makes his appeals to man's common sense, and makes them in such a manner, that common sense in a child, can neither misapprehend nor resist them. Let it not be again said, that the subject is mysterious. If there be mystery here, it is not the mystery of the subject, but of a perverse and unteachable heart.

THE END.