

SERMONS

OF *Saml. Miller.*

SAMUEL STANHOPE SMITH, D. D.

LATE PRESIDENT OF PRINCETON COLLEGE, NEW JERSEY.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

A BRIEF MEMOIR

OF HIS

LIFE AND WRITINGS.

TWO VOLS.—VOL. I.

PHILADELPHIA:

PUBLISHED BY S. POTTER AND CO.

J. MAXWELL, PRINTER.

1821.

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DAVID CALDWELL,
Clerk of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.

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SAMUEL STANHOPE SMITH, late President of Princeton College, was born on the sixteenth day of March, in the year of our Lord 1750, at Pequea in the township of Salisbury and county of Lancaster, in the then colony and at present, state of Pennsylvania. His father, the Rev. Robert Smith, an emigrant from Ireland, was a celebrated preacher and eminent divine of the Presbyterian church, and for many years superintended a respectable academy, established by himself, and under his care many pious and worthy clergymen of that church were reared. His mother, was Elizabeth Blair, daughter of the Rev. Samuel Blair, and sister of those distinguished divines, Samuel and John Blair, than the former of whom the church has seldom possessed a more judicious and profound Theologian, or a more fervent and successful Minister of the Gospel than the latter. He was initiated into the elements of his own language by his mother, who was a woman of an ex-

cellent native understanding, adorned with the softest and most pleasing manners. His parents, being encouraged by the prompt parts and virtuous dispositions of their son, which began very early to display themselves, determined that no exertions should be wanted to the assiduous cultivation of them; and that he should enjoy all the advantages of a liberal education, which his country at that time afforded.—At the age of six or seven he commenced the study of the learned languages in his father's academy, which besides a general superintendence by his father, was entrusted to the care of instructors who had come out from Ireland, and brought with them those rigid notions of scholastic discipline, and that minute accuracy in the system of teaching, which were prevalent in their native country. It was the custom of this school, to require the pupils, not merely to dip into the Latin and Greek classics, or pass in rapid transition from one to another, by which means a very superficial knowledge of any is obtained, but when once they had commenced an author, to read carefully and attentively the entire work. Besides this laudable and beneficial custom, the scholars of this academy, were stimulated to exertion by being brought into frequent competition, and by having conferred upon the successful candidates for distinction such honours as were calculated to awake their boyish emulation, and to quicken their diligence and attention. Latin was the habitual language of the school, and after the pupils had passed through a few of the elementary works, as the Colloquies of Corderius and the fables of Æsop, any error which they committed

ingrammatical propriety, either in addressing the teacher or in speaking with one another, was punishable as a fault. One literary exercise in the school was contested with more than ordinary emulation. When any class had advanced in its course beyond the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid and the *Bucolics* of Virgil, the members of it were permitted to enter into voluntary competitions for preeminence. On alternate Saturdays eight or ten of the better scholars from different classes, were allowed to try their skill in the languages in the presence of the principal teacher. Each competitor was suffered to select a sentence within a certain compass, of one or two hundred lines, consisting of not more than six or seven hexameter verses. On this selected portion, he was the sole examiner, and was permitted to inquire about every thing with which he could make himself acquainted, by the most diligent previous investigation; such as, the grammatical construction of the sentences, the derivation of words, their composition, relations and quantity, the history or mythology referred to in the passage, the beauty and pertinence of the figures and allusions, together with the taste and delicacy of sentiment displayed by the poet. After the whole contest, which usually lasted several hours, was concluded, rewards were bestowed by the master upon those who discovered the greatest address and ingenuity in conducting it. Competitions of this nature with his school-fellows, were all that diversified the early life of Mr. Smith, and on these occasions, he is said to have discovered remarkable adroitness and intelligence for a lad of his age, generally surpassing those who

were much older than himself: although, as Dr. Johnson is reported to have had a Hector, who, in this kind of academical warfare, rivalled and vanquished him; so our scholar found in a young man by the name of Dunlap, a formidable competitor, who often wrested from him the palm of victory.

At this early age Mr. Smith not only discovered that the sentiments of religion had taken deep root in his heart, by publicly joining the communion of the Presbyterian church, but evinced a strong predilection for that sacred profession, which he afterwards adopted, and in which he so eminently excelled. Taking little pleasure and aspiring to no distinction in the gymnastic exercises and sports of his school-fellows, he was remarked even at this early period to be prone to soberness and reflection. At church he was unusually attentive to the services and the sermon, and at his return home would give his father an accurate account not only of the text, and the general distribution of the parts, but oftentimes of the most minute subdivisions, together with the striking illustrations and remarks. In the absence of his father from home, he seemed to take great pleasure, in turn with his pious and excellent mother, in performing divine service in the family; and on some occasions, forming the semblance of a pulpit, and collecting his little brothers and companions round him, he would go through, with great gravity and earnestness all the exercises of public worship.

From his father's academy he was transferred in his sixteenth year to the college at Princeton, in the state of New Jersey. The President of that Institution, the

Rev. Dr. Samuel Findlay, having lately died, and the president elect, the Rev. Dr. John Witherspoon, not having yet arrived from Scotland, the College at this time was under the direction of the Rev. Dr. Blair, professor of theology, Mr. Joseph Periam, professor of mathematics, and Mr. James Thompson, professor of languages. Here those talents which had just begun to unfold themselves in his father's school, were displayed on a wider and more conspicuous theatre of action. Commencing with the studies of the Junior year, which, in that seminary, was devoted, for the most part, to mathematics and natural philosophy, Mr. Smith maintained throughout the whole of his collegiate course, distinguished reputation both for capacity and exemplary deportment. Before the conclusion of the first year, he was publicly presented by the faculty in the presence of his class, as the reward of his preeminent success in his studies, with the mathematical works of the professor of that branch of science, in the University of Oxford in England. Similar testimonials of respect were bestowed upon him by the professors during the different stages of his progress, both before and after the arrival of Dr. Witherspoon, who at this period entered upon the duties of the presidency; and in the eighteenth year of his age, he took his first degree in the arts under circumstances of distinction and superiority in a high degree gratifying to his ambition.

During his residence in Princeton as an undergraduate, he had been consigned more especially to the care of Mr. Periam, who had rendered himself distinguished in the institution and his country, by a profound

acquaintance with mathematics and natural philosophy. Accustomed to the study of abstract sciences, Mr. Periam, it appears, had not confined himself exclusively to the cultivation of the branches which it was his province to teach; but had extended his inquiries to metaphysics also, and became infected with the fanciful doctrines of bishop Berkeley, which consist, as is generally known, in denying the existence of a material universe, and converting every object of the senses into a train of fugitive perceptions. How this professor, who had been habituated to the hardy pursuits of mathematical science and the inductive philosophy, could ever have brought himself to embrace such a visionary theory, a theory so repugnant to common sense, and rather an object of ridicule than of serious consideration, it is difficult to explain, unless it be upon the principle, that having been accustomed in those departments of science which he cultivated, to require the most conclusive proof of every thing before he assented to its truth, he so far misconceived the subject, as to imagine that he must have arguments drawn from reason, to convince him of the existence of an exterior world, before he would admit the reality of it; and this surely is an evidence which nature would deny him, as she rests the proof of it solely and entirely upon the simple testimony of the senses. However this may have been, certain it is, that Mr. Periam had address and ingenuity enough, to infuse the principles of the bishop of Cloyne into the mind of Smith, and he began seriously to doubt whether there were in the world such real existences as the sun, moon and stars, rivers,

mountains and human beings. So sincere and zealous did he become, at this time in the maintenance of immaterialism, and so confident of the sufficiency of the proofs by which it is supported, that he was ever ready to enter the lists in a controversy on the subject; inso-much that his venerable father is said to have discovered no small share of solicitude and apprehension, lest his principles should be vitiated from this source with the fatal taint of scepticism and his understanding be perverted by false science.

Mr. Turgot, comptroller general of the finances of France, under Louis the sixteenth, we are told by his biographer, was in the habit of saying, with that fondness for point and paradox, which indicated that the fraternity of self-styled philosophers who lived in his time in France, were as depraved in their taste as they were unsound in their politics, impious in their religious opinions, and addicted to a miserable jargon in philosophy; "that the man who had never considered the question respecting the existence of an external world as a difficult subject and worthy of engaging our curiosity would make no progress in metaphysics." Is not this to assert, that in order to commence metaphysicians, we should be affected with the symptoms of a rising insanity? Surely from such an auspicious beginning we could not reasonably hope for any thing better, as the final result, than confinement in a mad house. Such idle and paradoxical declarations are as unfounded in truth, as they are disgraceful to philosophy, and are calculated to bring the noble science of metaphysics into utter disrepute and contempt, by impressing

upon the minds of reflecting men the opinion, that in order to be initiated into its mysteries, they must be bereft of their senses.—Would it not be as well founded in truth and right reason to assert, that he who does not perceive a difficulty in the axioms of mathematics can make no progress in mathematical science? There is as good reason for disputing the first truths in mathematics, as there is for disputing the first truths in that science which rests upon experience and observation, and which by a very apt and beautiful figure, has been denominated, by Lord Bacon, the interpretation of nature. And surely among all those truths which are regarded as elementary and incontrovertible in this latter science, none has a higher claim and more venerable and prescriptive right to be considered as elementary than the existence of an external world. The grounds upon which rest the truths of mathematical and experimental science, are different in kind but equally solid and immoveable; mathematics having its foundations in intuitive certainty, and experimental knowledge in what may be aptly denominated sensitive certainty, or the evidence of the senses. If, therefore, it be allowed to have been a proof of perspicacity and genius, as it undoubtedly was, in Mr. Smith at his early age, and unskilled as he must have been in the grounds of human knowledge, to perceive a real difficulty in proving by arguments derived from reason the existence of a material universe, or, in other words, inferring by necessary consequence the real existence of the objects of our perception, from our having perceptions of them; yet it must be admitted, at the same

time, that the knowledge of that man must be extremely limited in the science of the human mind, who does not readily perceive the method by which he can extricate himself from that difficulty, and arrive at undoubted certainty from the testimony of the senses of the real existence, in *rerum natura*, of external objects. Accordingly, Mr. Smith, although captivated, at first, by the specious fallacies of the bishop of Cloyne, had too much sober sense and penetration to be long held in bondage by the silken chains of such a fantastic theory. Dr. Witherspoon arrived from Scotland, and bringing with him, we are told, the recently broached principles of Reid, Oswald and Beattie, furnished him with a clue by which he was conducted out of the dark labyrinth into which he had been betrayed by bishop Berkeley and his disciple, professor Periam. From the cloudy speculations of immaterialism, he was now brought back to the clear light of common sense. Nature was again reinstated in her rights, and the external world, which had been banished for a while, returned and resumed its place in creation. This progress in the understanding and opinions of Mr. Smith will appear natural, when it is recollected that the powers of his mind were as yet immature, that he was misled by the guidance of a revered instructor, and that the utmost maturity of the intellectual powers is, in all cases, necessary to enable us to detect the errors and comprehend the abstruse subjects of metaphysical science. In an understanding ingenious and inquisitive, as was his, and prone to the pursuits of philosophy, the first tendencies, perhaps, uniformly are to ex-

pect, by argument to prove every thing, forgetting that in all the branches of human knowledge there are some principles and maxims that must be taken for granted, and upon which as a foundation we must erect our various superstructures, otherwise, as Aristotle has long since remarked, we must suppose the human mind capable of an indefinite advancement in the pursuit of elementary truths. If mankind had refused to cultivate the science of mathematics until they had proved the truth of its axioms and definitions by arguments drawn from reason, that interesting branch of human knowledge had remained until this time, barren and uncultivated. In like manner if we refuse our assent to the truths which have been established in the experimental sciences, under which head are included the science of mind and that of matter, until we have demonstrated by strict ratiocination the existence of an external world, we shall forever remain involved in doubt and uncertainty.—After the publication of the incomparable treatise of Mr. Locke upon human understanding, in which, with wonderful accuracy, he has traced the progress of the mind in the acquisition of knowledge from its simplest perceptions to its sublimest combinations, while, at the same time, with the most masterly skill and address he has ascertained and settled the grounds of all human knowledge, or the foundations upon which rest all kinds of truth and certainty, it would seem strange, indeed, that any persons could be found professing an acquaintance with his system, who could allow themselves to be misled by the philosophical reveries of a Berkeley or a Hume. Such persons

cannot have studied and understood the writings of Mr. Locke. They must be wanting either in the capacity or the pains to enter into his views or thoroughly to comprehend his meaning. Never could any refutation of errors be more complete and satisfactory, than that which may be drawn from the works of this illustrious metaphysician, of the principles of Berkeley and Hume. The Scottish metaphysicians above mentioned, are entitled to their share of praise, inasmuch as they have drawn the attention of the public to a subject which, important as it is, is by no means alluring, as they appear also to have been inspired with becoming sentiments of indignation and abhorrence of that abominable scepticism and atheism, introduced by Mr. Hume, and to have set themselves with so much zeal in opposition to them. Had they limited their pretensions to the humble sphere of becoming the expounders of the doctrines of Mr. Locke, and the preceding philosophers, and making a skilful application of them to the discomfiture and overthrow of scepticism, their merit, as far as it extended, would have been acknowledged, and their claims acquiesced in by all succeeding ages. But when we find them assume to themselves a credit to which they are not entitled, laying claim to discoveries, of which Mr. Locke was the author, arrogating to themselves the merit of having been the first who applied the true method of philosophising prescribed by lord Bacon to the science of mind, when, in this very circumstance, consisted the discriminating merit of the great English metaphysician; accusing all the philosophers, who preceded them, of being duped by hypothe

ses, and hoodwinked in their pursuit of truth, by an ideal and fanciful theory, unfounded in nature, and destructive to common sense; when we see them maintaining that the scepticism of Berkeley and intellectual fooleries of Hume, were legitimate inferences from the principles of that sublime philosophy, whose foundation was laid by the Stagyrte, and whose structure was carried on and completed by Des Cartes, Mallebranche, and above all, Mr. Locke, who may emphatically be styled the great metaphysician of human nature; we crave leave to enter our protest against the admission of such magnificent pretensions, and our most decided reprehension of such egregious misstatements. All that has been done in the science of metaphysics, that is of any importance to the interests of truth and mankind, has been accomplished by Locke, Butler, Clarke and the Philosophers who preceded them. Not a single doctrine has been taught, or a single discovery made in this branch of science, which is not to be found in their writings. It was the precise purpose of Mr. Locke, and a purpose which he fully accomplished, to apply the method of investigation recommended by Bacon to the science of mind, as Newton applied it to matter, and with equal justice and force he might have declared with Newton, *hypotheses non fingo*. His theory is founded in nature, and in its great outlines, or fundamental principles, will remain entire as long as the human mind shall retain its present properties, be governed by the same laws, and exhibit the same phænomena. Dr. Reid, indeed, throughout his voluminous works indulges himself very freely

in strictures upon the principles of Mr. Locke.—In more than half the instances in which he supposes himself combating his errors, he is, in truth, maintaining his doctrines, and fighting with phantoms of his own creation; and wherever he has departed from the track marked out by the illustrious Englishman, he has wandered from the truth. The very ideal theory itself, the grand heresy of which he accuses all the philosophers, from Plato to Mr. Hume, and out of which, as a fountain, he supposes their errors to have flowed, was unknown to the system of Aristotle, Des Cartes and Locke, although it undoubtedly tinctures the doctrines of father Mallebranche. It appears to have been the offspring of the schoolmen, those miserable interpreters and egregious falsifiers of the opinions of Aristotle, whose crude brains were sufficiently productive of metaphysical monsters; and although for sometime after the revival of learning, while the school philosophy remained in vogue, the phraseology prevalent during its continuance was still used in scientific works, yet no one has more completely thrown off the trammels of that system than Mr. Locke or more heartily despised its verbal contests and idle gibberish.

It is a little singular that Dr. Reid should have so frequently repeated as an accusation against Mr. Locke what that writer blamed Mallebranche for having attempted, that is, to explain the manner of perception.—To explain the manner of our perceiving external objects, it is asserted, all the philosophers agreed in having recourse to the ideal theory; but we venture to assert that when this matter shall have been thorough-

ly sifted, it will be found to have been falsely ascribed to the best of them, and as to Mr. Locke, he repeatedly and unequivocally disclaims all attempts to explain the manner of perception.

But to proceed from this short digression, with our account of the life and writings of the subject of these memoirs.—After taking his first degree in the arts, Mr. Smith returned to his father's family.—Here we find him perfecting his knowledge of the Latin and Greek classics by assisting his father in his school, and at the same time extending his acquaintance with science and literature by the perusal of the best writers with which the library of the family supplied him. The works of Pope, Swift and Addison, which were now read with avidity, served to form his taste upon the best models and imbue his mind with the principles of polite literature, while those of Locke, Butler, Warburton and Edwards exercised and strengthened the hardier powers of the understanding, and introduced him to an acquaintance with the more abstruse subjects of metaphysics and divinity.—To the circumstance of his having thus accidentally become familiarized to excellent models of writings may, in all probability, be ascribed that delicacy and correctness of taste which are perceptible in all his productions. In cultivating the more elegant fields of the Belles-Lettres, he seems, however, to have taken the greatest pleasure, and to this species of exertion, his intellectual powers appear to have been best adapted by nature. Inspired by the natural ardour of youth and wrought up to enthusiasm, he occasionally, at this period, attempted to give vent to

his feelings in poetic effusions, and a sonnet, an ode, or an eclogue was the result. But discovering in himself no native impulse prompting to such pursuits or promising much success from tendencies of this nature, he soon relinquished all efforts to cultivate the muses and directed his attention to objects more suited to his genius.

During his continuance at Princeton as a student, his talents and assiduity had not passed unnoticed by that able divine and nice observer of men and things, Dr. Witherspoon; and accordingly, a vacancy occurring in the offices of the college, Mr. Smith received from him a pressing invitation to return to the institution with the view, as expressed in the letter written on the occasion, of taking under his immediate charge, the classical studies of the college, while he should assist also in cultivating among the students a taste for the Belles-Lettres. In this station he spent the two next years of his life, performing, with acknowledged ability, the duties of his office in the institution, and at the same time prosecuting his theological studies, as he had now determined, as well from the dictates of his understanding as the impulse of his feelings, to devote himself to the church. As soon as he had finished the usual course of reading prescribed to students of divinity, he left Princeton, and was licensed to preach the gospel by the presbytery of New Castle in Pennsylvania. Having impaired his health by his application to his studies, and labouring for some time under the attacks of an intermittent fever which long held his life in suspense, he determined in order to restore his health and

at the same time, contribute to the utmost of his power, towards the advancement of that sacred cause, in whose interests he was now enlisted, to spend some time, before his settlement in any parish, in voluntarily officiating as a missionary in the western counties of Virginia. He found, upon his arrival in this country, a people lately removed from Ireland, among whom were many pious and intelligent persons, attached to the principles of the presbyterian church, who received him with Irish hospitality, and gave that warm and cordial encouragement to him in his labours which a pious people scarcely ever fail to bestow upon a worthy clergyman. Here he spent some time during two successive missionary tours performed in the same year, in giving catechetical instruction to the young, in preaching the gospel at every opportunity, and in grounding the people in the principles of the christian faith. In all these labours he was eminently successful in the cause of his Divine master. As a preacher or pulpit orator he was universally regarded by them with the highest admiration. There were many circumstances in the church of Virginia, at this time, that prepared the way for his favourable reception, facilitated his success in the ministry, and soon enabled him to rear and establish for himself the most distinguished reputation as a preacher. The people of Virginia generally belonged to the established church of England. Whether it was owing to culpable neglect and inattention on the part of the English bishops in sending out clergymen to supply the parishes in this colony, or to the circumstance that they were too much occupied at

home with their numerous and arduous duties to be able to pay that attention to an affair of this kind, which their own sense of duty as well as interest required; it is certain, that the clergy who were despatched from England and placed in possession of the livings in this state, were, in too many instances, most egregiously defective in all those moral qualifications which would have fitted them to become faithful pastors and spiritual teachers and guides to their flocks. The deficiencies and even gross immoralities of many of them, were flagrant and notorious. Violent contests often arose between the incumbents and their parishioners, which were maintained with equal bitterness and perseverance on both sides, and which sprang out of the disgust of the people at a ministry whose lives were at variance with their doctrines, and during the controversies maintained about the temporalities of the church, its spiritual concerns were entirely disregarded or forgotten. Even among those of the clergy who were best fitted from their piety, talents and learning to become able shepherds of the flock of Christ, the style of preaching which prevailed, was by no means alluring to the great body of the people. That cold and didactic manner which, in order to avoid the excesses of puritanism, had become fashionable in England, from the time of Charles the second, however suited it may have been to congregations brought up in the immediate vicinity of a polished capital, enjoying the advantages of a finished education and the enlightened intercourse of a court, and who, of consequence, would be more under the influence of their understandings and less under that of their feelings, was little suited to

affect and interest the simple and untutored inhabitants of the country. This was the style of preaching generally prevalent among the clergy of the church of England at this time in Virginia. It was, oftentimes, indeed, sensible, judicious and even profound, but altogether without power to influence the will or reach and affect the heart. On the other hand, the mode of preaching which prevailed among the other denominations of christians, who did not belong to the established church, while it was more passionate, earnest and vehement, and of course more attractive to the people, went equally into the opposite and worse extreme. As the preachers were, for the most part, uneducated but pious men, their pulpit addresses too frequently degenerated into mere empty declamation and vapoury effusions, which wanting the weight of sound sense and solid learning to recommend them, produced little effect that was permanent and were offensive to the intelligent and reflecting part of the community. In this state of things, it is little to be wondered at, if Mr. Smith soon gained among them the highest reputation as a pulpit orator, and awoke no common interest in his favour. Having a mind already imbued with elegant literature and a taste improved by familiarity with the finest models of writing in the Latin, Greek, English and French languages, and withal a genius that kindled into enthusiasm at the success of those celebrated preachers, whose praises and whose triumphs of eloquence he had seen recorded in ecclesiastical history, and above all a heart deeply touched and interested with the great truths which it was his province to pro-

claim; the doctrines of the gospel were presented to his hearers in a more attractive and imposing form than they ever before had been able to conceive. In Mr. Smith they found solid sense and deep learning recommending by their embellishments the simple and sublime truths of religion, and the influence of the whole augmented by all the graces of style, composition and delivery. The result was such as might have been anticipated. The people flocked from all quarters to listen to the popular missionary. On the Sundays in which it was known that he was to preach, the churches within several miles of the one in which he was to officiate were deserted, and the several denominations forgetting in the pleasure which they felt those differences of opinions and forms of worship by which they were separated from each other, assembled in the same place, attracted by the charm of his fervid and impressive eloquence. So strong at length, did the public sentiment in his favour become, that some gentlemen of wealth and influence, who had long felt the want of a seminary of learning for the education of their sons, determined to avail themselves of this favourable opportunity of accomplishing so important an object, and immediately set forward a subscription for the purpose. His popularity and weight of character among them, were now so great, that fifty thousand dollars were soon subscribed for laying the foundations of a college, of which it was contemplated that he should become the president. No sooner was the plan projected and the subscription list filled up, than those ardent and enterprising men commenced the erection of the build-

ings of that seminary which was afterwards chartered by the legislature, and in compliment to those distinguished patriots of England, John Hampden and Algernon Sidney, denominated Hampden-Sidney college.

Having now completed his missionary tour through Virginia, thus voluntarily undertaken, during the time in which the buildings were erecting for the contemplated institution, he returned to the northern states, and connected himself to his venerable president and preceptor by ties even more intimate and interesting than those which subsist between the professor and pupil, by marrying his eldest daughter, a lady of great gentleness of disposition and amiable manners. Soon after this event he returned to Virginia, to take upon him the two-fold charge of principal of the seminary and pastor of the church. In both these capacities he acquitted himself with the greatest talents and address, and fulfilled to those gentlemen who had reposed confidence in him, their most sanguine expectations. His reputation both as a pious and learned Divine, and an eloquent and successful preacher every day increased, and the attachment of his flock, and the students of the college to his person, was sincere and unabated during the whole time of his residence among them. The frequency and vehemence of his mode of preaching, however, added to his arduous duties in the seminary, were too trying for a constitution which, although naturally sound, was not robust, and in the course of three or four years, his health was greatly impaired and his expectoration immediately succeeding the public exercises of the church, became visibly tinged with

blood. This appearance did not at first abate his zeal or restrain his exertions, but at length he was found to discharge blood in considerable quantities from his breast, and it became necessary, that, for a time, he should desist from repeating this painful and dangerous experiment upon his lungs. In order to recruit his strength and recover his health, it was thought advisable by his friends that he should retire for a season to a watering-place among the western mountains of Virginia, known by the name of the Sweet-Springs, which was just beginning to be held in great repute for the salubrious qualities of its waters. On his way to these springs an incident occurred to him which would not be worthy of an insertion here, except as it exhibits strongly to view the tenderness of that connection which subsists between a good pastor and his flock, and may serve as an encouragement to the clergy to the cultivation of that species of intercourse with the members of their communion which may lead to the formation of attachments so honourable to both parties. During his journey to the springs, he was one evening passing by a dairy yard, where an elderly lady, the wife of colonel Christian, so famous in our Indian wars, was standing among her servants and cattle. As soon as she saw him, she instantly stepped forward, asking pardon for her intrusion, and begged to know if he was in any way related to that most worthy of all men, as she said, Mr. Samuel Blair, his maternal uncle. I consider him, she continued, as my spiritual Father. Many, many years ago, no man was more dear to me: and on seeing you, as you were passing, so strong a resem-

blance of his countenance struck me, that I could not resist the impulse, which induced me to make this abrupt inquiry, however improbable or almost impossible it may seem, to see any one of Mr. Blair's relations in these remote ends of the earth. Mr. Smith informed her that she was not deceived in the resemblance she had traced, for that he was a near relation of Mr. Blair, and then stated the connection that subsisted between them. 'Forgive me, my dear sir,' she continued, with great earnestness, 'if my affection for that good man constrain me to urge you to pass this night, as the day is far spent, with my family. I cannot help hoping to meet with his spirit in his perfect image. And let me have reason to bless my God and Saviour for this unexpected interview which strikes my mind as a special act of his gracious providence designed for the consolation of one of the most unworthy of his servants!' En-
viable tribute of regard and attachment! Whatever may be the difficulties, and discouragements of the ministry, such a testimony of respect and affection from one pious woman, an affection too springing out of so pure and sacred a fountain, amply compensates the pastor for a life of toil. When placed in competition with a sacred veneration of this kind for the memory of a good clergyman, all the glory of the conqueror and the loud applause of the thoughtless multitude, are but as the dust of the balance! It embalms his memory, consecrates his ashes, and without producing the effects supposed to result from his canonization, communicates to him its happiest rewards by enhancing his enjoyment in a future state of existence.

After remaining a few weeks at the springs above mentioned, Mr. Smith found the effusion of blood from his lungs to cease, and the slow fever which attended it disappear. On his return to his family with recovered health, new prospects opened to him in life and the way had been paved for his entrance upon a theatre in which the sphere of his usefulness would be extended, and those extraordinary powers he possessed be more conspicuously displayed. Through the influence of Dr. Witherspoon, who learned more justly to estimate the talents of Mr. Smith in proportion to the intimacy of his connection with him, a vacancy occurring in the higher offices of the faculty of Princeton college, he was invited to return to the seat of his former studies, and appointed professor of moral philosophy, as it was known that this was his favourite branch of science, and one which he had cultivated with the greatest diligence and success. In the year 1779, therefore, and 29th of his age, he received this appointment, so well suited to his wishes, and which introduced him into that field of exertion in which he was eminently qualified to excel. Leaving his brother, the Rev. John Smith in whom he reposed entire confidence, and who was worthy of it, to take charge of the infant seminary reared under his care in Virginia, he removed to Princeton, the place that was to become the scene of his future labours.

Upon his arrival at Princeton to enter upon the duties of his new appointment, the college was in a state of ruin. The war which had raged for some years before between the colonies and the mother country, had driven

the president of the institution from the state of New Jersey, dispersed the students and reduced the buildings to a state of complete dilapidation. The whole interior of that noble edifice and of the church attached to it, had been torn out and destroyed by the British and American forces, who successively occupied it as barracks for the soldiery, during their passing and repassing through the state of New Jersey. The roof had been made a field of sport for idle soldiers and vagabond boys from the village, until its use as a defence against the injuries of the weather was almost destroyed. Its windows and doors were all shattered, and many of them burnt, the plaistering had been wantonly punched through with bayonets, and the lathing torn off for the purpose of kindling their fires, and the floors had been so generally cut by hatchets and axes, as to be utterly unfit for use. Added to this unpromising state of the building and the general dispersion of the students, were the difficulties which arose from the injury sustained by the funds of the institution from the financial embarrassments of the nation, and the general distress of the times. As the seat of the war had now, however, been transferred from the north to the south, and the nation, shaking off its despondency, began to look with confidence to the final establishment of its independence, Dr. Witherspoon, determined to avail himself of this favourable opportunity to revive the institution. Mr. Smith, in whose talents and address he had now learned to place unlimited confidence, was fixed upon, as the person to assist him in this undertaking. Accordingly Mr. Smith was commissioned at

once to attend to the repairs of the building, and in connection with the other teachers to superintend the instruction of the small classes that remained. And with so much capacity, diligence and zeal did he devote himself to the interests of the seminary, that in a short time the building was put into a condition to receive the pupils who were beginning to assemble, and the usual system of instruction set into operation. On this occasion, that natural generosity, disinterestedness and total disregard of pecuniary advantages, for which Mr. Smith was distinguished, were strikingly displayed. The funds of the college, from the causes before alluded to, being insufficient to defray the expense of erecting the buildings, and at the same time contributing to the maintenance of the professors, he, with unusual liberality, devoted to these purposes considerable sums of money which he received from Virginia, accruing to him from the sale of some lands which he possessed in that state, and for which disinterested sacrifice of his own personal interests to those of the seminary, he never afterwards received any adequate remuneration.

In efforts of this nature commenced the labours of Mr. Smith in one of the higher offices of the college, in discharging the duties of which, together with what was subsequently done by him, he performed a part for that institution, for which she can never feel herself too deeply indebted to him. For a considerable portion of time too, it is to be remarked, that he had to execute the duties of his office under circumstances of peculiar disadvantage and delicacy. The great interests of the American nation which were at this time

pending, requiring the collective wisdom of her citizens to be brought into action for her welfare, Dr. Witherspoon, whose integrity, capacity and attachment to the cause of patriotism had been sufficiently evinced during the war, was chosen by the state of New Jersey to represent her in congress. For several years he continued to perform his duty in congress while he still held the presidency of the college, and during the time of his absence from the institution, the whole weight of his cares fell upon Mr. Smith, who was now placed in the very delicate situation of one who had to exert a vigilance and exercise an authority at all times offensive to the governed and reluctantly submitted to, without being invested with the dignity which commands respect and renders acquiescence and obedience easy. This circumstance oftentimes rendered the performance of his duties in the highest degree irksome. It must have been peculiarly painful to him to impose the restraints and inflict the censures, as well as exert that constant vigilance necessary in the government of a large number of youth, in a subordinate station, when the idea prevails among them that there is a superior, although he seldom interferes, who is an ultimate source of lenity and indulgence. For young men are too apt to measure that indulgence by their own wishes rather than by the standard of reason and the laws. Nothing, however, could overcome the firmness and perseverance of Mr. Smith. He had thus far been the chief instrument in reviving the seminary, and he was resolved to persist through all difficulties and discouragements to the accomplishment of his object. The superiority of his talents and the high respect

which the students could not fail to entertain for him, enabled him to surmount all obstructions. Under his care, supported by the character and influence of Dr. Witherspoon, the college was rapidly advancing to prosperity, when an event occurred which had well nigh deprived him of life, and the institution and the country of his future usefulness and eminence. So great was his activity and devotedness to duty, that besides his labours as an instructor, he had been in the habit of officiating also as preacher to the students.—These exertions, being above his strength and unsuited to the natural delicacy of his constitution, occasioned a recurrence of the symptoms of his former complaint. One evening in the beginning of November, 1782, the blood burst forth apparently from the same part of the thorax, or upper region of the breast, from which it had formerly oozed in smaller quantities, but now with greatly increased violence. It resembled the spring of the blood from a vein or minute artery which had been punctured by the lancet. The first flow of this alarming rupture, for the blood spouted to a distance from his mouth, was checked in a short time by bleeding in the arm and feet, to fainting. The hemorrhage, however, returned the next evening about three quarters of an hour later than the evening preceding, and was again restrained by a still more free use of the lancet. Evening after evening the same scene returned, only at each successive recurrence being somewhat later than on the preceding day, but with a stronger impulse and circumstances more alarming.—On this occasion, when death seemed inevitable, the resignation of Mr. Smith to the will of God, his confidence in his just and

righteous providence, and firm reliance on the merits of his Saviour, demonstrated that he was not merely a public teacher of the doctrines of religion, but that he deeply felt its power. While he was tranquil, self-collected and humbly resigned to the will of God, his presence of mind and nice discernment, in marking the progress of his disorder, and suggesting the best expedients by which to obtain relief, are well worthy of remark and even admiration.—Learning from the experience of several anxious days, that the flux of blood returned at stated intervals, he proposed to the physicians to endeavour to anticipate its approach by opening his veins just before the time of its regular return. As such a large quantity of blood had been discharged already, not less than two gallons in a few days, the attending physicians were averse from making so hazardous an experiment, declaring that by repeating the operation beyond the absolute necessity of the case, they were only increasing the debility of the system which would be done at the imminent danger of life. But Mr. Smith remarked in contradiction of their theory, that although so much blood had been lost, his arterial system, especially towards the approach of the time in which the paroxysm took place, was unusually strong, and the indication of its approach was a slight rise of the pulse and a gentle titillation at the ruptured spot. On the fifth evening, near the usual time of its return, Mr. Smith, with uncommon fortitude and presence of mind, perceiving the symptoms, solicited one of the physicians, who happened to be alone with him, watching by his bed-side, instantly to open his vein,

and if possible to prevent the flux from his breast. The good doctor, deterred by his own theory, refused to comply with Mr. Smith's urgent request, and while he was proceeding with his argument to justify his refusal, the blood released from the bandage which obstructed it, spouted into his face, at the same time running in a small stream from his mouth. Frightened at his own mistake, as soon as he could recover from his surprise he promoted its flow as much as possible, by increasing the stricture upon the superior part of his arm and opening another vein. When by these means the diseased flux from the mouth was arrested for the time, Mr. Smith, somewhat impatient at the objections of his physicians, and their delay in resorting to what he conceived to be the only remedy that was likely to be effectual in his critical situation, earnestly solicited the doctor to leave a lancet with him. He believed that urged by a sense of danger, he could summon resolution to perform the operation on himself; and thought that, guided by the symptoms, he could prevent the return of the disease, when a bleeder might not always be present to afford his aid. He thought moreover, that by daily anticipating the period in which the blood flowed from the diseased part, he might so far check the impulse of the fluid on that part as to allow the sides of the wound to unite and heal, since the current in the veins might be preserved in that calm and temperate motion which would not again force them asunder. The physician, after much persuasion, consented at last to resign the lancet to him, trembling lest he was putting the life of his friend at great ha-

zard. Mr. Smith, however, confident of the correctness of his own views, resolutely but cautiously opened a vein the next day, somewhat earlier than the usual time of the paroxysm, a person holding him up in bed while he performed the operation on himself. He drew from his arm nearly if not quite the quantity which had been found necessary since the accident took place, which, according to his calculations, prevented the eruption for that day. Extravasated blood however, which had been collected in large quantities in the cavities of the thorax and coagulated there, excited a slight disposition to cough, and it was computed that from six to eight ounces must have been expectorated by him during as many hours. This appearance, though alarming, did not discourage his cool and reflecting mind from repeating the experiment which had been so successful on the preceding day, although he was apparently almost exhausted even of the small quantity of blood requisite to maintain the functions of life. The experiment was now completely successful. The violence in the action of the system abated. Day after day the same course was pursued with the same result. He was now, indeed, reduced to a state of extreme debility and decay, insomuch that he was unable to move a limb, could not speak to his attendants except in whispers, could not be raised in bed without fainting, and truly appeared to be rapidly approaching the period of his dissolution. But his Heavenly Father thought proper to determine otherwise, and to raise him from the valley of the shadow of death, to become a chosen instrument of usefulness to his church, a blessing to the

seminary, and an ornament to his country. He was raised from the bed of illness. Before the complete reestablishment of his health, so great was his solicitude about the prosperity of the college, and so deep his sense of duty and responsibility, that for some time he was in the habit of attending to the recitations of his class in his own room before he was able to appear in his place in the institution. Being able now to walk and ride out, as the vernal season approached he was soon restored to his usual health and able to attend to his duties as a professor, but was obliged for some years to abstain from all exertions in the pulpit, except occasionally and with great caution, and under much restraint. During his future life it is said to have been his constant practice, when he felt any symptoms of a tendency to his old complaint or any unusual action in his system to resort to the lancet for relief, which he had learnt to use for himself without difficulty or apprehension; and contrary to the opinion usually entertained on that subject, he did not find the necessity of resorting to it increase but diminish during his advancing years.

Thus was this eminent servant of God once more restored, by a benignant providence, to his family and usefulness. He had still the same difficulties before-mentioned to contend with, during the life of Dr. Wither-
spoon, whose time was occupied at first with his duties in congress, and afterwards at the instance of the board of trustees, in paying a visit to England on the hopeless errand of endeavouring to collect money to replenish the exhausted funds of the college.—Soon after this

event also that venerable man was afflicted with total blindness, and many infirmities which almost deprived him of power to attend to his duties, so that the whole weight and responsibility of the president's office devolved upon Mr. Smith. Like all men of real talent, however, his powers only became more conspicuous, as they were called into more vigorous exertion. The trustees of the seminary becoming every day more sensible of his capacity and distinguished usefulness, added to his titles and dignities in the institution, besides the one of professor of moral philosophy, those of professor of theology and vice president of the college. Nor was his reputation any longer confined to the college alone.— He was beginning to attract the attention and respect of the literary public. In 1785, he was elected an honorary member of the American philosophical society in Philadelphia, the first institution of that kind in our country; and which comprised among its members, men of the highest distinction in science and literature. As his reputation, both as an orator and scholar, began to be justly appreciated, he was appointed this same year by that learned body to deliver their anniversary address. On this occasion, it was, that he chose for his subject, to explain the causes of the variety in the figure and complexion of the human species and establish the identity of the race. This masterly treatise, so well selected for the occasion, was published in the philosophical transactions of the society, and obtained for its author deserved reputation as a philosopher both in his own and foreign countries. This same treatise has since been enlarged and improved by him, and together

with some strictures upon the principles of lord Kaims, Mr. White of Manchester, &c. published in a separate volume. In the year following the publication of this work, while attending a commencement at Yale college in the state of Connecticut, he was unexpectedly to himself honoured with the degree of doctor in divinity, as some years afterwards he received from Cambridge in the state of Massachusetts, that of doctor of laws. His reputation as a philosopher, a divine and pulpit orator, was now established. Whenever he appeared in the pulpit, he excited universal approbation and applause. In the ecclesiastical councils to which he was sent, he shone as a distinguished luminary. With a mind inured to close thinking, by habits of application to the study of those authors the most remarkable for profound thought and extensive erudition, an imagination, which, to its natural fertility, had added the riches of all that it could cull in imagery from the finest productions in poetry and prose, and withall a ready and commanding eloquence, which he had cultivated from early life, he could not fail to become distinguished in debate. Accordingly it is said by those who knew him best, to have been no small enjoyment to listen to him in those discussions, which took place in the synods and general assemblies of the presbyterian church. The confidence which his church reposed in him was evinced by her uniformly putting his talents and learning into requisition, when any important measures were proposed or any interesting objects accomplished. In the year 1786 he was among the number of that committee, who were directed to draw up a system of go-

vernment for the presbyterian church in America. Besides himself, this committee consisted of Drs. Witherspoon, Rogers, M'Whorter, Sproat, Duffield, Allison, Ewing and Wilson, of the clergy, together with Messrs. Snowden, Taggart, and Pinkerton, ruling elders; a list of divines in a high degree respectable, and some of whom would have done honour to any age or nation. In pursuance of this appointment was prepared and digested that judicious and excellent form of Presbyterian government by general assemblies, synods, and presbyteries, which prevails at this time in our country.

In 1794 Dr. Witherspoon finished his earthly course, and in the following spring, Dr. Smith was appointed his successor, and entered upon the dignity of that office, the duties of which he had long before fulfilled. His talents, like all those which are genuine, shone more brightly in proportion to the elevation to which he was raised. The dignity of manners mingled with a respectful attention to their feelings which, on all occasions, he discovered in his deportment towards those students, who devoted themselves to their duty, and were obedient to the laws; the clearness, comprehension and force of style which he displayed as an instructor to his class, the manly and impressive eloquence which he exhibited on all public occasions, when he appeared in the pulpit, rendered him the pride and ornament of the institution. The period in which he was to preach became an era in the college, for at this time a pastor, had been provided for the church at Princeton, and the students on such occasions repaired

with alacrity and delight to the place of divine worship. Never did they return from the church on such occasions, without feeling a degree of enthusiasm in favour of the preacher and having a sensible effect produced upon their conduct by his eloquent and solemn sermons. The writer of this feeble tribute to his memory, can bear testimony to his success as a pulpit orator, as the effect produced upon his mind by the able and searching addresses of his venerable president will never be obliterated. They were the first that ever exhibited to him, that quickening power which the doctrines of the gospel are capable of exercising, when recommended by the ornaments of style and composition, and all the arts of a persuasive eloquence. The addresses which he delivered to the senior class, which according to a laudable custom, took place in Princeton college, on the Sunday before the day of their public commencement, were generally executed in his best style, and delivered in his most impressive and happy manner. These addresses annually delivered to his graduates became at length so celebrated that persons of the first distinction in our country went from considerable distances, even from Philadelphia and New York, to listen to them. The people of Trenton, in New Jersey, will long remember the effect produced upon them by his oration upon the death of General Washington, an occasion on which eloquence could exercise her highest powers, and eulogy lavish her most hyperbolical encomiums, without any apprehension of degenerating into extravagance or excess. About this time, he published one

volume of sermons, which was well received both in his own and in foreign countries.

While the affairs of the college were thus prosperously advancing, under the auspices of a president and professors of acknowledged ability, for Dr. Smith had the happiness of having associated with him, first Dr. Walter Minto, one of the most distinguished mathematicians of his age, and afterwards, Dr. John M'Lean, who, for clearness of understanding and largeness of comprehension, had few equals in those branches of science to which he devoted himself; an event happened which for a time overwhelmed with despair the friends of this institution. From some cause which, to this day, has not been completely explained, the college buildings were burnt to the ground. This conflagration was, at first, supposed to be the work of some incendiary among the malcontent students, and several of them suffered in their character, from the strong suspicions which were entertained of their guilt; but after a full investigation of the matter, it appears rather to have been the effect of accident than design. From whatever cause the effect may have been produced, we can more easily conceive than describe the sensations of Dr. Smith, when he saw that edifice, which he had been so instrumental in rearing after the ravages of the war, and which had been for some time past filled with young men, many of whom were ardently engaged under his care in the pursuit of knowledge, one heap of ruins. Sickened, however, as his heart was at the sight, his mind fertile in expedients, did not long hesitate as to the course which it was necessary to pursue

in this critical conjuncture. The board of trustees was immediately summoned, and a plan proposed of setting forward throughout the United States among the friends of the seminary a subscription, for the purpose of raising a sum of money sufficient to repair the injuries which had been sustained. In the execution of this plan, the influential members of the board were requested to exert all their power in collecting subscriptions in their several districts, while the president was directed in person to travel through the middle and southern states, where the supporters of the institution principally resided, with the same views. Such was the success with which these exertions were attended that, in a short time, the building arose like a phoenix from its ashes; a larger library than the college before possessed was purchased, and more ample and convenient accommodations were provided for the students. For some years after this event, the number of the pupils was augmented beyond what had ever before been known in it. Thus was Dr. Smith a second time, the principal instrument in rearing this literary institution. From this period no important event happened beyond what are usual in similar places, until the year 1812, when after repeated strokes of the palsy, he found himself unable to attend to his duties in college, and accordingly, at the next commencement, to the great regret of the students and all the friends of the college, he publicly resigned his presidency, and retired to a house allotted to him by the board of trustees, while, with a liberality that does that respectable body of men no small credit, the greater part of his former salary

was continued to him during his life. From this period although only in his sixty-second year, the paralytic strokes, with which he had been visited, had so far weakened his constitution, as to render him utterly incapable of any of his ordinary exertions of body or mind. Even in this enfeebled state, however, his natural ardour and activity in the prosecution of learning still continued. He spent a portion of his time in correcting his works, and prepared for the press, and published that system of moral philosophy, which for more than twenty years he had delivered to the classes, and which is certainly among the best productions of this kind extant. Conscious of the extreme debility of his system, he was obliged at length to relinquish all those pursuits, to which he had become accustomed, and devoted himself solely to the enjoyment of his family circle and those numerous friends whose attachment to him became strengthened, by the near prospect which presented itself of so soon being deprived of him forever. The fervour and sincerity of his piety, appeared more conspicuous now that it was brought to the test. With a mind conscious of the most unsullied purity, and uprightness of intention; the retrospect of a well spent life, and an entire trust in the mercy and goodness of God, he seemed to await, in unruffled tranquillity the summons of his heavenly Father, that should transport him to a better world. Divested of all the passions which disturb and embitter the intercourse of those who are engaged in the conflicts of ambition, living separate from the world, and under the sure pros-

pect of a speedy dissolution, he appeared, in the language of the poet,

To walk thoughtful on the silent, solemn shore
Of that vast ocean he must sail so soon--

For some weeks before his death, his strength became visibly decreased, and on the 21st August, 1819, the 70th year of his age, he died almost without a struggle, conversing to the last with his family, exhibiting entire composure and resignation, and discovering even an anxiety to be released from that weight of feebleness and infirmity, which for some years before had borne down his spirit, and cut him off from those enjoyments, in which his active mind found its greatest happiness. His funeral was attended by an unusual concourse of his fellow citizens, assembled, even from remote distances, to avail themselves of this last opportunity of testifying their respect for a man so much honoured and esteemed. His body was deposited by the side of the other presidents of the college, and the usual monument is now erecting over his ashes. He had the misfortune to lose his wife some years previous to his own death, by whom he had nine children, five of which number only have survived him.

We shall now proceed to state his claims as a philosopher, a president of the college, a writer, a pulpit orator and a man. Dr. Smith, from the earliest period of life, devoted himself exclusively to the cultivation of science. His pretensions as a philosopher do honour to his country. In all his works we discover great just-

ness and profoundness of observation, extensive acquaintance with science and literature, together with a liberal and philosophical cast of thinking. His Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion, his Moral Philosophy, his Lectures upon the Evidences of Christianity delivered to the students in college, his Treatise upon the Figure and Complexion of the human species, and lastly, his Sermons, consisting of three volumes, two of which are now given to the public; are the works upon which his reputation is built, and they are all written with the hand of a master. In his Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion, he has given a concise but neat and perspicuous view of the doctrines and rites of the christian religion, as they are received and practised in the presbyterian church. His views are decidedly calvanistic, but couched in terms of so much moderation and liberality, that in his hands they are rendered as little offensive to those who have embraced a different creed, as it is possible to make them. In this treatise he has comprised within a small compass, a great variety of theological learning and useful and interesting disquisition, expressed in a language at once neat and elegant, while his doctrines are recommended by profound reflections and happy illustrations. His Moral Philosophy is certainly among the best productions of this kind at present in the possession of the literary world. As a book for the use of colleges and schools, it is liable to fewer objections than any that can be obtained. The treatise of Dr. Paley on this subject, although perhaps as a work of genius superior to any other, and characterised by all those

excellencies usually discoverable in the productions of that amiable moralist and elegant writer, is well known, and I believe, generally admitted to be most materially defective in tracing the foundations of moral duty. The excellent work of Hutcheson, is too abstract and diffuse for the use of schools, and that of Dr. Beattie rather an inferior production, and without that body of interesting matter which we have reason to expect in an elementary treatise intended for the instruction of youth. It is a common objection against this work of Dr. Smith, that he has introduced into it many topics which are irrelative to the subject of moral and political philosophy; and, perhaps, it is, in some degree, liable to an exception of this kind. But even this circumstance which may be admitted to be a real imperfection in the work, when estimated as a production of genius, may be of service to it, when received into our colleges as a manual of instruction in the education of youth. The variety of subjects discussed serves to open, and expand the faculties of youthful minds, to extend the sphere of their acquaintance with science and literature, and at once to gratify their fondness for novelty, and to strengthen and invigorate their intellectual powers. His Lectures upon the Evidences of the Christian Religion, hold a respectable rank with the works of Stillingfleet, Grotius, Paley, and the numerous writers who have undertaken the discussion of the same subject, and his volume of sermons is one of the best on the subjects of practical divinity, which issued from the press during the last century. The treatise, however, upon which, if he had written

no other, he might found a high and well merited reputation as a philosopher, is that upon the variety of figure and complexion in the human species, which is among the first and best of his productions. It was at first published as delivered to the philosophical society of Philadelphia, and of course much less in size than it now appears in a separate volume, but it may reasonably be doubted whether by introducing into it a greater accumulation of matter, although that matter be of a very interesting and useful kind, and undoubtedly contributes to the information and amusement of the reader, he has not upon the whole weakened the impression, which the argument produces upon the mind. However this may be, in its present form, it is indisputably a masterpiece of philosophical writing, and such as would have done honour to any man that ever lived. He who contributes to the detection and exposure of error and the establishment of the great principles of truth and duty, who exhibits important doctrines in science, morals or religion in new and interesting points of light, recommends them by original embellishments of fancy and all the graces of style and composition, may, alike with him who has the happiness to make great discoveries in philosophy, be regarded as one of the benefactors of his race. In efforts of this kind lies the merit of Dr. Smith, in the treatise of which we are now speaking. If he had not the honour of conceiving the original plan upon which the varieties in the race might be explained, which it is conceded had been sketched out by the philosophers of Europe, he is entitled to the still higher merit of having reduced what they had only conjectured, or feebly supported, to a

finished and conclusive argument amounting to the highest degree of moral certainty. His object in this treatise, is to show that all that great variety exhibited among our race in their stature, complexion and figure, commencing from the Tartar and Sinoide in the north of Europe, including the fair complexion and regular features of the temperate zones, the copper-coloured Indian, the deep olive of the Moors, and terminating in the indelibly black of tropical Africa, together with the other peculiarities of that nation, may be explained from the united action of climate, the state of society, and manner of living. Besides that this doctrine would seem to be evidently deducible from the account given in the Sacred Scriptures of the original of our race, which is there traced, in the first instance to Adam our great progenitor, and in the next, to Noah and his sons after the deluge, by whom the whole earth is said to have been overspread, it would appear equally to result by unavoidable inference from the maxims of a sound philosophy. No more causes of things are to be admitted than are both true and sufficient to explain the phenomena, is a maxim which, ever since the days of Newton, has been held as undeniable. That admirable simplicity, which runs through all the adjustments and operations of nature, would seem to indicate that the Creator, in accomplishing the purposes of infinite wisdom, would resort to no more expedients than are absolutely necessary to the attainment of his ends. If, therefore, from, a single pair, or from the family of Noah, in the natural course of propagation, the whole globe would be speedily peopled

and the purposes of the Creator in replenishing it with inhabitants be accomplished, it would be against all the principles of a just philosophy to resort to the supposition of a diversity of origin, in order to account for the varieties which exist. Nothing can be imagined more unphilosophical and less founded in fact and experience, than the opinion of those who, with Voltaire, imagine different races to be produced, suited to their various situations, like vegetable productions springing out of the soils to which they are severally adapted. Such a crude and unconcocted theory as this could have arisen only out of a wanton spirit of hostility to religion. How completely would the scene displayed in this affair have been reversed, had the Sacred Scriptures contained an account of the original of the human race, and the first settlement of the globe, conformable to the views of those who now undertake, by this indirect means, to invalidate their claims to credit? Had they informed us, that progenitors for the different nations sprang up, like mushrooms, suited to their conditions upon the globe; what sage lessons would have been read to us by the same men who are now maintaining these absurdities, about the simplicity of nature in her operations, the necessity of being guided in all our inquiries by the strictest rules of philosophising, which require us to assign no more causes of things than are absolutely necessary to explain the phenomena, and since a single pair would be all that would be necessary to the population of the earth, it would be contrary to the principles of right reason, to suppose that the Supreme Being would have originally created more? This me-

thod of reasoning would at least be more consistent with their usual course of procedure in attacking the doctrines of religion or the authority of revelation, than the one to which they have resorted in the present case, as they generally wish to conduct their operations against us, if not with the genuine and authentic arms of philosophy, at least, with those which counterfeit her venerable image and superscription. Complaint has been made on this subject, that the advocates of the identity of the race, by attempting to enlist revelation on their side, would wish to extinguish the lights of philosophical investigation or stifle the voice of free inquiry. But might not the same complaint be made with equal justice and application, in reference to any other doctrines inculcated upon the authority of revelation? Might not the Sacred Scriptures be considered as liable to a similar reprehension, because they establish the truths that there is a God, a future state of rewards and punishments, an immortal existence intended for the souls of men, and all the other tenets of the christian faith, and no longer allow a license to the erring reason of men, to subject them to the trial of vain and doubtful disputations? Far be it from us to feel any inclination to check the progress of free inquiry, or set limits to that full and ample range which we would allow to philosophy while she confines her researches within those tracts, over which God and nature have assigned her a just and lawful dominion. We are sensible of no tendency to partake of that spirit of bigotry and intolerance, which led to the persecution of Roger Bacon and Des Cartes, exposed Gallileo to confine-

ment, and put his life in jeopardy for his philosophical discoveries; but we cannot conceive why what is undoubtedly revealed in the word of God or deducible from it by unavoidable inference, should be withheld or not boldly maintained, and pertinaciously adhered to, from an apprehension of checking reason in her range, or stifling the voice of free inquiry. We entertain no fears that after a full and complete investigation, the doctrine inculcated in Sacred Scripture on this or any other topic will be found at variance with the conclusions of a just philosophy. The experience of the church in the case of Gallileo, if she had not been taught many other lessons of a similar nature during the course of her history, should have put her on her guard, not to be too sensitive or over-jealous in points of this kind, or allow her fears to be too easily alarmed, for the safety of that precious treasure of divine truth, entrusted to her keeping; but, to repose in entire confidence upon the conviction, that the same God who has endited his holy word, will not allow it to be invalidated or falsified by his works, when rightly interpreted. As far as the parallel has been hitherto run, between the word of God and his works, as disclosed to us by the discoveries of science, the accordance, or correspondence traced between them has been strict and wonderful, and it is not likely, that any future investigations of science, will be found to set them at variance with each other. This observation has been still more strikingly verified in the present instance. Dr. Smith has shown, in the treatise, whose merits we are now canvassing, that the inference to which we should

be naturally led from the representations of sacred scripture, in regard to the identity of the human race, is the same which we should deduce from the principles of philosophy. We cannot but be of opinion, that any one who shall take the trouble, not only to read, but to study and comprehend this work, will find that by his able and learned argument upon the subject, he has fairly brought it to a conclusion, and supplied us with an evidence, as satisfactory to the understanding as the nature of the case admits. To all the objections, which have been alleged against his system, commencing with those of that elegant writer and profound critic lord Kaims, and terminating in the efforts of some later authors, who have had the presumption to controvert his principles, without taking the trouble to comprehend them, we consider him as having furnished satisfactory refutations. That his doctrine will ultimately triumph, and that all future discoveries of science will contribute to its support and confirmation, we entertain not the smallest doubt; nor that the work in which it is maintained, will, by all those who are capable of judging, be regarded as a valuable accession to the stock of human knowledge, and remain a lasting monument of his genius.

From his pretensions as a philosopher, we proceed to those which he sustained as the president of the college. His talents, it is true, were rather of the contemplative than the executive kind, and he was more fitted for researches and speculations of the closet, than for the prompt exertions, the quick perception of the best expedients to accomplish ends, together with the

ready and vigorous prosecution of them, which are indispensable qualifications in conducting to successful issues, the affairs of active life. To cool contemplation, or the calm pursuits of mild philosophy, rather than to the tumult and heat of action, he seems to have been formed by his habits, which were those of study and reflection. But, on important occasions in which his feelings became engaged, and his sense of duty propelled him to exertion, no man discovered more promptitude, decision and energy of character, or more firmness and perseverance. He entered upon the duties of the presidency in the college at a conjuncture, in which they had become peculiarly delicate and arduous. The French revolution which had just taken place, at the same time, that it uprooted the very foundation of the ancient monarchy of that nation, and threw the state into confusion and wild misrule as well as deluged it with blood, did not confine its effects to the limits of that single kingdom, but extended its influence to many of the contemporary nations. In no country was this effect more sensibly felt than in our own, as was natural, on account of the severe struggle from which we had just released ourselves in the establishment of our independence, and the train of feelings and opinions to which that struggle gave rise. It awoke among the citizens of this republic an enthusiasm in favour of the civil rights of mankind, which had an immediate tendency to extravagance and excess, and which extended itself throughout all the departments of civil and social life. If our people were not prepared to consider all government useless and oppressive, they were at

least not in a condition to bear with tameness and acquiescence any thing that bore the semblance of a restraint upon their liberty. From the members of the republic this infection spread itself among our youth, who strange to tell, carried these false notions of liberty along with them into our seminaries of learning, and the same cause that gave rise to all the uneasiness of our Washington, the stay of the federal government and the guardian genius of his country, and which on more than one occasion shook to its foundation the noble fabric he had reared, extended its action also into the colleges and schools of our country. The spirit of insubordination, which showed itself amongst the students, and their unceasing tendency to tumult and revolt against the exercise of just and lawful authority, was the spring out of which flowed all Dr. Smith's anxieties and difficulties, in discharging the duties of his high and responsible station. From this fruitful source, storm after storm succeeded in the institution, which required all the address, influence and knowledge of human nature, which he could summon to his aid, to prevent from leading to its utter ruin. On these occasions, his readiness of resource, his firmness and decision of character, his commanding powers of eloquence, and all those talents that constitute real greatness, as it is capable of being exhibited in active life, conspicuously appeared. The dignity of his presence overawed disaffection and revolt. Never did he address himself in vain to the students under his care. His eloquent appeals to their understandings, their pride of character, and their sense of duty were always irresistible. Armed with his pow-

ers, the authority of college never failed to triumph. Confusion and wild uproar heard his voice and was still. Severe as were the contests he had thus frequently to sustain with the students, they never ceased to regard him with the highest respect, and to entertain for his person undiminished affection. Of all those young men who were successively under his charge, I very much doubt whether a single one could be found who does not cherish for his memory the highest veneration. Never, perhaps, did any president of a college receive from his pupils a more flattering proof of attention and respect, than he received from his, when, after the conflagration of the college-buildings, he was taking his journey through the middle and southern states, in order to make up subscriptions to defray the expense of repairing the injuries which had been sustained. The gentlemen in the several districts through which he passed, who had graduated under his care, met together to consult not only about the best method of paying their respects to him by waiting upon him in person, but also for the purpose of anticipating, in the way the most grateful to his feelings, the object of his visit. To save him from the task, at no time agreeable, of making application in person to the men of wealth in the places through which he went, they not only presented him unsolicited the several sums which they themselves subscribed, but voluntarily undertook the office, of soliciting in his stead the contributions of others. An act of complicated virtue, by which they at once discharged the obligation of gratitude which they owed to their venerable preceptor, exhibited an example of the most

delicate courtesy to the object of their esteem, and fulfilled an important public duty.

As a writer he is entitled to a very distinguished rank. He had a mind which was, indeed capable of comprehending the abstruse and penetrating into the profound, but which following its natural impulses, chose rather to devote itself to the acquisition of what is elegant and agreeable in science and literature. If his natural parts did not prompt him, with Locke, Clarke and Butler, successfully to fathom the depths of that vast ocean of truth and certainty presented to us in metaphysics and divinity; with Addison, Pope and Swift, he found a high degree of mental enjoyment in exploring the more flowery fields of the *Belles-Lettres*, and all that part of knowledge which comes under the denomination of polite learning. With this kind of literary treasure his mind was richly stored, and he was at all times able to give vent to it in a correct and elegant style of writing. He was versed in the Latin, Greek, French and Hebrew languages; and his style of writing was remarkably neat and chastened, when compared with that which is now becoming every day more and more prevalent. In his works we find none of those meretricious ornaments, that perpetual splendour of diction, those studied efforts to dazzle by brilliant thoughts, and pompous expressions, which are now becoming but too common, and are always sure indications of a corrupt taste. His periods, it is true, are generally well turned, and harmonious, and he discovers no disinclination to receive legitimate embellishments of fancy, when they come to him unsought. His

style is full, flowing and polished, but never glitters with gaudy ornaments. If there be any fault that is worthy of being noticed, it is the want of ease, grace and that artless simplicity which give to the productions of some writers an irresistible charm. Whatever defects, however, a scrupulous criticism might descry in the compositions of this writer, they are compensated by his uniform perspicuity, strength and elegance, the most indispensable requisites in fine writing. Circumstances elicit the powers of authors, as well as the talents of those who perform their parts upon the active scenes of life, and are called upon to gain the ear of listening senates or sway the rod of empires. Had Dr. Smith lived at the time of the reformation, or at any critical and interesting period in the history of the church, when great interests were at stake and important controversies maintained, he would have been found one of the ablest champions that ever espoused a cause. In the days of Luther, Calvin and Cranmer, when all his powers would have been excited into strenuous exertion, we very much overrate his talents, if he would not have approved himself a worthy coadjutor to those illustrious men, and entirely equal to that sublime undertaking on which they had embarked.

As a pulpit orator he would have done honour to any age or nation. There was a dignity and even majesty in his person and appearance in the pulpit, as well as in his conceptions and style of speaking, which excited involuntary respect and commanded the most unremitted attention. He seems to have formed himself upon that imaginary model of a perfect pulpit orator, which

Dr. Blair in his excellent lectures upon rhetoric has so well delineated, in whose sermons and mode of address there should be transfused into the sound sense and masterly argument of the English preachers, the spirit, fire and vehemence of the French. To a certain extent, it must be admitted, that he carried into execution what his mind had conceived. In his sermons there was always contained a large body of judicious and interesting matter, wrought with the highest art, and the whole animated with the glow of passion and imagination. Adorned by his genius the pulpit was converted into a fountain at once of light to illuminate the understandings of his hearers, and of heat to warm and fructify their hearts. We have often listened to preachers who, at times, would produce a more powerful effect upon their audience and awake more sensation; but we have never heard one who throughout the whole of his address afforded them a richer and more delightful repast. His discourses were always constructed with exquisite art and address, commencing with a regular exordium and exciting a deeper interest as he advanced through their different stages, and such was the earnestness and pathos of his mode of delivery, and his masculine eloquence, that the attention seldom flagged until he arrived at the conclusion. His oratory was a gentle stream that flowed, for the most part equably and smoothly, but which at times could swell into the force, impetuosity and sublimity of the torrent. His voice was clear, full and harmonious, his enunciation distinct, his gestures few, but significant and impressive, his whole appearance dignified and imposing, and,

on some occasions, when he was more than usually excited by passion, every feature spoke, and that fine expressive eye, which nature had given him, became lighted up with a fire which penetrated every heart. In him we perceived no frothy declamations, no little arts to captivate the vulgar, none of the tricks and flourishes of eloquence, with which the discourses of those preachers who aim at popularity are too frequently disgraced. All was sober, chastened and dignified both in his matter and manner. A vein of ardent but rational piety ran through his discourses that warmed every bosom, and kept the devotional feelings in a state of agreeable and wholesome excitement. No one returned from the church in which he had officiated without being sensible his heart had been made better, his understanding furnished with useful aliment for reflection, and his moral feelings softened and improved. In his private qualities he was no less distinguished than in his public character. His person was somewhat above the ordinary size, his limbs well proportioned, his complexion fair and delicate, the features of his countenance which were regular, remarkably handsome, and strongly marked with the lines of thinking, were crowned by an open and manly forehead and a large blue eye, in a high degree expressive and penetrating, and which, when any thing interested him, kindled with intelligence and spoke the language of an ardent and noble mind. To a person thus well proportioned, he added an agreeable and insinuating address and an ease and urbanity of manners, that would have adorned the most polished circles and given grace

and dignity to a court. His principles were all of a high and honourable kind, and bore the stamp of greatness and of the sternest integrity. No man had a deeper detestation of vice, or would more instinctively have shrunk from any act that would have cast a blemish upon the purity of his character. Slander did, indeed, as usual, fabricate against him her calumnious tale and essay to tarnish his reputation, and that envy which could not reach his excellence endeavoured to bring him down to its own level, but the uniform tenor of his life, answered and refuted the aspersions of his detractors. In domestic life his manners were amiable, affable and engaging. As a husband, parent and master, no one could be more gentle, affectionate and lenient in the exercise of discipline. To his family he was indulgent even to a fault. Arduous as were his public duties, and devoted as he was to the pursuit of science and literature, he found time to assist in the education of his own children, daughters as well as the only son that lived beyond the state of infancy; and after repeated strokes of the palsy had disqualified him from his attendance on the duties of the college, we find him spending the last remains of his strength in educating his little grand children, two sons of a favourite daughter, Mrs. Prevost, whom he had the misfortune to lose some years after her marriage. With politics he never publicly interfered, after the conclusion of the revolutionary war, although at its commencement in his youth, he is said to have assisted by his eloquent sermons, in exciting among the people in the state of Virginia a spirit of resistance to the measures at that time pro-

posed and adopted by the parliament of England. He was a warm and decided friend to rational liberty, but a determined enemy to that democratic rage, which would level all those distinctions so necessary to the existence of society, pull down authorities and powers, and under the sacred name of liberty, give rise to a general insubordination and licentiousness, incompatible with the existence of a just and equal government. Under these impressions, he was a warm supporter of the administration of Washington, and ranked among those who, amidst the party distinctions of the times, were denominated federalists. As a friend and companion, he is not so highly to be commended as for his domestic qualities. There was a coldness, reserve, and even stateliness in his demeanor, arising probably from his habits of abstract reflection and close application to study, which threw a damp at first upon the efforts of those who were desirous of approaching him on terms of intimacy and friendship. Upon more familiar intercourse, however, this reserve was laid aside towards those whom he esteemed, and his natural frankness, cordiality, and susceptibility of the tenderest attachments, appeared. Upon one thing his friends might calculate with perfect confidence, that he would never deceive them by false appearances. He professed no regard which he did not feel, and where he made overtures of esteem and friendship, it was always done in candour and sincerity. His generous and noble mind, was infinitely superior to all dissimulation, disguise or artifice. He was equally above all intrigue and management to promote his own elevation. The ho-

nours which were conferred upon him, came to him unsought and unsolicited. To the advantages and splendour which are derived from wealth, he appeared to be entirely indifferent. Of these his own intrinsic worth and real greatness prevented from ever feeling the want, while his religion taught him to elevate his views and affections above them. His piety was genuine and sincere, without being obtrusive, deep and heartfelt without being gloomy, ardent but not noisy, active but not ostentatious. His uniform integrity and uprightness of conduct, his sedulous devotion to all his moral and religious duties, his unabated zeal for the promotion of the temporal and spiritual interests of his fellow-men, the readiness and alacrity with which he entered into all plans of usefulness, and above all, his calm, composed and happy exit from the world, showed, as far as such matters can be exhibited to the view of men, that he had a good conscience, and that the fear of God reigned in his heart, and was the ruling spring of all his actions. He has gone to his great account, and we doubt not, that his works of piety and virtue will follow him, and through the mercy of his Creator, will render his futurity as blessed as his life was exemplary, and his death tranquil. The peace of Heaven be with his spirit.—Illustrious man! A pupil who once revered thee as a preceptor, and whom thou afterwards didst honour with thy friendship, would erect to thee this frail monument, as a memento at once of his gratitude and attachment. By the efforts of thy genius thou hast reared for thyself, an imperishable monument. Long shall thy memory be cherished

by the friends of science and virtue, of religion and thy country, of which thou wast so bright an ornament. May thy mantle fall upon thy successors in the pulpit, and thy spirit and eloquence be caught, in promulging the doctrines of thy Divine Master. Taught by thy great and good example, may future divines and orators of the pulpit, place their chief glory in the triumphs of their sacred eloquence over the vices and passions of mankind, and in conducting them by the charm of a virtuous and pious life in the ways of peace and salvation.

SERMONS.



SERMONS.

FELIX TREMBLING BEFORE PAUL.

“And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.”—Acts xxiv. 25.

CHRISTIANS! you see in the apostle Paul before the tribunal of the Roman governor, the example, at once of a great orator, and a faithful minister of Jesus Christ. Accused by the high priest and elders of the Jewish nation of being a seditious disturber of the public peace, and of profaning their holy temple, and the sacred mysteries of their religion, he defended himself with the simplicity and energy of truth, and with the generous fervour of conscious innocence, against all the arts of that mercenary orator by whom they attempted to support their charges. Leaving to Tertullus those base flatteries which were only designed to gain the ear of corrupted power; Paul, in his noble and manly defence of himself, although always respectful, as became a prisoner to the magistrate before whom he was arraigned, seemed never once to forget his dignity as a man, or his authority as an apostle. Felix, charmed with his eloquence, and, probably hav-

ing his curiosity excited to learn something more certain concerning that new religion which, under such an able advocate, was beginning to make the most important revolutions in the state of society and of public opinion, desired to hear him again on this interesting subject. It was with a view apparently so just and honourable, that he came with great pomp to the place of their judicial assemblies, accompanied by his nominal wife, the object of a criminal passion, to whom he desired to give the pleasure of hearing so celebrated an orator upon questions which were then agitating all Judea and the world.

The apostle, with the faithfulness which became a minister of God, spoke *concerning the faith in Christ*, and unfolded to him those sublime and astonishing doctrines which distinguish the gospel from all the systems of Pagan theology;—the descent of the Son of God from heaven,—the great oblation which he offered for the sins of the world,—the resurrection of the dead,—an immortal existence beyond the grave, and the everlasting retributions which await the righteous and the wicked. When, in the progress of his discourse, he came to treat of the moral precepts of the gospel, with great address he turned the force of his eloquence to illustrate and press those virtues chiefly, for the violation of which his illustrious hearer was most culpable, and had even become infamous throughout Judea. These topics he appears, from the effects produced on the conscience of Felix, to have urged with irresistible energy. He spoke of righteousness, or justice, the basis of all our social relations; and of temperance,

or the moderation of all our appetites and passions, the foundation of personal purity and perfection, before a governor who was equally detested in his province for his iniquities, his cruelties, and his voluptuousness. The discourse of the apostle began at length to reach his inmost feelings; he searched his heart with the awful light of truth; he held up to him the mirror of his life; and while he depicted the beauty of virtue, the tranquillity and peace which it imparts to the innocent and upright breast, and the glory and the honest fame with which it surrounds the humane prince, he presented to him, in the strongest colours, the iniquity and the horrible consequences of his past crimes. Never, perhaps, before had he seen himself in his true character, and he now began to be agitated with unusual inquietudes. But when the holy and fervent preacher came, at length, to denounce the vengeance of heaven against such iniquities, and disclose to his view the terrors of a *judgment to come*, Felix, unable any longer to contain his emotions, trembled on the throne on which he sat. Admirable force of truth! that could thus penetrate a heart grown old in vice, inflated by the incessant flatteries of parasites, dazzled with the splendours of power, and rendered obdurate by the enormity of his crimes. It arrested the prince, and converted the judge into the criminal. He trembled before Paul, who had been brought a prisoner, loaded with chains, into his presence.

My object in the present discourse is briefly to review the subjects of the apostle's reasoning, and to point out,

1. In the first place, the reference which they bore to the history and character of the Roman governor, and,

2. In the next place, the application which may be made of them to our own state.

1. Righteousness, or justice, of which St. Paul first reasoned, comprehended, according to the ideas of the ancients, and the distribution of the virtues made in their schools, the duties both of equity, and of beneficence. The faithful execution of all our civil functions, our domestic duties, the equity which we owe to others in our commerce with them, the compassion which we should extend to affliction and want; in a word, all the charities of life were embraced under this name; and, perhaps, not without reason. For every act of beneficence which the miseries of our fellow-creatures require, every kindness and comfort which they need, and which it is in our power to bestow, is strictly an office of justice due from man to man. Against this duty, in every branch of it, Felix was a high offender. In the exercise of his government, he was equally unjust and unfeeling, avaricious and cruel: vices which so often are found together in corrupt rulers. The annals of Judea and of Rome, inform us that he sported with the lives and liberties of the people of his government. Under the most frivolous and iniquitous pretences he robbed the wealthy, and caused the innocent to be put to death. His troops, accustomed to blood, he often employed in the most wanton acts of violence and carnage. Prompted at once by avarice and prodigality, he plundered his province to enrich himself; the deci-

sions of his tribunals were always at auction; he expected money of Paul to restore him to that liberty which the laws of Rome, and of human nature entitled him to enjoy. A Roman historian* has said of him, that he exercised the power of a prince with a base and mercenary soul. And, when he returned to the seat of empire, public accusers, and the universal complaint of his province followed him to the presence of the emperor; and nothing but the powerful interposition of his brother, who happened to be, at that time, a favourite in the palace, preserved him from suffering the merited punishment of his crimes. Such was the character of this famous governor before whom the great apostle was called to plead the cause of justice and humanity. After tracing these virtues to their sources in the principles of human nature, in the great interests of society and mankind, in the will of God; after exhibiting in strong and beautiful colours, the dignity and worth of an upright character, the glory of a prince who presides with justice over his people, the amiability of the humane and benevolent feelings, those powerful cements of the order and felicity of the great family of man, that he might aggravate the picture of iniquity and inhumanity which he intended to draw;—how, may we suppose, would he depict the crime of trampling, by his injustice and violence, on the laws of God and man; of rending asunder the peaceful bonds of society? of violating that happy security of the citizen in his condition which the laws were intended to protect? and, instead of presiding,

* Tacitus.

like a guardian angel, over the public prosperity, for which purpose alone power was entrusted to his hands, carrying desolation and terror throughout the nation, and invading with rapine, lust, and blood, the recesses of domestic happiness? With what energy would he address the heart; what appeals would he make to the conscience of his judge?—I seem to see the fervid and indignant preacher call up to his awakened imagination the spectres of so many murders which had been committed by his orders; surround his tribunal with the cries of widows and of orphans, whose husbands and fathers he had caused to be dragged to prison and to death,—besiege his heart by the groans or the silent griefs of whole families reduced to beggary and despair for imputed crimes, and ruined by the enormous sums at which they were obliged to purchase a precarious justice; or given up to plunder because they refused or were unable to purchase it. These images presented with all the strength of colouring which the eloquence of so great a master would give them, could not fail to disquiet the heart of his guilty hearer. His busy and disturbed fancy would recall to him, in one moment, all the iniquities of his life. Conscience shook him with its awful power: and, though surrounded by his guards, and by a magnificent retinue which would awaken all his pride, he was seen to tremble in the presence of his humble prisoner.

2. The apostle treated, in the next place, of temperance; a term of more extensive signification in the original language, than in our tongue, comprehending not only moderation in the pleasures of the table, but the

due government of all our senses, appetites, and passions. This topic of the apostle's discourse, not less than the former, came home to the bosom and experience of his illustrious hearer.

Felix, whose province was equal to kingdoms, and whose rank was superior to that of the tributary princes of the Roman empire, lived in all the splendor of Asiatic luxury, and abandoned himself to that shameless intemperance in meats and wines which, at that period, so often disgraced the conduct of the imperial lieutenants, who enjoyed and abused the opportunity of raking the wealth of nations into their private coffers. But, intemperance in wine was to him only the fuel of intemperate lust, which rank and power gave him the means, and the imaginary privilege of indulging without restraint and without shame. Of this, Drusilla, who sat by his side at that moment, afforded an example which could not fail to strike every spectator. She was the daughter of the first Agrippa, and the lawful wife of the king of Emesa. But, seduced by the licentious arts of the Roman, flattered with the splendor of imperial favour, and of a station exalted above that of kings, and burning herself with a disgraceful passion, she causelessly broke the holy tie which united her to her husband, and, deserting his palace, plunged into the bosom of corruption in a new and infamous connexion.

Drusilla was a princess of the Jewish nation; and the high priest daring, with a manly fortitude, to reprehend such a violation of their holy law, and of common

decency, Felix procured the courageous and upright pontiff to be assassinated.

What a field would these enormities open to the apostle, to display the guilt, and the horrible consequences of his licentious appetites, and unbridled passions? Not to speak of the degradation of a reasonable and immortal nature wallowing in the low excesses of the table, not to speak of the madness and fury of a tyrant inflamed by wine, and his utter abandonment, in that state, of all the principles of humanity; with what holy ardor and indignation would he dwell on the fatal consequences of that lust, the victim of which he saw before him on the throne with Felix? To what disorders in society, to what crimes has it not given birth? What dark jealousies, what insidious plots, what worse than barbarian cruelties have sprung from a passion which claims, at the same time, to be the softest in the human breast? What humiliation, what shame, what unceasing tears has it created to innocence seduced and ruined? For an instant of guilty pleasure, what cold, what joyless what disconsolate hours must succeed of neglect and self-reproach! or, if tempted to extinguish feeling in a life of profligacy, what infamy!

But, on this subject, and in the presence of such an audience, would not the faithful apostle turn the principal force and point of his discourse on the sacredness of the *conjugal tie*? on the peace and harmony of families? on the relation of this holy union to the public morals? on the cruelty of robbing a worthy man of the pure affections of a virtuous wife? the villainy of

introducing distrust and shame, and all the exquisite miseries of disappointed affection and tarnished honour, into those peaceful mansions, that sweet asylum of human happiness, where love and chastity only should reign? In what strong and glowing colours would he not represent the superior guilt of those who, sitting in the seat of the law, are the first to violate its justice and order? who, having the peace and purity of domestic manners under their protection, carry into them nothing but pollution? who, having the supreme charge of the public morals, give every where the most open and scandalous examples of public vice? Felix, conscious of the point and application which all these truths bore to himself; condemned by his own reason, by his reflections, by the light flashed upon him by the eloquence of the apostle, seems to have felt each moment increase the compunction which had already seized him, the fears which had already begun to agitate him.

3. His confusion seems to have been completed, when the sacred orator proceeded to expose to his view the tremendous certainty, and awful retributions of a judgment to come. Amidst all the errors and follies of Paganism, in which Felix had been educated, some vestiges were still preserved of this sublime doctrine, although obscured, and weakened in its influence on the mind, by the fables of the poets, and the doubts of the philosophers. The law of God written on the heart, and the inextinguishable voice of conscience, preserved so high and important a principle of morals from entirely perishing; and offered to the apostle a

foundation on which to erect the superstructure of his reasoning. And, when he exhibited to Felix the nature and perfection of the Supreme Deity, so awful to guilt, his eternal being, his almighty power, his infinite holiness, his inflexible justice, which will reward in terrible righteousness the iniquities of sinners; when he turned his attention inward to the dictates of that judge which God has placed in our own breasts, and showed him how those dictates point to a supreme tribunal, and the fearful decisions of eternal justice: these ideas, so consentaneous to reason and nature, were calculated to take a deep hold on the heart even of a pagan, who, by his crimes, had roused upon him all the force of his conscience.

The apostle having so far gained the attention of Felix, to truths which appear to have their foundation in the most certain principles of nature, would be prepared to declare to him those awful circumstances of the final judgment which transcend the discoveries of nature, and can be made known to man only by the holy spirit of inspiration. With what majesty, then, would the herald of heaven announce to the iniquitous governor, and to that vast assembly which had come together on this occasion, that God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness; wherein every man shall receive according to the works that he hath done, whether they have been good, or whether they have been evil? With what grandeur and terror would he paint to their imagination the heavens on fire, and wrapt together as a scroll,—the sun and moon extinguished in their orbits, and the earth, and

the elements melting with a fervent heat! would he represent the judge descending with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God, assembling before him all the nations of the dead and of the living, and erecting his tribunal on the flaming ruins of the universe? Would he display to their view that fearful gulf of fire destined for the punishment of the impenitent; and uncover before him, as it were, the smoke of their torments, which ascendeth forever and ever? Would he depict the consternation of sinners, the terrors of guilt, and the utter impotence of all human power to resist the decrees of omnipotent justice!—Yes, that sovereign judge hath erected a tribunal before which shall appear princes as well as the meanest of their subjects; the great and noble of the earth, as well as the dependant and the poor; I your humble prisoner, and Cæsar your lord and mine. There, not rank and fortune, but character and conduct shall form the great distinctions among mankind. There shall be judged with equal justice, the prince who here was above the law, and the friendless wretch who was its victim. And the crimes which now awaken in the bosom of guilt so many anxious forebodings, shall there be seen to surround the sinner as terrible witnesses against him in the day of judgment. The horrible revellings of intemperance shall convert their brutal pleasures into instruments of torture. The tears of violated innocence, the sighs of those unhappy victims who have been first seduced from virtue, and then abandoned to shame and wretchedness, the injuries of ruined families, the blood of those who have perished by the injustice of power,

will cry from the earth for vengeance on the head of guilt. Felix, convinced, penetrated, condemned by his own heart, felt, in a moment, all his courage forsake him. The imperial governor trembles! his pride cannot support him, his legions cannot protect him. He trembles in the face of his guards, and of that vast concourse assembled on such a public and interesting occasion.

The Roman orator once made the instrument of condemnation drop from the hand of Cæsar: but here the criminal favourite of Cæsar, a prince only inferior to the emperor himself, in magnificence, in power, and pride, is made to write his own condemnation, in the terrors depicted on his countenance, in the strong agitations of his whole frame, in his haste to dismiss the penetrating preacher. Oh! to have been witness, said an ancient father of the church, to those divine strains of eloquence which flowed from this great apostle!

My brethren, let us, instead of indulging a vain regret at no longer enjoying the pleasure of admiring and being edified by those divine talents which shall never more appear upon the earth, rather set ourselves to inquire into those practical lessons of morality and duty, those reproofs and admonitions, which we may derive from this portion of sacred history.

2. This was the second object of our discourse.

Not invested with the power, we have neither been exposed to the temptations, nor enjoyed the opportunities of becoming so criminal as this Roman prince. We may even think, as Hazael, while he yet remained in an humble station, that we are incapable of the same

enormities. But, if we carefully examine our hearts, we may, perhaps, find there the seeds of the same iniquities, which require only the sun of prosperity to ripen them into act. Often do the smallest ebullitions of turpitude and vice even in our most unguarded actions, betray a hidden fountain of impurity within, which is ready, whenever external obstructions are removed, to overflow with the waters of foulness and corruption. Do we see a man void of sensibility for the miseries of his fellow-creatures? Do we see one who is ever ready to extort from penury its last farthing? Who, absorbed in his own interests, shuns the view of distress and want, lest it should make some unwelcome claim upon his charity? We see the principles of all the iniquities which naturally spring from pride and selfishness, from avarice and inhumanity exalted to power?

The crimes of Felix, indeed, appear with the higher aggravations, because his power and rank at once gave force to his passions, and enabled them to move in a wider and more destructive sphere. But do we not perceive the same unrighteous spirit continually operating throughout society, according to the extent of its opportunities and its means? What iniquitous transactions in commerce are often covered by a specious fraud! What a horrible abuse have we seen made of the confidence of friends, involving them, with cool deliberate cruelty, in the ruins of a falling fortune! What project of speculation, which are at least of doubtful honesty; what hazardous enterprises in trade; what a style of luxury in living, which no means of

fairness and integrity can support, are plunging, not the culpable alone, but all who are connected with them, into the deepest distress, if not into absolute ruin! Good faith is betrayed, friendship is sacrificed, families are hurled from affluence and respectability into the abyss of affliction; and the guilt of the destroyers ascends to heaven, loaded with the sorrows of so many unhappy victims. And, how frequently, alas! have we lately beheld fraud, grown great on the spoils of unsuspecting faith, display, with insolence, its fastuous equipages in the view of the misery which it has created, and rear the scandalous edifices of its vanity on the sighs and tears of those whom it has plundered!

But descending from such great enormities to those narrow plans, those low tricks of dishonesty which often take place among the inferior classes of fortune;—is not that spirit of extortion which is ready to exact upon the necessities of a neighbour; that low cunning which studies to overreach his candour or inexperience in a bargain; that pitiful deceit which would detract an inch from the measure or an ounce from the weight of the smallest articles of your commerce, a crime in your sphere equivalent to the greater robberies of iniquitous power? *Shall I count him pure, saith God, with the wicked balances, with the bag of deceitful weights?*—No; the Supreme Judge of heaven and earth beholds, and will punish the iniquities of the heart, however they may be laid, by the force of circumstances, under restraint in their operations. They want only power and a theatre, to exhibit themselves in all the enormities of rapine and oppression which disgraced the tyranny of

Felix. God beholds in these elements of iniquity, if I may call them so, the crimes to which, without the restraints of his providence, they would grow; and will cast them out with abhorrence from the presence of his glory, in the light of which no unrighteousness can dwell.

In the next place, you have seen this illustrious sinner giving an unbridled indulgence to all his licentious appetites. You have seen him in his career of intemperance, and of the bold and unblushing violation of all the laws of chastity and decency, which have attracted upon him the reproaches and execrations of succeeding ages. But, in looking round this assembly, do I see none before me, who, with shameful obedience to the impulses of a gross appetite, daily offer up their reason at the shrine of intemperance and debauchery? What effect would the fortunes and the power of Felix have on such persons, but only to enable them more completely to destroy in their hearts all the nobler affections of human nature? **Husbands!** who sacrifice by intemperance the peace and comfort of those delicate females who, by a mistaken affection, have put their happiness in your power;—**Parents!** who neglect the culture, the honour, the protection of those unfortunate children, to whom you have been the cause of giving existence, only to leave them afterwards a prey to ignorance and vice;—**Debauched sons!** who pay no regard to the fond hopes, the anxious solitudes of parents, whose secret prayers and vows continually ascending to heaven for you, who are callous equally to their admonitions and their tears, who can wound their

tenderest feelings, who, in order to obtain the means of your own criminal indulgence, can undutifully impose, by false tales, upon their unsuspecting affection—behold in yourselves, crimes which, in their principle, vie in malignity with those of this guilty ruler who trembled at the development of their enormity by the holy apostle. Ah! the sighs of those parents, the shame, the vices of those children forsaken by you, or corrupted by your example; the griefs of that wife who finds in you no friend, no companion, whose soul is wasting away under your barbarous neglect, or your insulting cruelty, shall call down from heaven the vengeance of eternal justice. Such are some of the crimes of that intemperance which perverts, corrupts, and eventually destroys all the best powers of human nature, and the best affections of the human heart.

The character of this degenerate Roman affords an additional point of comparison, in the excesses to which he indulged a licentious passion, whence another instructive and practical lesson may be drawn.

No passion more debases and contaminates the soul; none renders it more gross in its enjoyments, and more incapable of tasting the pure pleasures of virtue and piety; none more certainly excludes it from the mansions of a holy and eternal love. Could I represent to you in the glowing colours, and with the generous indignation of that divine preacher who made Felix tremble, the gulf into which it sinks the soul; could I depict its scenes of pollution, and the multiplied and exquisite miseries which often spring thence; could I present to you the bosom of chaste love wounded and bleeding in

secret; the shame, the remorse, the eternal tears of betrayed and ruined innocence; the jealousies, the rage, the crimes of a passion, as cruel as it is effeminate and dissolute, its infamy and guilt would flash with horror upon the heart!

But, what though *you* do not riot in all the voluptuousness which countless and iniquitous treasures enabled him to purchase, or despotic power enabled him to command? Yet, if you are faithful to yourselves, and to truth, may you not find in your hearts the seeds of all those passions which pierced even his callous conscience with remorse?

But I will not offend the ears of this assembly by speaking of their grosser pollutions, which it is difficult even to reproach with decency. Are there not lower degrees of these vices in which a sensual heart will often indulge itself without restraint, and which it will employ all the sophistries of a corrupted reason to justify and defend? Do you delight to amuse the fancy with those loose images which a remaining modesty, perhaps, still restrains you from realizing in a dissolute practice? Do you permit yourselves to abuse the freedom and gayety of conversation by indelicate allusions, and double meanings? Do you attend with pleasure, and even seek for opportunities to attend those exhibitions which are calculated to inflame the passions and corrupt the modesty of youth? Do you love to stimulate an impure imagination by those indecent pictures, those licentious odes, which a shameful abuse of the arts has employed to infect the manners of society? Ah! God, who beholds the consequence in the princi-

ple, sees, in these elements of vice, the essence of those crimes into which it is to be feared that time, and opportunity, and habit, will at length ripen them;—crimes, which made an illustrious and most obdurate offender to tremble on his own tribunal, and will cause him, one day, to tremble more horribly before the tribunal of a higher judge. To that awful bar, at which we, and all men must stand at last, permit me for a moment, in the close of this discourse, to direct your thoughts. Nothing, perhaps, will serve to impose a more effectual check upon the disorders of the heart, and of the life, than the serious remembrance that God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness. It is a fearful consideration to guilt, that, *for every idle word, and for every idle thought, we shall render account to God.* In this judgment all the depths of the soul shall be searched by a severe and omniscient eye. God shall judge the secrets of all hearts. Actions which had been long forgotten, actions which had been studiously concealed from the world, which self-love had endeavoured to conceal from itself, shall there be recalled from their darkness and oblivion, and exposed in the dreadful light of eternity. Under the impression of these solemn and awful truths, frequently re-enter your own breasts, and judge yourselves with the same spirit with which you shall be judged. Ah! sinners of every grade;—unjust, intemperate, licentious—avaricious, envious, selfish—proud, haughty, disdainful—hard-hearted, unkind, uncharitable—slanderers, back-biters, disturbers of the harmony of society—impious, disloyal, undutiful! look up to that tribunal where no

sin shall escape its just condemnation; where no veil shall conceal it; where no sophistry shall protect or palliate it; and where, also, that witness, that serpent within shall wring the heart with undescrivable anguish. Thence cast your eye down to that fearful abyss of everlasting darkness and fire, ready to receive the reprobate *children of wrath*: and, as they descend into it, listen to the shrieks of their despair which add augmented horrors to the last groans of the universe!—But alas! when I would represent to you the terrors of that judgment, the holiness and majesty of that tribunal I feel the impotence of my own powers! Oh! that Paul himself, glowing with the inspiration of Heaven, could address you with the same voice which made the tyrant of Judea tremble! But thou, most Blessed, and Holy Spirit! thou canst give effect even to the feebleness of our words!—Strike! penetrate our hearts! and make the sinner tremble at the terrors of thy justice only that he may flee to the refuge of thy mercy! Amen.

THREE SERMONS.

ON THE

PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON.

1st. On the Excesses of the Prodigal.

And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks which the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. *Luke XV. 13—16.*

WHAT a striking image is here presented by our blessed Saviour, of a prodigal who, from the impulse of his own unbridled passions, or the seduction of other sinners, has forsaken the path of virtue, and plunged into the excesses of vice and dissipation. The youth, impatient of his father's control, listening only to the calls of appetite and pleasure; without experience, and without prudent forecast, enters into the world. From a parent's indulgence, he solicits, and obtains that ample provision which might have procured him a virtuous, and happy independence; but which, misapplied, became the incentive of every criminal passion, and the fatal instrument at length of his shame and ruin. Home, which was the sweet asylum of his first years, and the happy scene of his simple and regulated habits, becomes

a prison to his unchained desires, and the reverend presence of his father, which was a source of happiness in the period of his innocence, becomes irksome to an extravagant youth bent on the gratification of his unlawful passions. As long as the sentiments of filial piety were not entirely extinguished in his heart, the eye of a parent whom he was accustomed to revere, imposed some restraint upon his errors. Wishing, therefore, to deliver himself from the reproach of his looks, he sought a far country in which he might dare to give unlimited scope to his inclination. In this scene of fancied pleasure, his excesses soon reduce him to indigence and misery; and he finds a wide difference between the pleasing pictures to which his youthful imagination had given its warm colouring, and the sad realities, in which all its illusions, are found to terminate. Instead of those scenes of perpetual gayety, those eternal raptures of which he had suffered his fancy to dream, you see him discontented, anxious, filled with bitter recollections, overwhelmed with his own reproaches, and, in the end, left destitute of the common comforts of life, and obliged to share with filthy swine their miserable offal. A picture more humiliating, could hardly have been drawn of the abandoned situation of an unhappy young man, in that region where swine were viewed with peculiar abhorrence, not only as the most obscene, but regarded by their religion as the most profane of all animals.

I shall not wait to present to you the different interpretations which have been made of this beautiful and instructive allegory, or the various applications which

have been given to its instructive moral. It is sufficient that it depicts in striking colours, the unhappy consequences of the errors and excesses of a young, and headstrong profligate; and points out the infelicities which pursue, in the end, a course of sinful pleasures. It is calculated, in the next place, to display the deep repentance to which these several corrections are often made to lead the sufferer under the gracious direction and influence of the spirit of the Most High. And, finally, to exhibit the benignity and compassion of Almighty God, who often extends his mercy to the humbled penitent in his deepest affliction; and often comes to his succour in the moment of his despair.

The whole parable, contemplated in this view, would open too extensive a field to be embraced in a single discourse; I limit myself, therefore, at present, to exhibit the errors and excesses of the prodigal, purposing to pursue, hereafter, the remaining subjects in their order.

His first error, and the fatal introduction of all which followed, was his precipitate endeavour to elude the inspection of his father's eye, and escape from the control of his reverend presence. *Give me*, says the unhappy youth, *that portion of goods which falleth to me: and when he had received them, he went into a far country.* He could no longer endure the observation of that countenance, which he had been accustomed to venerate, and which appears to have derived an awful majesty from the lustre of virtue and religion which beamed in it; he dreaded the importunity of his remonstrances. Some remaining sentiments of duty still ex-

isted in the midst of his follies, which rendered it irksome to know that that good man was acquainted with his disorders. He hastened, therefore, to escape from the restraints of an authority, a veneration for which, his vices had not entirely extinguished in his heart. *He went into a far country.*—We have in this image an affecting exhibition of the thoughtless career of the prodigal who, in the pursuit of his criminal passions, studies only to forget, and in forgetting, hopes to elude the inspection and judgment of Almighty God. It is perhaps, impossible habitually to recollect his holy presence and, at the same time, to abandon the heart to its criminal pursuits. It is only when his awful holiness, when the majesty of his perfection, when all his relations to us as our Father, our judge, and the avenger of our crimes are forgotten, or pushed from our thoughts, that conscience is rendered silent, that the fears of guilt are laid asleep, and reason dares to betray its sacred trust, and become the pander of lust, or the advocate of passion. When *God is not in all our thoughts*, the world, and its images alone fill the heart. Let us then contemplate the prodigal, thus released in his career from all control.—Just now master of his fortune, freed from every inconvenient restriction which the presence of a venerable parent still imposed upon him, flourishing in the vigour of health, which his excesses have not yet impaired, he fancies that he has now entered on a path which will always be strewn with flowers. Headlong he rushes into the pleasures before him, with no other study but how perpetually to vary them. He is engaged in a

whirl of folly which hardly leaves his intoxicated heart one moment for reflection. All appears smiling round him, and he seems to himself to be in the morning of a fair and beautiful day that will never be obscured by a cloud. Ah! he has no suspicion of the tempests which will agitate its noon, or of those dark storms which are gathering to overcast its evening! His substance he wastes; riot undermines his health; debauch destroys the faculties of his mind; profligacy of manners, by degrees, lays waste the conscience; excess exhausts the powers of enjoyment, and renders him at once incapable of true pleasure, and yet incapable of living without that withered and barren form of it, which a constitution, worn out in the service of sin has left him. Every sensation is blunted, at the same time, that habit increases the demand for pleasures which he is no longer able to enjoy. Thus he destroys the noble powers of nature, and dissipates the goods which his heavenly Father has bestowed upon him. His imagination, his reason, his affections, all the energies of nature are absorbed and sunk in folly. The talents of the mind, the vigour of the body, the advantages of fortune, which should all have been consecrated to the glory of God, have been perverted and abused in the infamous servitude of vice.

But these are not the only wastes of this unhappy prodigal. Not to speak of the diseases, the premature old age, the impotence of enjoying even lawful pleasures, which intemperance and sensuality create, what becomes of the fond hopes of parents, the expectations and proud predictions of friends, that appeared to be

justified by the talents and the amiable dispositions which the dawn of life had begun to unfold? disappointed, and blasted, they leave them perhaps to grief and shame which embitter the remainder of their days. What becomes of that peace of mind, that sweet serenity of heart, that conscious worth and self-respect which are the companions of innocence and virtue? They are lost in the gulf of the passions, supplanted by remorse, and sunk in the humiliating conviction of the lost esteem of the world. The means of knowledge, and of moral and religious culture, which he once enjoyed, and which should have early planted in his heart the principles of religion, now serve, to increase his hostility to all good, and precipitate his downward course to ruin.

After the substance of the prodigal is wasted, his folly appears in stronger colours.

A famine arises in that land to which he had retired, far from virtue, and far from the presence of his father; and he begins to be in want. He who had been master of superfluous wealth, is forced to seek a shameful subsistence by selling his services to the most infamous employments; he, who had revelled in the bosom of so many delights, is constrained to associate only with the swine which he is commissioned to feed; he seeks to devour along with them their filthy husks; but they are not sufficient to satisfy the cravings of his hunger. Behold, a new image of the vile slavery to which his ungoverned passions have, at last reduced the profligate, the brutality into which they

often sink him, and the misery in which they finally leave him.

Do you see an unhappy youth who has sacrificed honor, interest, duty, his own convictions, the hopes and happiness of his family to the demon of pleasure? *Straightway he goeth after her as an ox to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks.* She imposes upon him her cruel chains. She drags him at her chariot wheels; often, indeed, a willing slave, but often also, a reluctant captive. The reproaches of his own heart, the reproaches of the world, the loss of private character and honor; the tears of his friends stand in the way of his guilty career, but the power of his corruptions urges him on to the consummation of his disgrace. He sinks a slave to the most abject principles of his nature. Well have they been represented by herding with swine, and being nourished only with the vile husks which form the food of the filthiest of all animals. By the same figure, only improved by the fictions of poetry, does the prince of heathen poets depict the companions of Ulyses metamorphosed into swine by the malignant power of Circean pleasure.

At last, even these miserable and polluted streams fail him. He had once rioted in abundance. Now, he seeks only to glut himself with the veriest offal of his filthy herd. Deprived of every pure, rational, and manly source of happiness, he drains every filthy puddle in his way; but their foul and poisonous waters, instead of quenching his raging thirst, serve only to inflame it. An immortal soul cannot be satisfied with brutish enjoyments. In spite of the impure propensities of vice,

it pines for a felicity more worthy of its celestial nature. What in the gross corruptions of a mortal body, can have any congeniality with its heavenly origin? Nothing but the consciousness of having fulfilled its duty; nothing but the pleasures of piety and virtue; but the *beauty of holiness*; but *God in Christ reconciling the world to himself*, can completely satisfy the tastes of immortality. All things else are barren, and leave the soul famished, for want of its proper nourishment. The libertine wanders from object to object. Disappointment meets him at every step; but far from curing his follies, it only stimulates him to new and alas! successful efforts. Each object pleases for a moment, and, he is ready to say, surely the happiness for which I seek is here. Hardly is it tasted, till, like all the rest, it writes vanity upon its own shallow stream, and leaves nought behind, but the painful void of folly, or the sting of conscious guilt. Whenever he returns upon himself, he is unhappy. The levity of youth, the ardour of pleasure may, for a time, suspend reflection. But the decays of nature, the strokes of divine providence, or the disastrous consequences of his crimes, will force conviction at last upon his reluctant heart. A constitution broken by vice, a family, perhaps, reduced to distress by extravagance, the griefs of friends, the reproaches of the world, or personal affliction will some time or other speak to the conscience with a voice which cannot be stifled or misunderstood. Yes, affliction will, sooner or later, such is the order of providence, vindicate the rights of God, and of divine justice. The sinner will be made to feel the vanity of all

his projects of happiness, which leave the soul famished, and bereft of its true good; dissatisfied with the world, yet incapable of the hopes of religion. Filled with distressful apprehensions, when the hand of heaven is pressing sore upon him, when his sins are pursuing him with their scorpion stings, will not conscience terrified with gloomy forebodings, and despairing of hope from the world, begin also to despair of that heavenly mercy which it has so long contemned and abused?

Yet, it is this despair, which yields to piety the earliest dawn of hope for the wretched prodigal. The vices and follies of mankind are often cured by the evils which they bring after them; and the Holy Spirit not rarely employs the severe corrections of divine providence to bring the first effectual convictions home to the breast of sinners.

As long as this wretched youth could subsist on the offal of swine, he thought not of returning to the best of fathers. It was only the pressure of extreme calamity which brought him to his senses. Ruined by his own follies, he began to call to mind the security and happiness, the pure and virtuous joys he had tasted, the delightful moments he had passed in his father's house: thither, therefore, he resolves in deep contrition of soul to return, and seek there, if possible, an ultimate refuge from calamities to which he sees no end. And, in the holy and sovereign providence of Almighty God, how often is the cup of salvation extended to sinners on the rod of affliction? Almost all men require many and repeated corrections to redeem them from

the multiplied errors to which human nature is prone. And certain it is, that a deep sense of the evil of sin, and of the infelicity of a sinful course, is the first principle of true repentance; the first step in the prodigal's return to his heavenly father. But it is not my design at present, to portray the penitent sentiments which were at length awakened in the heart of this undutiful youth. These I reserve to offer to your reflections on a future occasion, that I may use your remaining time to derive from the portrait of his follies which has now been presented to you, some useful admonitions that may be applied to our own peculiar circumstances and state.

Does any hearer then secretly acquit himself to his own heart, and put aside the mirror which I have endeavoured to hold up to him, because he has not proceeded to all the excesses of the prodigal in our gospel? Let us advance the glass a little nearer, and see if it do not reflect too faithful an image of ourselves. When first this mistaken youth solicited the exclusive control of his own fortune, he had probably no design, nor anticipation of proceeding to that height of folly to which he afterwards arrived. He became not completely depraved at once. Vice steals upon the sinner by insensible approaches. In the commencement of his course he would be startled at the proposition of crimes to the commission of which he proceeds, at length, without remorse or shame. It is only by degrees that he casts off that modest reserve, and that delicate respect to the observation of the world of which youth are often deeply sensible in their first deviations from the path of vir-

tue. By frequently extinguishing the fears of innocence and the blushes of modesty, the countenance becomes hardened. Irritated by reproach, by advice, or even by the distant apprehension of public censure, the sinner comes, at length, to set them at defiance. Seeking a deceitful peace to his heart, he attempts to involve himself in those fallacious folds which may hide from his view the disorders of his conduct. He rejects the cautious habits, and the prudent maxims of his earlier years. He studies above all things to forget the presence of Almighty God his Creator and his judge, that the awful consciousness of his inspection may no longer impose a check on his incipient career. For a time, the principles of his education, or his respect for the observation of the world, may lay a useful restraint on the irregularities of his course, but if the habitual sense of a divine witness, is removed, every barrier against sin, every mound of duty is soon borne down by the violence of passion or overleapt in the inconsiderate levity of youth.—Guard, O young man! against the beginnings of sin. *It is*, saith the wise preacher, *like the letting out of water*, which wears to itself a wider, and a wider channel, till the impetuosity of the flood, at last, overcomes all resistance.

Beware, not only of forgetting God, but of too early affecting an independence on those whose wisdom, and affection entitle them to direct your inexperienced years. Remark how severely this unwise son suffered for his temerity. Youth are flattered with the idea of being their own masters; but their natural indiscretion, renders that period of life a season of infinite hazard

to their inexperience. The world is full of secret snares, of corrupting examples, and of allurements dangerous to the passions of a bold and thoughtless youth. The first draughts of pleasure intoxicate the fancy and the heart. He sees nothing before him but scenes of delight; he hears nothing but enchanting sounds; but ah! he looks not to the gulfs which surround the Syren, while the charms of her voice are lulling him in a sweet delirium on the verge of ruin.

No lure to perdition is more certain. Ah! young men! be not ambitious to deliver yourselves from the control of the authority; from the direction of the wisdom and experience of those, who love you, and to whom nature has wisely subjected your first years. Happy, if their experience can become yours by a dutiful submission to their counsels; if it can preserve you from the ten thousand unseen dangers which every where encompass your footsteps. Happy beyond expression! if it can save you from the errors, and the fate of the vain undutiful prodigal of our gospel, who rashly hastened to deliver himself from the restraint of a father's eye, and the importunity of a father's advice.

Would you, then, effectually guard against that fatal progression in vice which terminated in the total corruption of the manners and morals of our young prodigal. Shun the first avenues which lead to its dangerous declivity. Let your first prayer to Heaven be, *lead us not into temptation*. No symptom is more unpromising in the character of a young man, than a defect of filial duty; than that most culpable love of pleasure which is regardless of the convenience, the

advice, the happiness of parents; which is willing to impose upon their love; which regards it in no other light than as affording a facility of obtaining the means of every criminal indulgence; which considers as clear gain to itself all that it can elicit, or extort from their tenderness and affection. Oh! the base ungenerous spirit of sinful pleasure! The prodigal commenced his career by wishing to make a father subservient to his guilty purposes, and then to withdraw himself from the authority of his observation, the admonitions of his love. On the other hand, if you cherish that filial duty, that lively sensibility to the comfort, the hopes, the honest pride, the ardent prayers of a worthy and affectionate parent which is the character of ingenuous youth, it will hardly be possible to depart far from the path of virtue. It will prove the most favourable introduction to the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit.

But shun, as the surest road to the consummation of a worthless character, the society of idle and vicious companions. Idleness is the parent of almost every other vice. Vicious companions inflame each other's passions, assist each other's projects, and stimulate each other's excesses. Ah! what pernicious principles in such societies, are first sported and then received as maxims of conduct! What criminal projects are first suggested, and then executed! What disgraceful vices, at first regarded as momentary levities, are afterwards ripened into deliberate acts, and fixed in inflexible habits! And have we not reason, alas! from the same cause to lament, in too many examples.

age as well as youth perverted and destroyed by improper associations. Once industrious and sober, we often see it, at length distinguished for frequenting the places of idle resort. Business is given up for loitering,—the duties of a useful calling, for pernicious company keeping,—sobriety for intemperance.—Arrived at this stage of profligacy, what an afflicting change is perceived in the whole moral character of these devotees of pleasure! Ask of their own breasts, where self-respect, where serenity and peace, where conscious worth have been long lost. Ask of their houses, filled, perhaps, with dissolution; or of a wife and children forsaken for the dearer society of profligate companions. Ask of their families in tears, perhaps, for their absence, or trembling for their return. Ask of the world which now loads them with its reproaches.—Ah! deceived, mistaken men who dare to name the name of Christ! Flee, if it be not yet too late, these destructive monsters, which threaten to precipitate you into irretrievable ruin. The multitude of unhappy examples, which continually obtrude themselves upon our view require, my beloved brethren, this urgency in our public discourses. Can we see without deep concern for the interests of piety, and the interests of our country, the prevalence of crimes which are hastening to extinguish every principle of virtue and every manly and generous sentiment of the soul,—that are sinking men into the gulfs of corruption, which open their fuming mouths into the gulf of Hell?

Almighty God! we implore of thy mercy, to rescue, even at this late hour, the miserable remnants of age

already exhausted in the service of sin! Arrest in the commencement of their prodigal career, the dangerous profligacy of youth, and turn them in this precious season of life, to the obedience of thy holy will! where lies their true happiness and their true glory! AMEN!

THE REPENTANCE OF THE PRODIGAL.

Second Discourse upon the Parable.

And when he had come to himself, he said, how many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and went to his father. *Luke XV. 17—20.*

IN the preceding discourse, I have presented to your view the errors of the prodigal,—his excesses,—and the miseries in which a life of dissipation and folly had involved him—miseries which, at length, forcibly arrested his career, and brought him to serious reflection. Pressed by misfortune, and penetrated with remorse, he comes to the resolution of returning to his father's house, and imploring his compassion and forgiveness. I request your attention, therefore, to-day, while I offer to your devout meditations, the *repentance* of the prodigal.

1. He profoundly felt the wretchedness to which his follies had reduced him. *I perish with hunger.*

2. He resolved to return to his father, with contrition and confession of his sins; and soliciting his forgiveness, there to devote himself with renewed duty and zeal to his loved family.—*I will arise, and go to my*

father, and say unto him, father I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants

The sense of his miseries—and the resolution to forsake his errors, and to return to his father, form the sum of his repentance.

1. When the intoxication of his passions had subsided, he found himself reduced to a state of the deepest distress;—*I perish with hunger.*—He had now learned from his unhappy experience how false and deceitful are all the promises of unhallowed pleasure. The scenes which imagination had pictured before him, and the delights which the senses, while they were not yet blunted by excess, had yielded, are all vanished, and he wonders by what infatuation he could have been so long misled and enslaved. Pleasure, while the appetite is not sated by indulgence, has the power of representing all its objects in charming and beautiful colouring. When desire is cloyed, the enchantment is broken. And the disgusted sense throws them back upon us as the filth of human nature, and the scouring of creation. With what different eyes does the prodigal, when come to himself, look back upon the scenes of his folly. At every step in this humbling review, something he sees to awaken remorse; something to cover him with confusion. Allied in his enjoyments to the swine which he is feeding, he feels himself justly condemned to herd with them as his companions. And the joys which had once made him forget his father's house, and his own most precious interests, have become like coarse and tasteless husks: or like

the apples of paradise which appeared fair and beautiful to the eye, but tasted, were found to fill the mouth with dust and bitterness.

After a profligate career, in which this young man gave full scope to his desires, and withheld not his heart from any joy, he comes, at length, to taste the bitter fruits of his follies, and sinks into want, disgrace, and sorrow. In the painful retrospect of life, the memory of every sinful joy opens to his view a gulf in which reason, conscience and his own happiness have been whelmed. The recollection of his father's house, with the innocence, and virtuous delights which reign there, present images which fill him with regret. When he turns his view inward, on himself, he meets only the reproaches of his own heart; and when he attempts to cast his eye forward to his eternal being, darkness and horror rest upon the prospect. The pleasures of sin are made, in the righteous order of divine providence, to punish their own follies, and avenge the rights of God, of virtue and humanity. Within himself he has no resource against the deep distress which has overtaken him; the world affords him none; he can hope for none in a repetition of sins which have now become the cause of his deepest affliction, and which he cannot look back upon, but with profound horror. If then, he has none from that benignant and gracious parent, whom he has forsaken, hopeless indeed must his condition be.—But from this quarter a ray of light first breaks in upon his soul, through the darkness which surrounds it. He was sinking in despair. But when he thinks of his father's house, he conceives a

hope that he who has given him existence, will not spurn his repentance. It is, at least, his refuge; and into it he is resolved to flee. Ah, christians! how gracious frequently is God in the sufferings which he inflicts! If this unhappy prodigal, could any longer have found subsistence in that far country to which his passions had driven him, still, perhaps, he would have been willing to rest contented in his slavery, and to wallow in the kennels of impurity. But a merciful providence still pursues him with repeated strokes. His own sins are made his tormentors. All his comforts have abandoned him.—Stripped of every hope on which he had been accustomed to repose, he is left naked to the buffetings of that dark storm which Heaven has collected round him, and to that still more afflicting tempest which conscience has raised within his breast, till overwhelmed with grief, he yields to the full conviction of his guilt. His supreme solicitude now is, how he shall tread back his former steps, and regain, if possible, his father's forfeited love. Conscious that he has no plea to make for the fatal errors of his life, no ground on which to claim forgiveness, he resolves to cast himself absolutely on that mercy and compassion which a repentant son never implores in vain from an affectionate father. Such is the first step of a sinner's return to God,—the first movements of a sincere repentance. He is penetrated with a deep sense of his miseries and his guilt, while yet, far from God, his heavenly Father, *he is without God, and without Christ in the world.* When smitten by divine providence with severe affliction, or pierced by some ar-

row from the word of God, he is arrested in his career; when he is forced to turn his reflections backward on his actions, which in the whirl of his dissipations, he had never seriously considered; or to enter into the recesses of his heart, to which he has hitherto been a stranger, in what new lights appears the whole scene of life? What new sentiments oppress his heart? He had flattered himself, formerly, with the innocence of all his pleasures. He now sees in them nothing, but unexpiated crimes. He is overwhelmed with fear, remorse, and conscious guilt. Instead of that countenance of thoughtless hilarity which had marked the course of his dissipation, you perceive his countenance clouded with melancholy; for forward presumption, you see only anxiety, and apprehension. Pride and arrogance are turned into humility and contrition; and he is ready to say with Job, *thou writest bitter things against me and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth.* As all objects assume the colour of the mind, the heavens gather blackness over his head,—God, most merciful, appears arrayed in terrors, and the majesty of his throne is surrounded, only with the flames of a consuming justice. But to what quarter shall the conscience of guilt have resource for relief? Shall he return to the world to find a comfort in its pleasures, which he cannot find in his own breast? or a diversion in its pursuits from his troubled thoughts? Alas! he has tried the utmost that the world can yield, and found it barren of true felicity. He has experienced its end, and found it wormwood and gall. Shall I then, such is his language, strive to forget the judge, the tribunal,

and the awful destinies of the eternal world? Oh! infinite folly! does not that judge still behold me? does not that tribunal still await me?—Can I, by forgetting, escape the judgments of God?—Nay, will not that terrible day surely arrive, like the deluge on the inhabitants of the old world; or like the fire from heaven on the guilty cities of the plain, only the more terrible for not having been expected? No, I cannot return to the paths I have left. Alas! there is no source of consolation open to a reasonable mind, out of religion. A God in Christ is my only refuge. And, to me the universe is a comfortless void, till I am reconciled to my heavenly Father. I feel the earth totter beneath my feet. Eternity presents to my view an abyss of horror. To no quarter can I look for hope, but to the benignity and compassion, the remaining tenderness which I may yet find in the bosom of a justly offended father. Yes, it is my last, my only hope.—I will go,—I will go and cast myself upon his compassion.

2. It is the second consideration which presents itself to us in the repentance of the prodigal. He resolves to return to his father.

This resolution is the consequence of his painful experience, and of that profound reflection on himself, and his errors, which the Holy Spirit, taking advantage of the calamities which his sins had brought upon him, has awakened in his heart. *I will go to my father—here I perish.* My folly and madness, now appear to me in the strongest lights, and in the darkest colours. But shall not a penitent son find kindness with him who is kind even to the evil and unthankful?

Ah! if I could obtain his forgiveness, if I could regain his favour, never, never, would I again renounce those holy endearments, which, if I had been wise, I might still have enjoyed in his presence, and is not this what he supremely desires, my repentance and reformation? Then may I not even yet hope for compassion from a parent whom my ingratitude has so deeply wounded? If I cannot deserve the affection of a son who has never erred; may I not claim his piety, at least, as a suffering wretch that he may remember was once his son? I think I see the good old man in the days of my wandering, following me with his affectionate solitudes, with his anxious prayers; and will he not rejoice to see me at last, rescued from the gulf into which my headlong passions had precipitated me? It is, at least, the only hope which remains. And I will pursue it, till, if I must be driven to despair, it shall be by the stern command of that father himself, the image of whose goodness now lights up the last ray in my bosom, penetrated with remorse and shame. The humblest menial in his house possesses abundance and contentment. Amidst the easy service which he pays to so gracious a lord, he enjoys a calm of mind, a self-approving conscience, a sweet serenity which, in all my guilty pleasures, I could never find.—*I will arise and go to my father.*

But, in putting this resolution into practice, with what sentiments, and with what language would a penitent son approach a father, whom he had so deeply afflicted and offended? Would he come with excuses or palliations in his mouth, in order to prepare a fa-

vourable reception? Would he say, the levity and inconsideration of youth, which should be regarded with indulgence, hurried me away? Would he allege the ardour of the passions at that age, the force of example, the solicitations of pleasure, which it is difficult for a young man in certain situations to resist? But, in the midst of all my errors would he add, my heart was still good? I still thought with kindness of the parent whom I had forsaken; and excepting the torrent that bore me along, I would, in other things have been willing to regulate my actions by his counsels? Would he hope to advance his plea by throwing such softenings over his faults? No, he would be too much humbled to hold this deceitful language. No, in the depth of his contrition, he would see only his guilt, not its excuses. He would dwell upon its aggravations, not upon its palliatives. He would delight, such is the spirit of repentance, to take a certain revenge upon himself for his ingratitude and folly, by the depth of his contrition, and the humility of his confessions. I will go to my father, if an unworthy but penitent son, may yet dare to address him by that tender title, and will say to him, *father I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Against Heaven.*—For, in breaking the ties of nature, I have violated the most sacred laws of God, my heavenly Father. I have forgotten that holy and awful presence which would have imposed a check upon my infatuation, which duty to an earthly parent was unable to restrain. I have sinned *before thee*, my father, who didst foster me with so much indulgence; before thee, whom every law of nature, and of duty, whom

ten thousand acts of kindness and endearment should have taught me to love;—*before thee*, whose consolation in the decline of life I should have proved; but whose peace I have wounded, whose soul I have filled with bitterness and anguish. Yes, *I am no more worthy to be called thy son*. That holy privilege which, by my bitter experience, I have been at length taught so highly to estimate, I have most justly forfeited. But if I cannot be restored to that prerogative which, like Esau, I have shamefully sold for the gratification of my low appetites, may I not be permitted to behold, to serve, to reside near thee, whom I have learned to love, when, alas! I no longer deserve to be beloved. *Make me as one of thy hired servants*, till I have proved by my dutiful zeal that I am not altogether unworthy thy compassion.

Such are the simple expressions of the prodigal's repentance, extorted from a heart profoundly penetrated with its folly: such also are the sentiments which penetrate a convinced and penitent sinner, conscious of the enormity of his offences against God his heavenly Father. When first he turns his eyes towards the throne of the heavenly grace, will not the same grief for his transgressions, the same shame of his follies, the same humiliating sense of the evil of his sins mark his penitent confession of them before Almighty God? He employs no palliations to soften their guilt, he studies no concealment, or disguise to hide their number, or malignity from his own view? His acknowledgment is frank and sincere, universal and unqualified. Hardly can he find words sufficiently strong to express his ab-

horrence of their evil, his sense of his own unworthiness, or the depth of his self abasement. The holy Psalmist in his affliction, speaks the genuine language of repentance;—*Against thee only have I sinned, and in thy sight done this evil. Mine iniquities are gone over my head. They are too heavy for me to bear.* And the convinced publican gives a just and affecting example of the humility, and conscious shame of a sincere penitent, when *he could not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner!* He has no plea in his own merits to offer to God his father and his judge; no justification in his own good intentions, no excuse in the violence of temptation. He lays open his inmost soul to the inspection of his judge. He justifies the sentence which condemns him; he condemns himself.—*I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee.*

This confession implies deep, unfeigned sorrow for his manifold sins and offences against Almighty God; for the dishonours offered to the glory of his heavenly Father, and to the purity of the law of eternal rectitude. Is it for his own miseries that he is grieved? For the pains which vice brings after it in the order of divine providence? Or even for the eternal sufferings to which, by the righteous judgment of heaven it is doomed? No, it is simply for the evil of his sins; for the vileness of his ingratitude; that he is overwhelmed with repentant sorrow. For when his sins are most freely forgiven, and the sense of that pardon most graciously sealed to his heart; when most encouraged to hope in the divine mercy, his fears are all extinguished

in the blood of the everlasting covenant, it is then that his griefs flow most copiously. It is then that a sense of his ingratitude opens new sources of sorrow in his bosom. It is then that, with David, he wets his couch with his tears; or with Peter, when the cock summoned his sleeping conscience to its duty, and the compassionate look of his master melted his heart, that *he goes out and weeps bitterly*. God may forgive him; but he knows not how to forgive himself.

When the penitent prodigal has resolved to return to his father, one of the most decisive proofs of his sincerity, is the promptitude with which he executes his dutiful resolution. Does he then, remembering with too fond an attachment, pleasures which he must now part with forever, study to procrastinate the moment of separation? Does he find difficulties in accomplishing his purpose too powerful for his virtue? Does the distance of the road deter him? Does the strength of dissolute habits overcome him? Does the shame of his own appearance, all squalid and in rags, withhold him from the presence of his father? Does he fear the ridicule of his companions? Or shrink from the austerity of the manners he must now assume? No, he has suffered too much from his follies to be reconciled to them again; or to hesitate about renouncing them with holy indignation. His ingratitude has too deeply penetrated his soul to suffer him to waver in his purpose. The returning tide of his affections is too strong to be resisted. He waits not to deliberate. He makes no nice calculation of difficulties. His zeal

bursts through every obstacle; and he hastens to throw himself at the feet of his father.

Here is another analogy which strongly represents the case of a penitent sinner in forming his first resolutions of duty. Many difficulties meet him in entering on a new course of life. The self-denials of repentance, and the duties of religion present to him a face of gloom before he has yet tasted the divine consolations which flow from a sense of the presence, and the most gracious favour of his heavenly Father. Can I, at once, and entirely, break my connexions with the world, with which I have been so intimately associated? Can I, at once, make such an entire change in all the habits of life? Shall I be able to bear the reproaches, the sneers, the coldness of companions whose party I must now forsake? Can I hold myself up as a spectacle for the observation and remarks of the world, which never remarks with candour? Will not a gravity and seriousness of deportment, an abstraction from all the little follies, and even the innocent gayeties of society be expected from me that I cannot support?

Ah! when the soul which has hitherto been the slave of sin, is about to break its chains, and enter on a new life, all the remains of corruption in the heart, will rise up to oppose the change, and present to the imagination every difficulty, most calculated to deter a young convert from taking an open and decided part in favour of religion. But if, with the repenting prodigal, he is truly sensible of the evil and depth of his iniquities against Almighty God, of the infelicities of his state, of the vanity of all his past projects of happiness:—if

pricked in his heart, with the hearers of the apostle Peter, on the day of Pentecost, it is his solicitous inquiry, *men and brethren! what shall I do?* If, like the penitent and believing disciples, looking up to Jesus Christ, he is compelled to exclaim;—*Lord, to whom shall I go, thou hast the words of eternal life*—all difficulties will vanish before the views of eternity which will then open upon the soul,—will be overborne by the torrent of feelings which will then deluge his heart. Shall I sacrifice my eternal interests, may he say, to a false shame? Shall any pleasure of my own, if the world could now afford me pleasure, come in competition with the boundless obligations of gratitude and love which I owe my Creator and Redeemer. Shall I shrink from ridicule and scoffing, if it be necessary for his glory, who did not shrink from shame and mocking and from the agonies of the cross for me? Does the world whisper me that the change which I am about to make, is too great and sudden to be supported with consistency, by those who would, at the same time, maintain any reputation in society? And therefore does it advise me to break my connexions with it only by degrees? Ah! false and insidious deceiver! *How shall I, who am dead to sin, live any longer therein?* How shall I, who am alive only to the feelings of duty, delay one moment, to cast myself before the mercy seat of my heavenly Father?—Does the pride and error of a corrupted heart insinuate that I ought first to prepare for myself a favourable reception, before approaching into the presence of his holiness, by the merit of a pre-

vious course of duties. Alas! what merit is there in those outward, and heartless services which I vainly call my duties? What merit can a sinful mortal present before the throne of divine mercy? Is not the whole system of my salvation a system of absolute grace? How can a penitent sinner appear most acceptably before God, but as a humble suppliant, renouncing all confidence in his own righteousness, and relying solely on the gracious promise of Almighty God, through the righteousness of Jesus Christ? Yes, unworthy as I am, and without any plea to offer, but my miseries, I will not postpone my return to a father to whom penitent misery, will be always welcome;—who has invited *the weary and heavy laden* to come to him;—who offers to the hungry and the thirsty, *wine and milk without money and without price*;—and who has declared to those who believe, *though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be as wool; though they be red like crimson, they shall be white as snow*. In one word, who proclaims to *the wretched, the miserable, the blind and the naked*, to sinners of every grade, *him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out*. Yes, when the convinced and penitent prodigal is brought to this point, neither the menaces, nor the blandishments of the world; neither the example, nor persuasions of other sinners; neither the fear of man, nor the seductions of pleasure, can delay or divert his firm and holy resolution of returning to God his heavenly Father. His heart is full of his father's goodness.—*I will arise and go to my father.*

O penitent souls! who may be forming this wise and pious resolution, may Almighty God, in his infinite mercy, grant you those abundant aids of his grace which are requisite to enable you to fulfil your wise and holy purpose! AMEN!

THE RETURN
OF THE
PRODIGAL TO HIS FATHER.

The third discourse on this Parable.

But, when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell upon his neck and kissed him. And the son said unto him; Father, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat and be merry: for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry. *Luke XV. 20-24.*

CHRISTIANS! you have followed the prodigal through the errors of his youth; you have seen him plunged in the deepest affliction. Overwhelmed with miseries induced by his own misconduct, he reproaches his folly; he turns his view wistfully back on his former happy state; he recalls to mind the goodness of his father whom he had so grievously offended, and now penitently resolves to return and implore his forgiveness. The benignity with which his father receives him; the joy with which he embraces a profligate son restored to a sense of his duty; the image of the divine compassions towards penitent sinners, is the interesting matter which still remains to be considered, and which now claims your serious attention.

Let us then contemplate the affecting images presented to us in this beautiful allegory, that we may derive from them an encouragement for every sincere penitent, to hope in the mercy of his heavenly father, notwithstanding his manifold offences.

The anxious father had never withdrawn his affectionate solitudes from this undutiful son, even after he had abandoned his family. His fond hopes had still anticipated his return to virtue; his fervent prayers were continually addressed to Heaven, that some merciful correction in the dispensations of divine providence, might restore his lost child to himself; to the reflections of wisdom, and to the sense of his duty. Often he turned his eyes to that quarter where the unhappy youth, in departing, had vanished from his sight, and from which, if he ever should again behold him, he expected his return. He was the first, therefore, to perceive the young man's approach. Though covered with rags, squalid with disease and filth, and emaciated with want, yet a father's affection was able, under all these cruel disguises, to discern the traces of an image which love had indelibly impressed on his heart; and when, yet a great way off, he recognized his son. He saw him trembling, overwhelmed with shame, hesitating in his approach, and doubtful of his reception. The good old man dissolved in tenderness at the sight; hastens to console, and reassure the afflicted penitent. And in the tumults of his joy at again seeing him, and seeing him returning to his family, and his duty, he could no longer restrain himself;—*he ran, he fell upon his neck, he kissed him,* and carried to his heart the

seal of his pardon, by the ardour, with which he embraced him.

What a moment for the prodigal, who was approaching almost without hope! Covered with confusion, and oppressed with his own recollections, his heart swells with a thousand emotions, which, for a time, suspend the power of utterance, and break from him only in sobs and sighs. At length, he recovers himself so far as to begin his affecting confession;—*Father, I have sinned against Heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.* He would have added, *make me as one of thy hired servants!*—but the impatience of his father's eager sensibility on the occasion prevented him; and, before he could finish the sentence which was in his mouth, orders are already given to array him with the best robe; to efface all the marks of his former servitude and wretchedness; and to invest him with the customary pledge in the east, of his being restored to his rank and honour as a son, by putting a ring on his hand. Let it be a jubilee in my family! prepare a feast! invite my friends! let all partake in my joy!—for *this my son was dead, and is alive again, was lost, and is found!*

In this beautiful and touching group of images, you have presented an interesting picture of the compassion and benignity of our heavenly Father towards his guilty and offending children, who return to him by sincere repentance.

1. Then his patience and forbearance with the sinner during his errors.

2. The readiness with which he meets and reassures the penitent.

3. And lastly, the joy with which he receives an exiled son, on his return to his family. *There is joy in Heaven, over one sinner that repenteth.*

1. Let us contemplate, in the first place, the patience with which this indulgent parent waits on all the errors of an undutiful son.

Instead of cutting him off from the privileges and hopes of his house, in just displeasure for the abuse of his goodness, his paternal kindness never forsakes the unhappy youth, amidst all the movements of his folly. He waits, and hopes, and prays for his restoration, till his excesses, and the sufferings which spring out of his own misconduct, at last, bring him to a just sense of himself, and an humble recognition of the beneficence of a parent who had been so unworthily requitted. With still greater benignity, my dear brethren, do we not behold, in the whole order of divine providence, the mercy and long-suffering of Almighty God waiting upon sinners, while they are forgetful of his holy claims upon their duty and love: nay, while they are boldly setting at defiance his laws, and his almighty power? If he does not cut them off in the pursuit of their sinful pleasures, if he spares them in the midst of so many follies and crimes, is it because his holiness is not most justly offended? or, because his power cannot reach them? Surely not. But our most merciful Father is waiting the operation of those means, which, in the benign, but corrective dispensations of his providence, he is employing to bring them to repentance, and re-

store in their hearts the sentiments of obedience and duty. Let me endeavour to carry this reflection home to the bosom and feelings of every hearer.

Has not your own experience, my Christian brother! afforded you the most affecting proofs of the forbearance of Almighty God, the father of mercies, with your manifold wanderings, notwithstanding the *wastes*, to use the language of the parable, which you have made of that portion of goods entrusted to your care; that is, of your time, your mental talents, your active powers, your temporal blessings, your spiritual privileges. Life, which you have so often perverted from its proper end, is still prolonged, to afford you the opportunities of repentance. Mercies which, alas! have been so often abused, are not yet withdrawn. The means of grace, and the aids designed for the attainment of your salvation are not only continued, but multiplied. The voice of his providence, by which he would recall you to himself, is continually becoming more distinct, more frequent, and more loud. Impenitent prodigal! whoever you may be, let me speak to you with plainness, and let me intreat you to deal sincerely with your own heart. Has not Almighty God, at some times, while he seemed to snatch you from imminent death threatened by disease, or other alarming accidents, carried to your bosom, for a moment, the conviction that he had recalled you to life, only to repeat the invitations of his mercy? Has he not on other occasions, by the disappointment of your hopes, by painful suffering, by the disgusts which followed your excesses, made you a thousand times feel the vanity of the world, and the infeli-

city of your pursuits, only that he might raise your thoughts to higher and purer aims? When your sins, perhaps, have been on the point of exposing you to public shame, and overwhelming you in ruin, has he not mercifully delivered you from the abyss which you had prepared for yourself, and that was already gaping beneath your feet, only that he might impose upon you new obligations of gratitude to his holy providence? Has he not, by his most blessed spirit, often created and cherished in your breast many serious resolutions of duty, which have been again, alas! extinguished in the cares or in the pleasures of the world? Has he not even prompted, and by his grace, assisted you, to make some feeble and tottering steps in your return towards him? Has he not waited on your delays? Has he not again and again renewed those serious impressions, which you have as often hastened to efface? By multiplied mercies, he has graciously sought to attract you to himself. By afflictions he has called you; he has called you by the penetrating remonstrances of his word; and by the secret suggestions of your own conscience; and has he not sometimes called you by the most interesting voices from the tomb, into which you have seen your dearest friends descend before you? And this day does he not come to repeat so many calls? O God! how rich is thy mercy! How astonishing thy patience with worms of dust, who dare to insult thy long suffering benignity! Thou hast not discharged on their heads as thou justly mightest, the thunders with which thy justice had armed thee; but thy mercy still prolongs to them the season of heavenly grace!

2. You perceive, in the next place, the gracious readiness with which our heavenly Father meets the return, and reassures the hopes of his prodigal but penitent children.

This compassionate parent, the type of our heavenly Father, recognized his son, while he was yet a great way off. Love had impressed an ineffaceable image of that dear, though undutiful youth upon his heart; and parental affection preserved him ever attentive to remark the first returning sentiments of piety and duty, for which, notwithstanding all his errors, he never could entirely cease to hope. He, accordingly, recognized his abashed and trembling son, under all the disadvantages of his appearance, the first moment of his arrival; and flew to meet him on the wings of parental love.

What a lively portrait is here traced of the benignity and grace of our Father who is in heaven! For, is not he who is the author of all beneficence and compassion in the human breast, still more ready than an earthly parent, to receive repentant sinners to his mercy, who, notwithstanding all their follies, are still his children. He looks with benignity on their first wishes to regain his favour, he assists, by his grace, their first endeavours to return to their duty—he sees them with compassion, to pursue the image of the parable, while they are yet a great way off, and hastens to embrace them. From afar, from eternity, he prepared for them that astonishing system of grace, which, in the fulness of ages, was displayed in all its glory on the mount of Calvary. He contemplated them with mercy, in Christ

Jesus before the foundation of the world. And is it not he, at last who inspires them with the penitent sentiments of the returning prodigal, and the holy purposes and resolutions of sincere obedience? And have you not, in these acts of divine beneficence, the strongest demonstrations of his love, of his readiness to forgive iniquity, transgression, and sin, and to receive the returning prodigal to all the blessings of his heavenly family? Penitent believer! your experience will speak for God, and attest not only the compassion with which he forgives your transgressions, but the grace with which he anticipated your return, and, if I may speak so, kindly urged and attracted you home. Is it to your own wisdom, your own good dispositions, your own just reflections that you ascribe the first movements of repentance? Or was it not God himself, who, by some powerful idea from his holy word, first touched your heart; who, by some afflicting, but merciful stroke of his providence, first brought you to a pause in the course of your iniquities: who, by some sudden thought, the origin of which you could hardly trace, opened at once upon your view your sins, and the imminent dangers of your state, your neglected duties, and your eternal interests? Even after you had formed the resolutions of returning to your father's house, would you not again, and again have fallen back into the vortex of the worlds temptations, if he had not, by his blessed spirit, assisted your infirmity, and kindled anew the holy purposes of your soul? And when you were faithful to the grace received, did not he increase its attractions, its consolations, its holy constraints, till he had banished

the fears of guilt, and perfectly *assured your heart before him in peace?* Yes, Christian, he sees the penitent and returning prodigal while he is yet a great way off, he meets him with the assurance of his love, he dispels his apprehensions, he revives his flagging resolutions, and reanimates his hopes when beginning to despair; nor leaves him till he brings him home, and makes him taste the ineffable joys of forgiveness and reconciliation with God.

3. Finally, in this accumulation of tender images, our blessed Saviour would represent, not only the mercy of God, to the returning penitent, but the holy joy with which he embraces, and restores him to his heavenly family.

This benevolent father, who is intended to exhibit to us an image of the highest human kindness, no sooner beholds his humble and weeping son, overwhelmed with the sense of his miseries, than he orders him to be habited in the best robe; adorns his hands with rings, the symbols of peculiar favour; crowns his return with feasts, and with every public demonstration of joy; and, unable any longer to restrain his ecstasies on the occasion, gives vent to them in the most affecting strains, — *My son was dead, and is alive again, was lost, and is found.*

In these figures you behold the sinner, though stained with many pollutions, cleansed in the blood, and clothed in the righteousness of the blessed Redeemer; — you behold him raised to the favour and the honours which he had forfeited; you behold the *joy that is in*

Heaven over one sinner that repenteth.—Let us review these ideas.

A sincere penitent, under the deep convictions of his guilt, is ashamed and afraid to appear in the presence of his Creator and his Judge. He trembles, he hesitates to embrace the offers of the free and abundant mercy of the gospel. He doubts of the application of that mercy to his peculiar case; for, in the true spirit of repentance, he esteems himself among the chief of sinners, and hardly dares to raise his hopes to it. A righteousness, which completely fulfils the precept, and magnifies the justice of the divine law, is the only habit of soul, in which he can appear with acceptance in the presence of infinite purity. But when he reviews the past, and reenters into his heart, in which are concealed the polluted springs of his actions, he sees there the profound depths of his iniquities. He perceives innumerable imperfections mingled with his most holy services. In the spirit of the prophet, he confesses that *all his righteousnesses are like filthy rags; and his iniquities like the winds have carried him away.* He is overwhelmed with confusion, before God most holy, at the nakedness to which his sins have reduced him. But, behold the condescension, the grace, the infinite love of his heavenly Father! He gives commandment to clothe him in the best robes. He covers all his imperfections in the merits and righteousness of Jesus Christ, *who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and complete redemption.* He cleanses him from all his impurities, and removes the stains of his former crimes in that precious

blood which was shed for the remission of the sins of the world. In this beautiful imagery, the trembling penitent enjoys a new source of consolation and hope, added to a thousand gracious promises inscribed in almost every page of the word of God.

When this affectionate parent has arrayed his prodigal in pure garments, his next care is to restore him to the dignity and honours of his family. And, in the merciful constitution of the gospel of our salvation, is not this grace attached to the repentance of sinners that they should be *called the sons of God*? United to Christ, they become incorporated with him into his heavenly family; and, by virtue of their head, are made heirs of glory and immortality. *Put a ring on his hand*, saith the father, the pledge of my love, and of his complete restoration to the privileges and honours of my house. In this precious symbol, what blessings are conferred on the humble, and penitent believer! What glorious reversions are pointed out to him beyond the grave! *Such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive.*—Oh! heavenly Father! graciously deign to receive the sentiments of our contrition! and make us, according to thine infinite mercy in Christ Jesus, partakers of the blessings of thy children redeemed from sin, and from everlasting death!

But that which our blessed Saviour, in the view which I have taken of this parable; may be supposed chiefly to represent by the festivities, and all the demonstrations of joy with which this good father celebrates the return of his unhappy son, is the holy joy

with which Almighty God beholds the repentance of a sinner. Nothing, indeed, in the Divine mind, can resemble those transports which an affectionate parent would feel on recovering a beloved and lost child. But our heavenly Father, by employing such tender images, exhibits, in the most lively forms to the human heart, his infinite benignity, and affords the penitent sinner the most affecting encouragement to repose his hope in the promises of his grace. *The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. As I live, saith the Lord, I delight not in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn to me and live. His tender mercies are over all his works.* And my beloved brethren, do we not behold these most precious truths shining in the whole structure of the universe, and in the whole order of providence, in every part of which infinite goodness presides along with infinite wisdom, and infinite power for the happiness of his creatures.

But the most transcendent proof of the love of God, and his joy, if I may speak so, at seeing his undutiful children returning to his family, and to their own happiness, you behold in the life and the death, the incarnation and the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. What brought the Son of God, who *inhabits the praises of eternity*, to this abode of frailty and misery? What led him to submit to the humiliation, and afflictions of this mortal state? Why did he offer himself, for the guilt of human nature, to the stroke of eternal justice? Can infinite benevolence demonstrate by stronger proofs, or paint in colours more worthy of Heaven, that love

which passeth all understanding, that boundless compassion with which the Redeemer is ready to embrace the repenting sinner, that divine and ineffable joy with which he receives into his bosom the tears of their contrition, the pledges of their duty? Here, O penitent souls! behold your encouragement to flee to the refuge of his mercy, from the denunciations of the law; from the cry of the *avenger of blood*. Here behold the security with which you may rest on the promises, and the grace of the gospel.

If God, who is the fountain of love, rejoices over you; if the Saviour rejoices to see the fruit of his sufferings and death, *there is joy also in heaven above, and in the church on earth over one sinner that repenteth.*—The servants, the whole household, the friends of the happy father are all invited to partake in his happiness, and do not all good men, who are animated with the same spirit which breathed so fervently in their blessed Master; do not the angels, those *ministering spirits who are sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation*, indulge a holy triumph in seeing continually new accessions to the kingdom of grace, and new heirs to the kingdom of glory? Yes, piety must ever rejoice in beholding the designs of divine love advancing upon earth; and contemplating the progressive victories of evangelical truth over the kingdom of error and of darkness.

Oh! ineffable goodness and condescension of Almighty God! His patience is not exhausted, his love is not quenched, even by your iniquities! If pressed then, by the calamities, the shame, the disappointments which your follies have brought upon you, in that far country

to which you had impiously fled from his presence; if urged by your convictions, and the reproaches of your own heart, you have been brought to this pious and wholesome resolution, *I will arise and go to my father*; behold he stands ready to embrace you; he runs to meet you, while you are yet a great way off; he is ready abundantly to supply your wants; he will clothe your nakedness; he will raise you to honour; he will acknowledge you as his son; he will rejoice over you with immortal joy.

Suffer me now in the conclusion, to call your attention again to the gracious condescension of God our Saviour. What accumulated proofs does he offer, not only in this parable, but throughout the sacred scriptures, to reassure and comfort the penitent soul oppressed with the sense of its guilt! The convinced conscience, under a full discovery of its sins, is prone in the first paroxysms of the humbling conviction, to distrust the promises of divine grace as extending to an object so unworthy. It ascribes a peculiar malignity to its sins, as if they transcended the mercy of our heavenly Father, whose nature is love. The ever blessed Redeemer, therefore, knowing the conscious timidity of guilt, has multiplied the assurances, and examples of his grace, in order to remove, if possible, every doubt which its fears could suggest. Often the alarmed conscience is prone to represent the limited season of the divine mercies as entirely past. Never, O penitent soul! while the period of your probation is still prolonged, and your heavenly Father is waiting to receive your return; never, while the means of grace are offering

you their aid, and the calls of the gospel are sounding in your ears.—Never, while the Holy Spirit is speaking to your heart; while he is moving on the face of the waters, to bring to order the chaos of corrupted nature, and to compose your disordered affections. Never, while he is awaking in your souls those desires after salvation which demonstrate that he has not forsaken you; desires, which he alone could create; which he alone can satisfy; and which he thus rouses into these holy actings, only that he may most abundantly satisfy.

Fulfill, O, heavenly Father! our humble and fervent desires! and receive to the arms of thy mercy, thy returning prodigals! AMEN!

ON SWEARING IN COMMON CONVERSATION.

Above all things, my brethren, swear not.—*James, V. 12.*

An oath for confirmation is the end of all strife. And in the administration of civil justice, the laws are often obliged to appeal to that reverence of the Supreme Being, which nature has impressed upon the hearts of men, to strengthen their natural respect for truth in rendering testimony. This immediate appeal to Almighty God, on proper occasions, so far from being refused by religion, is sanctioned by its highest authority. The only restriction which it imposes is, that, in assuming an oath, *thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.* The indiscriminate and irreverent use of oaths had infected, in a high degree, the common discourse of the pagan nations in the age of the apostle. This profane abuse, on trivial occasions, of names that were held sacred, is proscribed, in the text with positive authority, and with a holy and indignant zeal. The apostle would preserve the awful name of the eternal, with the most sacred reverence only for his solemn worship, or for the most important purposes of society. In the same spirit does religion reprehend all customary swearing, and inconsiderate imprecations in the common intercourse of mankind with one ano-

ther. No vice admits of less palliation, and none perhaps, has become more audacious and unblushing in its exercise. Unhappily we see it, not confined to the classes of ignorance and debauchery, it has become the disgrace of those who boast a better education and hold a higher rank in society. It seeks not concealment, as other vices do, nor does it attempt to bury its shame in the shades of night; but is spreading a baneful infection through our social manners, in which no language should be heard that is not delicate and chaste, and conformed to the rules of piety and virtue. It would seem indeed, as if the peculiar sanctity of our religion, by imparting more grand and awful conceptions of the Divine Nature, had only rendered unworthy christians capable of a more frightful impiety.

To demonstrate the sinfulness of common and profane swearing,—its unreasonableness,—and its inutility to those ends which men think to serve by it, is the object of the present discourse.

1. The sinfulness of this practice, under which I include all oaths, execrations, and profane exclamations in common discourse, all those light and frivolous invocations of sacred names, so often uttered through habit, or employed to give vent to the ebullitions of passion, or of any sudden and silly surprise, will be manifest on considering, for a moment, the disrespect which it offers to God our maker—the evil which it causes to men themselves—and the injury which results from it to the best interests of society.

Above all things, saith the apostle, *swear not*; placing this vice in the highest grade of crimes against the

purity of social intercourse, and that sacred reverence which creatures owe to the supreme Creator. What, indeed, can strike the ear of piety with greater horror than a light irreverent invocation of the name of Almighty God,—of him *who hath made the heavens and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth*; at whose look *the earth trembles, and the foundations of the everlasting hills are moved*? The law of Moses, which is no other than the law of God, surrounds and guards this holy name with the most profound veneration and awe. The Jewish nation called it the unutterable name; and never dared to pronounce it, but in the most serious form, and on the most solemn occasions. To the praise of some of the greatest men who have ever adorned the annals of piety, or science, it is recorded, that they never spoke of God, without preceding that holy name by a serious pause, accompanied with a secret act of mental adoration.* But why speak we of men? The angels of heaven are represented as veiling themselves in deepest humility before the eternal, unable steadfastly to look towards the throne of his holiness. Listen to the noble rhapsody of the prophet Isaiah;—*I beheld the Lord upon a throne high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Before him stood the Seraphim. Each one had six wings—with twain he covered his face—*

* This sacred reverence for the name of God, is so conformable to every principle of reason, that in the moral writings of heathen sages, we find it enjoined, as well as in the oracles of our holy religion. “The name of the Divine Being,” says Plato, “ought never to be employed on light and trivial occasions.” And another Greek moralist adds that the true way to preserve that veneration which ought ever to be paid to the Divine Nature, is to abstain from every irreverent use of his name.

with twain he covered his feet—and with twain he did fly. And one cried to another, and said, holy! holy! holy! is the Lord of hosts! the whole earth is full of his glory! And, is it for worms of the dust, whose breath is in their nostrils, to insult that Being of Beings, who made them by his power, who can consume them *with the breath of his mouth*; but who still spares them in the midst of their crimes, only to afford them the opportunity and the means of repentance. Is it for miserable mortals, in their mirth, or in their cups, irreverently to toss that holy and venerable name from their impure mouths, and to make it the vehicle of their wrath, or their sport? Oh impiety! oh blasphemy!—How are the ears of piety wounded! how is reason revolted! It is a crime, it would appear, without motive, without temptation, without excuse; committed in the mere wantonness of impiety.

Do men ever treat the respected characters of those whom they revere or love, with the same indecent license? Would it not be deemed the last outrage of a disciple on his master, of a dependent on his benefactor, of a child on his parent, of a profligate wretch on a man of worth? In what light then ought we to regard it in a worm of dust towards the Lord of nature, our Creator and our Saviour? O God! how long will thy forbearance spare the follies of impious mortals! Above all, when they deal their execrations on their fellow worms, or imprecate thy vengeance on their own heads; holy and righteous God! will the thunders of thy justice forever sleep! Ah! profane sinner! if God should blast thee in his wrath while thy *mouth is filled with*



cursing and bitterness, would not thy conscience, in perishing, justify the rigour of his judgment? Is God eternal and most holy; is Christ Redeemer of the world, a name to be thrown from impious lips in anger, or licentious sports; with which to vent your ruffian rage, or assist your buffoonery; to express your chagrin in an unfortunate game, to dash with your drunken cups, or to aid you in dragging to dishonour and ruin the deluded-victim of perfidious vows? Is it a name with which to season impure discourse, to help out a miserable jest among fools, who mistake profanity for wit, to stop the gaps of conversation, and supply a wretched vacuity of head? A pious mind shudders at such profanation. Do you ask, then, if the same reproach is to be passed on those inferior forms of swearing which persons of vulgar taste are prone to blend with their discourse, by certain saints, or heathen deities, and a hundred other silly, and unmeaning names? If they do not strike the ear with equal horror, they surely are not less worthy the deepest reproach. Every departure from the plain and dignified language of truth proceeds from some wrong principle. *Thou shalt not swear by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath.* When oaths and profanity form the common style of conversation, they detract from the respectability of any character. They even tend to impair that confidence in a man's veracity which a decent and well regulated conversation, always weighed in the balances of reason and virtue will naturally create. Assimilated in his language to the lowest characters in society, we are ready to ascribe to him the same grossness of mind, and the same defect of virtuous sentiment, however it

may, in some instances, be more decently varnished by the forms of civility.

Saint Chrysostom, in a still warmer strain of indignation, charges the habit with the foul stain of perjury. *He, says that holy and eloquent orator, who habitually swears in his discourse, both intentionally and inadvertently; on subjects on which he is ignorant, no less than on those within his knowledge, in jest, as well as in earnest; just as he happens to be impelled, must frequently be liable to the charge of perjury.* What, indeed, is this obvious crime, but invoking Almighty God, as the witness perhaps of a falsehood; of a threat that will never be executed, of a promise that will never be performed; of a fact that does not exist; or which in the law of morality, is the same in its effect, of which we have no certain ground of belief? Ah! how many rash assertions must they, who indulge in this pernicious habit, unguardedly utter; attesting, at the same time, the holy name of God, and imprecating on their own falsehood his terrible damnation? Forgive me, christians! this harsh language, which they so freely employ against themselves to their great reproach and the injury of their own souls.

Blasphemers of the name of your God! give to these reflections your most serious attention. Ah! what is it thoughtlessly, or falsely to obtest the living and eternal God, the Creator of heaven and earth? What is it to defy omnipotence, or, in the madness of our folly to imprecate, upon our own souls, his curse, whose wrath burns to the lowest Hell?

This vice merits, in the next place, the most pointed

reprobation, for the injury it creates to the civil interests of mankind. He who weakens the religion and sanctity of an oath, loosens the strongest bonds of our political associations. The fear of God is the most powerful principle of justice in the human breast; and an appeal to God as the witness and judge of our sincerity, is the surest pledge of truth to society. *No obligation, says the great Roman orator, is more effectual to secure the fidelity of mankind than an oath.* But Cicero made this declaration when the simplicity of Roman manners was not yet entirely corrupted. For, afterwards, in the extreme degeneracy of the empire, the Romans became liable to the same reproach which a great historian has made to the Greeks, in consequence of the introduction of an universal luxury of manners, and the prevalence of an Atheistical philosophy; *that they could not be bound by any oaths, or pledges of their truth.* And surely a customary profanation of the divine names and attributes, is the most direct way to obliterate the fear of God from the minds of those whose tongues, or whose ears have become familiar with this unhallowed language.

I will not assert that every person who disgraces his conversation by a thoughtless profanity, will not fear a false oath when solemnly called to recollect himself, and the presence of his Creator, before a tribunal of justice: but surely no habit more obviously tends to this unhappy consequence, so dangerous to the interests of our social union. Above all, when ignorance is led by your example, lightly to pronounce, and violate the most awful oaths, the most deteriorating effects are

justly to be apprehended to our civil institution, to follow in rapid succession.

II. After exhibiting the enormity of this vice, as involving a direct offence against the duty of a creature to his Creator, it might seem superfluous or improper to argue against it on the ground of its indecency, were it not that many men are still governed by certain sentiments of propriety, long after they have lost their reverence for religion. And may I not ask if this vice is not a gross violation of that amiable and benevolent character which every christian should be peculiarly solicitous to preserve, of a delicate attention to the feelings of others, and endeavour to place them at ease, and render them satisfied with themselves and with us? *Whatsoever things are lovely, saith the great apostle, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think of these things.* It would be giving a darker picture of the public manners, than, I presume, they yet deserve, if we should not suppose that few companies can be assembled, in which there are not some persons, and those probably of the best taste, and of the most amiable or respectable characters whom it deeply wounds to hear the adorable names of their Creator, and Redeemer treated with a rude impiety. How unworthy, I do not say, of a pious man, but of a man of cultivated manners, to pay no regard to sentiments so worthy, to feelings so just and noble! If the modesty of these good men, or their love of peace prevent them from expressing the just indignation with which they are warmed at the dishonour done to religion; if their meek piety leads them to pray for the offender rather than re-

proach him, the insult upon their feelings is the more inexcusable. Nor is it much palliated by that absurd preference of politeness to religion, which sometimes leads a man to ask pardon of a grave and reverend person who may happen to be present, for a profane expression, which has escaped him, while, at the same time, he treats with open disrespect the awful presence of Almighty God.

Genuine good breeding, besides its delicate attentions to the sensibilities of others, ever connects with them a certain refinement in our mental tastes. This forms, indeed, the principal distinction between barbarian and civilized society. And the most polished classes of the latter, always study to exhibit in their conversation a picture of the elegance and cultivation of their minds. But is any rational train of thought expressed by profanity? Does it contain any indication of true refinement? On the contrary, is it not a proof of vulgar manners and a gross taste? It sinks conversation to the coarse level of the streets. It is accordingly, in Europe, almost wholly excluded from the intercourse of the higher ranks of life, as a disgraceful symptom of vulgar education. If, unhappily, delicacy has been less observed in our own country, it is only because, among us the highest improvements in society have not been generally aimed at. Hardly have any other distinctions been established but such as the possession and pursuits of money create. Adventurers in a new world, having too often acquired sudden wealth, have not been able, in a more elevated station, to lay aside the rudeness of their first habits. And if children's children,

inheriting a fortune accumulated by their grandsires, have forgotten whence they were sprung, yet this remaining vestige of uncultivated manners, and defect of moral education, might make them look back with shame, to the recent vulgarity of their original, and lead them to hasten to extinguish the remembrance of it, by a more pure, and chaste conversation.

III. Let us consider, in the next place, what apologies, or what excuses men, in their folly, have been prone to plead for this outrage upon religion, and on decent morals. Seldom, indeed, do they ever attempt its justification. They only seek to find palliations of its grossness or impiety. It is committed, they say, without thought,—it is not accompanied with any intentional disrespect to religion,—it is an effect merely of momentary passion, or of wine.

Without thought! what folly! nay, what depravity of heart! in which crimes of this dark colouring can excite no reflection! Do you pretend that it is not accompanied with *intentional* impiety? May not this absurd apology be equally pleaded for every sin? The immediate aim of vice, is not to offend Almighty God; it is to gratify ourselves: but this gratification, the sinner pursues in contempt of his laws, and in violation of the duty of a creature to his Creator. It is his crime, that God is not in all his thoughts. And of this sin it is the peculiar aggravation, that it tends more directly than any other, in its very commission, to recal the divine presence to his mind, which he forgets, despises, or insults. If you excuse it as the effect of passion, which you cannot repress, or of wine which inflames the

brain. What crime may you not justify on similar grounds? Is not wine the parent of lust and of quarrels? Are not robbery, violence, murder, the fruits of intemperate passion?

Would you accept the same apology from your servants, from your dependent, from your child? Ah! it is only adding crime to crime; and while you think you excuse, you are only aggravating the offence.

I request your attention, christians! in the last placé, to the folly of this vice, which appears in its utter inutility even to those foolish ends which men usually hope to gain by it: for, most assuredly, it can never increase our favourable opinion of the veracity, the wit, or the courage of the common swearer.

Weak, indeed, must he be who hopes to strengthen his credibility by oaths and cursings. If his upright character do not give weight to his assertions, they can derive none from his impiety. What barriers of truth and virtue are able to restrain that man from pursuing any end to which his passions impel him, whose pious principles are not sufficient to preserve him from insulting the Most High God, by profaneness and blasphemy? A very coarse but common proverb, with which every hearer is acquainted, demonstrates the general impression on the minds of men to be, that habitual profaneness is usually accompanied with a very doubtful veracity. And that poet drew his observation from human nature, who, to caution innocence against the arts of a seducer, has said;—“*but if he swear, nay then, he'll certainly deceive you.*”

Does not that man offer the greatest affront to his own truth and honour who confesses, by this practice, that they stand in need of this equivocal support?

Some men have unhappily adopted a false and pernicious notion that profaneness serves to increase the zest of their wit. A repartee, they think, has something more smart; a story has a more lively air, that is seasoned by an oath. And the impious strain of dialogue kept up in a multitude of miserable farces, exhibited in our theatres to attract the populace, has strengthened this mistaken notion in those young men who have little education besides what they derive from these schools; and few principles of taste, or morals, except such as are borrowed from a misconducted drama. It is a poor and low conception of wit, to imagine that it is in any way allied to irreligion. There may be ribaldry, there may be buffoonery, there may be an odd assemblage of profane expressions to make the vulgar laugh, but there cannot be wit. I deny not that there have been profligate and profane men who have been witty: but it was not the profanity of their discourse that constituted its wit.—Yet, this unfortunate association, which sometimes takes place, has misled many a vain youth, who has been ambitious to imitate the vivacity of their genius, but has caught only their irreligion. Much to be pitied, if not contemned, are those young men, who imagine that impiety is any indication of talents, or that its language can add any ornament to discourse. It is, on the other hand, an almost infallible criterion of shallowness of thought.

and of circumscribed ideas. It is a vulgar and impoverished substitute for wit.

The last and almost the silliest error in judgment on this subject, is seen in those young men who affect a profanity of language, in order to impress the world with a wonderful opinion of their courage, by seeming to have risen fairly above the fear of God. True courage is a calm, and firm, and dignified principle. A profane may be a brave man; but the blusterings and ravings of impiety are very equivocal symptoms of real magnanimity; and, more frequently, they are mere arts to supply the want of it. It is not uncommon, and if the scene were not too gross, we might be amused, to see two vile and pusillanimous wretches, trying to frighten one another, or to lash up their own spirits to a little effort by horrible blasphemies. But, alas! they inspire no person with any belief of their bravery, unless it be the impious audacity of braving the terrors of Almighty God, only while they vainly suppose them at a safe distance. For, ah! when he shall appear to avenge his violated law, and vindicate the insulted glory of his name, what affright, what horrible dismay shall seize upon these false bravoës! Whither then shall be fled all their impious courage, when they behold that God arrayed for judgment whom they had so often defied? when they see the flames of that damnation kindled, which they had so often imprecated on their own heads? Jehovah! it is because thou art God and not man, that thou dost not smite them on the instant, and sink them down to perdition with the streams of their blasphemy issuing from their lips!

In the conclusion of this discourse, let me present to you in a single view the united prospect of the evils which we have seen associated with this reproachful vice. It displays a high insult on the glory and perfection of Almighty God—it brings dishonour, added to the guilt of perjury on the soul—it is an outrage upon good manners, and deeply injures the best interests of society—it is equally without reason and without excuse—and, finally, it accomplishes not one of the ends which a profane man thinks to serve by it, either to raise the reputation of his veracity, his wit, or his courage. In one word, it appears, in every view which we can take of it, to be a melancholy dereliction of virtue and decency, equally unprofitable, shameful and sinful.

Therefore, christian brethren! *Swear not at all, neither by heaven, nor by the earth, nor by any other oath; but let your communication be yea, yea, nay nay, in the simplest forms of affirmation and denial; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. AMEN!*

TO A GOOD MAN,

THE DAY OF DEATH

PREFERABLE TO THE DAY OF HIS BIRTH.

Preached at the funeral of a pious friend. December 18th, 1803.

And the day of death, than the day of one's birth. *Eccles. VII. 1.*

THE maxims of wisdom, to the men of the world, often wear the appearance of paradox; for they respect enjoyments for which the worldly mind has no relish; or bear a reference to a state of being of which our present experience furnishes no adequate images. They draw the principal motives of action from an invisible world; and often they recommend the discipline of affliction and sorrow to men who seek to spend life only in a continued succession of varied pleasure and joy.—“*It is better,*” says the wisest of preachers, “*to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting.*” And, not less strange and contrary to our first impressions, is the maxim of our text, that *the day of death is better than the day of one's birth*. The whole proverb, to which he appeals, is, *a good name is better than precious ointment; and the day of death, than the day of one's birth*. Taking these two maxims together in the connexion in which they are here placed, the sacred writer seems, by the first, to intend, not merely, to lay down a general proposition; that a good name is

to be preferred to the richest perfumes—that a virtuous fame, and the honest reputation of piety, are more to be desired than all the ostentatious displays, and voluptuous indulgences of luxury. But the whole has an evident allusion to the elegance and magnificence of eastern funerals; on which occasions the wealthy embalmed the bodies of their friends with the most costly spices, and washed them in the richest, and most fragrant oils. The import of this proverb, then, may be expressed in the following proposition; that the reputation of piety and virtue, which *the excellent of the earth* carry with them to the tomb, is infinitely to be preferred to all the costly honours which can be paid to their remains. Much dearer to the heart is the tender remembrance of departed goodness, than the ostentatious pomp of funerals, or the invidious magnificence of tombs; the tears which embalm the memory of those who have rendered themselves beloved by their virtues, than the perfumes which wealth, or vanity profusely scatters on their dust.

But the proposition which immediately follows: *better is the day of death than the day of one's birth*, bears, in the estimation of the world, much more the air of paradox. What, it may be asked, does not man at his birth, open his eyes on the sweet light of life; and begin to taste the charming consciousness of existence? Does he not enter on a multiplied and varied scene of enjoyment, both sensible, rational, and social? Does not death, on the contrary, present to the imagination, ideas the most formidable to human nature?—It is undoubtedly, an awful event to those who know no high-

er good than the indulgence of their appetites, than the pursuit of their passions, and the gratification of their pleasures, and whose troubled and boding consciences cannot look through the shadows of the grave, with calm and pious hope, into the eternal world. The proposition in the text, therefore, cannot be regarded as an universal maxim. It is applicable to those alone, to whom faith and piety have prepared in heaven a blessed retreat from all the troubles, and sorrows with which sin has poisoned our residence upon earth, and which frequently fall with peculiar severity upon the lot of the pious.—If there were no happier condition of being reserved for virtue beyond this life, how many of the most estimable of mankind might pronounce that the evils of existence have far overballanced its enjoyments? How often might the children of misfortune exclaim,—Why, O merciful God, Creator! have we been brought into being only to pass our transient moments in suffering, and then drop again forever into the gulf of annihilation? We begin our course in pain; and, as we advance in the road of life, we measure its stages only by the succession of our griefs. Continually we find one hope, and one project blasted after another. We incessantly renew them only to be blasted again. The moments of happiness which now and then we are permitted to enjoy, but prepare for us, by their disappointment, an increase of sorrow.—Have you united your heart to a friend who is worthy of your confidence? It is, perhaps, only to suffer in his sufferings, and then, in the bitterness of your soul, to part with him forever. Are you blest in the smiles and

protection of an affectionate parent? With what anguish are you shortly to be robbed of that protection, and to see those smiles extinguished in death! Do you find the enjoyment of yourself doubled in the caresses of a lovely infant? And does not the same moment create in your bosom ten thousand anxious apprehensions, for its safety, its virtue, and its happiness? With what painful solitudes do you follow it often till the close of life? And, at the length, what expressible pangs are prepared for your heart, whether God shall call you to leave it, deprived of your protection, to the distressing uncertainties of the world, or to follow it yourself to the dark forgetfulness of the tomb? Have you chosen one to whom you have imparted your soul, who is dearer than father, mother, friend or child; who multiplies, by partaking all your joys, by reciprocating all your most tender sentiments; and is still more endeared by sharing and soothing all your griefs? Ah! what distractions await your final separation! What disconsolate hours remain for you, when the tomb has swallowed up your richest moral treasure, your joy, your hope!

Review the pains, the diseases, the wants, the languors, the despondencies, the envies, the rivalships, the animosities, the slanders, the injuries, the eternal agitations with which life is filled, and say, if the world considered only, in itself, and separated from the hope of a future, and better existence, would be a desirable abode?—Who would be willing to take life again, just on the same terms on which he has already enjoyed it, with the certainty of running the same round of errors,

of follies, and disquietudes, and of meeting again in it the same chagrins, sorrows and afflictions, if these were to terminate all its hopes?—Life, then, derives its principal value; often, indeed, it is rendered tolerable, only from the hopes which religion affords the believer of a blessed immortality, to which death opens the obscure but interesting passage. Here we discern the true or the supreme reason, of the preference given by the sacred writer, of the day of death, over the day of one's birth. The afflictions of the world render that day desirable to a good man when he shall forever rest from all the troubles of this vain life. The hope of heaven crowns with joy that moment when he shall exchange them for everlasting peace and happiness.

Let us, then, in this view, institute a brief comparison between the present life, and the future, and blissful state of the pious, which will serve, still farther, to illustrate and verify the maxim in the text.

At our birth, we enter upon existence; but, at the same time, we enter upon sorrow; we are introduced, indeed, to many sources of enjoyment, but they are spoiled by our imprudence, and our passions. We have received, from our Creator, the faculties of reason which greatly ennoble us above all the other inhabitants of the earth; but still that reason is limited, and afflicted by innumerable errors and doubts. The social sympathies which unite us to our family, our friends, and to human nature, are the sources of many exquisite enjoyments, but they are the sources likewise of the most poignant afflictions.—But life is finally the theatre of sin and human imperfection; of all those

moral evils of the heart, most grievous and oppressive to the delicate, and pious conscience. In all these points, to a sincere christian, the day of death has an unspeakable advantage in the comparison, over that of our entrance into life.

For then the pains, the infirmities, the diseases, and all the innumerable evils which cursed the fall of man, which poison the pleasures of existence, and often render insensibility desirable, are buried, with these remains of corruption, in the grave. The soul, which now partakes of the disorders of this frail body, to which it is so closely allied, being freed from the mass of infirmities which oppress it, shall be elevated to a state in which it will flourish in perpetual health and vigour. Its powers of enjoyment, its capacities of happiness, its active energies, will be inconceivably enlarged.

What its state will be till the general resurrection of the just, we have few lights afforded us to judge. Only, it will not yet have attained the consummation of its happiness. That interval, nevertheless, is but a moment. Duration is not measured in eternity as it is among men on earth. *One day is, with the Lord, as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.* Before Jehovah, the infinitude of space is as a single point, the infinitude of years as a single instant. The grave is a bed in which we lie down for a short repose; but the moment of sleep touches on the moment of waking, the moment of dissolution on that of our resurrection, when *this corruptible shall have put on incorruption; and this mortal shall have put on immortality.*

And all the redeemed shall rise, and sing; *O grave! where is thy victory?*

2. Having spoken of the multiplied evils of life, I must beg permission to add that its calamities are augmented by its very pleasures, which are often spoiled by our imprudence, and our passions. For men are prone to pursue them to cloying, when they always end in disgust. They set an undue value upon them, and then are rendered unhappy by the disappointments created by their own errors. Pursuit fatigues; possession begets indifference. We are continually flying from flower to flower, rifling their sweets; and then dissatisfied because they have faded. We endeavour, by an eternal succession of objects, to perpetuate enjoyments which are incessantly escaping. But alas! how often is imprudent pleasure, when it seems to be surrounded only by light gayeties, void of care; by charming dissipations; by the delirium of joy, treacherously digging beneath our unsuspecting feet, the most terrible pit-falls! I would not, by these reflections, be understood to undervalue the blessings of divine providence. Every creature of God is good: but, for want of wisdom, of moderation, and prudence, in the enjoyment of them, they are often converted into real sources of misery.

Such is the condition of human nature in the present world. What the state of the soul will be, when released from the incumbrance of this body of sin and death, has been marked in the sacred oracles, with small precision to our indistinct conceptions. Only the powers of enjoyment of the glorified mind, become vi-

gorous, and susceptible, of a sublime felicity, which far transcends the impotent capacity of language to express, or the impotent talents of imagination to conceive. Not depending on these gross material sensories, which wear themselves out by their own action, and exhaust themselves by indulgence, they will be able to bear an eternal action without fatigue, they acquire strength by enjoyment; every new pleasure only imparts the augmented and undecaying faculty of enjoying more. The pleasures of piety and virtue, of reason and devout affection to the supreme author, and sum of universal being, which reigns in heaven, have this quality, that they never can cloy. Pure, and sublime, they are always serene. Without the tumult, and the delirium which always attend the high pleasures of sense, they never fatigue. Every enjoyment awakens new desires, and every desire gratified augments the power of enjoyment. As the rays of the sun penetrate and illuminate the whole substance of the diamond, so the *sun of righteousness*, the source of supreme felicity to the holy soul, penetrates with immortal light and joy all its essence. It is full of God. Oh! Infinite mind! Immaculate fountain of happiness, whose nature is love! What unknown felicities dwell in thy presence! What ineffable joys flow along with the emanations of thy glory, to the spirits of the redeemed in heaven!

Is then the grave, my Christian friends, the only gate to these celestial habitations? And is it not want of faith in the promises, and the glory of the Redeemer, unworthy of his disciples, that can allow us to say

that the day of death is not greatly to be preferred, when we judge of it by the lights of religion, to that day which only ushers us into this region of imperfection and sin; of so many false pleasures and so many real pains?

3. We may otherwise verify the maxim of the sacred writer on the grounds of our intellectual powers. They afford us, without doubt, many advantages which elevate human nature far above all the other inhabitants of the earth. Yet is the sphere of their operation, at present, confined within a range that is extremely limited. They can penetrate but a little way into that dark abyss which surrounds us on every side. We discern, only now and then, some faint openings into the book of knowledge; but immediately it is shut. We perceive some feeble rays of light from the eternal world, but instantly, they are extinguished, leaving us to painful conjecture, and to anxious doubt; inflamed with the desire of knowing, and incessantly mocked with disappointment. How confined is our knowledge of ourselves, of our Creator, of the boundless works of nature, of our present, or our future being! Nature is so fine in her elements, so complicated in her structure, so vast in her extent, that the few discoveries which we are capable of making, serve only to awaken a curiosity which can never be gratified. The soul, the body, their mutual actions and relations contain mysteries which the wisest men have, for ages, endeavoured to resolve. Reason has studied to know what God is; piety has sought to approach him; but clouds and darkness envelop the view. Still he is a God who *hideth himself* from our most eager inquiries, who with-

draweth himself from our most ardent endeavour to embrace him. And when we attempt to penetrate the mysteries of eternity, on them rest the profound shadows of the grave. But, when the soul shall have laid aside this feeble apparatus of sense, which sometimes aids, but often misleads our inquiries; and when we shall have emerged from this dark and narrow sphere, from its painful doubts, its imperfect views, its innumerable errors, into the glorious lights of an immortal day, *then shall we know*, in the language of the apostle, *even as also we are known*.

The cultivation of knowledge is among the noblest employments of the reasonable soul; and, an eternal progression in its development, will be, in heaven, among the sublimest sources of its felicity. What exalted faculties shall there be added to the glorified soul, what divine illumination shall shine upon it, no mortal language can depict to the human imagination. An infinite field shall be laid open to its insatiable thirst of information; a field so boundless that although the mind should comprehend every subject to which it applied its thought with the rapidity of intuition, eternity would not be sufficient to survey them all. Say then you who are ambitious of knowledge, who have tasted the pleasures of that small portion of it which is permitted to man upon earth, how rich and glorious are the prospects which religion opens to your hopes, in the career of your future existence? They add the highest consolations to the death of the righteous. For if *here we see through a glass darkly, we shall there behold face*

to face the glory of God, and the splendors of the universe.

4. Suffer me, christians, to add as a strong corroboration of the pious and happy truth which I am illustrating, that the social sympathies and affections of our nature, which, on earth create so many pains as well as pleasures, prepare for the pious soul in heaven, only the most pure and elevated enjoyments. Sweet is the society of friends, whose souls are congenial, whose sensibilities are at once warm and virtuous, whose minds are enlightened, who mutually share each others thoughts, sentiments, wishes, and their whole bosoms, without suspicion, misapprehension, or doubt. But, alas! the imperfection of human nature will never permit them to be completely happy in this preliminary residence. Their intercourse is embarrassed with so many cautions; so many contrary interests, real or imaginary, divide them, as leave only faint ideas of what might be enjoyed by a perfect nature not more exalted than that of man. If such is the case of even the purest and noblest unions among men, what alas! is the ordinary intercourse of the world? When you suffer your view to fix on its coldness, its selfishness, its jealousies, its rivalships, its slanders, its envies, the collisions of its interfering claims; when you consider the impertinences in which conversation is wasted, the follies which you cannot but despise, the profaneness which wounds the ears of piety, the indelicacies which offend against virtuous morals,—what a scene of vanity, what a bleak and chill region does this world appear to a heart warmed with the sentiments of benevolence, of

friendship, and of piety! Are you not ready to exclaim with the holy prophet; *Oh! that I had in the wilderness, a lodging place of way-faring men, that I might leave my people and go from them; for they are all an assembly of treacherous men; they bend their tongues like their bows for lies. Take ye heed every one of his neighbour, and trust ye not in any brother.*

Contemplate, on the other hand, the blessed society of spirits made perfect in Heaven, of the general assembly of the church of the first born, of beings the most wise, the most pure, the most benignant; from which is excluded all jealousy and suspicion, all reserve and distrust, all weakness and imperfection; in which all the intercourse of society is a commerce of wisdom, of affection, of fidelity; where heart meets heart, and soul mingles with soul, in all the ardor of love, with all the frankness of truth. No language can exhibit, no colours of imagination paint that blissful society, those delightful attractions which unite pious souls in heaven. The happiness of heaven is perhaps too frequently represented as one eternal ecstasy; one unceasing and rapturous act of devotion. The devotions of that immortal temple will undoubtedly form its noblest exercise, and the sublimest source of its joys. But eternal ecstasies do not constitute the state of any being. In that sublime world, as in the present state, the principal portion of active duty, and the most numerous sources of actual felicity consist in that social intercourse which is perfected by the acquisition and communication of knowledge, by mutual and endearing acts of benevolence, by the delightful and recipro-

cal effusions of love between all holy and happy spirits. Shall we not even hope that these friends will again meet and recognize their friends from the earth; and that those happy unions which have been formed in time, will be there purified from all alloy, and shall attain complete perfection in the regions of immortal love. Oh! most blessed society! what strong possession does the idea take of the heart! How blissful to the believing and regenerated soul will be that day which is destined to introduce him to its full fruition!

5. The present life is, in the next place, full of the most afflicting fluctuations. Tossed on a troubled ocean, the agitated mind enjoys no settled calm. Even the apprehensions of death, which ought to be regarded, by a good man, as a happy release from all its evils, become, by the despondency of his faith, the sources often of his deepest anguish. But when God shall have called his children home from this land of exile, and distressful change, which was designed only as a place wherein to exercise and ripen their young graces, their happiness is then fixed beyond the power of accident, or of duration itself almost omnipotent in its force to impair or change. No contingency can affect it, no tempest can shake it, no enemy can annoy it; for *none shall ever be able to pluck them out of their Father's hand.*

Christians! compare the feeble spark of life which we receive at our birth, the pains and miseries which are ready to extinguish it almost as soon as it is lighted up, the storms which afflict it, the anxieties which harass it, the troubles which overwhelm it, till it is at

length quenched in the tomb; compare these with the glories to which the redeemed shall be raised by Jesus Christ, with the eternal and immutable beatitude which they shall enjoy with him; and what believer will not ardently confirm the sentence of the holy preacher; that, *better is the day of death than the day of one's birth*: for to a good man, death is only the beginning of an everlasting life.

6. Finally, if at this solemn and interesting period, the humble christian escapes from the afflictions of the world, and the innumerable evils to which man, by his fallen nature is heir through sin, it is still a higher consolation that he escapes from sin itself. What is now the subject of his supreme anxiety and grief? Is it not the unsubdued remnant of sin in his heart? What is the object of his most assiduous labours, of his most earnest conflicts with himself, and with the world? Is it not to repress, and finally to subdue the last struggling efforts of sinful passion? What are the most fervent breathings of his pious soul? Are they not to recover the lost innocence and perfection of his nature? to behold the glory of God? to be transformed into the same image from glory to glory by the spirit of the Lord? Never, then, shall these anxious solitudes cease, shall these fervent aspirations be completely satisfied till the believer has laid down all his imperfections in the dust of death. At his birth he brought into life a nature prone to sin, as well as subject to misery; senses which deceived him, appetites which misled him, passions which tyrannized over him. At death the remains of sin, which he never ceased to lament, shall be finally

expelled from their strong hold in the heart. The passions against which he maintained a perpetual conflict, shall be extinguished in the grave. The seductions and temptations of the world, which so often misled him from his duty, which so often harrassed his peace, which so often made him falter and flag in his heavenly course, shall be annihilated by that stroke which severs the soul from the body; when the immortal spirit, released from its imprisonment, and bondage, and breaking all those hateful ties which had bound it to its corruptions enters, at length into the immediate presence of Almighty God, whom it loves, whom it adores, and impatiently desires to resemble in all the holy attributes of his nature. Beholding, in the resplendent light of heaven, his infinite purity, it is *changed into the same image*. Jehovah; the infinite *I am*, penetrates all its essence; it is commingled with the supreme mind; it is dissolved in his infinite love. Behold then the happiness of the pious disciple of Christ consummated, his joy forever perfected. And, although to the eye of sense, and the erring affections of nature, distress and misery surround the bed of death; and whereas only joys and congratulations greet our entrance into the world, yet precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of his saints; it is still true, when religion sheds its light on the darkness of the grave, as well as on the false joys of the world, that, more blessed to the real saint, is that moment which introduces him to his heavenly rest, than that which first opens his eyes on this scene of error and imperfection.

Often, christians! should your interest and your comfort lead you devoutly to contemplate your pious hopes of a blessed and immortal life with your glorious Redeemer, that they may sustain your pious fortitude in all the afflictions of life, that they may purify and elevate your heavenly affections and raise your nature above itself. When we review all the topics which justify the reflection of the sacred preacher, it would seem surprising, if we were not aware of the imperfection of our christian graces, and with how little vigor a celestial faith flourishes in this barren soil, that a disciple of Christ, should ever be reluctant to meet that glorious change which is to transfer him from earth to heaven; from the society of imperfect men, to the glorious assembly of perfect spirits in heaven; from this region of darkness to the immediate vision of God. One of the ancient poets with much good sense has said, “the Gods conceal from mortals how happy it is to die that they may be willing to live.” The Creator indeed, in order to attach us to live for the sake of its necessary duties, has implanted in the human breast a natural dread of dissolution which can be overcome only by the sublime discoveries of faith, and the strong affections of religion. And it is to the reproach of our religion if we have not so lived as ardently to aspire to rest where our Redeemer is. Yes, christians! if your faith is able to open to your view the land of promise, the reward and termination of your labors, as Canaan appeared to Moses from the mountain of Pisgah, what can be formidable in dying—in ending a painful pilgrimage—in escaping from a desert of fa-

mine, and perpetual conflicts—in passing the flood of Jordan, under the conduct of the captain of your salvation? Why should we be distressed at seeing our pious friends pass before us the holy stream to their eternal rest? or why should we be afraid to follow them? Let the apostle be our example, who so earnestly *desired to depart and be with Christ*. Let so many believers be our examples who have looked on death not with tranquillity only, but with triumph. If it be true then, that religion alone can inspire you with a rational superiority to the fears of death, and even render that formidable event a supreme blessing, cultivate within your hearts its humble graces, and its celestial hopes. Confirm more and more your pious confidence in the name, the promise, and the righteousness of the Redeemer, that, in that moment so formidable to conscious guilt, so trying to frail humanity, you may be able to join with the apostle, and with all true believers in this holy and triumphant song; O death! where is thy sting! O grave! where is thy victory! The sting of death is sin, but thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through Christ Jesus our Lord! AMEN!

THE RECOMPENSE
OF THE
SAINTS IN HEAVEN.

Rejoice in that day, for behold, your reward is great in heaven.

Luke VI. 25,

THIS is the consolation which our most merciful Redeemer offers to his humble disciples, who, for the trial and purification of their graces, are often exposed to severe afflictions in the present world. Instead of sinking under the actual calamities of life, or repining at the prosperity of others who advance before them in the road of wealth and honours; the precious hopes of religion, when they take full possession of the heart, are sufficient to check every envious disposition, and subdue every impatient anxiety, and may even furnish them with a lawful subject of exultation and triumph, in circumstances otherwise fitted to produce the deepest depression. The necessary evils of the present state, how severely soever they may press upon the believer, can be only of short duration, and shall be exchanged, according to the promise of the Saviour, for a state of felicity in the heavens, where *the ransomed of the Lord shall come to Mount Zion, with songs, and everlasting joy; and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.* Nay, the afflictions which oppress him in this *vale of tears*, often prepare for him a richer inheritance, and a more glorious crown in the kingdom of his heavenly Father.

Our blessed Lord, in proposing these elevated hopes to his suffering followers, enters into a brief comparison of the rewards of afflicted piety, with the ultimate consequences of the most successful course of vice; *Wo to you rich! for you have received your consolation! Wo to you who are full! for you shall hunger. Wo to you who laugh now! for you shall mourn and weep.* Not that poverty on the one hand, or wealth on the other, that adversity, or prosperity, is necessarily connected with the virtues, or with the vices of individuals; but while the gospel offers its consolations to those who may be oppressed with the weight of their afflictions, it warns the great and those who live in pleasure, that, if all their hopes are bounded by the enjoyments of the present world, most miserable, ultimately will be found their mistaken choice.

Let us enter carefully into this interesting comparison, and examine, with devout attention, the principles on which these general propositions are founded. The rewards of the world are mutable, and uncertain;—in their best estate, they are of small value, and, in a little time, they vanish forever from the grasp of the possessor.—Opposed to these imperfections of earthly things, the final reward of piety is sure,—*Behold!* saith the Saviour, indicating its certainty; as if placed by faith within the immediate view of the soul—He adds, it is *great*, pointing in this expression, to its excellence and perfection; and it is consummated, in the last place, by being laid up in *heaven*, the blessed residence of pious and redeemed souls, a name indicative of a happy and everlasting existence to express its eternity and

glory.—The *certainty*, therefore, the *glory* and *eternity* of the rewards of the righteous in a future state, will form the subject of our pious meditations on the present occasion.

Useful it is frequently to raise our thoughts to the contemplation of heavenly things; that our affections by being elevated above this world, *which is not our abiding place*, may be rendered more spiritual and pure; that thence we may draw more sublime and animating motives to a holy diligence in all our religious duties; and that, from the most blessed hopes, we may derive a sovereign consolation under the manifold afflictions of this mortal state.

1. Accompany me then, my christian friends, in my meditations; first on the *certainty* of this recompense, which places the believer so far above the painful vicissitudes, which almost ever attend the most prosperous career of earthly fortune.—For those *who rejoice now*; shall *weep and mourn*.

After men have fatigued themselves in the pursuits of gain, or of ambition, and, perhaps, exhausted the powers of nature in incessant labours, for the accomplishment of their ends, how often, I speak not here of the young who are just now in the morning of their hopes, but of those who have made a full trial of the world, how often have their most flattering prospects been disappointed! What mortifications, chagrins, reverses have continually met them! When they have been most successful in their pursuits, do they ever attain that settled calm and peace of mind, without which there can exist no true felicity? How many, on the

contrary, do we behold, who, after all their solitudes expended on a fortune which for ever escapes them, are left to eat the bread of carefulness, and to drink the waters of the deepest sorrow! The world has overwhelmed them with misfortunes; men have cast out their names as evil; friends have deceived their confidence; or if a few have remained faithful, pressed together by a similitude of suffering, all the comfort they can yield each other in affliction, is only an unavailing sympathy in their common griefs.—Wo, then to those, who look for their reward from the world, and who are only tossed, without the tranquil and refreshing hopes of religion, upon the ocean of its uncertainties! But our blessed Saviour pronounces the benediction in the text upon the poor and afflicted who trust in him, that it may be their consolation, under all their present sorrows,—*your reward is great in heaven.* On what, then, does the security of this gracious promise rest? On the unshaken foundation of the truth and faithfulness of Almighty God. You behold in the immutable attributes of the Father of mercies, an unfailing ground of comfort to the sincere believer, under the severest calamities which can oppress his lot. Who was ever pressed under a heavier load of sufferings than the great apostle of the gentiles? But when he looked forward to the blessed recompense of the saints, and contemplated the security of his inheritance in the promise, and its completeness in the glory of God, he shrunk not from poverty or reproach, from imprisonment, or chains, or death. All his afflictions seemed to be swallowed up in the sure and certain hope of the glory to

be revealed. *For I know, in whom I had trusted, and am persuaded, that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day. Henceforth, is laid up for me a crown of righteousness which the Lord, the righteous judge will give me in that day, and not to me only, but also to all them that love his appearing.* To this blessed assurance, this holy triumph, every believer, however obscure his rank in society, or afflicted his lot in life, is entitled by the favour and promise of Almighty God. *For with god there is no respect of persons.*

The rewards of a proud, envious, and unjust world are always uncertain. But if it were less unjust, it may not be acquainted with your merits. Your obscurity may have concealed them from its view. You may have wanted opportunities to produce them into light. Men may have been too proud, or too selfish to turn their regards upon your fortunes. But let the humble christian be assured that no obscurity can conceal him from the merciful eye of his heavenly Father. His eye penetrates the deepest shades of poverty and affliction. He beholds the virtues and graces of those who are unknown to the world; and will display them, at last, before the universe in the full light of heaven. How many saints are now in those abodes of blessedness, whose modest worth, whose heavenly graces were, while on earth, hardly known to their nearest friends! Nay, God who searches the heart, beholds and records against the day of recompense, those holy intentions, those pure desires, those pious breathings which raised from the bottom of the soul, can be discerned only by

his omniscient eye. He discerns the good that you would do, if the means were not wanting to give it effect. So that there is not a pious purpose, a benevolent wish, a devout aspiration formed in the heart which is not sure of its reward. The meanest services of those who can do no more, raised from a spirit of unfeigned charity,—the two mites of the widow cast into the public treasury,—a cup of cold water given to a disciple in the name of Christ, shall receive from his mercy, at last, a most gracious reward.

But the security, to the sincere christian, of this blessed promise rests not only on the inviolable truth and benignity of the eternal, but on the foundation of the perfect obedience, and all sufficient merit of the glorious Redeemer, *the Lord our righteousness*. The grace of God, by giving a Saviour to the world, and accepting his atonement for the sins of mankind, has condescended to convert the promise into a retribution of justice. It is now, not only an attribute of his mercy, to receive the penitent to its protection and grace, it is *just* also, *in God to justify the sinner who believeth in Christ*, and to raise him, at last, from the grave, to the possession of eternal life. Behold, Oh! humble believer! the sure foundation of your hope;—the truth of Jehovah, and the all availing sacrifice of our redemption! In the blood of the son of God, you behold the seal of that eternal covenant which is the immutable security of your confidence and faith. All the mercy, the justice, the truth, and the righteousness of heaven are the pledges of this inheritance to every believer who hath united himself to the merits of Je-

sus Christ. Rejoice then, O christian! *behold your sure reward!*

Thus briefly have I opened to your view its *certain-ty*, in opposition to the instability, and changes of the world. Let us, in the next place, contemplate its excellence and glory,—*great* is your reward.—The men, without doubt, who serve this world only, serve a hard, and often an ungrateful master. It repays them with little that is worthy the anxieties, and the labors wasted upon it; and still less that is able to satisfy the desires of the reasonable soul. Many sorrows attend its pursuit; and when attained, as far as mortals can possess it, still it leaves in the heart a most painful void. And though it should lavish on your ambition, or your avarice, its highest glories, or its most ample treasures, to something still the soul aspires, infinitely beyond these mutable and perishable possessions. But the portion which an humble believer enjoys in God his heavenly Father, so far overbalances all the afflictions of *this present time*, that, in the comparison, they are lost and forgotten, or felt only to urge him into a closer union with his supreme good. And when he raises his sublime views to his future inheritance, it is seen to be commensurate to the ever growing aspirations of the soul in the eternal progress of her being.

The hope of the *reward* of the saints in *heaven*, alleviates the painful afflictions which are the necessary portion of the best and most upright man in this probationary pilgrimage. *For*, in the language of the apostle, *we count that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that*

shall be revealed in us. And, to an humble and sincere faith in the promises of the gospel, our sufferings help to soften their own pains, by weaning the heart from the vain caresses of the world, and urging it into a nearer and more intimate union with God. Thus are our *light afflictions, which are but for a moment, made to work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* Let the pious sufferer, then, be consoled; for, though now he *may go forth sowing his seed in tears, he shall return bearing his sheaves,* and gathering, in the end, the rich and blessed fruits of an immortal harvest,

If then, the hope, and the distant view of your heavenly inheritance is sufficient to sooth and relieve the heaviest calamities of life, much more must its possession be commensurate to the utmost desires of your heavenly being. Those vast desires, which the world cannot satisfy, are brought to perfect rest in God; their ardent thirst is quenched, if I may speak so, in those *rivers of pleasure which flow at God's right hand.*

The immortal powers of the glorified soul can never be wearied, or cloyed with the pure delights of which God is the source, and the sum. Shall I speak of the glories of that heavenly country, the paradise of God? shall I speak of the general assembly of perfect spirits enshrined in bodies which shine as stars in the kingdom of their father; of the blessed society of redeemed and holy souls united to one another in an eternal love? All are sources of a joy, at present, inconceivable by mortals; but it is God himself, the fountain of life, whose nature is love, and whose love is the life

of the universe, who constitutes the supreme felicity of the heavenly state. The happiness of a pure spirit is to mingle with the infinite and eternal mind, who fills and occupies all its powers. God is the sum, and plenitude of its joy.—O God! most worthy to be loved! when the soul is full of thee, what can it desire besides. The royal Psalmist of Israel, in the ecstasy of devout meditation, anticipating the future glory of the saints, exclaims, *I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness!* Feeble is our translation often to express the strength and beauty of the original. In a short paraphrase let me endeavour to transfuse, if possible, the force of this expression into our language. In the *resurrection*, when I awake from the sleep of death, I shall be *satiated* with beholding thy glorious image. Every power of happiness will be completely occupied; every vessel will be full and running over. This divine poet then proceeds, *they shall be abundantly “satisfied” with the abundance of thy house.* Very forcible in the *Vulgate* is the translation of this phrase, *they shall be inebriated with enjoyment, and the delights of thy presence, thou wilt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures; for with thee is the fountain of life; and in thy light, shall they see light.* They shall drink immortal life and happiness from those pure and refreshing streams which spring eternally beneath thy throne, whose is *the fountain of life.* And *in thy light, shall they see light.* Remark this strong and singular expression, which implies that the light of heaven, that ecstatic light which fills all the celestial regions with unutterable joy, is only the emanation of

the glory of God. But of these heavenly objects it has not yet *entered into the heart of man to conceive*. Yet, in this distant and obscure region, examples are not wanting, which exhibit some feeble gleams of that felicity which the saints shall enjoy in God, when freed from the cumbrous veil of mortal flesh, they shall behold his glory in open vision. How many blessed martyrs, when only a ray of that glory has entered their souls, have been able, with the apostle, to rejoice in chains, and in death? How many have offered themselves as pure sacrifices to their Redeemer in the midst of flames? The transports of their minds have not only rendered them insensible to suffering, in situations which affect us with horror to conceive, but elevated them above their sufferings in holy ecstasies.—But not to resort to these high and rare examples, christians, have you not the evidence within yourselves? Notwithstanding the manifold imperfections of which you complain, and the lukewarmness of this age of the church, have you not, at some happy moments, *been satiated with the abundance* of his house? In the delights of a pure and holy devotion, in the temples of the Most High, or at the table which bears the precious memorials of your Saviour, have you not, while prostrate in spirit before the throne of grace, almost forgotten, for a season, both the follies and the interests of the world; its hopes, its fears, and its pleasures? Filled with the sweetness of your divine consolations, have you not been ready, with the apostle, *to count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord?* or to exclaim in the

holy raptures of the king of Israel, *whom have I in heaven but thee! and there is none upon the earth that I desire besides thee!*—Christian! if such are the refreshments with which you meet in the way, what will be the full measure of your joy when you shall have arrived at the period of your trials, and attained the consummation of your reward? If your exile affords such comforts, what will be your joy; a joy past all understanding, when, having surmounted the dangers and troubles of the desert, you shall have gained, at last, that promised land which you have so long and so anxiously sought?

Vain, and abused world! which dost occupy the soul, to the exclusion of God! what are thy rewards, the gold of thy misers, the pleasures of thy sensualists, the triumphs of thy conquerors, compared with the recompense of the most humble and afflicted disciples of Jesus, even in this earthly pilgrimage; above all, when they shall have arrived in their everlasting *habitations*?

III. This is the third and last character of the reward of the saints which I proposed to illustrate—it is *immutable and everlasting*. *Rejoice, for great is your reward in heaven; in heaven, that eternal condition of happy existence in which the saints who have been redeemed from the earth shall enjoy a sublime and glorious felicity commensurate with its endless duration.*

Though now you groan under the burden of the corruptions, which you still bear about with you, you enjoy the promise of the eternal spirit of truth, that, when you have put off this body of death, you shall be cloth-

ed upon with your *house which is from heaven, and be forever with the Lord*. When you have passed, in a diligent course of faith and obedience, the storms and tempests of life, you shall reach a peaceful shore *where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest*. Remember what our Saviour hath said, *those who laugh now shall mourn and weep*; intimating, by this image, how unstable are the fortunes of this world. And how often do we behold the vain children of prosperity dashed from the proud eminence on which they thought they stood like Gods? But if they escape the ordinary fluctuations of the world, how soon shall death bury all their prospects, and annihilate all their possessions in the grave? How soon shall that glorious edifice of their fortune, which they are rearing with so much pains, that pampered tabernacle of their bodies, which they nourish with so much care, crumble in pieces, and fall in ruins? Where then, shall be found the immortal soul if it has no portion in God? But in union to thee, O God! eternal in thy being! fountain of life! sum of all excellence and perfection! consists the consummation of our happiness; and the general assembly of the redeemed, united in one body to Christ their glorified head, shall, along with him, derive their supreme felicity from the everlasting emanations of thy love!—Eternity is the sublime idea which crowns the hopes of the believer. Interminable existence, ceaseless progression in glory and perfection, *which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive*.

But when we strive to expand the soul to these vast conceptions, we are absorbed and lost in a boundless sea of thought! Count O my soul, if possible, the sands upon the shore of the sea; reckon the drops in the ocean—compute the rays of the sun, or the atoms that compose the universe, in order to measure the ages of happy existence; these ages shall roll away; but the pious soul shall have approached no nearer to a termination of her felicity than at the first moment when they began to revolve.—Oh! glorious, mysterious being! You shall live with God, and in God, and partake of his immortality! If we had not the infallible word of Revelation on which to rest our hope; if religion had only kindly deceived us for our pleasure, I would say with the great Roman philosopher, *may I never be waked from so sweet a delusion!* But our blessed Saviour has not merely offered these transcendent prospects to our faith, but in a manner verified them to our senses, by his own resurrection, and his triumphant ascension to his original glory in the heavens; where, in the progress of your interminable existence, you shall see suns and systems roll away beneath your feet, replaced by new suns, and new systems, and the universe perishing and renovated myriads of times, while seated on Mount Zion, and near the throne of God, you shall contemplate the wonderful revolutions of eternity.

When once we have tasted the joys of existence, with what dread we contemplate the possibility of losing its pleasures. With what earnestness we desire to prolong its duration! But simple existence is not

all that the promise of the new covenant holds out to the hope of the believer. It is an eternal progression in knowledge, it is the everlasting exercise, and enjoyment of that heavenly love which is the life of the soul.

To the curious thirst of knowledge, the boundless fields of the universe will be laid open to the excursive flights of pious souls, who, with the celerity of lightning, or on the wings of the wind, will pervade the immensity of the works of God; according to the beautiful image of the Psalmist; *who maketh his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire,** at the same time, they will, with a holy rapture, for which the language of mortals furnishes no expressions, the ideas of mortals no images, mingle their being with that Infinite Mind whose nature and essence is love. They will breathe in heaven the air of love; and be united in the most delightful emanations, and reciprocations of an eternal love, with *an innumerable company of angels, and with the general assembly of the first born whose names are written in heaven.*

Wherefore my beloved brethren, disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, *sceing you look for such things what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness? Show that you are seeking a better country, even an heavenly. And be diligent that, at his coming, you may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless. For only the pure in heart shall be admitted to see God. AMEN!*

* I am aware that this passage will well bear another translation: "who maketh winds his messengers, and flames of fire his servants."

ON SLANDER.

Speak not evil one of another brethren.—*James iv. 2.*

THE great duties of morality and religion, being prescribed by the clear dictates of reason, and enforced by the powerful sanctions of conscience, are not often so openly and palpably transgressed, as those lighter obligations of the law of charity, which should regulate the ordinary intercourse of mankind in society. In these minor duties, the heart is more frequently off its guard; their importance to the general interests of humanity, is seldom duly appreciated: and the little passions, which so often intrude into our social circles, to disturb the harmony of life, are apt insensibly to seduce men, beyond those delicate boundaries of charity, which require a scrupulous self-command always nicely to observe them, and the active and steady influence of virtuous principle, always to respect them.

To none of the duties of morality are these reflections more applicable, than to that prudent government of the tongue prescribed in the text. And the transgressions of this *unruly member*, are wont to be esteemed of so light a nature, that the habitual inattention of mankind to preserve a proper control over it, contributes greatly to multiply its unguarded errors.

The mind is so little braced to a just and virtuous caution on this subject, that the tongue, freed from the salutary restraints, which prudence, as well as religion should impose upon it, is prone, through mere want of reflection, to infringe those amiable ties which are necessary to bind society together. But there are, besides, so many causes of indifference to each other's feelings in the intercourse of life; so many points of rivalry and competition; so many sources of envy, jealousy, prejudice, that, perhaps, men more frequently infringe them through some secret impulse of alienation and resentment hardly perceived by themselves.—When we reflect on the numerous occasions which prompt to the violation of this amiable law of benevolence, perpetually recurring in the commerce of mankind; and when we further reflect on the constant vigilance, and self command required to impose a proper restraint on the indiscretions of conversation, we have the highest reason to exclaim with the apostle;—*if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.* Among the multiplied offences of the tongue that, perhaps, is the most common which consists in *speaking evil one of another.*

It is a subject of just lamentation that many of the disciples of the mild and charitable religion of our blessed Saviour, while they profess to fix their view almost exclusively upon the transcendent duties and doctrines of the gospel, permit themselves to overlook the humble, but not less real duties, of social morality. They are at little pains to regulate their temper and their passions, or to subject to a prudent control the license of

the tongue. None are more rigid upon certain points of doctrine; none more negligent in cultivating those mild and amiable graces by which we approach nearest to the meekness, humility, and charity of Jesus Christ.—Ah! mistaken followers of your Redeemer! by no vice is the genuine spirit of the gospel more tarnished, or the temper of its benevolent morality more reproachfully impaired than by evil speaking and slander. Conversation has grown from this cause, to be an almost perpetual offence against the genius of our holy religion. And christians, who should regard one another as brethren, or, to employ, with the apostle, the image of a closer union, as *members of one body in Christ*, are frequently rent, by this vice, into innumerable little factions, to the great annoyance of our social harmony.

On the principle of speaking no evil, however, thus generally expressed, it is requisite to make some explanations.

It is not every censure passed on the faults, or the vices of our fellow men which may justly be brought under the reprehension of the apostle. There are occasions in which it becomes a duty to speak with just severity of their conduct; as in the case of parents or of guardians, who are charged with the moral instruction of their children, or their pupils, and who may usefully enforce their precepts by proposing examples of vice to their censures;—the officer of justice may prosecute, or denounce offenders against the laws of his country; a friend may remonstrate with a friend, and hold up, with the most benevolent designs, the dan-

ers of imprudent, or vicious eonnexions which unawares, his friend may be forming. But the sin which the apostle condemns, consists not only in falsely and malignantly forming, and disseminating histories of scandal, to the injury of our neighbour's reputation, but in unnecessarily, thoughtlessly, and without that due consideration of his honor and peace, which charity requires, giving currency to the tales and whispers of scandal, which are so often cruelly; so much oftener, inconsiderately; but always uncharitably, circulated through society.

Slander may be considered under three aspects—As it is malignant and propagated with the previous knowledge. or belief of its falsehood; as it is supposed to be justified by the truth of its facts; and, finally, as it consists of those lighter faults and stains of reputation which unhappily form the common entertainment of our social parties.—1. Malignant slander has indeed few or no open advocates. It is reprobated by the world, as the indication, and the foul ebullition of a heart most detestable in its principles and diabolical in its aims. And hardly is any epithet in the vocabulary of reproach, more opprobrious than that of *vile slanderer*. Yet, shameful as it is, and exposed to just abhorrence, can we say that it is, happily, among us, a rare crime? Seldom, indeed, has it appeared with that open and unblushing effrontery which, a few years ago, it assumed in the public vehicles of intelligence in our own country. Seldom has it possessed such an open field, or been inflamed with such poisonous virulence, as then it displayed by

the competitions and passions of our political parties. And have we not accordingly seen this vile prostration both of truth and charity deform society with a most pernicious influence? The public ear was shamefully polluted, the sacredness of character profaned, and no victim spared, if only envy, ambition, or wounded vanity required the sacrifice. Restrained neither by decency nor by truth, its principal aim was to beat down an enemy, or to put aside a rival; to inflict a wound upon his feelings that should gratify an atrocious vengeance; and rob him, if possible, of the public esteem. And, provided the end were accomplished, it sanctioned the iniquity of the means. In this career, if the calumniator does not possess sufficient hardihood to *invent* his dishonorable tales, he is prone to seize with avidity on those which Fame, with her malignant breath, and thousand tongues, has prepared for him; which, like some magical operator, is continually raising up new scenes in society. These he colours, distorts, or magnifies at pleasure, through the optic glasses of envy and passion.

Another form of this vice, if not so atrocious, yet certainly not less unworthy, ungenerous, and base, consists in those dark, designing calumnies which shun the fair and open light, and are propagated chiefly by hint and insinuation. Your enemy studies to preserve himself in concealment; and hopes to wound in security, from behind his cowardly covert. With affected scrupulosity he avoids the odious imputation of direct slander; but every thing is suggested to our suspicions, which have been previously and artfully excited. His

narratives are so framed that every doubtful incident shall be interpreted in its worst meaning, every suppressed circumstance shall be more than supplied by the apprehensions of his hearers, and awakened imagination shall complete a history which he affects to conceal. Oh! most vile assassination!

II. But in the next place, we often perceive this violation of christian charity which no one will defend under its proper title, indulged and justified under the pretext of the *truth* of the calumnious imputations.—Truth, it is said, is no scandal.—This maxim of the passions is neither just in itself, nor consistent with the mild spirit of christianity. The illiberal temper by which it is dictated, betrays itself by the vengeful tone with which the spurious maxim is pronounced. Alas! may not a malignant truth recall to memory, or cruelly divulge the lamented errors of a life, in other respects, most worthy and amiable; and the more interesting, perhaps, for that softening of meekness and humility which repentance for those very errors has shed over it. Ah! christians! who are we that we should rejudge the judgments of God, and still subject to the protracted tortures of infamy, the lamented evils which infinite mercy hath pardoned, and covered with the Redeemer's blood.

But, without entering into a scrutiny which belongs only to God; scandal, which presents to the public view, nothing but the blemishes of character, never exhibits it with fairness and truth. The observation is no less true, than universal, that there is no man without his faults: but it is, perhaps, not less true, that there is

hardly any man who does not possess many virtues which entitle him to our benevolent and charitable consideration. But the unfriendly pencil of slander portraying him only on his worst side, presents to us a false image instead of that mixed character, so like our own, only composed, perhaps, of a different mixture of virtues and vices, which should claim our sympathy, or obtain our indulgence. On a ground of truth, may be laid a representation which, on the whole is false, and calculated to deceive. The colouring is deepened, and all the lineaments, are distorted. If our passions do not guide the hand, in finishing the portrait, fancy adds a colouring which it thinks necessary to give it a higher interest; but if personal injuries have inflamed the temper, resentment colours it to justify its vengeance.

How often, before experience has corrected the precipitancy of our judgments, may we have received, from such partial representations, the most unjust prepossessions against the most estimable of mankind? Some accidental deviation from the path of virtue, drawn forth by circumstances of peculiar temptation; some misconception; some error of judgment; some sudden imprudence of passion; some foible against which the weakness of human nature is not, at all times, sufficiently on its guard, may have furnished to slander that single trait of truth on which the calunmy is founded.

But if you accurately examine the fact, will it not frequently be discerned to be no other than one of those common rumours, of which no one can ascertain

the origin? And small acquaintance, surely, does it require with human society to understand how uncertain, and often, how baseless are those foolish tales which are daily circulated. Prejudice or mistake has given them birth; malignity, carelessness, or the mere love of talking has propagated them; and the malicious curiosity of mankind has entertained them without examination. At each step in their progress, they are magnified by some new exaggeration, till, at length, the original fact is lost in an accumulation of false additions. Ignorant of the world must he be who has not observed in a thousand instances, how common fame disguises, and distorts every little incident which she touches. He who disseminates a slanderous tale on this ground must be either malevolent or; weak; malevolent, who estimates, so cheaply, the good name and tranquillity of mind of his brother; weak and credulous, who can still trust the integrity of fame after all his experience of her idleness and falsehood.

Permit me to remark further, that so few men are capable of making accurate or candid observations on the conduct of others, and that those actions from which any important inferences with regard to character can be justly drawn, are so rarely seen in a fair light, that the plea of actual observation is often an extremely equivocal ground of censure. Actions can seldom be fairly estimated when seen single, and apart from the circumstances with which they are connected. Their motives, which are often concealed; the situation into which the actor may be accidentally thrown, various principles of education; ideas and habits form-

ed in different circles of society, create a wide diversity in the judgment which men are prone to make of the same action. The most innocent conduct, measured by our prejudices may be tainted by unmerited reproach. What security have we for candor, or for truth amidst the collisions of opposing interests, amidst the conflicts of contending parties in government, or unfortunately, even in religion, amidst the pride of ignorance, the rivalships of different individuals, or classes in society, which almost always exhibit in an oblique light the actions and the language of those who differ from us in party, or in social connections? Do not the most serious umbrages often arise from mere inadvertances? And how often do all these causes concur to aggravate the errors of our unsuspecting neighbours; above all, to distort, almost unperceived by ourselves, the features which we draw of an obnoxious character?

On this subject, fellow christians! let me appeal to your own experience. What injustice have not you suffered from prejudice, from imperfect observation, from the want of fair and candid examination? From actions misconceived, from motives misinterpreted? In a word, from the folly of thoughtless, or the envy of malignant tongues? Ah! disciples of our blessed Redeemer! with what scrupulosity and caution should you ever suffer yourselves to entertain injurious impressions against the reputation of your brethren? With how much more charitable caution should you ever be induced to communicate those impressions to others? The pretence of truth can seldom, from the very constitution of human nature, and human society,

be received as a legitimate source of the histories of scandal and truth; if we were more certain of attaining it on those suspicious subjects, can never, unless where imperious duty imposes the obligation of revealing it, sweeten the malignity of the fountain from which it flows.—*Charity speaketh no evil; Charity thinketh no evil.*

III. I proceed to consider this vice in its inferior grades, as it consists in exhibiting the lighter faults of character for the entertainment of our friends, or our social parties. They are made the subject of uncharitable comment from various motives: Sometimes as a mere supplement to the barrenness of conversation; sometimes only to give vent to the impulses of a loquacious humour; at other times, to indulge a vein of facetiousness and pleasantry; to amuse a frivolous curiosity; to gratify some private pique, or avenge some imaginary injury; or finally, to please those whom the narrator may conceive he has an interest in pleasing, by sacrificing a rival to his vanity, or resentment.

On each of these motives I solicit your attention to a few reflections. And let no hearer deem the subject unworthy of the gravity of this place, or the sanctity of the devotions of the sanctuary. The first law of Christ, and of justice is, *to do to others as you would that they should do to you.* He has well nigh attained the perfection of christian charity, who is able to bridle the indiscretions of the tongue.

The first cause from which men usually have recourse in society, to this unworthy anecdote, is mere barrenness of thought. Vulgar minds are little capa-

ble of the elegant displays of wit, or the agreeable and instructive discussion of the usual rational and useful topics of discourse. The laxness of our morals, and the declension of devotional fervor, have rendered sentiments of piety scarcely admissible into mixed companies. And, often, there is too little of benevolence, or candor in these circles, to take pleasure in exhibiting, in favourable lights, the amiable and worthy qualities of men among whom the competitions of self-love, or the jealousies of honor, or of interest, have created many more points of rivalry, and perhaps, of secret alienation, than of friendship and union. In this case, the blemishes in the character and reputation of our acquaintance present the easiest sacrifice to the general amusement, or malignity.

II. Not uncommon is it also to meet with those thoughtless spirits who offend against this rule of charity merely through a natural, and imprudent loquacity. Governed by this mischievous impulse, they seldom regulate their discourse with judgment. And unhappily, the defect of judgment is rarely the only frailty united with this indiscreet temperament. Too often we find a pernicious humour of prying into the secret affairs of individuals, and of families, even by the most circuitous means, and from the most corrupted sources, in order to furnish out the unworthy fund of their inexhaustible volubility. And although they are commonly persons of weak and frivolous minds, yet are they, not unfrequently malignant also; and have the mischievous power of rendering more deserving characters unhappy, and sowing the seeds of discord through society. Could

they be charged only with imprudence, yet are the errors of indiscretion often not less culpable, nor less pernicious in their consequences than the designs of malice.

If your company is in a vein of pleasantry, how often does the common cheerfulness cruelly seek its entertainment in the foibles, or perhaps, grosser delinquencies of their friends? The *general* faults of manners would be the legitimate subjects of mirth or reprehension; but to be agreeable in this way requires a greater fund of talents and of observation than ordinarily falls to the share of common and mixed society. Less invention and ingenuity are requisite to seize on the blemishes of individuals. It is easy for dullness to collect the materials of vulgar mirth, and direct it against the greatest talents, or the greatest virtues. Aristophanes could laugh at the wisdom of Socrates,—Foote could turn into ridicule the piety of Whitefield. The sons of profligacy have glorified in their moments of sportive wantonness, to charge the virtuous and amiable Addison with intemperance, and the moralist Johnson with occasional debauch. Slander often appears in this form, in which the thoughtless gayety of the company makes them forget that they are immolating human victims, in a detestable sacrifice to their own vanity, or endeavouring to erect a shelter for their vices under the defects of superior virtue.

Suffer me, on this occasion, strongly to appeal to the self-love of every hearer. Imagine yourselves the subjects of this humiliating pleasantry, and, by the keenness of your feelings, judge of the injury you may be doing to the sensibility of others. In the view of chris-

tianity, indifference to their happiness is a sin against the genuine principles of charity; lightly to trifle with their just and natural claims to respect, is the hardness of selfishness; to be sportive with their failings is the triumph of malignity.

In this view let us contemplate the ordinary strain of those social parties which are professedly intended to preserve the mutual endearments of good neighbourhood, and are boasted to be among the proofs of the refinement of our manners.—What are they, in truth, but perpetual offences against this benevolent law of our Saviour, and against the genuine spirit of humanity? On this humble theatre do we not daily see character traduced, acquaintances depreciated, friends sacrificed? Under the face of hilarity and good humour, does not the same uncharitable, cold, and treacherous spirit lurk in every bosom? And he who smiles at your story in this company, is ready to smile at you in the next. With the highest appearances of union and social enjoyment, each is secretly divided against all.

Here, likewise, may I be permitted to observe, that that portion of our species chiefly formed to soften and harmonize human society, whose glory it is to mitigate and correct the ruder passions and manners of men, and to educe into act all the finer feelings of the soul, are too often seen to lay aside the gentle characteristics of their nature. It would seem, indeed, as if the peculiar sensibility of their hearts, by making rivalships more ardent, and multiplying the points of competition, often added keenness to their satire, bitterness to their invective, and poignancy to their ridicule.

On other occasions, this odious vice appears to have little in view besides interesting an idle curiosity. To be the first to attract attention by some new tale of wonder, or of scandal, has, to a large portion of mankind, a surprising charm. To the dishonor of human nature, obliquely almost always finds an indulgent reception in society; and a little mind is pleased with the temporary importance which the malignant curiosity of the world bestows upon it. By persons of this low vanity, blemishes in the conduct of all their acquaintances are eagerly sought after, for the unworthy pleasure of displaying them; the private infelicities of families are diligently raked out in order to be exposed. Such spirits, and such there are in almost every vicinity, may be regarded as the evil genii of human society. They multiply the causes of mutual alienation among brethren; they scatter contagion around them; and provided they have a tale to amuse, or the power to excite a wanton smile, feel little compunction at the cruel wounds which they inflict.

The licentiousness of the tongue, however, is more frequently set in action by some private pique, or for the purpose of avenging some real, or imagined injury. The infinite collisions and interfering interests of society insensibly create innumerable causes of mutual alienation. Rising reputation, the praise of talents or of beauty, is received with envy. The approbation of friendship, is misinterpreted by ever vigilant jealousy, as involving some indelicate reflection upon those who are present, and is seldom admitted without being qua-

lified by exceptions, or counteracted by some low and base insinuation.

But, the most violent and unchristian animosities are often discerned in those persons whose ardent sensibilities, prone to sudden and precipitate attachments, are united with a proportionable defect of prudence and judgment in forming them. Easily wrapped into fervent and visionary friendships, their predilections are as easily converted into the bitterest enmities. They require the fervor of their own zeal to be returned by their friends with equal warmth; and such sacrifices are continually demanded in order to correspond with their romantic notions of this *union of hearts*, that friendships of this fine texture can seldom be durable. But, when they are dissolved, it is commonly in a tempest of angry passions. For these fine and elastic spirits, whose benevolent feelings are so exquisite as hardly to be within the range of human nature, are found to be not less susceptible of the paroxysms of fury than of kindness. And as there were formerly no bounds to their admiration, and their zeal for your service, there are now no limits to their indignant retaliation of your imagined treachery. Innumerable faults are recorded with every exaggeration which disappointed love or friendship can create. Sarcasm, satire, reproach, and the most envenomed detraction, are employed to vilify a friend converted into an enemy; and all companies are tired with the histories of their wrongs.

Finally, the lowest and most unworthy exercise of the spirit of detraction, is speaking evil of others, for

the sake of creeping into the good graces of those who have in their hands, the distribution of office, emolument, or honor.—To substitute art and cunning for truth and integrity,—to trample on innocence, in order to advance any sinister interest of our own, are sure indications of a treacherous spirit which you can bind by no principle, which you can hold by no obligation. And he who is now the idol to whom the sacrifice of character is made, shall himself become the sacrifice, if the tide of interest changes, or new prospects of fortune are opened to the insidious flatterer.

Thus, my christian brethren, have I exhibited this sin, so pointedly reprobated by the holy apostle, in a variety of interesting lights, traced its motives, exposed its false and unworthy pretences,—and presented it to your view, as a crime against both justice and charity, equally pernicious, detestable, and vile.—

Speak not evil one of another, brethren.

Few sins are more lightly chastised by the conscience of men than evil speaking; yet few are followed by a more pernicious influence on the harmony of society; few tend more effectually to extinguish that spirit of mutual benevolence and charity which is the true principle of the happiness, as well as of the great duties of human nature. The wounds which are given and received by thoughtless and envenomed tongues form a large portion of the infelicities of human life. In vain will you excuse its lightest indiscretions, as being the effects of levity and inconsideration; or as a harmless endeavour to raise an innocent amusement out of the venial failings of your acquaintance. Could

you, in the same manner, sport with the character of a parent, a brother, a sister, a friend? But the law of charity is, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*.

Consider, I pray you, my fellow christians, the unhappy, and often irreparable consequences which result from this vice to the peace and comfort of society; and frequently, to individual honor and reputation, the most valued possession to a delicate and virtuous mind. When a slander is once committed to the world, who can answer for the extension it will receive, or the injury of which it may be productive? Every repetition adds somewhat to the original tale, till, at length, common fame raises into an enormity which deserves the execration of mankind, a small and venial failing, which merits their indulgence, or compassion. Perhaps, without a failing, the malice, or the indiscretion of one unfriendly or inconsiderate tongue may have alarmed all imaginations, may have infused distrust into all hearts, and filled a country with the wrecks of a ruined reputation.

It boots you not that you possess the most mild and inoffensive temper, or that your life is adorned by the most conspicuous virtues. The iniquity of slander will take advantage of the unresisting meekness of the one, or is provoked by the pre-eminent merits of the other. In vain you attempt to retrieve the purity of your name, by proving the falsehood of its imputations. You may prove them false; still your reputation shall be tarnished, and your innocence have received an indelible stain. Do you expect reparation from the repentance of the slanderer? The injury he has done

you has made him your enemy. But though he should repent, the evil is no longer in his power. The slander is gone from him. It is in possession of others. And each new reporter circulates it from a different center, till it fills at length a diffusive sphere to which we can hardly assign any limits. Alas! what jealousies, what distrusts, what mutual alienations, what poignant miseries often spring from this guilty source! Christians! whose spirit is charity; whose symbol is *concord*; and whose motto, like that of the primitive believers, should be *union and love!* never may this shameful dereliction of the spirit of Christ dishonor your holy profession! Learn to govern this *unruly evil*. Regard the character of your brother as a sacred treasure which ought to be approached with reverence,—as the most delicate of all possessions, liable to be tarnished with the lightest breath. Endeavour to change such unprofitable, and unhallowed conversations, where you are unhappily exposed to them, into a wiser channel. But if the indiscretion of uncharitable tongues must prevail, learn to be silent. Silence is the school of prudence. It preserves the tranquillity of the mind; and still keeps the heart open to the influence of amiable and good affections. *But the tongue is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison; it is a world of iniquity; it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell.*

Permit me, christians, in the last place, to remark that the most effectual correction of this unhappy propensity of our fallen nature is, along with the love of God our heavenly Father, and with charity to

mankind who are his offspring, to cultivate the spirit of genuine humility. If men will humbly and penitently reflect on their innumerable offences against Almighty God, it will restrain that self-sufficiency and pride, which is prone to comment severely on the errors of our fellow christians, and extinguish that uncharitable spirit which is ever ready to blazon them to their injury. Carry forward your view to the supreme tribunal of heaven; it will prostrate in the dust, that presumptuous arrogance which dares to judge our fellow sinners. Humility, like charity, in the bosom of a christian, *speaketh no evil, thinketh no evil.*

Almighty God! so influence our minds, at all times, that restraining the evils of a thoughtless or uncharitable tongue, *our words may always be seasoned with grace!* AMEN!

ON REDEEMING TIME.

Redeeming the time—*Ephesians*, 5. 16.

My Christian brethren! we have before us in the present life, a duty to perform, and an interest to secure, of the highest moment to every heir of immortality. The cares of our future and eternal existence are continually pressing for our most earnest attention, while the means and opportunities of successfully fulfilling these interesting duties, are rapidly escaping from our possession, and soon will be forever past. These truths, important at all times, were addressed at that period with peculiar force to the Ephesian converts, from the affecting circumstances in which the christians were placed. Persecution, in its most cruel forms, continually menaced them. Encompassed with chains, and with funeral piles, they were obliged to be always ready to prove the sincerity of their holy profession, and to seal their faithful testimony with their blood. In the midst of these perils it was, that this illustrious apostle exhorted his beloved children in the faith, to be ever prepared to meet the dangers, and the deaths which environed them; and to use, to the best advantage, for this purpose, the precious moments still indulged to them by the goodness of God.

He employs on the subject, a strong and unusual figure, *redeeming the time*, as if by extraordinary assiduity in the discharge of every duty, and a wise appropriation of our whole time, we might purchase back the seasons which have been misapplied and lost; or gain additional leisure from our other necessary occupations to bestow, on the cares of our salvation, and the interests of eternity.

Although the external circumstances of the church are, at present, more prosperous and happy, and the fires of persecution are no longer kindled among us; yet, as human life is at all times uncertain, surrounded with thousands of seen, and tens of thousands of unseen dangers, the exhortation of the apostle, to *redeem the time* may, with no less propriety and earnestness be addressed to us, than to the persecuted saints of Ephesus. Perhaps, to us, it speaks with a louder voice than to them. Their imminent dangers imposed upon them the necessity of continual vigilance, and was calculated to awaken the most active zeal in every duty; while the lukewarmness and security of our age, lulling our watchfulness to sleep, and weakening all the pious energies of the soul, require its admonitions to be more frequently sounded in our ears, and more earnestly pressed upon our thoughts. It requires not less firm and established principles of grace, nor less fervour of pious zeal, to resist the temptations of prosperity, and the seductions of pleasure, than to encounter the terrors of chains, of imprisonment, and of death.

Let me request your most serious attention, then, my Christian brethren, while I endeavour,

I. First, to explain, and afterwards to enforce the duty enjoined in this precept, by the holy apostle.—

I. In its primary view, it implies the faithful employment of the whole of life in diligently fulfilling all its duties, and pursuing the great end of living, the salvation of the soul. By a wise disposition, and prudent application of our time, we may greatly multiply the useful moments of life, and compensate for many past neglects and wasted opportunities of promoting our own improvement, or essentially serving the interests of our fellow christians. And christians! when we recollect what a holy culture is requisite to prepare the soul for the mansions of perfection and happiness in the heavens; and what a solemn account is to be rendered of all the actions of life; when we remember, further, that all our acts, that all our words, that every emotion which rises in our breasts, every affection or impulse which we cherish in our hearts, is impressing some colour on our eternal destiny; and finally, that the felicity of the saints in the everlasting progress of their being, shall bear some proportion to the good which they have done in life, with what persevering activity and zeal ought every duty to be performed, and every moment be put to profit? One of the principal means of fulfilling this duty, is the happy and pious talent of making all our ordinary engagements in the world, all our necessary employments, and even all our lawful amusements, minister to the views of religion.

Some austere and gloomy men have vainly imagined, that, in order to *exercise themselves unto godliness*, it is requisite to retire from the world, and bury themselves

in profound solitude, where they may be continually occupied in a melancholy devotion—This is mistaking the spirit of the gospel. It is in the world, *amidst* its trials, its conflicts, its labours that our duties lie. For society we were formed by our own benevolent Creator. And the first law of our being, next to that supreme devotion which should terminate immediately on God our heavenly Father, is to glorify him by diffusing happiness through the great family of his children. Genuine and rational piety confers on a good man the divine art of living continually for heaven, and making all his occupations in life subservient to the primary end of his existence. He enters upon them in obedience to the will of God, he discharges them, as being always under the immediate inspection of God—In them all he remembers the reference which they bear to the final judgment of God—the idea of God mingles with all, and sanctifies all.

11. We are here presented with the most general view of this important and comprehensive duty. Descending into its details, it implies, in the first place, a more than usually earnest and diligent improvement of certain seasons in life, or opportunities occurring in the order of divine Providence over the churches, which are found to be most favourable to the cultivation of the principles of religion in the heart.

It has often been remarked that, in the pursuits of life, there is, to every man, a tide in his affairs, which, if wisely observed and improved, will usually lead to a successful issue; but if the golden opportunity be lost, seldom, or never can it be effectually regained.

The analogy exists, not less, in our spiritual concerns, than in those of a temporal nature—in seeking the salvation of the soul, than in pursuing the fortunes of the world. There are seasons, in the arrangements of divine Providence, which are peculiarly calculated to assist our improvement in divine knowledge, and in all the devotional exercises of the heart. They are commonly as transient as they are inestimable; and, when once they have passed away, they never return, or never, with the same favourable circumstances.

Of these seasons, the most auspicious to religion, is youth. It yields the heart more tender and susceptible to the persuasions of the gospel. Its softness, not yet hardened in a course of vice, is more easily cast into the mould of virtue. The arts and interests of the world have not yet depraved its ingenuousness, and rendered it indocile. This lovely period our heavenly Father regards with peculiar complacency; and he listens to the first lispsings of a child, who begins to seek his favour. Or, to change the figure, according to the beautiful imagery of the parable in the Gospel, he meets, with affectionate warmth, the return of the young prodigal, who, sensible of his errors, desires again to find a refuge in the compassions and forgiveness of a Father. But after the susceptibility, and openness to instruction of this age is passed away, the Holy Spirit speaks to the heart less frequently, and, when he does speak, his *still, small voice* is more easily drowned in the clamours, and the cares of the world.

Youth is the spring of our being, the precious seed time of eternity, which, under a wise and faithful cultiva-

tion, promises the blessed fruits of an immortal harvest. In this vernal and genial season, if I may be allowed to pursue the image, how much more may be done for the improvement of the soul, and the growth of its heavenly graces, than during the ardors of summer, when the passions burn in all their fury---than during the busy cares of autumn, when interest only occupies the heart---than during the frozen winter of age, when the affections are all locked up, and the powers of nature are all in decay?—To descend from this strain of figure, youth is the season of improvement; the happy period most favourable for introducing the principles of piety into the mind, and cherishing the warm affections and the sacred glow of religion. The advance of life may be more distinguished for stability of character, for prudence and wisdom; but the fervors of piety, of charity, and divine love, flourish chiefly in youth. Then is the period which requires the most earnest application of mind for the cultivation of every praiseworthy talent of our nature, and of every divine grace that habitually elevates the soul to heaven. If youth has been misspent, manhood becomes, in consequence, void of worth, age sinks into contempt, and, most commonly, the fatal foundation is laid of shame and everlasting contempt.

If we may dare, without rashly interpreting the counsels of Heaven, to point out another season peculiarly fitted and designed by our blessed Saviour to call his wandering children to the bosom of his family, and to assist their progress in the divine life, it is when he is pleased, in the superintendence of his gracious providence over his churches, to move by a more copious

influence than usual of his Holy Spirit on the hearts of men---when we see a more solicitous attention awakened in the public assemblies of christians, to the truths of the gospel, and happier effects accompanying the administration of its ordinances. Whether these seasons have been prepared by causes more or less obvious, they are to be regarded as precious means to assist the cultivation of the immortal interests of the soul, while all the sympathies of human nature are engaged on the side of religion, in seeing greater numbers *turning from the error of their ways*, and the true Israel are perceived, according to the beautiful image of the Psalmist, to proceed with a more vigorous pace towards the heavenly Zion, through this dry and thirsty vale, while *all its pools are filled with water*. Opportunities there are, which impose on every christian, inviolable obligations to the most active diligence in all the offices of religion, not only by the blessings with which they are usually accompanied, but by the spiritual judgments with which their neglect or abuse is often visibly followed. The soul which they do not dissolve, they harden; if they do not persuade, they irritate the sinner; the sins which they do not exterminate, only strike their roots deeper, and extend them wider in a soil which has been partially softened by the rains and the dews of heaven. The most inveterate enemies of Jesus Christ, and of his holy religion are commonly found among those who were once, *almost persuaded to be christians*.

Apply these reflections, as they may be justly applied, to those movements of divine grace which are

more peculiar and personal. Seasons there are in the life of perhaps every hearer of the gospel, when divine truth addresses itself with more than ordinary persuasion to the heart; when Divine Providence has, by some interesting dispensation, reached its inmost feelings, and awakened it to deep and serious reflection. These are precious moments. Cherish their sacred impressions; pursue the pious and penitent resolutions which they have begun to form, and let them augment your earnest solicitude at the throne of heavenly grace. Know, then, the merciful day of your visitation, and improve it with diligence to the glory of God and your own salvation, whether it rises in brightness, like the morning sun unspotted with a saddening cloud; or descends, like the refreshing dews and shadows of the evening.

III. This important obligation consists, in the next place, in a wise and prudent distribution of the employments and duties of each day, and giving to each its appropriate season. Our time can seldom be less usefully employed than by an irregular and unequal attendance on its necessary avocations. But when each engagement commands its stated period; and the whole business of life has its order fixed, you multiply its useful moments, and every portion of your existence is made to contribute to some valuable end. But if the seasons of devotion, of meditation, and the various offices of piety, are wavering and unsettled, seldom can the soul be devoutly collected in these holy exercises, and raised to a due elevation of pious fervour. They are then easily turned aside, or postponed by every

trivial occurrence, and your affections become cold and unequal. In order, therefore, to redeem the time with the best advantages, employ it with order; appropriate to each duty its proper season, and to each season its proper duty. Thus may you prolong life; you may multiply its useful moments, and increase the value of each moment as it passes, for the most holy offices and duties of religion.

IV. The sacred obligation of redeeming time, includes, in the last place, such a recollection of the time which is past, as will make it a useful monitor to direct us in the wise employment of the future. The frailties of human nature require that it should be educated in the severe school of experience, that we may learn wisdom from our own errors. Too commonly the review of life, is only the review of its follies, of its omissions of duty, of the mistakes of ignorance, of the illusions of pleasure, of the surprises of passion, of opportunities neglected, of time misapplied and wasted. From a faithful retrospect of our errors, what instructive lessons may often be derived! Here prudence may learn to avoid the faults into which inadvertence has fallen; to escape follies into which passion has been ensnared: to correct the defects of precipitancy, or the more serious evils of criminal ignorance. If pleasure has deceived you, my brother, by specious appearances, if passion has involved you in disastrous consequences, let experience preserve you hereafter, by continually pointing to these beacons of your danger.

Another important instruction meets us, in this serious review of time. It is calculated deeply to pene-

trate the heart with its extreme brevity; that affecting idea so little realized by men in the moments of health, but always so justly alarming to the sons of guilt. In looking forward, time appears long, and we are often impatient of its tardy progress; it is only when we take a retrospective view, that we discern how speedily it has flown. The ancients painted these truths to the imagination by a very striking emblem. It was the image of an old man who had but a single lock of hair remaining on his head, and that was before; while the hinder portion was entirely bare. Conveying this most interesting moral, that, if we do not seize time and opportunity promptly, while it is advancing, and presents to us only this forelock, there is nothing by which we can arrest or detain it when it has passed. This aged figure, which carried with him a formidable scythe, that, in its destructive sweep, cut off all animated being, like the grass of the field, hid behind him, in his approach, an ample pair of wings, and seemed to move with the tardy and faltering pace of decrepid years, but when past, he spread his pinions, and flew with inconceivable swiftness. Behold, my beloved brethren, an image of time!

II. Permit me now to offer to your serious consideration, some additional reflections on the importance, the brevity, and the uncertainty of our time on earth, in order to enforce the duty enjoined in the text.

The importance of things may often be estimated from their connexions; and the life of man derives an unspeakable value from its relation to succeeding eternity. It is the season of preparation for our immor-

tal existence, in which according to the use, or the abuse that we make of it, shall be fixed the condition of every soul either in a glorious and interminable felicity, or a condition of wo which my heart shrinks to conceive, and my tongue fails to pronounce. My Christian brethren! how interesting and how awful this consideration!

If we see mankind so assiduously labouring as they do, *for the meat that perisheth*; for a perishing fortune which they must soon leave to others; or a perishing name which shall soon be buried with their ashes in their tombs, *how much more ought we to labour for the meat which endureth to everlasting life!* for the glorious distinctions, and the high rewards wherewith God shall crown the fidelity of those who love him!—For *the wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever.* Christians! can this narrow period of time, these fugitive moments, appear in a more interesting light than as destined to prepare the soul for her immortal being? The faithful improvement of this transient existence opens a path to glory and immortality which is terminated only by the throne of God.

Not only does our present life derive a reflected value from that immortal being which awaits us; but its importance is unspeakably enhanced by the consideration that it is the only season wherein the salvation of the soul can be attained. There is no after state in which the errors and mistakes of the present may be corrected. The voice of the Spirit of truth has declared;—*There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.* Do you not

hear the decree of Heaven announced in terms so explicit that no sophistry can explain them away? Do you not see it illustrated by the whole course of providence. If the season of education and improvement has been misapplied, can its lost advantages ever be regained? if you have neglected your seed time, can you hope to reap in harvest? Do not intemperance and profligacy implant diseases in the constitution, which no medicine, no length of time, no repentance can cure? and when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, judging the universe, what is his fearful decree on those who die in their sins? *Let him that is filthy, be filthy still. Depart ye cursed into everlasting fire!*—Yes, then, the merciful Abraham cannot send Lazarus with one drop of water to mitigate the intensity of the flames which consume them. Yes, when the Bridegroom is come, the doors of mercy are forever closed against the foolish virgins who were not prepared to receive him at his coming.

The dissolute and profligate often abridge, by their own follies, the brief period of the mercy of Heaven. Before they have run out half their days, they are given up to an impenitent mind; and the secret seal of the Almighty is already fixed upon their destiny. Behold then, Christians, heirs of immortality! the unspeakable value of this transient portion of time. Life, fleeting and precarious, contains the utmost limit of the season, and the means of salvation; of that period of our moral education which is destined to cultivate the soul for heaven. These blessings are, perhaps, restricted even to a brief portion of the rapid hour which is pass-

ing: possibly the present moment brings with it the only remaining offer of the divine mercy, which awaits thee, my dear brother. All the importance of eternity may be attached to each moment, as it passes. With what fervent devotion of soul, ought it to be redeemed, and put to profit!

If all the hopes of the present life, if life itself, to any culprit against the laws of his country, should rest upon a single moment; if the criminal had only this moment remaining, in which to solicit a reprieve, that was still in his power, how precious would that moment be? With what earnestness would he prefer his suit? would he engage others in his behalf? would he study to interest the public sympathy? would he set to work every engine which could advance his hopes? Alas! what is that little particle of time which a criminal could redeem from death, compared with his eternal existence? What is this frail and perishing life, if we could prolong it to its utmost period upon earth, compared with the ever during being which commences beyond the tomb? What is that stroke which it awakes all his energies to escape, however painful or however shameful it may be, which mingles only this corruptable portion of our nature with the dust, to that fearful decree which consigns both soul and body to Hell forever?

Could one of the happy children of light address you from the abodes of blessedness, in which he enjoys the ecstasies of eternity, with what immortal ardors would he proclaim the value of time? would he press upon you the wise improvement of the present

moment, pointing to the glory in which he now exists, and which, after a few more conflicts, awaits every pious soul in the mansions of the redeemed? Fearing the weakness of faith, clouded and darkened as it is by the shadows of sense, which once impeded his own progress in the divine life, and put to hazard his own salvation; how would he redouble the earnestness of his admonitions, and strive to reanimate your languishing zeal!

On the other hand, could you hear the lamentations of one of those miserable *prisoners of wrath, who are reserved in chains, under darkness unto the judgment of the great day*; in what fearful accents would he preach the same truth! Would not his lamentations be in the room of ten thousand arguments, to gain an access to your hearts? Oh! those precious means of securing the salvation of my soul, once indulged me by the mercy of Heaven, but lost by my folly, by my madness! In what, alas! have they ended? Terrible judge of the universe! only in these flames which consume me! When I look round, I behold nothing but unquenchable fires; but the horrors of despair! When I look forward to eternal ages, the same fires burn, the same horrors reign! Mortals! if you knew your present happiness! Just God! were not thy decree inexorable! could I regain the moments I have lost! irrevocably lost! how would I consecrate them only to thee! Yes, I would astonish the world with my zeal. They would call it madness; but to a soul that knows the power of thy wrath, it would be only the fervor and diligence of wisdom.

In the ardent sentiments of these heirs of glory, and

these heirs of shame learn, my beloved brethren, to estimate the preciousness of those moments which, by the unmerited favour of Almighty God, you still enjoy. What lessons on their pious employment do they teach to humble wisdom!

The duty of redeeming time is urged with increased force, if possible, by the solemn considerations of its brevity, and its infinite uncertainty. But how shall we give impression to these important truths, which seem to have lost their effect upon the hearts of men only by their constant repetition in our public assemblies, and even by the terrible examples of them continually presented to our view in the course of divine providence. O God! thou alone, by thy heavenly grace, canst effectually touch the heart, otherwise insensible to the instructions of thy blessed word! Give efficacy to these solemn ideas,—accompany the admonitions of thy holy providence, so often seen and disregarded; so often felt, for a moment, and forgotten, with the powerful energy of thy most Holy Spirit!

My brethren, look back upon the long succession of time that is passed. How many generations of the human race have been already swept from the earth, and *the places which have known them, shall know them no more forever!* And are not we, in our turn, hasting to pass from the view of men? The period in which we have lived, shall in a little time, be no longer remembered; or, if history record a few events, merely to connect the series of ages, they will form but one imperceptible link in that infinite chain. *Our days on earth are as a shadow; as the vision of the night; as a vapour which ap-*

peareth for a little, and then vanisheth away.—Great God! so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom!

If our time is short, is not even this brief period abridged by a thousand avocations?—by the cares of a family—by the engagements of business,—by the necessary refreshments of nature,—by the functions of our station,—by the decencies and civilities of society?—Take from life all that is necessarily, or unnecessarily bestowed upon the world; take from it all that is wasted in dissipation, in frivolity, in amusement, in mere inaction, and how small a portion remains to be exclusively devoted to devotion, and the cares of our salvation? And, is not that small portion continually escaping from us almost without our observation? Arrest it, then, in its progress by the power of meditation. Recall it daily to your own tribunal, rejudging there the actions of every day. Fix your attention deeply on its solemn and awful lapse.

A profitable exercise it may be frequently to set apart some stated period, as a birth day; the commencement of a new year; the anniversary of some remarkable dispensation of divine providence, and reviewing the interval between the present and the past, to demand of your heart how you have lived in the mean time; what you have done for God, for eternity, for the benefit of human nature? what ripeness you have gained for heaven?

It may not be unuseful, frequently, in serious meditation, to count the hours as they strike, or attend to the seconds as they beat. They are so many portions of time continually reuniting themselves with eternity. A few more shall beat, and the last shall bear us with

it on its wings to the tribunal of God. A celebrated poet has employed this thought with great beauty and force. —It was past the dead hour of midnight, and mortals, all insensible, were sleeping on the bosom of that mighty stream which is silently, and constantly bearing us along with it into the abyss of eternity.—The next hour tolled:—"The bell, saith he, strikes one! we take no note of time, but by its loss. To give it then, a tongue is wise in man. As if an angel spoke, I feel the solemn sound. It is the knell of my departed hours. —It is the signal that demands despatch.—How much is still to do!"

If to the brevity, we add the uncertainty of time, that fearful uncertainty, which every where meets our view in ten thousand affecting examples, can motives more powerful, or interesting be addressed to perishing mortals to be always *in readiness for the coming of their Lord*. It is the common and fatal error of mankind to count upon the continuance of time, and opportunity, till they are just vanishing from their possession. In health, they admit no serious apprehensions of the approach of death, till their last sickness has overtaken them. In sickness they flatter themselves till their disease has already seized upon their vitals. So true it is that almost all men perish suddenly at last. Some build their promises of life on the vigour of their frame; some on the elasticity of youth; and others raise their falacious expectations even on their old age, because they have already resisted so many assaults of disease, or escaped so many of the strokes of accident.—Ah! deceive not yourselves in a calculation on which such an infinite

stake depends! Do you count on the maturity of your strength? Alas! what is the fancied vigor of mortals, when touched, and withered by the hand of death? Do I see in this assembly, a few heads already blossomed for the tomb? Let your withering wrinkles, your gray hairs, your frail and tottering limbs be solemn monitors to you, that you touch upon the verge of the eternal world. I seem to see death beckoning *you*. Nor let the inexperienced ardor of youth, which gilds so deceptively the prospects of life, delude the young with the vain hope of having time to spare. No age, alas! is exposed to greater hazards. Your precipitancy, your inexperience, the delicacy of your frame which constitutes the principal charm of that lovely period, are your snares, and often the invisible pitfalls of your ruin. Death lies in ambush about your path. He points his fatal arrows at one and another of your companions. You see them fall in the midst of the triumphs of conscious strength and beauty. And thou, my brother! my son! thou dost not know if the next shaft may not be aimed at thee. AMEN!

THE GIVING
OF THE
LAW ON MOUNT SINAI.

In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai—— and there Israel encamped before the Mount. *Ex.* 19. 1, 2.

THE people of Israel, having left Rephidim, where that miraculous stream from the rock had refreshed their fainting spirits, and where Joshua had made his first essay in generalship in a victorious conflict with the hosts of Amalek, were encamped in the plain of Sinai, before that sacred mountain on which God had already appeared to Moses, to invest him with the high commission of legislator of his chosen people, and on which he was again about to appear in terrible majesty to promulge his holy law. Hitherto they possessed no known and written code, but were regulated by daily orders issued by their leader. All their controversies were brought to his tribunal to be decided according to a law in his own breast, or according to those lights by which, in special cases, his mind was informed from above. Henceforward, they were to enjoy a known and written system of laws by which they should understand both their duties, and their rights, and which should be interpreted and applied

by judges chosen from among the most venerable heads of families in their respective tribes.

To the legislator himself, appeals lay only in a few great and difficult causes. In that unrefined age, the extreme simplicity of manners required, and admitted of, only the most simple organization of the government, and the people, in their judges, found their Fathers.*

All the preparations for the publication of the law were made with the greatest solemnity. Limits, which the people were not to pass, were marked out round the mountain on which the glory of God was to descend, to teach them the profound distance at which they were placed from him,—the awful reverence with which they should approach the presence, or hear the commands of their Creator. They were required to purify themselves, to wash their garments, and to preserve their persons from all defilement, as emblems of that purity of soul with which we should come before Him who is holy, who searcheth, and will, at last, judge the heart.—And finally, they were called to impose upon themselves a solemn and national vow to obey the laws which were about to be promulgated to them from heaven.

The circumstances accompanying this vow merit your attention. Moses was called up into the Mount by God: probably by means of some voice distinctly

* The respectable and pious priest of Midian, the father-in-law of the legislator, had the merit of suggesting this judicial arrangement when he came to bring to Moses his wife and his two sons, whom he had sent back into Arabia, when he went into Egypt to deliver his countrymen.

formed in the air: for, that no image, or figure of any being was ever seen by Moses, he himself expressly and strongly asserts. He brings back from Jehovah a message full of affection, recounting the prodigies by which he had effected their deliverance in Egypt, and the care with which he had guided, cherished, and protected them in their dangerous march; and, concluding with the most gracious promises, if they should continue to observe his covenant, and to obey his word;—*you shall be to me a peculiar treasure above all people; a kingdom of priests? a holy nation.*—This message Moses communicated to the elders who were the magistrates, and representatives of the nation, and they to their respective divisions of the people, who, with universal acclamation, pronounced *all that the Lord hath spoken we will do.*

On the morning of the third day, as Moses had foretold, while the minds of the whole nation were suspended in anxious expectation, God descended on Mount Sinai, in the symbols of his awful Majesty and his glorious power. Clouds and darkness involved its summit; while the tremendous thunders and lightnings which issued from them struck terror to the hearts of that vast congregation. The mountain was all on flame, and the smoke, as a mighty furnace, ascended from it to the skies. In the midst of these convulsions of the elements, the trumpet, the image of that last trumpet which shall raise the dead and shake the universe, sounded long and loud. And as it waxed louder and louder, the whole mountain shook to its base. Then it was that God, willing to put a mark

of distinguished honor on his chosen prophet, and to stamp a divine authority on his mission, in the hearts of the assembled nation, called him, by a heavenly voice, to come up into the top of Mount Sinai enveloped in clouds and flames. Behold, then, this divine man, all serene, penetrating, if I may speak so, the bosom of the thunder, and approaching the presence of him *who maketh darkness his pavilion round about him, dark vapours, and thick clouds of the sky; before whom the earth shook and trembled, and the foundations of the heaven were moved.* How sublime the spectacle! what grandeur, what authority did it throw round the character of their legislator in the eyes of that great nation! There he conversed face to face with God his maker; and returned only to dispose them in order, to receive the law which was about to be proclaimed not by man, or by inferior agents, but by the awful voice of God himself. Then was the moral law, the basis of the political and religious institutions of Israel; that law which was afterwards written on two tables of stone; and which is inscribed by nature on the hearts of all men, delivered from the midst of the darkness where God resided; and each law was announced in thunder. That law, so apt to be forgotten by mankind unless when recalled by some dreadful dispensation of divine Providence, was impressed on their hearts by all the terrors of the Almighty. The people overwhelmed with fear, besought Moses that he only would speak to them, hereafter, in the name of God, *and let not God speak to us lest we die.* Moses again ascended into the Mount. The thunderings and the lightnings ceased. Only the

thick cloud remained upon the summit; and the holy legislator entered alone into the darkness where the glory of the Most High resided. He brought thence, after six days, the heads of his civil and religious polity, and reciting them in the audience of all the people, engaged them, by new vows, to their observance.* Once more, however, he was to return into the Mount, that he might receive from God in detail all the institutions of that singular, but admirable code, which was destined for the future government of Israel.

Committing, therefore, the supreme government to Aaron and Hur, during his absence, he retired, along with Joshua, his lieutenant and successor, into the cloud which still invested the top of the Mount, and veiled the divine glory which shone in the midst. Here, in a residence of forty days, he received from God the tables of the moral law, and the volume of his political, and ceremonial institutions.

Let us review the scene at once so awful and majestic, which we have just contemplated that we may derive from it some useful and pious reflections which may confirm our faith, and lead us justly to esteem our

* For this purpose, he took with him Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, as representatives of the whole nation, and on one of the eminences of Sinai far below the summit, but in the view of the whole camp, he performed all the rites which, in that age, were used to accompany the most solemn covenants. He erected twelve pillars, one for each tribe, as lasting monuments of the transaction,—he sacrificed a victim,—he spread a feast of which they all partook before God,—and finally he took the blood of the victim, which is called the blood of the covenant, one half he sprinkled on the altar, and with the other he sprinkled the people after they had, with one voice declared, *all that the Lord hath spoken will we do.*

own superior blessings under the milder dispensation of the gospel. All these glorious displays of divine power seem to have been necessary to give authenticity to the mission of this great legislator, and to procure from a people as yet rude and uncultivated, a prompt obedience to his laws. The lights of the great revelation of nature were beginning to be extinguished in the corruptious of the world; the pious traditions of the patriarchs of the respective nations were hastening to be buried under the growing mass of superstitions: when God would arrest this corruption, and rescue the truth from beneath the load of superstitious error which covered it, it became necessary to display anew before the eyes of mankind, the same omnipotent power which created the universe. He alone who gave the original law of nature could restore and republish it, if it has been lost and corrupted. When God determined to rear a nation to be the depository of divine truth, and of the hope of the world, it was to be expected that he would found it on some transcendent demonstrations of his power and glory. Miracles of grandeur, miracles of terror only could produce a deep and permanent impression on minds like theirs, or inspire that voluntary submission to law and political order which Moses desired to establish. What was the state of their minds? Bred in servitude, knowing no law but the will of their masters, they possessed not the habits of self-government, and were unacquainted with the institutions of evil society: just emancipated from slavery, in the delirium and intoxication of freedom, they were impatient, murmuring, factious. No means,

then, existed, by which such a people could be governed, except a military despotism, by which they would still be subjected to a master; or an institution founded on the awful power of religion, by which, while the mind was subdued to obedience and habits of order, it would, at the same time, acquire a sense of its dignity, and its rights. Moses was too wise, too humane, and too pious a legislator to aim at establishing a despotism which degrades and depraves the mind. He wished to infuse a degree of liberty into his government which was not known in that age, and which their habits and ideas had not yet prepared them to enjoy. He gave them known and certain laws which ascertained their rights not less than their duties, he entrusted their administration only to the most competent and impartial hands; and placed the whole under the sacred and inviolable protection of religion. And the most tremendous sanctions of religion, the most sublime displays of divine power, were necessary to subdue the untractable minds of this great nation, even to institutions on which their prosperity, and their existence depended. Other legislators, indeed, have pretended to a secret intercourse with some Deity, in order to procure veneration for their laws, and to strengthen their own authority. But who, like Moses, has conversed with heaven in the face of an assembled nation? Who, like him, has wielded the powers of heaven in the sight of millions? has obtained from heaven those illustrious testimonies which come home to the senses and the heart of every spectator? His miracles rested not on the credulity of vulgar minds,

nor could they consist in deceptions of sense. Could Moses, in the passage of the Red Sea, in the miraculous descent of their daily bread, in the tremendous tokens of the divine presence on Mount Sinai have imposed on the senses of a whole nation? Could he, without illustrious miracles have induced this nation, as yet uncultivated and disorderly, to adopt so holy and sublime a law? Could he have fixed its roots so deeply in their hearts as to render it more stable than the institutions of any other nation which ever existed?

The wisdom of the policy of Moses, in the next place, deserves to be admired and imitated, founded as it is in the purest and sublimest ideas of virtue and religion. A finer epitome of pious and moral principles never was conceived than that which is prefixed to the Mosaic code. It were too long to go into an analysis of those commandments, the sum of which is, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* With these principles in the heart, obedience to all the particular laws which unfold and detail them, will be both certain and delightful. Virtue, which is the most stable foundation of states, is itself securely founded only in religion. When religion is abandoned, virtue declines along with it. Impiety is the parent of profligacy of manners, which when they become general among any people, absorb the public affections in the pursuits of private pleasure, and the state is hastening to be overturned. Such is the order of Providence, that depravity of morals is not more

certainly the forerunner of the ruin of individuals than of nations. This serves to explain that sanction added to the second commandment, so often mistaken by the friends of piety, and so often made the subject of virulent and ignorant declamation by its enemies:—*I am a jealous God visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.* Declension to idolatry by the people of Israel would be the utter dereliction of the true God, whose glory they had seen displayed in so many astonishing operations; and would be in them the proof and the increasing source of the general depravity of the public morals. When a people is become impious and sunk in vice, their speedy ruin is inevitable. The disorders and evils of one generation are accumulated on another, till at length, all the ties which hold society together being dissolved, they become ripe for conquest, for horrible revolutions, or for some dreadful and exterminating stroke of Divine Providence. This is *visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children.* For this threatening, however it may applicable to individuals in a certain degree, has an aspect chiefly on the state of nations. And if we consult experience, which is the history of the world, we shall find that, when once such extreme corruption of public sentiment and manners has taken place, the fourth generation, or even the third, has seldom passed, before such a nation is sunk into the common gulf of states and empires. On the other hand, if the republic preserve

its manners uncorrupted, were it to a thousand generations, such is the force of virtue, it shall continue to flourish under the smiles of heaven. Oh! ignorant objectors to religion, who have spent your venom on this, as on a thousand other passages in the sacred writings, is it not, however, a just exhibition of the visible and established order of the moral world? Why then should not God declare it both as a warning and an encouragement to that people whom he had taken under his more immediate protection? Or is it harsher, or more unreasonable to declare it in terms than to act upon it in the government of the universe? Ah! how often does malignity of heart press against revelation objections which it has drawn only from the fund of its own ignorance. Unbeliever! explain to me the course of nature, justify the visible order of Providence; that is, explain and justify the first principles of your natural religion, and I will, on the same grounds, vindicate the doctrines of revealed.

But your time demands that I hasten to a conclusion. Let me, then, observe, in the last place, that the terror with which the law was delivered on Mount Sinai forms a striking contrast to the mildness and gentleness with which the gospel was announced by the Saviour of the world. Leaving, now, the particular circumstances of Israel out of view, which required the most awful demonstrations of a divine power to enforce that law on their acceptance, which they were not prepared by any previous habits or ideas, to receive; the terrors of the one, the peace and tranquillity of the other, are emblems of a conscience penetrated with a sense of

guilt, and of a heart restored to hope in the mercy of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. *The law is a school-master to bring us to Christ.* Not only do all the shadows of that typical institution continually point to the future Saviour, but the conscience of guilt, awakened by the violated law, could not be appeased but by those victims which derived their efficacy only from the great sacrifice which was offered *for the sins of the whole world.* *The law is holy, just, and good;* but for every transgression it denounces death on the sinner, or on the victim which stands in the sinner's room. And still do we not find that a guilty conscience forever repeats the thunders of Sinai in the bottom of the soul? To the convinced sinner the justice of God appears in the most terrible forms; devouring fires are kindled by it; and the dismayed criminal can no longer speak to the Most High, or deliver himself from the fears of instant perdition but through a mediator. Christ, by satisfying the claims of justice, by quenching the consuming fires of a broken law, by sprinkling the blood of the covenant on the altar, and on the sinner, restores peace to the heart, and opens the gates of eternal mercy.——The thunders of Sinai precede the still small voice of divine grace. And believe it, sinner, you must feel the full force of the claims of the law before you will ever be persuaded to flee to the refuge of the gospel. But to every convinced, humbled, and penitent soul, the gospel exhibits an immovable rock on which it may rest its hopes, an ark of safety into which it may retire. Rejoice then, O christian! that you are *not come to the Mount that might not be touch-*

ed, and that burned with fire; nor unto blackness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and that dreadful voice which they that heard, entreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: but you are come unto Mount Zion, unto the city of the living God, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling which speaketh better things than that of Abel. Behold, then, your encouragement and consolation under all the terrors of guilt, under all the threatenings of the law. But remember, O hearer of the gospel, and let the interesting truth sink deep into your hearts, that, in proportion to the consolations and the riches of divine grace, will be, at last, the terrors and the hopelessness of abused mercy. See, then, that you refuse not him who speaketh from heaven. For, if he who despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the spirit of grace? And what, Oh! what was the awful grandeur with which he descended on the sacred mountain, as the legislator of Israel, to the terrors which shall surround him as the judge of quick and dead! What was the trumpet which shook Sinai to its base, to that trumpet which shall waken the slumbers of death, and shake the mighty fabric of the universe into ruins! What were the fires and the darkness which enveloped its summit, to the blackness of darkness forever, and to the fires which shall never be quenched! What were the dreadful

thunders which petrified the camp of Israel, to those thunders which eternal justice will lanch on the heads of the guilty! Hasten, then, O sinner! to the gates of mercy while yet they are standing open, before the decree of heaven, which pronounces, *him that is filthy let him be filthy still*, shall close them forever. AMEN!

A DISCOURSE
ON THE
GUILT AND FOLLY
OF BEING ASHAMED OF RELIGION.

Whosoever, therefore, shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy Angels.

Mark VIII. 38.

To perform our duty, and then without ostentation to avow it, is our most honourable and useful character. It is fulfilling the first law of our nature, and extending religion and virtue in the world, by the influence of our example. To be *ashamed* of our duty, is to be ashamed of our glory. To acknowledge its obligation in secret, and yet disguise it before men, discovers a weakness and duplicity of mind, that is no less inconsistent with dignity of character, than with piety. The sentiment of *shame*, that gives, to the opinion of others, so great authority over our conduct, is, originally, a wise and excellent law of Nature. But, the depravity of man hath perverted the best principles, and changed the most ingenuous feelings of the heart into ministers of sin. Great crimes are evidently opposed to the interest of society, and, therefore, they are condemned by public opinion. The depravity of the human

heart is equally opposed to the spirit of true religion; and, therefore, the manners, and, at least, the ostensible opinions of the world, contradict the purity and simplicity of the Gospel. The one opposes vice in the extreme; the other tends to encourage vice in a certain degree.

The world hath so accommodated its conversation, its wit, and its opinions to its manners, that men, in the cause of piety, are afraid of incurring its censure or contempt. They want courage to oppose the stream of custom; they renounce their duty, in compliance with fashionable vice, or they conceal their inward reverence for it; and, against their conviction, they live like the world.

To be ashamed of Christ is a sin, that may be considered in a variety of lights. Our Saviour, in pronouncing this sentence, had, probably, an immediate view to the testimony, which his disciples would be called to bear to his name, before the tribunals of their unrighteous judges, where the splendor of courts, the scoffs of enemies, the ignominy of punishments, and the humble and unfriended condition of the first Christians, would all contribute to subdue their minds, to make them ashamed of their Master's cross, and to deprive them of the courage necessary to profess, or to suffer for, his despised cause.

Honour elevates the mind, and gives fortitude to the weak. Shame is an enfeebling principle, that takes, even from the brave the confidence necessary to avow truth, and the firmness necessary to endure suffering. Indeed, to be *ashamed* of Christ, and to *deny* him, are

so intimately connected, as cause and effect, that St. Matthew, in expressing this declaration of our Saviour, says, "whosoever shall *deny* me before men, him will I also *deny* before my Father, who is in Heaven."

Through the goodness of God, we are not exposed to persecution. But, living in an age in which custom, in which the powers of wit and ridicule, in which the honours of society, and in which even reason and philosophy have been engaged on the side of vice, we are liable to disguise the truths of the Gospel, and to be ashamed of Christ, with a more criminal weakness, than they who suffered their constancy to be shaken by the majesty of tribunals, and the terror of flames. It is this evil which I propose, from the text, to explain and condemn,

I. By pointing out what is implied in being ashamed of Christ, and his words, and,

II. By demonstrating its folly, and its guilt.

I. In pointing out what is implied in being ashamed of Christ, and his words, I shall treat of the sentiment of shame, directly, and unfold some of its principle causes, and consequences, as they affect the profession of religion.

I. In the first place the sentiment of shame. This, like other simple feelings and emotions of the human mind, cannot be easily understood, except, by exciting the perception, and calling to mind the occasions on which we have most sensibly felt its constraints. Let us recollect those seasons, in which a sinful regard to the observation of men, has tempted us to decline the duty to which we have been urged by our own hearts;

or, in which we have gone into criminal compliances with the world, through a weakness of mind, that was unable to support the presence, or to contradict the opinions, of our fellow sinners. Let young persons, particularly, recollect their fears, lest it should be known that they worship God, and pay, to the Creator, the first duty of a creature. Recollect what it is, that sometimes clothes you with a light, and thoughtless air in the house of God; afraid to be serious, lest you should appear too much to believe the Gospel, or to be affected by its truths.

When, at any time, the Divine Word begins to seize upon your hearts, what is it that excites you to shake off the conviction? And, when almost persuaded to be Christians, what withholds you from being persuaded altogether? It is shame. You are afraid the world will remark it; the world, whose presence weighs more with you, than the authority of an invisible Deity. If you feel the compunctions of repentance; you fear, lest they should be imputed to melancholy, or to weakness. If you perceive the duty and importance of making salvation your first care, and of honouring your Saviour by a public profession of his name; yet, you want the necessary resolution to encounter the world, to meet the sneers of your companions, their looks of suspicion, their hints of hypocrisy, their presages of inconstancy.

Thus, may every hearer understand this sentiment, by recalling to mind the occasions on which he has felt it, and on which it has checked his desire, or destroyed his resolutions of duty.

II. I shall farther illustrate it, by pointing out some

of its principal causes. These may be reduced to the three that follow; the pain of singularity, the power of ridicule, the want of sincerity.

Singularity is always painful to an ingenuous mind. It seems to hold us out, as exceptions from the general law of human nature, as insensible to its feelings, and worthy neither of the affections, nor of the confidence of mankind. Singularity always attracts the censure of the world, or, by contradicting general practice, or opinions, it invites contempt. The public manners have numbers on their side, sufficient to brand with ignominy, whatever, by differing from them, implies their condemnation. Superstition, contraction of sentiment, weakness of mind, illiberality of heart, are the mildest reproaches, that fashionable dissipation bestows on piety that dares to be singular. Wealth and power, objects before which the human mind is prone to bow, being too often on the side of vicious fashion, give it great advantage, in establishing wrong ideas of honour and disgrace. And, because the multitude of men of science, like the vulgar multitude, are frequently in the same interests, even philosophy and wit have been pressed into its service by these its obedient sons. To withstand so many formidable enemies, is an arduous task, even for confirmed virtue. Little is the wonder then, if first resolutions, in religion, should be shaken by them; and if the young should, sometimes, not have fortitude to bear up against them. To be singular in piety, is to dare incur contempt, for the despised cross. A hard sacrifice for human pride, and, especially, for juvenile virtue! Many more are found,

who are ready to forsake the Saviour, than who have firmness of mind sufficient to overcome the constraints of a false shame. Imperious fashion, both in conduct and opinion, will forever sway the wordly heart. To rise above its influence, requires an extraordinary zeal in religion, that seems to annihilate the temptations of the world, or an established and respected character in piety, that gives a man authority over his own actions. But, in the commencement of a religious life, and before a character in it hath become appropriated, as it were, and sacred, for a man to enter into the society of his companions with reserve; to go with it only a certain length; to seem to enjoy it with constraint; to reproach them, by more severe and corrected morals; and to incur their suspicion, obloquy, or contempt, requires uncommon prudence, and uncommon fortitude. How often does the dismaying power of shame subdue the heart, before so many difficulties!

2. Another source of shame is found in the power of ridicule. Ridicule is perhaps the severest assault, which a man about to enter upon duty is called to sustain. It is apt to dismay and humble him more, than the coolness of contempt, or the violence of power. So sensible of its force are some infidels, that, with this weapon alone, do they attack Christianity, which they have so long in vain assailed by reason. It is a species of attack which every man can use against religion; because all can laugh, though few can reason. It can be used against religion with peculiar success; because its perfections are often invisible to sense, or withdrawn from the view, while the imperfections of its professors, which

are mistaken for it, are obvious to every eye. The saints! The hypocrites! The weak fools! are titles that will furnish abundant sources of amusement to those, who mistake names for characters, and laughter for wit. And, when other matter fails, minickry, the lowest species of ridicule, comes in, with a thousand malicious and false additions, to dress out the last scenes of humble diversion. The wise and experienced Christian arrives, at length, to feel his superiority over these ludicrous attacks, but the young and inexperienced find them almost irresistible. They feel the humiliating contempt of laughter; they are degraded in their own esteem; ridicule dismays them; a senseless smile subdues their hearts; and, before a sinful generation, they are ashamed of Christ, and of his words.

3. In the consciousness of want of sincerity we find, another cause of that weak shame, which is prone to deny, or to disguise, our reverence for religion. Pretences to an unsupported character, are, in the highest degree, dishonourable and reproachful. The world, that differs in so many things from the disciples of Christ, agrees with them in condemning visible hypocrisy. Many young persons, dreading the contempt that is due to this character, are deterred from making a declared choice of religion. Conscious that a conduct grave, devout, and holy should accompany the profession of piety, and fearing lest they want that sincere and courageous zeal, which will enable them to make such a resolute and conspicuous change of life, as becomes the followers of Christ, they decline to appear openly for his cause. They are afraid of discovering for it

that reverence and attachment which they really feel, lest they should not be able to support the profession with uniformity and consistency. Ah! my brethren, if our hearts were sincere, the importance and glory of Divine things would at once decide our choice, and overcome the apprehensions of being ever willing to sacrifice them to worldly interests, or to worldly pleasures, to the solicitations or the sneers of men. But insincerity fears the reproach of hypocrisy more, than it fears hypocrisy itself; insincerity shrinks from the opinion of a worm, but does not tremble before the justice of the Creator; insincerity is ashamed of our glory, in the midst of sinners, who are forever glorying in their shame.

4. The consideration of the effects as well as the causes of this principle, will assist in explaining its nature. One of the most certain consequences of being ashamed of duty, is, to lead to boldness and audacity in vice. Shame is perhaps the evidence of a middle character, neither virtuous nor abandoned. It is always accompanied with some remaining reverence for God. But, judging, from the licentious face of the world, that other sinners are not subject to the same constraints, it blushes for this sentiment, as for a weakness. Endeavouring to cover its belief, or its fears, it assumes a greater show of infidelity, and licence, than perhaps is real. It soon affects to talk in the stile of the world; to divert itself with serious persons, and, at length, with serious things; it gives hints of libertinism, which it represents, as superiority to vulgar prejudice; it sometimes pushes these appearances farther than would be

necessary, if men were really infidels, to secure to themselves, without controversy, that honourable character. But conscious insincerity urges them to extremes, to cover its own deceptions. And, men being prone to form their opinions, no less than to derive their feelings, from sympathy, these mutual appearances contribute to create, at length, that vice and infidelity to which all, in the beginning, only pretend. It is, besides, a principle of human nature, that pretence itself will ultimately form those dispositions, and habits, which it continues to affect.

But, if shame more modestly resolves, not to renounce, but to postpone, the care of our salvation, is there not reason to fear that this unhappy resolution will eventually come to the same issue? Need I repeat, in this assembly, the usual fruits of delay? Ah! my brethren, men always find the same reasons for delaying; and those who, through a false shame, and fear of the world, postpone their duty, may usually be considered, in effect, as resolving to renounce it. If conscience, however, or if other motives prevail with some men, who are, notwithstanding, under the influence of a criminal shame, openly to acknowledge their Saviour, will it not often corrupt the principles, and pervert the spirit of religion? They study to accommodate its spirit, and principles, to the opinions and manners of the world, that the world, seeing nothing in their piety, but its own image, may cease to reproach them. Piety becomes, with them, prudential maxims of behaviour. The distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel, the denial of ourselves, the regeneration of the

heart, and spirituality of life, are little to be observed in persons, who are afraid of nothing so much, as of being remarked for religious singularity, and who aim no higher, than to pay the same ceremonious respect to the church which they do to the world. Lest their piety should be reproached as superstition, they are careful perhaps to make it understood, that they do not place too high a value on the public institutions of religion? Lest it should be derided as enthusiasm, do they not banish, from their devotion, all appearances of zeal? Lest they should incur the imputation of a narrow or illiberal mind, do they not often run so far into the principles and manners of a dissolute age, that hardly can you discern they are the friends of religion?

Having thus far considered what is implied in being ashamed of Christ and of his words, I proceed,

II. To show its folly, and its guilt. "Of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed." The folly and the guilt of this vice are reciprocal. They mutually contribute to illustrate and aggravate each other.

In this connection, its folly deserves, in the first place, to be considered with the most serious attention. It consists, in being ashamed of our true glory; in hoping to avoid, by renouncing religion, an evil which cannot be shunned among men, I mean, detraction and ridicule; in fearing an imaginary evil, that is, reproach for real virtue and piety; and finally, in exposing ourselves to infinite danger, for the sake of covering a fruitless deception.

1. It consists, in the first place, in being ashamed of our true glory. What is the highest glory of man?

Whether we consider ourselves as creatures, as sinners to be redeemed, or as moral agents, the most important lights in which we can be viewed, our glory and our duty are the same; obedience to the Creator, gratitude to the Saviour, and conformity to the laws of our nature. If God is our Parent, and the author of our being, doth not every idea of duty, and of honour, require us to worship him, and publicly to claim our relation to him? On the worthy and obedient child the virtues of the parent are reflected; and every-related object derives a splendor from the dignity of the principal. But, examine all the things on earth, that are the subjects of human boasting, and are they not, in his presence, “less than nothing, and vanity?” O, God! the universal Father! Origin of Being! Fountain of Good! in union to thee, in conformity to thine image, in obedience to thy will, consists the glory of the rational and moral nature! To be ashamed of thee, is not the absurdity only, but the madness of human folly!

Gratitude to the Saviour is the second duty, and the second honour of man. To show a defect of gratitude, where it is justly due, is a decisive proof of a degenerate and ignoble mind. But the greatness and condescension of the Redeemer, the meanness and the guilt of man, concur, in this case, to impose a boundless claim on our gratitude and love. Is it not our true glory, my brethren to feel, with all their force, the infinite obligations created by redemption? Is it not our glory, to acknowledge them with warmer gratitude, in proportion as they are forgotten,

or neglected, by the world? Yes, this is the dictate of a true, a generous, a grateful, as well as pious heart.

Lastly, the honour of man consists in fulfilling the end of his being, which is the will of God. But this weak principle, which makes him desert his duty, changes, at the same time, and degrades, his rational and moral nature, and sinks them from their original and native glory, the one, to a resemblance of brutal natures, the other, to an image of infernal spirits. O Man! ambitious of glory! afraid of nothing so much as of disgrace! Unwise and foolish man! Thou art ashamed of thy glory! and thou gloriest in thy shame.

The folly of being ashamed of our duty appears, in the next place, in vainly hoping to avoid, by renouncing religion, an evil which cannot be shunned among men, I mean, detraction and ridicule. What is the world, but a vast theatre, where envy and malice are perpetually sharpening the tongues and the wit of men against each other? What is half the intercourse of life, but a scene of obloquy and sneer, where the characters of the absent are the constant sacrifice to the vanity of the present? Where ever you have rivals, and that is, where ever you have acquaintance of the same sex, or age, or profession with yourself, you find those, whose weak minds have no other means of exalting themselves, but by depressing you. Change then your life, you only change the subject of discourse. You cannot gain, by continuing of the party of sinners, what you fear to lose, by embracing the cause of religion—their friendship, or their good opinion. And why should you fear, in the service of God alone, an evil, to which

you must be equally or even more exposed, by remaining in the interests of the world? I say more exposed, for it greatly augments the folly of this sin.

In the next place, that, while it incurs a real, it flies from an imaginary evil. It fears reproach for religion, when, in reality, the world has no reproach to make; when, instead of despising, it respects, the beautiful and supported character of piety. Wisdom and goodness, rightly understood, can never be the objects of ridicule, or censure. They vindicate themselves to the judgment and conscience, even of the vicious. Misrepresentation, to which an honest mind should ever be superior, is here the only ground of reproach. And what can, even, misrepresentation alledge? That, in youth, it is an affectation of wisdom and virtue above your companions, and above your years. Alas! can any age be too early to be wise, and to seek for real and durable felicity? If the multitude of your companions afford few examples of piety, is it not the greater honour to rise to a degree of wisdom, rarely attained even in mature life; and, at an age in which we think it much if you learn with docility, to be able, already, to give an example worthy of imitation? Will the world busy itself to find out false motives for your change? Let such malice serve to disgust you more with a world, the true character of which you are now just beginning to discern. Will they say, with a sneer, "Ah! this zeal will not last long!" Let such insult only determine your resolution more firmly to support the dignity of religion, by the integrity of your conduct, and by perseverance in virtue. If you do thus, be

assured that the world itself, after proving your sincerity, and spending its first resentments upon you, for having forsaken its party, will regard you with reverence and esteem. It is not indeed religion, but insincerity, and hypocrisy, they despise. If, then, you would silence obloquy, and obtain an honourable place in their hearts, be not ashamed of the doctrines of Christ. But you must be careful to mix with your religion nothing weak or superstitious, nothing libertine or worldly. Do not resemble, too much, the men of the world; it is their own image which they despise in a Christian. Persevere in the path of duty. They will convert contempt or hatred into veneration; they will applaud your resolution; they will envy your destiny; and, if they cannot resemble you, in their lives, they will secretly sigh, that their end may be like yours.

The folly of this evil consists, in the last place, in its exposing us to infinite danger, for the sake of covering a fruitless deception. "Whoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words (saith the Saviour) of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed." Wo to that man, of whom the Son shall be ashamed! God, when offended, might be reconciled through his atonement: but, when the Saviour is rejected, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins. Is this the issue of being ashamed of the Gospel? Is this the reward of that frivolous honour, which we would preserve, in the opinion of a corrupted world, by renouncing virtue? Is this the fruit of that criminal deception, which we strive to maintain by unworthy pretences, against the struggling sense of inward duty? Do we derive from it even

present gain, to make a momentary compensation for the eternal loss? No. Worldly reputation and interest are, when rightly considered, in favour of religion. But, when the soul; when the hopes of salvation, when the judgment of God, are put in the balance against a slander, a sneer, a suspicion, a look of miserable mortals, and outweighed! oh! infinite folly! My brethren, eternity alone can disclose it, in its full magnitude, when we shall see, in the dreadful light of everlasting burnings, the vanity of human opinion, and all the terrors of that denunciation, "Of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed."

Having endeavoured, in few words, to illustrate the folly of being ashamed of religion, I shall, with equal brevity, illustrate its guilt. Its guilt consists, in exalting the authority of man above the glory of God; in ingratitude to him, who was not ashamed of us; and, in promoting vice, by the pernicious influence of our example.

1. In exalting the authority of man above the glory of God. His infinite perfection, independently on his rights as our Creator, has a supreme claim to our adoration and love. He is infinitely more worthy, than any of his creatures, of the fervent and entire devotion of our hearts. He, who hath created the powers of understanding and enjoyment, is able to fill them with consummate and eternal consolations. Not to love him, therefore, not to make his glory predominate over all other objects, is an evidence that the heart is blind to moral beauty, and corrupted in all its affections. But, to make man the arbiter of our duty to God; to

make the Divine glory stoop to the pleasure, or opinion of a miserable worm, is a crime beyond expression. Its malignity is to be estimated from the perfection of him who is offended, and, like that, it is infinite.

2. The guilt of this sin consists, in the next place, in ingratitude to him, who was not ashamed of us. Ingratitude, to a benefactor, is among the most detested vices. If the ingratitude of men, for the blessings of salvation, strikes us with less horror, than other examples of this sin, it is because we do not discern, in the light of faith, the infinite distance between the Creator and the creature. But, when he descends from his eternal throne; when the incarnate Deity submits to suffer; when the Divine glory was not ashamed of human weakness,—that sinners should be ashamed of him! Be astonished, O Heavens, at this! And tremble, thou Earth, who bearest in thy bosom such guilt!

It has sometimes been asked, by those who are not willing to make great sacrifices, whether we may not acquit ourselves of duty in secret, without exposing our profession to the view of those who would insult or deride it? I answer, No. Sincerity glories in its object. And, when God is the object, the soul, occupied in the blessedness of its portion, forgets, in a measure, the applause or censure of the world. His glory will be a sufficient portion, when the world frowns. The sense of his love will support the heart against the fear of its reproach. Shame to that worldly prudence that is ashamed of its God! Shall sin, the disgrace of our nature, walk among us with elevated and impudent forehead? And shall religion, the glory of the reasonable

soul, blush and retire, lest the profane eyes of men, dazzled with its beauty, should not be able to endure the sight?

3. Its guilt consists, in the last place, in promoting vice, by the pernicious influence of our example. Example is contagious; and the world becomes more corrupted, from the vice that is already in it. To decline the profession of religion, through false shame, is, in some respects, more injurious to the interests of virtue in the world, than open impiety. This, sometimes prevents imitation, by a certain horror at its enormity: That, by preserving greater decency, more effectually insinuates its poison. Your example proclaims your unbelief, or your contempt of the Gospel, and invites others to receive it with incredulity, or to treat it with scorn. In the account of Divine justice, the depravity, and perhaps the perdition, of many sinners shall be charged to that criminal shame, which alienates you from the life of God, and shall go to augment your guilt.

In the conclusion of this discourse, permit me to remark, that, although Divine grace alone can effectually secure the heart, and raise it above the influence of a false and unholy shame, yet, it will greatly contribute to this happy effect, to have, early established, just ideas of honour and shame, by a well directed education. It is of great importance, in the beginning of life, to preoccupy the mind by good impressions; to teach it to reverence God, before it has yet seen the beauties of holiness; to honour, before it has learned to love religion; and to prepare it to despise, before it

has arrived to detest the vices, and the follies of the world. It is of the greater importance, because our habits and opinions are constantly and imperceptibly forming, by all that we see and hear. If religion does not, early, impart such as are rational and just, the world will, necessarily, prepossess the mind with such as are pernicious and false. False shame will withhold it from the influence of piety; false honour will raise up, within it, the most dangerous enemies to salvation.

Let parents and instructors, therefore, be diligent to discharge their duty, with fidelity, to the rising generation. The most happy fruits will reward your prudent and honest zeal. Reflect what advantages you enjoy, when you plead the cause of piety, against vice, and of Heaven, against the world. What can be more glorious, than the service of the King of kings? What, more great and worthy than virtue, which brings to perfection all the best and noblest principles of human nature? Religion is the true glory, as well as happiness of man. Sin only is his real shame. It is accompanied, besides, with unspeakable danger, and is speedily tending to eternal ruin.

Suffer me to extend, a little, this idea. It is strongly implied in the expression of our Saviour, “ of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of the Father, with the holy angels.” All miseries are included in this threatening. When God condescends to treat the sinner in this language of sarcastic contempt, it strikes me as the most fearful denunciation of Divine vengeance. Other threatenings

seem more definitely to mark their penalties: this, presents nothing distinctly to the imagination; but holds up every thing most terrible to our fears. Shall I call up to view the last tribunal; the Heavens on fire; the earth shaken, and moved out of its place; the elements melting, with fervent heat, before the wrath of God and of the Lamb? Shall I speak of Tophet, that is ordained of old, the pile whereof is fire and much wood, and the breath of the Lord, as a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it? And shall I not say after all, that his most fearful sentence is, “of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed?” This is indignant justice heightened by contempt. The flames of anger may consume the sinner. Shame will bury him forever, from his sight, in the depths of misery. What! banished from thy sight, O merciful Saviour of men! This is, indeed, the blackness of the everlasting darkness! Let those unhappy men, who are ashamed of Christ and of his words, deeply reflect on this dreadful destiny! To persuade you to this wise and necessary resolution, is the whole object of the present discourse.

May the Spirit of God add, to these instructions, his own evidence, and his almighty energy! May he impart to us a wise estimate of eternity, and time; of the opinions of men, and the approbation of God! And now, to the King eternal, immortal, and invisible be rendered, through Jesus Christ, all honour, glory, and praise, from all on earth, and all in Heaven. AMEN.

A DISCOURSE

ON THE

NATURE AND DANGER OF SMALL FAULTS.

THOU SHALT NOT SURELY DIE.—*Genesis iii. 4.*

THIS is a suggestion that arose in the breast of the mother of mankind, and encouraged her to the commission of a crime, that hath involved the whole race in vice and misery. Plucking the fruit appeared, to her, to be among those actions which have been left indifferent by Nature; and plucking it from a forbidden tree, was probably represented, by her curiosity, to be among the small and venial errors, that may be indulged to human weakness.

A like suggestion is continually rising in the breasts of all her children, on those vices to which they are strongly prompted by inclination and by pleasure. Pleasure invests vice with a charm that deceives the heart; and, although satiety often strips the delusion from indulgence and gives a momentary force to the sentiments of conscience, that condemn it; yet, nature speedily recovers her tone; the same pleasures grow again to be enjoyed, and again surround their objects with the delusive appearances of pardonable weakness, or of doubtful innocence. They are forever repeating, like the first temptation, "Thou shalt not surely die."

The call of pleasure is esteemed the voice of Nature, when, by Nature, is meant only a factitious depravity, which hath become ingrafted by habit in the constitution. How often do we hear it contended, that a merciful Creator could not have connected pleasure with guilt; but, that where we find gratification, we may fairly conclude we are within the bounds of innocence? In reasoning thus, we forget that Nature, ever luxuriant, gives birth to superfluities, in the moral, as well as in the natural world, designed to exercise the industry and virtue of man, in correcting or subduing them. The rich and abundant soil of the human heart produces weeds, as well as better herbs; and it belongs to the husbandman to eradicate the noxious and to cultivate the useful. But men are forever employing the most false and superficial pretences to justify their inclinations.

There are, indeed, some high and atrocious crimes which attack the security of society and the happiness of mankind in the most essential points, to which the conscience can seldom give its sanction, even after the longest habits of sinning. But there are some vices which every man studies, with success, to excuse; some which he indulges with less caution and restraint; some which he esteems small and venial faults, and on which he is always saying to himself, "Thou shalt not surely die."

These form a numerous and dangerous class of offences. Highly criminal in their own nature, they become the seeds of greater evil. They tend, in the na-

tural progress of habit, to weaken the power of conscience, to render inclination our supreme law, and to change, at length, the whole system of duty, and of truth.

These sins will form the subject of the following discourse, in which I propose,

I. To explain their nature, and,

II. To point out their dangerous consequences.

I. When I speak of small sins, I do not comprehend, in that denomination, those lamented errors and imperfections, that spring from the infirmity of human nature, in the best of men; I do not mean those evils, that sometimes surprise a Christian, in an unguarded moment, but which are speedily resisted, confessed, and effaced, by sincere repentance; I do not mean those, over which he is gaining a slow but progressive victory. I speak of such as enter into the plan of life; as are excused, because they are small; as are not recollected with penitence, but are studied only to be justified. They may be divided into such as are acknowledged to be sins, such as are of a dubious nature, and such as may be considered chiefly in the light of temptations to other sins.

1. In the first place, acknowledged sins, which are, however, palliated or excused, from the minuteness of their objects, from the rarity of their occasions, and from the force and concurrence of passion and opportunity.

(1.) Men, if they cannot be charged with those high and daring offences, that, by insulting the majesty of God, and disturbing the peace of society, awaken the

indignation, or the pity of the wise and good, are prone to flatter themselves with the idea of comparative innocence, and to hope, that the Divine mercy will impute their smaller failings to infirmity and not to guilt. Let me illustrate the observation by an example. If they abstain from blaspheming their Creator, or from persecuting and reviling those who serve him, they pardon themselves, as a trivial offence, their neglect of his worship, their indifference to the progress of religion, or their want of that inward purity of heart which alone is worthy of his children. If they abstain from open fraud, it does not wound their conscience, perhaps, to make an advantage of their neighbour's ignorance, or to impose on his undesigning and credulous simplicity. If they abstain from violence and bloodshed, do they not, however, justify themselves, though they hate their neighbour in their heart, and rejoice in an opportunity to injure his precious reputation, or to disappoint his lawful hopes? If they cannot be accused of that mad ambition that desolates the earth, are they not guilty of the same vice, though acting in an humbler sphere, by being proud, or insolent, or vain? If they are not chargeable with seducing matrimonial chastity or virgin innocence, yet do they not abandon themselves to those loose imaginations, to those soft and effeminate dalliances, which contain all the luxury of sensuality, while they only seem to abstain from the ultimate crime? Thus, while they do not proceed to the last and highest acts of vice, they plead, with success, an indulgence for themselves, at the tribunal of their own hearts, for all inferior evils. They even

claim some merit, perhaps, for the restraints which they impose on their passions.

(2.) They derive, in the next place, an extenuation for particular sins, from the rarity of their occasions. If they can seldom be charged, and on such occasions, only, as seem to excuse them, by the opinion, or the practice of the world, are they not prone to make their own apology from the general predominancy of a better conduct? Will you bear me, without offence, to produce an example that is perhaps too common? Have we not known men, who, in their habits, were sober, temperate, and industrious; who notwithstanding, to show their hilarity with a friend, or to testify the sincere part which they take in seasons of public festivity, would transcend those limits of moderation and sobriety, which, at other times, they esteem themselves bound to observe? It is, in their view, a sufficient answer to the remonstrances of religion, to say, that these excesses are rare; and that, if the general tenor of life be regular and prudent, it is a rigid morality that will not permit us, at certain seasons, to indulge somewhat to the occasion.

(3.) Another class of acknowledged sins, which are held to be small, consists of those that are extenuated from the force and concurrence of temptation. Temptation is passion awakened by opportunity. The passions conceal the deformity of vice. Circumstance and opportunity excite them into ardour, and precipitate them into action. Pleasure, therefore, that bribes the conscience, and precipitation, that precludes reflection, both tend to lessen, in our view, the guilt of sin.

And, instead of penitently confessing, and deploring it before God; instead of condemning it, in the sentiments of an humble and contrite heart, too frequently, we seek a false peace, by extenuating its evil. The strength of temptation, we say, the attractions of pleasure, the coincidence of opportunity, the combination of events, were too powerful for human nature, and we hope that God will look with indulgence on the weakness of his creatures. Ah! my brethren, this is not the language of repentance, which never seeks to cover or protect our sins, but is disposed ingenuously to acknowledge, and warmly to condemn them. It is building our inward peace, and our religious hopes, not on the true foundation of the Gospel, but on the false ground of extenuation and apology.

2. Another class of these sins, that are considered as small, consists of such actions, as are of a dubious nature. The decision of the apostle, is founded in the highest reason. He that doubteth is condemned, if, under that doubt, he proceeds to act: Yet such evils usually leave a feeble impression of their guilt on the conscience; and men, who judge thus lightly of duty and of sin, will ever follow inclination, in contradiction to their doubts. Under this principle of action, it is easy to obtain every gratification that the heart solicits. The heart gives its colouring to all moral objects. If it cannot paint them, as absolutely innocent, it seldom fails of being able to represent them, as dubious, at least, and, under this form, to enjoy their pleasures.

That principle is false, that invites us to act against our doubts; or, that supposes dubiety affords an equal

chance for the action being virtuous. On the other hand, it necessarily involves guilt. It is often the result of criminal ignorance; it is more frequently the result of criminal passion; it poisons innocence itself; and it renders vice, if possible, more guilty, because it is the depravity of the heart that creates the uncertainty.

As vice consists less in the kind, than in the circumstances and degrees of action, a wide and diversified field is hereby opened for self deception. The gradual increments of passion are infinitely minute; the circumstances of actions are infinitely various, and contain in them something peculiar to the character and state of every person. The progressive shades of conduct, if I may speak so, are so delicate, their limits seem to be so blended, as to afford an endless scope for uncertainty, especially to those who do not wish to see. Pious men are afraid to approach this dubious boundary. They deny themselves, therefore, many lawful enjoyments, that they may restrain indulgence, clearly, within the limit of innocence, which, when attempted to be too nicely traced, is always uncertain. Vice loves to lurk in these obscure confines, that, in their uncertainty, it may find an excuse for transgressing them; that it may enjoy its beloved pleasures, without suffering the reproaches of guilt; and that, wrapped in its own shades, and concealed from its own view, it may flatter itself it is also concealed from the view of God. Conscience, indeed, amidst this darkness and doubt, often raises its voice and shakes the breast with secret terrors: But they are as often calmed, by the dangerous opinion that they

are sins of only small, or dubious guilt. Thus, all these inward admonitions perish without fruit, and the soul returns to that state of doubt, which it makes both the motive, and the protection of vice.

3. A third class, consists of such as may be considered chiefly in the light of temptations to other sins. Temptation, voluntarily indulged, is a lower degree of the vice to which it leads. A good man, who fears sin, and, at the same time, is conscious of his own frailty, will study to shun its dangers, by retiring from them. Those who cherish the temptation, secretly love the vice: Yet, as long as sin rests chiefly in the thoughts and affections, and is not carried into open act; as long as it can be considered, rather in the light of temptation, than of compliance, men admit, with difficulty, the conviction of its guilt. It is viewed, at the utmost, as a small and venial fault, and, like the first temptation, is continually repeating, "Thou shalt not surely die."

Under the idea, that temptation indulged, that emotion and desire, when not carried into act, are not criminal, or are only small faults; how often are those places frequented, without caution, the contagion of which is dangerous to virtue? How often are those societies courted, whose breath infects the purity of the heart? How often do we; deliberately, throw ourselves into situations, from which it is almost impossible to escape without sin? Are not malevolent sentiments cherished, under the same idea, against our neighbour? Is not the tongue indulged, in an unchristian license, to depreciate his reputation? Do

not envy, repining, and discontent, secretly insult the providence of God, or openly attack the peace of mankind? Doth not passion exert itself, in a thousand unrestrained ebullitions? Are not the sweets of revenge tasted in imagination? Are not loose and sensual scenes enjoyed in fancy, and pictures of soft and effeminate indulgence created, in all their variety, and all their licentiousness? It is possible, perhaps, to be more sensual, in the continual reveries that occupy and dissipate a vain imagination, than in the most gross and actual vice. Sensuality appears here with a refinement, that may tempt even a noble mind; and it is exempted from those disgusts and disappointments, which always succeed and dash those pleasures, when they are grossly enjoyed. The heart abandons itself to the delightful delirium; and the conscience, little offended at evils that are not attended with public eclat, easily admits their apology. Small effort is made to overcome, or destroy them. They are ranked among the venial errors and infirmities of human nature; and, by degrees, they infect and corrupt the whole soul. This leads me,

II. In the next place, to point out the danger of this class of sins. This danger consists in their strengthening, insensibly, the corruption of the heart, and increasing its vicious tendencies; because they alienate from the heart, the aids of the Holy spirit; because they confirm our sinful habits and passions; and, because the human mind, in executing, always falls below its own purpose, in framing its plans of duty and conduct.

1. They alienate, from the heart, the aids of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit, however it has been abused by weak and enthusiastic sects, seems to be a dictate of natural, as well as of revealed religion. In some secret and ineffable manner, he guards the heart against the power of temptation, he suggests and illustrates our duty, and often sheds a peculiar evidence and persuasion on all its motives. But, as his aids are bestowed to render us faithful, so, our fidelity is necessary to secure their continuance. The voluntary indulgence of sin, tends to extinguish his lights. If he is resisted, he withdraws; and, in his holy Word, there are many examples, and many threatenings of his forsaking those who depart from him. "My spirit (saith the Lord) shall not always strive with man." The heart shall cease to feel the emotions and constraints of piety, in proportion as it persists to violate the affections inspired or the duties imposed by religion.

The Holy Spirit frequently enables a good man to combat the force of sudden and unexpected temptation, by the inward energy of Divine grace; but more commonly he secures his virtue by disposing him to shun its finest impressions. If, contrary to his faithful admonitions, however, we invite its dangers, and unnecessarily expose ourselves to the influence of situations, and of objects unfriendly to piety; if, for example, we enter too freely those circles, whose high and unguarded gayeties are dubious, at least, in the aspect they have on piety; if we amuse ourselves too often with writers, whose principles or manner is unfavourable to purity of morals; if we permit ourselves, through a display of wit, to sport sentiments which our own

hearts do not perfectly approve; if we voluntarily frequent scenes, that are calculated to inflame the passions and corrupt the soul: if, in instances like these, we thwart the tendency of the Divine Spirit, and rush into dangers, against which he would mercifully guard us; if, in these small combats, these preludes, as it were, to vice, we resist his movements, and quench his grace; may we not expect, that, in greater trials, he should leave us to ourselves, and withdraw that holy influence which we have abused? Doth not our own experience, my brethren, verify the threatening of religion? Are not our hearts growing more callous to the impressions of Divine truth? Is not vice losing its deformity, and becoming more practicable to the heart? And while, without reserve, we indulge in small sins, is not the guilt of great ones lessening in our view? Are not these the symptoms of the departure of the Holy Spirit? This is the first danger.

2. The second, is, that they strengthen the passions and the habits of vice. The human mind is ever in progression. Dispositions and habits increase by indulgence. Moral principles, in this, resemble the growth of the natural powers. Every exercise of the heart strengthens its tendencies. The indulgence of small sins contributes to inflame all the vicious passions. Its pleasures excite the appetite, and at length, render it too powerful for reason and principle. They weaken the force of conscience, which they have often violated; and they are tending, by degrees, to dissolve the obligations of duty, which they have so often relaxed. Each gradation of vice is so minute and imper-

ceptible, that we are hardly conscious of our progress; and, as every indulgence increases the tendency to gratification, it impairs, by degrees, the power of reflection, and the habit of self-command. What, then, remains to guard the weakness of the heart? What is there, of sufficient force, to restrain it from proceeding, at length, to every vice to which passion may prompt, and opportunity invite? Yes, my brethren, the habits of indulgence, created amidst small or dubious gratifications, cherish those vehement desires, which finally arrive to spurn at all control.

If, then, you indulge those loose and sensual emotions that agitate the heart, when it is not subjected to habitual restraint; if you use those perpetual flatteries to the sex, or those doubtful assiduities, which tend to suspicious attachments; are you not ultimately in danger of taking the most criminal licences? Or, to give an example of a different kind, if you cherish in your breast, those emotions of aversion or contempt, which are apt to rise against others, who differ from you in interest, in rank, or in manners; if you give yourselves an incautious liberty in ridicule, or in satire, and severe wit; if you indulge your tongue in expressions of disdain towards those who have displeased you, or in those little tales of obloquy and censure, that are perpetually creating dissensions in society; will not your affections, by degrees, be alienated from your brethren? Will not that meekness and benevolence, which ought to characterize a Christian, be extinguished? Will not animosities grow to be unforgiving and eternal? In like manner, if an excessive love of interest hath tempted you to little frauds, to be hard and overreaching in your

contracts, and to press with severity on your neighbour's wants; doth not the heart, in time, become unfeeling? Is it not preparing to go to the extremes of dishonesty and cruelty, when any great advantage may be derived from them? If you attend the ordinances of religion with a careless and irreverent mind; is not this the way, at length, presumptuously to profane them? If you treat virtue with derision, or with levity, in your conversation; if you use habitual and indecent profanations of the Divine name; are not the strongest obligations of piety thereby dissolved? Are you not in danger of mounting, step by step, to the extreme of vice, which sets at defiance both the fear of God, and the opinion of the world?

Besides the strength and irritation of the passions, created by small indulgencies, sin itself is gradually diminished, in the sense of its guilt, and becomes daily more practicable to the heart. The heart, not yet entirely corrupted, shrinks from great crimes; but decoyed and allured on, from one stage to another, it boldly reaches, at least, a degree of vice, to which it would once have looked up, and trembled. Each minute gradation is familiarized, by repetition and by habit; and the sinner, in his conduct, rests there perhaps, till, by a thousand apologies of self-love, and a thousand deceptions of the passions, offence begins to wear the face of doubtful innocence. The next superior degrees of vice are then considered as small sins, and, on the principle I am combating, we first venture upon them, and, finally, learn to justify, or to excuse them. Thus, is the heart insensibly seduced; and it may possibly ar-

rive to commit the highest crimes, under the idea of their being only small offences. Ah! how difficult is it, when once you begin to say, of any sin, "thou shalt not surely die," not to plead the same encouragement for all? It is easier, perhaps, to forego every unlawful gratification, than, after we begin to yield, to set any bounds to compliance. Appetite, accustomed to few indulgences, claims but few, and can, with less difficulty, resign them all; but, flattered and pampered, it soon becomes impatient of restraint, and, while it has power to enjoy, is still soliciting for new pleasures.

3. In the last place, the voluntary commission of small sins exposes to greater crimes, because the human mind, in executing usually falls below its own purpose, in resolving. If, therefore, men will take all those criminal, or doubtful freedoms, which they may deem, in any way, compatible with their general duty; if they aim, in practice, just to escape great sins; will they not, probably, be permitted to fall into them? The ball, that is too exactly levelled at its mark, sinks below it. To strike it, with certainty, we must take a higher aim. In like manner, we must, in morals, aspire to an elevated pitch of virtue, we must aim at perfection; if we would rise even to that imperfect degree of goodness, to which the pious sometimes attain, in the present life.

To those who observe the human mind with care, this will appear a natural effect. She forms her resolutions in retirement, when the objects of temptation are withdrawn. the passions are subsided, and the beauty and importance of religion appear, in their proper glory, to the eye of faith and reason: But, when she descends

into the world, and applies herself to carry her views into operation, the vigor with which she resolved is weakened, the liveliness of faith is obscured, amidst the impressions of sense, and the conflicts of passion. A thousand objects oppose her purposes. Indolence, interest, pleasure, ourselves, mankind, the universe, all tend to hinder their execution. It may be received as a sure and general principle, that he, who voluntarily indulges himself in small faults, will in the natural progress of moral habit, become a greater sinner. Virtue, indeed, is never secure, that does not guard against dubious as well as against acknowledged vice; nay, that does not renounce all appearance of evil, and aspire after holiness.

Having thus, from reason and experience, explained the nature, and the danger of small faults, and illustrated these remarks, by many appeals to our own feelings and observation, permit me, in the conclusion of this discourse, to urge on every hearer, as an object of the highest importance, to remark, with attention, the insidious progress of vice, and to guard, with diligence, against its beginnings, and its first impressions. Small faults are the dangerous seeds of higher sins. And all the most atrocious crimes in human society, may, ordinarily, be traced to these commencements. Vice, enjoyed in fancy, allures and corrupts the soul. The cherished ideas of sensual pleasure, that offer, for themselves, a thousand palliations and excuses, betray, or impel it to actual crimes. Places of licence and danger frequented, ensnare and enflame it; render vice, at first, familiar to the view, and, at length, prac-

ticable to the heart. Temptations, not resisted in time, and banished from the imagination, acquire too firm a hold. Omitting, or precipitating the duties of religion, or suffering their warmth and spirit to be relaxed, weakens the sentiments and affections of piety, and gives, to every dangerous and criminal object, an opportunity to impress its idea with vivacity and strength. This is the artifice of sin. It betrays insensibly. One gradation opens the way to another. Sin never could tempt us, with success, if all its deformities were open to the view at once. But the gradual and imperceptible access of temptation, offers no alarm to the heart. Pleasure, which gilds its object, justifies compliance, and throws over it a veil of innocence. And, at each gradation of vice, the next above it appears as a small fault. How many persons come, by these means, freely to indulge in vices, on which they would once have looked with aversion, or with horror? How many vices are there, that, once condemned and shunned, as threatening the destruction of the soul, now enter into the plan of life, and are incorporated into the character? For example, how often may habitual intoxication have grown out of a convivial humour, imprudently indulged? How often may a profligate impiety have sprung, from the apparently innocent ambition of pleasantries and wit? How often perhaps may conjugal infidelity, and the loosest passions have arisen, from the smallest of all vices, an extreme desire to please? Oh! what pernicious consequences flow from these apparently inconsiderable sources? The beginnings of sin are like the letting out of a flood, which wears itself a wider,

and a wider passage, till, at last, it deluges the whole land.

Finally, therefore, let me urge it on every serious hearer to avoid these sins, as being among the most dangerous, as well as insidious enemies of the soul. Do you not perceive, my brethren, what ruinous consequences they bring in their train? and how insensibly this ruin steals upon the heart? While you are saying peace and safety! then sudden destruction cometh. While you are repeating, "thou shalt not surely die," the decree of death issues from the sovereign and irresistible justice of God. Beware of small faults; they terminate in great sins, and, eventually, in certain perdition. What ever pleasures they offer, or by whatever deceptions they beguile the heart, you are called, resolutely, to sacrifice them to the glory of God, and to your own present peace, and your eternal salvation. Christians! is this an arduous labour? Have you not, already, resisted the greatest temptations? Have you not, already, overcome the greatest sins? Is not the most painful conflicts, already past? Nothing remains to you, one would think, but light victories over an inconsiderable enemy. Engage, therefore, in this warfare, with resolution and decision; resolve to destroy every sin, the smallest, as well as the greatest. If they are small, do not, for such trivial gratifications, endanger your eternal hopes. And in this pious and noble labour, cease not, till you have rendered the work of virtue and holiness complete. Fervently implore the aid of the Holy Spirit, without whose grace our own resolutions will be ineffectual. And, may the God of all mercy and

love strengthen our virtue, and animate our holy purposes, for Christ's sake. AMEN.

Now, to Him, who is able to keep you from *falling*, and to present you, *faultless*, before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy, to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now, and forever. AMEN.

CHARITY.

But the greatest of these is charity. 1 *Cor.* xiii. 13.

THE history of human greatness is found almost exclusively written in the revolutions of empires, and the records of actions which fill the world with miseries and crimes. Religion entering more truly into the real value of things, and framing its estimate according to the rule of the divine will, would fix our esteem supremely on those silent virtues of the heart which, without noise or ostentation, tend to promote the happiness of mankind. Charity, which is only another name for that pure benevolence and love which chiefly assimilates man to God, is the constant theme of its praise, and the principle which it lays at the foundation of all its duties. The whole fabric of religion, indeed, may be regarded as the temple of love; its altars burn only with the fires of a holy love; and the consummation of its hopes in the kingdom of heaven, is but the perfection of that spirit of love which connects all intelligent and moral natures in the sweetest bonds with one another, and with God the centre of their common union. This is that heavenly principle in the heart of a good man, which the apostle, in this chapter, exalts above all intellectual attainments, above all the external rites and offices of religion, and even above all other graces and virtues of the heart.

Let me, then, on this occasion, christians, turn your pious meditations for a moment, on the nature and the excellence, of the gráce of charity; and endeavour to awaken your pious zeal to fulfil its duties.

The subject, indeed, is so trite that it hardly affords, in a christian assembly, any novelty of thought to interest your sympathies; but its utility, and its benign aspect on the happiness of society, will speak for me in the goodness of your own hearts, and procure an indulgent ear to the repetition of the most common truths.

Charity, in its original and most extended meaning, embraces in one word, the whole moral law of the gospel;—*thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* But because in the moral order of the world, much the most numerous class of our active duties terminate directly on our fellow men, the sacred writer has described this grace chiefly by its effects on our social relations. The term, however, has, by time and custom, received, in common usage, a more limited application, to a part only, though a most important part, of those social duties,—the assistance, and comfort of the most destitute and afflicted portion of our species,—provision for their wants, consolation for their sufferings, and that benevolent care of their instruction in the elements of christian knowledge, which will preserve them from the fatal temptations of vice, naturally resulting out of their unhappy condition, and restore them to some consciousness of the

dignity of their immortal nature.—To this limited idea of christian charity, the present occasion invites us, in a great measure, to confine our views. And a noble and godlike virtue it is, to take the poor and the distressed, and especially, the helpless widow and forsaken orphan under its protection. Or rather, should I not call it, a heavenly grace? For, till the system of grace and mercy was revealed from heaven, and its spirit had descended into the hearts of men, had the world ever witnessed such charitable cares, such benevolent institutions, as have grown up since that period, for the comfort of the desolate children of sorrow.

Let me intreat you, therefore, christians! disciples of the merciful Redeemer, to lend me your patient and candid attention, while I unfold, a little more in detail, some of the most obvious characters of this grace.—It is universal in its objects;—most pure and benevolent in its designs;—and in all its actions most beneficent.

1. This genuine philanthropy diffuses its benevolent regards, and, within the compass of its means and opportunities, its benevolent deeds, to the whole human race. No rank or condition of men, no sect, or name of religion excludes them from its kindness and protection. “I am a man, said a virtuous heathen, and nothing that concerns human nature can be indifferent to me.” There broke forth a sentiment not unworthy a disciple of Jesus Christ. A sentiment springing out of that felicity of nature which we sometimes see disclosing itself beneath the darkness of paganism; but which, cultivated by the grace of the gospel, exalts

man to the perfection of his being. Such a man, surrounded by the spectacles, and assailed by the claims of human misery, is ever prone to forget himself, absorbed in the emotions of his own benevolence. Health, fortune, talents are to him only so many precious means of doing good. To the destitute he becomes a protector, to the oppressed a defender, to the orphan a father, to the wretched a comforter. Even the miseries of vice, if it may yet be reclaimed, find in him, as in the Deity, a Saviour. All the distinctions which subsist among mankind are sunk in the common relations of humanity:—for *all are of one flesh*; the equal offspring of God.

2. But the true nature of this grace appears, in the next place, in the sincerity of its affections, and the purity of its aims.

Let us not love in word and in tongue, saith St. John, but in deed and in truth. What doth it profit, saith another apostle, though a man say to his poor brethren, be ye warmed, and be ye filled, notwithstanding ye give them not those things that be needful for the body?—Men may sometimes speak well, or even declaim eloquently, on the virtue which they do not practise: And charity, alas! has often flourished in good words and wishes, while it has been starved and barren in good deeds.

Not frequently, likewise, have the most liberal alms lost their acceptance with God, by the impurity of their aims, or the corruption of the source from which they flowed. Vanity has fed the hungry, and clothed the naked. Ostentation has reared magnificent hospitals:

and still more strange, the most splendid acts of munificence have sometimes, been merely a shameful commutation for crimes?—What then, is the genuine principle, and the standard of christian charity? Hear it from the mouth of the Divine lawgiver himself;—*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* In doing your alms let only the pure impulses of a benevolent mind prompt your hands and your hearts. No calculations of interest or of vanity ought in this holy service, to sway you: for *thy left hand shall not know what thy right hand doth.* And *whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.* Behold the equity of the gospel! It makes your self-love the measure of your charity to your fellow men.—In imagination transfer the feelings of the afflicted, the miserable, the dependent, to your own bosom, and whatever your consciousness that the claims of humanity, in your case would demand, in those claims, my beloved christian brother, read the benevolent law of your Saviour. Oh! merciful Saviour! if thy disciples always drunk deep of this divine spirit, would the children of wretchedness and poverty so often have cause to mourn that they were despised and forgotten by their happier brethren? would modest but unfortunate merit be so often compelled to retire from the eye of contemptuous wealth? Would Lazarus so often beg in vain for the fragments which daily fall from the table of purpled luxury? Would the penitent Magdalen be rejected, and her returning virtue be discouraged by reminding her, like the unfeeling Pharisee, that she had been a sinner. Would even the miserable offspring of idleness and vice be cast away

like a polluted thing from the pure bosom of charity, when they are not yet so far lost, but that they might be redeemed to society and to God?

Blessed Saviour! thy most benevolent example has taught, what thy precepts have enjoined, ever to cultivate a tender sympathy with the sufferings of our fellow men;—to cover, with the mantle of love their imperfections;—to console the mourning;—to raise the afflicted from the dust;—to embrace in the arms of our christian affection, the most necessitous, and wretched of mankind, who, notwithstanding their multiplied miseries, are still our brethren. Be such the purity and sincerity of those holy affections in which you are required chiefly to imitate Jesus Christ, your Lord, who deigns also, to be called your *Elder Brother*. —*Let love be without dissimulation. Not only rejoice with those that do rejoice; but, as still more becoming the lot of human nature, and the disciples of him who, for our sakes, became a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, weep with those who weep.*

Finally, true charity is distinguished by that active beneficence which is employed in doing good. If it rests in those instinctive emotions of sympathy which are the involuntary impulses of human nature on seeing an object in distress;—if it goes no farther than inactive wishes, and barren prayers, this is the mockery of virtue. Christian benevolence is ever operative, studying in proportion to its means, and often beyond its immediate means, to diffuse its blessings to that portion of human nature that is within its reach. What a noble and delightful employment!—to enter into the

plans of the Father of mercies! To dry the tears of the afflicted! To turn into acts of praise the sighs of the disconsolate! To pour a refreshing balm into the wounded spirit! to be like the angel of God to the widow and the orphan! Blessed is the lot of those whose riches are neither hoarded with niggard selfishness, nor scattered in an ostentatious and effeminating luxury, but, flowing, like a beneficent Providence, with diffusivemunificence, carry along with them the streams of happiness throughout society.

But, christian brethren, is great wealth always necessary to fulfil the duties of charity? May not mediocrity redeem from so many factitious wants, from so many useless gratifications of vanity the funds for doing good? Nay, will not benevolence find its resources in the very bosom of poverty? If it has not gold and silver to bestow, has it not its sympathies, its assiduities, its thousand nameless services, which are often more precious than silver or gold?

Charity is a habit of the soul, always in action; perpetually alive to whatever affects the comfort and happiness of human nature. Every event in Providence it connects with some benevolent emotion of the heart; congratulating with the happy, sympathizing with the distressed. Is the cold piercing? Is the atmosphere filled with contagion? It sheds a tear over the miseries of the poor. It devises the means of their relief. Does the storm rage? It sends to heaven its prayers for the houseless child of want, for the desolate traveller, or the perishing mariner.—Charity feels for every mortal. As it has opportunity, it does good to every

creature. It carries in its bosom, if I may speak so, the human race.

II. Christians! I have spoken to you of the nature of charity: listen, if you please, in the next place, to a few reflections on the excellence of this grace.

In its most extended view it is the principal end of all the instructions of the holy scriptures; it forms the most distinguishing character of the Redeemer of the world; it is the band of the moral union of the universe; it is the supreme source of the felicity of heaven. And, in the more limited view I am now taking of it, all these considerations concur to form the most endearing union of the believer with his fellow christians.

Throughout the sacred writing you perceive it every where inculcated with the most affecting and persuasive eloquence. It is the scope of all their histories, their laws, their moral maxims, their divine songs, their ritual institutions. The whole force of the Spirit of inspiration seems employed to kindle and cherish this holy fire in the bosoms of the faithful. One would think that the sole end of the incarnation and ministry of the Saviour, besides making atonement for the sins of mankind, and bringing life and immortality to light, to the miserable heirs of death, was to announce and reiterate to them these two commandments;—*Love God, your Creator and Redeemer—and love your fellow men, who are your brethren.* He who could have unfolded all the mysteries of nature, He who could have laid open the secret and infinite chain of causes and effects in the universe, has limited his instructions only to forming good men. Instead of gratifying the

vanity of science, his doctrine is designed to be the consolation of humanity—to unite mankind in one harmonious body in him who is the Head,—and to connect heaven with earth by the holy ties of beneficence and love.

If our blessed Saviour has given such importance to this principle in his divine instructions, with infinitely more beauty and force has he recommended it in his most holy example.

If the works which he effected for our redemption are too sublime for the imitation of mortals, behold him in his humanity, and in the whole course of his beneficent life, the amiable pattern of our virtue. It was one illustrious scene of benevolence. *He went about*, saith the sacred writer, *doing good*. When the Holy Spirit, who speaks in the Evangelist, would bestow on him the highest eulogy, he does it not in the pomp of artificial eloquence, so often employed to impose on the imagination, and mislead reason;—but in two simple words, *doing good*. Oh! virtue most worthy of the Son of God!—It is also, as I have said, the blessed bond of the moral union of the universe. Descending from God through all pure and intelligent natures, and returned from them to him in devout affection, it embraces and binds together the whole in the most delightful and harmonious ties. When God would reunite the universe to himself, and connect in one holy family the whole brotherhood of mankind, he sent forth upon earth the spirit of charity in his own Son. A mutual and immortal charity forms the perfect state of all holy minds. It was the glory of Paradise.—And

it is the state to which the gospel is tending, through the power and grace of the Redeemer, to restore our imperfect nature in the everlasting kingdom of the just.

Love is the true principle of the happiness of heaven,—that love which unites all holy and intelligent natures to God, the centre of their being, and unites them to one another in him. It is for this end in order to strengthen the root and habit of this heavenly affection, and to prepare its perfection, that we are placed under the present *discipline of charity*, if I may call it so, in his church and kingdom upon earth. Great part, without doubt, of the felicity, as well as of the employment of the celestial state, where God unveils the immediate splendors of his throne, shall consist in high and rapturous acts of devotion. But even the immortal powers of the saints made perfect in glory, will not be able to sustain an eternal ecstasy: nature will alternately require more gentle movements, and those softer pleasures which will be found in the delightful exercise of all the heavenly charities.

To recapitulate these ideas in a single sentence. The principal end of the Creator in forming this system seems to have been the *happiness* of man: or, if we would rather say his *own glory*, his glory consists in the happiness of the creatures he has made. That happiness is placed chiefly in the exercise of a mutual and universal charity. To teach the law of charity, the Son of God descended from heaven. Charity is the scope of all the instructions, the institutions, the examples of the holy scriptures. Charity is the image of

God, the glory of the Redeemer, the moral bond of the universe, the supreme source of the felicity of heaven. *Now, therefore, abide these three, faith, hope, charity; but the greatest of these is charity.* Faith embraces the gospel as the word of God, the rule of life, and the foundation of hope; charity is its spirit, and its sum. Hope discloses to the believer the motives of obedience, in the immortal rewards of piety and duty; of which charity is the essence and the sum. And in heaven the perfection of charity shall form its own eternal reward. Faith shall cease, being lost in vision. Hope shall be consummated, being realized in possession. But charity, but love shall exist forever. In the presence of the Eternal King, commencing a new career, freed from all obstruction and imperfection, it shall continually advance our nature nearer to the perfection and felicity of the Supreme and all perfect mind. Many reflections will naturally have suggested themselves to a christian assembly from the preceding principles and illustrations. A very few only I can select for your reconsideration. Among the first, a devout disciple of Christ, can hardly fail to recognize with holy joy the character of the living and true God whom we adore, whose nature is love. With what divine superiority does the gospel exhibit him who is the source of all being, above the multiplied shapes of error which bewildered and disgraced the reason of the blinded nations before the advent of the Saviour. Among all the phantoms which superstition has ever offered to the veneration of mankind, can any resemblance be found to him who places his glory in the fe-

licity of the universe which he has created? Where superstition and vice, for they always go together, maintain their blind dominion, we behold ignorance and cruelty trembling before the bloody altars of Moloch, or sensuality rioting in the groves of Syrian pollution. Shows, festivals, and fantastic rites are substituted in the room of those virtues of the heart, and that divine love which alone should reign in the temples of the Eternal. Merciful Redeemer! who has taught thy disciples to love one another, endue us richly with that spirit of charity which is thine image, the distinction, and glory of thy most blessed gospel! That interesting discourse, out of which my text is taken, proposes to us, in the next place the truest estimate of the respective value of religious principles. Speculative truth has, undoubtedly, its importance; the rites and ceremonies of religion, which give it its visible form and body, are not without their price; but that which is most essential to the spirit of the gospel is its tendency to promote the happiness of mankind. The true test of piety is its good works,—its imitating the benevolent labors, the munificent pattern of the great Teacher and Example of all virtue. What was the life of Jesus Christ but a constant exemplification of that active beneficence to the bodies and the souls of men, which should form the honorable distinction of all his disciples? What was the whole scope of his discourses, but to teach men to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God? On what shall turn his decisions in the last judgment, when seated on the throne of eternal justice, the destinies of the universe shall proceed from his lips?

I was hungry and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink; naked and ye clothed me; a stranger and ye took me in; sick, and in prison, and ye came unto me. And how does he himself interpret the spirit of this divine sentence? *In as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, ye have done it unto me.* O, Almighty and most gracious Saviour! what thanks and praise do we not owe thy condescension and grace, who hast so identified the humble children of poverty and affliction with thyself, as to make our charitable cares for them, the test of our obedience, and the measure of our final rewards from thee!

In the remaining portion of this discourse, let us, my christian brethren, turn our attention more directly on those objects of our benevolence, which have so deeply engaged the efforts of this amiable association, at whose request the present assembly has been convened. And, on this subject, I have the pleasure of believing that no prejudices arising from diversity of opinion, either on religion, or on politicks, can be suffered to enter this temple of charity, to obstruct the free current of your benevolent emotions. Here humanity alone pleads for her afflicted children.

The unprotected widow, and the helpless orphan, present themselves before you, to solicit your alms, at the commencement of a season always filled to them with peculiar distress. They have no language in which to express their own griefs. And they offer themselves to you this evening, through the medium of this benevolent society, the exquisite sensibility of whose sex has taught them to feel, and the sympathy of whose

pious hearts has carried them into the thousand retreats of female suffering in this city, to collect the simple and unaffected details which they here present to your charity, for the love of God. They lift, for a moment, before your eyes, the veil that covers the scenes of sorrow which every where surround you. Ah! could you enter into the innumerable receptacles of penury and want, and personally witness the infirmities of age, and the emaciated forms of weakness and disease, destitute of every comfort which sick and exhausted nature requires, pouring their disconsolate sighs to Heaven, while they seem forsaken of every human aid, could you, amiable children of affluence and ease! could you restrain the sympathy of your tears, and the munificence of your charitable hands?

If, to the other distresses of abject penury there be added, what often happens, a family of helpless children weeping round a disconsolate mother; who has no means of relieving their painful necessities; let the heart of a mother picture to itself the deep anguish of her soul! They ask for food, but she has only her tears to give them; they cry for a garment to cover them from the piercing cold; she can answer only with her groans; tortured with their incessant importunities, she can only weep with them, looking to Heaven, and to you. If, from the precarious supplies of charity, she can glean a scanty pittance for the most pressing wants of the present day, alas! how often does she know not where to find her next meal, or the next fragment of wood to light and to warm her hearth! How many, alas! struggling in the extremities of want, do I seem to see, like

the poor widow of Zarephath, addressing the prophet Elijah; *As the Lord thy God liveth I have but a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruise, and behold I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it and die.* Then surveying the melancholy scene around her, and anticipating the still more melancholy prospects before her, her full heart is ready to burst. And, indeed, she must sink down overwhelmed with her sorrows, if your charity do not come in, like the heaven-directed prophet of God, to restore life to her and her children.

Christians, these are not pictures presented from a too ardent fancy. Those whose benevolence prompts them, and whose activity and leisure enable them personally to examine these abodes of affliction, often have their feelings harrowed up by scenes that the benevolent heart hardly dares to contemplate, and that language is too feeble to express. In its anxiety to relieve only the most urgent wants, which continually press on the benevolence of this society, it is, alas! constrained to suffer all the anguish of an impotent charity. Oh! could the delicacy of those amiable females who shine before me in all the elegance of taste and wealth, consent, not to take these representations from my lips, but, forsaking for a moment the chambers of ease, to look into these receptacles of human misery, what new views of life would arrest your feeling hearts! What new impulses would be given to your christian charity, already so conspicuous? But another class of female sufferers, permit me to bring forward to your attention, christians! not less to be pitied perhaps, though they

do not offer to the eye such obvious spectacles of distress. They have once been more happy, and their timid delicacy, which shrinks from contempt, and perhaps, some proud remembrance of the past, long restrain them from revealing their necessities; as long as they are able to support their sufferings, they devour their tears in secret. Their griefs, which they cannot resolve to disclose, consume their spirits and their health; and it is only the wan and anxious countenance of wo, that betrays to the discerning eye those cruel wants which they have long endeavoured to conceal from the world. Do you, whose feeling hearts understand the modesty and delicacies of an amiable woman, pity the deep and covered griefs that often fatally prey upon the finest sensibilities of human nature.

But the highly meritorious and benevolent association who apply this evening to your charity, have, for their objects, not only the comfort of distressed widows, suffering under accumulated afflictions, but the protection, nourishment, and moral culture of destitute orphans. And christians! what can be more worthy the disciples of Jesus Christ, who is himself the example of all mercy and grace, than to rescue from misery and vice, and to restore to society and virtue, those helpless infants who have no parent, no friend but God and you.

And for them we dare to solicit your benevolence in the name of your country, of religion, and humanity. No evil can more dangerously affect the peace and order of the community, than throwing into it that mass of ignorance and vice, which must result from abandoning the children of poverty without instruction, or

protection to all the infelicities of their unhappy state; whereas, by extending to them the hand of a munificent charity, you prepare for your country, a class of useful citizens, serving it by their labour, attached by the grateful remembrance of the benefits they have received from it, and strengthening its social ties by virtuous habits, and religious principle. Yes, christians, by this benevolence, you are discharging one of the noblest duties which, as good citizens, you owe your country, or, as christians, you owe the church of God. But, if society possesses its claims, does not religion impose its commands? Has not God declared himself the protector of the fatherless? And by bestowing on you the means of fulfilling this beneficent design, has he not devolved on you, also the sacred trust of protecting them in his name? Oh blessed Saviour! who, in the days of thy flesh, didst take little children in thine arms and cherish them; from that throne of glory, to which thy charity and love to mankind did raise thee, inspire our bosoms, here in thy holy temple, with the same divine spirit! and deign to accept the sacrifices of our charity, which, on this evening, we make in thy courts to the praise and glory of thy heavenly grace! Permit me, now finally, christian brethren, to address our invocation to you in the name of humanity.

When you consider the friendless condition of these orphans, thrown by the hand of Providence, on the cold neglect of the world, do not the strongest sympathies of nature plead for them in your breasts? Who, alas! remains to mitigate to them the injuries of their forlorn

condition? Who to administer the soothing of pity to their wretchedness? Despised and forgotten, or passed with contemptuous scorn by every casual wanderer, they seem to have no interest in human nature, not even in its sympathies. From their first capacities of action, encompassed only with the incentives and examples of vice, they speedily lose every ingenuous sentiment that should attach them to society, every consciousness that can remind them, for a moment, that they belong to an order of beings above the brutes that perish. And, when you look forward, christians, disciples of that blessed Saviour who hath brought life and immortality to light, who is there to implant one principle of piety, to cherish one spark of immortal hope in their young bosoms? How strong then is the appeal which these wretched outcasts make to your charity as christians, and to your feelings as men? If you regard them only as helpless children, most tenderly do they solicit your commiseration. But if you view them as immortal beings, the heirs of everlasting life, or everlasting death, how much more forcibly do they knock at the hearts of the disciples of the Redeemer of mankind?

If you will permit me, my christian brethren, in the conclusion of this address, to suggest an inferior, but certainly, a most interesting consideration; your benevolence this evening is not less necessary to soothe the hour of dissolution to the dying parent, than to protect the beginning of life to the destitute orphan. Death, so terrible in its own nature, is often aggravated a thousand fold to the feeling heart, by the prospect of leaving

a dependant family where there is no asylum to receive them from the contempt and injuries of the world. What must be the sensations of an affectionate parent, in bidding a last adieu to his beloved offspring, in this dreadful extremity? He is poor indeed, and we are too apt to think lightly of the feelings of poverty: but poverty has not quenched nature in his heart. Oh! dear but wretched portions of my self! What retreat now remains to you from that dark, dark cloud which I see bursting over you! Had I been spared, these hands could still have laboured for you. But who will be a parent to you when I am gone? Oh! my God! my own sorrows I could have born. But when I look on these children who exist, and are miserable, only because I once loved, my heart dies within me before thy last stroke. Merciful Father of the universe! To thy compassion, may I dare in this last moment, to commend them? Be thou their father and I die in peace!

Yes, christians, from heaven he hears the anguish of a parent's heart pleading for his wretched offspring; and he commits to your charity this evening, the duty and the privilege of saving them for him. Pity, disciples of your Redeemer! the griefs of a dying father, of a dying mother. Commiserate the tears and the sufferings of an unhappy orphan; or if it is yet ignorant of all its calamities, let that very ignorance prove a new plea for it to your humanity.

But, is there not another class of forsaken infants, the offsprings, on one hand, of unfeeling licentiousness, on the other of error and cruel deception, which no

less powerfully claim your charitable protection, not for the sake of the guilty parents who merit your deepest abhorrence, but for the sake of the unoffending little sufferer, whom, not its own, but their vices have doomed to be an heir of misery and shame. Christians! disciples of that gracious Master who received the penitent Magdalen to the asylum of his mercy! to that charity by which you chiefly resemble him, would I appeal in its behalf. Nay, to that sex conjoined in this benevolent association, whose virtues are most justly offended, may I not dare to appeal? Ah! let not your chaste and virtuous indignation against the crime of a wretched mother, stifle the sympathies that would move you to rescue a perishing infant. God forbid that I should endeavour to repress one indignant emotion in your bosoms against a vice, the bane of public morals, of domestic tranquillity, purity and honour. But ah! remember, that she has, most probably, fallen a sacrifice to cruel, villainous seduction. Unfeeling wretches! who can coolly immolate to your brutal appetites inexperienced innocence; who first intoxicate the heart by a well dissembled passion,—betray its too easy confidence by vows and oaths,—and then plant in it the stings of an eternal remorse! on you chiefly should fall the vengeance of public opinion, and the justice of the laws. Yet such is the perversion of our manners that you still continue to enjoy a certain indulgence in society, while the deluded victim of your perfidy is abandoned to despair. Gracious Heaven! what could impel a mother to desert her own infant? The weakest and most timid animals are inspired with

courage to defend their young: women for them will rush upon the weapons of death, or plunge into the midst of flames. Are then the sentiments of nature extinguished in her heart? Has vice converted her into a monster? No; the all-subduing power of shame has urged her to this act of horror. Great God! thou wast witness to the anguish of her soul while she perpetrated this deed. Penetrate with repentant compunction the heart of her destroyer! Let her deep contrition be the pledge of her restoration to virtue! And let a wretched infant, though surrounded with crimes, find an asylum in the charity of so many virtuous matrons, whom their own virtue permits, without shame, to snatch it from perdition! And do you, venerable fathers, do you, young men of virtuous principles, and generous feelings, endeavour by your charities, and by the moral and religious culture extended to these children of shame, to expiate, in some measure, the vices of so great a portion of your sex. Do I speak to one person whose *criminal arts*, perhaps, whose *perjuries*, have plunged a woman into infamy, or thrown a helpless outcast on the benevolence of the world? Oh! for once be honest: for once let a sentiment of virtue touch your heart; and here, in this temple, make some atonement for the sighs, the tears, the anguish you have created. Ah! cruel father! unhappy mother! how near were you being stained with the blood of your own infant, if the charity of those chaste and delicate minds who most deeply abhor your crime, had not rescued it from impending death, and you from so horrible a deed! Father of mercies! if ever vice, by such deeds of infamy,

shall outrage the morals and purity of a christian city, let not charity be ashamed to clasp the little sufferers to her bosom, and rear up children to virtue and to thee!

In behalf of female orphans, especially I address myself to that sex distinguished for the purity of their sentiments, the delicacy of their feelings. When you reflect to what vice, to what profligacy, their ignorance, their wants, the abandoned society with which they will be compelled to mingle, must expose them, unless redeemed from ruin by your charity, can stronger motives be proposed to the benevolence of your hearts? To a virtuous woman this is a state worse than death. Mothers! secure in the virtue of your amiable daughters; daughters! happy in the protection and example of such virtuous mothers! pity the unfortunate orphans of your own sex; and save them from vice and infamy. Christians! I have now appealed to your charity in behalf of your country, of religion, and humanity: suffer me finally to appeal to it in behalf of yourselves.

Your own benevolence will furnish you with your purest and noblest pleasures. What enjoyments are so sincere, or so nearly allied to heaven as those which are tasted by the heart in doing good? What so much ennobles human nature, as bearing the image of Him whose beneficence extends to all being: Every grief which you extinguish, every sigh which you suspend, every consolation which you pour into the bosom of the afflicted, redoubles, by reflection, your own happiness. And at last, when you shall rest from the labors and sorrows of life, how sublime will be your felicity!

to be surrounded in the presence of God by those whom you have contributed to save! to draw down on yourselves the blessings of those who were ready to perish! and to have the benedictions of your charity. AMEN.

PAUL PLEADING BEFORE AGRIPPA.

And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds. *Acts xxvi, 29.*

PAUL, in this eloquent discourse made in the presence of Agrippa, displays, as he had formerly done in that which he delivered at the tribunal of Felix, the talents and address of a consummate orator. This king, the son of Herod the great, had been educated in the principles of the Jewish religion; and, although a man of pleasure, was not unacquainted with the writings of Moses and the Prophets, nor, perhaps, wholly incredulous of their divine authority. The apostle, availing himself of this incident, boasts to Agrippa his Jewish origin, and displays his zeal in the Jewish religion, which nothing could abate, or divert from its fervent and excessive course, till the blessed Saviour of the world, arresting his career, poured round him a light from heaven beyond the brightness of the sun, and at once subdued both his prejudices and his reason, and cured his unbelief, by appearing to him in all his glory. The strength of early prejudices in Paul, and the ardor of his exterminating zeal, were vouchers for him that nothing but the most full conviction, the most illustrious miracles, could have led

him to embrace the gospel of Christ, and to be ready to suffer imprisonment and death, in that cause which he had, so lately, been persecuting with the bitterest fury. He now saw the scriptures in a new light;—he saw the types and prophecies all pointing, not to a conquering Messiah who should vindicate the Jewish nation into liberty, and subdue the world by arms, but to a suffering Saviour who should conquer only by his death. On this subject his tongue glowed, till the Roman governor, who understood none of these things, exclaimed, *Paul! thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.* With dignity, but with the profound respect due to this illustrious magistrate, he repels the imputation; at the same time he takes occasion from it to appeal to the prejudices of Agrippa as a Jew. *The king knoweth of these things, saith he, before whom I speak freely.* They are known to him not only from their publicity in Judea, but from their analogy to events which he believes in our ancient scriptures.—*King Agrippa! believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.* This appeal, so full of art, and so happily applied, this apparent confidence in his principles as a Jewish prince, touched the heart of the king. *Almost, saith he, thou persuadest me to be a christian.* How noble, how benevolent, how animated, and yet delicate, the reply of the apostle,—*would to God, that not only thou, but also all who hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds!* The address discovered by the orator in this conclusion cannot be too much admired. Finding that he had gained the ear of his principal

judge; perceiving, in the language of Agrippa, a rising interest in his favour, he instantly, and in the most masterly manner, turned it to his own advantage. After wishing for them, and for all the vast assembly which heard him, the happiness which he enjoyed as a christian, as a disciple of Jesus, and an heir of the resurrection, he just points to his chains as the only deduction from the sum of his felicity, and the only thing which he would not include in his wishes for them. Those chains speak powerfully for him to hearts already predisposed both to pity and admire him. He foresaw the impression they would produce; it was sufficient now *merely to point* to them, to make every spectator feel their cruelty more sensibly than could be done by a thousand harangues. Festus and Agrippa rise from the tribunal, and, penetrated with his innocence, take measures, with all expedition, to transmit him to Rome according to his desire. Sublime orator! of whose eloquence the master of Grecian critics has already made the eulogium, thou wast still more excellent and worthy of our esteem as a christian minister. Let us then, my brethren, consider the import of his prayer for Agrippa, for Festus, and for all that immense assembly whom curiosity had attracted together to hear this celebrated discourse. The apostle, feeling the strongest conviction of the truth, as it is in Jesus, and glowing with the love of his Saviour, and conscious of the ineffable happiness which flows from the belief and the hopes of the gospel, dares, though in the humblest station, though exposed to labours, afflictions, persecutions, and though now just drawn forth

from a prison, to wish for kings, and princes, the same felicity in the reception of that precious gospel which he himself experienced.

What then, is the happiness flowing from a sincere believer in the doctrines of Christ, which emboldened his courage and prompted his benevolent zeal to utter such a prayer in their behalf? In ordinary cases, it would have been deemed insulting to men of their station and rank in the world, to desire for them the happiness of a prisoner in chains; but the holy apostle, inflamed with a subject so interesting to him and to mankind, was moved by the consciousness that he was imploring for them the highest of temporal and eternal blessings.

The religion of Christ, embraced on the ground of conviction, and with the sincerity and ardor with which St. Paul received it, is a source of the most exalted happiness to the greatest and wisest, as well as the humblest, of mankind;—because it composes and settles the doubts and anxious inquiries of the human mind, with regard to subjects the most important and interesting to man, on a basis of immovable truth,—it offers to the affections of heart the most perfect objects to fill them,—it affords the only true consolation under all the calamities of life,—it elevates our nature, strengthens virtue, and opens to us the sources of the highest felicity in a future, a blessed, and immortal existence.

1. It composes and settles the fluctuating and doubting mind, tossed among a thousand anxious uncertainties concerning subjects the most important and inte-

resting to man. Without the aids of those lights from heaven which we can follow with security in examining them, reason is agitated in a chaos of doubt. In the deep of security which surrounds us, its feeble taper seems only to mislead us the more. Abandon revelation, and what can we know of the Creator; of the origin, or government of the world; even of our own nature, our duties, or our destination? What various, what incoherent, what contradictory conjectures have the wisest of men framed on these subjects which, above all others, they have sought to understand! O God! if by the efforts of reason alone we attempt to lift our souls to thee, and unite them to the infinite source of being, how are we lost and confounded! Ignorance repels us from thy throne, and we seek to know thee, in vain! Nay, could we be assured amidst the evils of the world, if there were a God; or if all things were governed by capricious accident, or by a senseless fate? If our destiny were indifferent to him, or if frail mortals might hope to find in him a father in whose goodness and compassion they might take refuge even in death?—Would not as many anxious inquiries arise also with regard to our own being? What are we? For what end do we exist? What are our duties either to heaven or earth? What shall be our destiny beyond this life? These are questions, and they might be multiplied without end, which involve interests the dearest and most precious to man; ideas which the eager curiosity of the reasonable mind is most solicitous to understand. But has reason, has all the wisdom of the wise ever been able to resolve them,

or to bring to light any solid grounds on which an anxious inquirer after truth can rest? No, we find, in the revelation of the Spirit of Christ alone, those lights which can lead the heart to solid repose. Agrippa was at this moment agitated by an important doubt. He was irresolute, and undetermined whether he should yield himself to the instructions of this great apostle of Christ, or resign his understanding again to all the uncertainties of his former state. Conviction on the one side, or rather the dawning rays of truth, and, on the other, habit, honor, pleasure, drew him different ways. Would to God! saith this holy minister, that I could withdraw you from the dark and dubious regions of nature in which you are involved! that I could make you partaker of those holy and consolatory truths on which my own mind reposes with such unspeakable satisfaction! That I could shed into your heart those precious lights which would fix all its waverings, and lead you, as they have done my own soul, to a perfect rest in God!

2. The faith of Christ is a source of the highest happiness, in the next place, because it offers to the heart the noblest objects of its affections. Would to God, saith St. Paul, that *you* were as *I* am, for my consolations are complete in Christ. And well might this prayer be made for Agrippa and for Festus, for princes and for people, for all who bound their pursuits and hopes by this world. What is necessary to happiness? Interests which are stable, friends who are sincere, pleasures which are worthy of our nature. And, alas! what are the pleasures which the world

affords? What are the pleasures, especially, which reign in the courts of such princes as Festus and Agrippa? Are they not those of appetite, of intemperance? Pleasures which are such, only during the moments of passion and intoxication; but leave behind them guilt, remorse, and humiliation.

What in the next place, are the friendships of the world? cold, interested, treacherous. For friends, do you not too often find rivals, enemies, secret assassins of your name and happiness? And are not the most splendid conditions of fortune still more than others, subject to these infelicities? And what is the ordinary state of society in the world, but an intercourse of insipidity, of frivolity, of indifference, of insincerity, in which the heart is deserted, or pleases itself only with delusions? What, finally, are the interests of the world? Is there any thing durable in them? Any thing which can completely satisfy an immortal mind? Are they not continually disappointing our hopes, and perishing from our embrace? Is not their pursuit tumult, their possession anxiety; and, if these are our only goods, their loss despair? Do not these agitations and fears more frequently harass the prince than the peasant? Do not the vicissitudes of the world more dreadfully assail the throne than the cottage? The hearts of those who are elevated to high stations and to power, have still less to fill the void that is in them than those of the meanest of their dependents. Surrounded with sycophants and interested flatterers, they seldom possess a single friend with whom they can confidentially reciprocate one frank and tender feeling

of the soul.—O King! if you would seek for sincere happiness, happiness that shall be durable and worthy of your nature, expect not to find it in the splendor of your throne, in the dissipations of your court, in that crowd of flatterers and dependents who surround you, in a word, in any of the enjoyments of the world. It is to be found only in the religion of that Heavenly Master whose grace arrested my criminal career, and illuminated my darkened mind, and in whose name I now preach. Would to God that I could impart to you the principles of that joy which passeth all understanding, now reigning in my breast, which the world, in all its prosperity, cannot yield, nor can all its adversity take away. This furnishes the highest and the only certain sources of felicity to a reasonable mind. But it must be a mind renewed, purified from the grossness of the flesh, cultivated by the spirit of God himself, to be able to relish, and truly to enjoy them. In God, in Christ, in the law of charity and love, in the contemplation of a blessed and immortal existence, the heart of a good man enjoys its richest treasures, its supreme consolations. In the Creator he finds the sum of all that is sublime and beautiful, that is excellent and perfect in the universe. In him all the powers of the soul may expatiate with eternal and unwearyed delight. But Christ is the mirror in which the glory of the Deity shines with the most transcendent beauty to man. In him the penitent soul finds peace with God. The fears, the apprehensions, the disquietudes of guilt are allayed. Without a mediator, no frail and sinful mortal can look up to the supreme tri-

bunal, or approach to the borders of the grave without fear. But in Christ repentant guilt has nothing to apprehend even from the justice of heaven. And let every believer say, if he does not afford to the heart the object of its sweetest and most delightful affections. Behold, God manifest in the flesh! behold, God reconciled to offending man! behold yourself redeemed from eternal death, and made an heir of everlasting life! What cause is here for the unbounded flow of gratitude and joy, for the holy ecstasies of love! O, Agrippa! thou hast never experienced, in all the pomp of royalty, in all the flatteries which wait on power, in all the excesses of criminal pleasure, joys to be compared to these. Would to God, saith the apostle, animated with all the fervors of divine love, that thou wert a partaker of my felicity, so pure, so exquisite, so surpassing all understanding!

Other objects of the heart in the law of charity, and love to our fellow men, I omit particularly to present to you, lest I exhaust your attention; but proceed to recall to your minds,

3. Another source of the happiness afforded by religion in the consolation which it affords in all the calamities of life.

Of this, experience had rendered Paul himself a most competent judge. Stripes and imprisonments, insults, and the excesses of popular fury, dangers and fatigue, hunger and thirst, by land and on sea, on the highway and in the desert, had constantly pursued him ever since, obedient to the heavenly vision, he had consecrated himself to the service of Christ. He had often,

as he says himself, been in the midst of *deaths*, for the cause of truth and of his ever blessed Redeemer; but the consolations of religion were superior to all his sufferings; and, at that moment, though a prisoner and in chains, he felt himself happier than kings and pro-consuls on their tribunals and their thrones. Whence did these consolations arise to the apostle? and whence do they arise to every sincere believer? From the glory of God, from the mercy, the grace, and salvation of the Redeemer, which, absorbing all the soul in the most delightful contemplations, and wrapping it often in the ecstasies of admiration, gratitude, and divine love, render it superior to all its afflictions. They arise from the conviction that all these temporary pains, which are part of our discipline upon earth, are, under the direction of a most wise and gracious parent, who *does not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men*; a merciful correction that will ultimately be converted into a peculiar blessing to those who love God; and that *these light afflictions, which are but for a moment, work out, in the end, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*, to those who enter heaven *through many tribulations*.

The world is full of calamities; and, commonly, as we advance in life, and, especially, as we verge towards its decline, the strokes of misfortune fall so heavily, and are repeated in such quick succession, that, were it not for the supports of religion, the tender and sensible heart would sink under them. And are thrones exempted from afflictions, more than cottages? wealth and splendor of fortune, more than poverty? Agrip-

pa more than Paul? Nay, are not elevated stations more exposed than the humble, to the fury of the tempest? Prosperity, while it gives an increased value to the world, and renders it more necessary to our happiness, at the same time softens, and weakens the heart, and makes all the vicissitudes of life the more terrible. High fortune commonly finds, in the latter end, men more treacherous, and the world more deceitful. But, when the world, and all its enjoyments, are about to pass away forever, how fearful is the grave, how fearful is eternity, to those who have no higher portion! Life was troubled, anxious, insecure; but despair rests upon the tomb.

4. Another excellence and felicity of religion, therefore, and one which gave the state of the apostle an infinite preference above that of his illustrious hearers, is the precious hope which it yields a good man of a blessed immortality. It removes from the grave that despair which covers it to the guilty, and adds to the consciousness of being a higher and purer enjoyment by the consoling assurance that we shall not perish in the dust; that life is there suspended only for a moment, to be restored improved to inconceivable degrees of felicity and perfection. Blessed and glorious hope! What ideas can contribute so much to elevate our nature, to strengthen the principles of virtue, and, from both causes, to promote the happiness of a sincere believer in Jesus Christ? Paul, when rapt to the third heavens, he saw and heard what it was impossible to express in the language of mortals, had still but faint conceptions of the glory that is to be revealed; but it

taught him to rejoice in persecution, it inspired him with a *desire to depart and be with Christ*, it enabled him to triumph over the last enemy of man—*O grave! where is thy victory! O death, where is thy sting!*—Was it not with reason then that the holy apostle prayed for his princely hearers, that they might be persuaded to embrace that blessed gospel, the divine fruits of which he had found to his own unspeakable consolation; that blessed Redeemer who by his death hath purchased, by his resurrection has assured to all his faithful disciples, everlasting life? Paganism, philosophy, that lax Judaism which Agrippa professed, could give no distinct ideas, no certain hopes of a future and happy existence. But without this hope, what are the pomps, what are the fortunes, what are the pleasures of the world, which are hastening to pass away, and be swallowed up by death? It is not merely the gloom of anticipated annihilation which is shed upon them; but conscience, with a boding voice often shakes the heart in the midst of its crimes with the most fearful apprehensions of a future retribution. And at no time, perhaps, are these bodings louder, or these apprehensions more severe than in the intervals of the excesses of pleasure. What are those *blue hours* as they are often called by the world, those distressful feelings of which the intemperate so often complain, but dismal anticipations of futurity? Oh! Proconsuls of Rome! Kings of the east! dissolved in luxury, enervated by pleasure, dazzled by the splendors which surround you, yet often trembling at that airy hand which, to the eye of conscience, is writing your condemnation, how supremely blessed is

a humble, persecuted apostle in chains, compared with you! Oh! ineffable consolation to have beyond this life the hope of living forever, of beholding God in peace, of being united in the blessed society of all those pure spirits who have been redeemed from the earth by the blood of the Lamb; of pouring into the bosom of the Saviour the eternal ecstasies of our gratitude, and of advancing forward, by an endless progression in the perfection of our being, towards the infinite source of existence, and of happiness. Ah! would to God! that all who hear me this day were both almost and altogether such as was this holy and fervent apostle, except his bonds! But why need I make this exception? You would be happy in bonds, in imprisonment, or death, if it were necessary in the service of Christ.

But, my brethren, remember that, for this end, you must be not only almost but altogether christians. You must not rest, like Agrippa, in partial convictions of the truth; in resolutions and wishes imperfectly formed: you must not rest in rites and exterior forms, and in a merely nominal and exterior profession of the gospel of Jesus. You must imbibe, you must be animated by his spirit. *Let the same spirit be in you which was also in Christ Jesus our Lord.* The higher you rise in your attainments in virtue and piety, the more richly will you drink of those rivers of pleasure which flow at God's right hand.

Endue us, O God! with thy Holy Spirit! Elevate our views, our tastes, our affections, above this world,

that, partaking copiously of the communications of thy grace, we may begin on earth, the felicity of heaven!

AMEN!

THE DESIRE OF THE APOSTLE TO
DEPART, AND BE WITH CHRIST.

Having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

Phil. i. 23.

WHEN we regard the present life as a period of trial destined to prepare our nature for a higher condition of existence: it will be the tendency of a genuine faith in the truth of the gospel, often to look beyond all the imperfections of life, to the full maturity of our being, and the glorious rewards, with which a faithful and merciful Saviour shall ultimately crown the obedience of his sincere disciples. *The hope of the glory to be revealed.* bestowed by the grace, and enjoyed in the presence of the Redeemer, affords the supreme consolation to humble piety under all the distressing vicissitudes of the present life. And when the evils of the world are multiplied, and the frailty of human nature is ready to sink beneath their pressure, often will the good man lift to heaven the eye of faith, as to his proper home, pouring his sighs into the bosom of his heavenly Father, that the moment may at length arrive, when he shall be permitted to *rest from his labours*. And in the progress of his pilgrimage, where harassed by temptation, or overwhelmed with grief for

the remaining imperfections of his nature, when hope is ready to forsake him, and the feeble and obscure discoveries of faith are insufficient to satisfy the ardent longings of his soul, will he not often be ready anxiously to exclaim, *when will the day dawn, and these shadows flee away?* when shall I lay aside *this body of sin and death*; and my soul arrive at its desired rest!

Such were the fervent aspirations of this holy apostle, under the numberless perils, and the unceasing persecutions to which he was exposed for the sake of the gospel of his Lord and Saviour. Nature almost exhausted, and sinking under the weight of his sufferings, panted for repose like the weary hireling at the close of day. And nothing reconciled him to enduring the load of life but the prospect of rearing to maturity those churches which he had planted amidst the most imminent dangers. Earnestly *he desired to depart and be with Christ, nevertheless*, saith he, *to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.*

1. Let me, then, in the first place, consider the import of this pious aspiration of the holy apostle, which has been frequently repeated by other believers the imitators of his faith.

2. And, in the next place, illustrate the principal reasons for which a sincere disciple of Christ may desire, when such is the will of God, *to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord.*

1. This holy desire of the apostle, and of every true believer by whom it is repeated, implies as an indispensable pre-requisite an humble and confiding trust in the *righteousness of the Redeemer*, and in his most gra-

cious *promises of eternal life*. Out of Christ, saith the Holy Spirit, *our God is a consuming fire to the workers of iniquity*. To them, therefore, the dissolution of the body, and the appearance of the soul before the Supreme tribunal, far from being an object of desire, is an event which necessarily fills them with dismay. It is only when our faith can rest its hopes upon *the rock of ages*, that it can overcome the painful apprehensions of our approaching dissolution. It is only when the soul, confiding with a holy assurance in Christ, can fill her view with that celestial glory to which he is raised, as the head of all his people, that she aspires to enter with him into her eternal rest. In this confidence she is able to meet the last enemy with a divine tranquillity, and, often, to rejoice, in the stroke which breaks the ties that hold her enchained to the corruptions of the flesh; and rends the veil which obscures the vision of all that she has longed most ardently to enjoy. Hence the saints in scripture are so often heard to speak the language of triumph in the prospect of death, and under the pressure of sufferings more formidable than death to the devout and holy soul. Being *justified by faith*, saith the apostle, *we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*. *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature,*

shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Jesus Christ, our Lord. Here then, *holy brethren*, you perceive the first principle of that fervent aspiration expressed by the blessed apostle, and which has often been breathed forth by the saints, to *depart and be with Christ*,—a firm trust in the righteousness of the ever blessed Redeemer, and founded on this, a lively hope in the future rewards and glory which await all true believers. Why, indeed, should not an afflicted christian earnestly desire this happy release from a suffering and sinful world, if, with the venerable patriarch, in similar circumstances, he can say, *I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand in the latter day upon the earth:—and though after my skin, worms destroy this body, yet, in my flesh, I shall see God.*

2. This breathing of the soul, implies in the next place, that the apostle had risen, by the power of a divine faith, above the undue influence of all the ordinary, and even lawful causes, which usually attach a good man, most strongly to life.

I do not mean those natural appetites for the common blessings of divine Providence which are inseparable from human nature as long as we remain connected with this system of sense. Desirable and lawful they are while pursued with moderation and enjoyed with temperance. But what are the highest delights of the perishing body, compared with those *rivers of pleasure*, which spring eternally from the throne of God? What the products of your most fruitful fields compared with the fruit of *the tree of life* which grows in the midst of the paradise of God? And although it is a

pleasant thing to behold the sun, will not the humble christian joyfully close his eyes upon it, who believes that he is entering into that city which *hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of the Lord doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof?*

But the causes to which I refer, and which are adapted to take the most powerful hold on the heart of a truly pious man, are the desire of being more extensively useful to mankind; solicitude to strengthen the habits of piety and virtue in his own breast, before he is called to appear in the immediate presence of his Supreme judge; and finally, the wish to promote the comfort and happiness of those who at once are most immediately dependent on his protection, and are the dearest objects of his affections upon earth.

1. Of these causes, I place first, the desire of being more extensively useful to mankind.

This holy apostle, notwithstanding his solicitude to exchange his labours for his reward, his conflicts for his crown, was ready, if such were the will of his heavenly Father, to continue in the midst of his sufferings and dangers, to rear by his care, and nourish with the word of life, the churches which he had planted by his labours. To promote the glory of God in the salvation of mankind, is the object of supreme desire to every faithful servant of Christ. United in affection to those to whom he has been made the instrument of spiritual good, he may wish still to live with them, to encourage and assist their progress in their heavenly journey. Ever attentive to the interests of the church, he may

be anxious to see, with regard to it, the issue of new and uncommon aspects of divine providence. Perceiving with grief how little he has hitherto done to advance the kingdom of his Redeemer, so dear to all the faithful, he may be solicitous still to remain upon earth, to repair, if possible, the imperfection of his past services. He may have laid down new resolutions of duty, new and more holy purposes of usefulness, which he may pray only to have time to accomplish. Yet these motives, however laudable, must be submitted to the sovereign disposal of Almighty God. If it is his will that you should leave the harvest in the midst of your labours, go without a murmur; go with cheerful resignation to receive a reward, in your own esteem so little merited, knowing that he hath other labourers whom he can send into his harvest. On the other hand, however ardently he may long for his eternal rest, he will be willing to encounter all the afflictions of this earthly pilgrimage, as long as his Saviour has one work for him to perform, or one trial for him to endure. *He is in a strait betwixt two*; but the will of Heaven shall decide his choice.

2. If a zeal for public usefulness contribute to strengthen his desire of life, it may, perhaps, be augmented by a pious solicitude to become more conformed to the image and the will of God, before he is called from this state of trial to receive his final reward.

This is a case, however, in which the deceitfulness of the human heart may easily mistake, in ascribing to a desire of increasing sanctification, only some feeble purposes of future duty. If it were simply his desire

to rise to the full maturity of his christian virtue; where can he so certainly attain the perfection of holiness as in heaven, when he shall have put off this body of sin and death? Ought not a believer therefore, to find, in these considerations even stronger motives to desire *to be absent from the body and present with the Lord*; and to look forward, as his chief joy, to those celestial habitations where *he shall sin no more*?

3. But a much more powerful tie to life, is the desire which is natural to all men, and which is often most strongly felt by the best of men, of remaining to provide for the happiness of those who are most dependent upon his protection. Those affections which attach us to family and friends far from being weakened, are strengthened and refined by the habits of virtue, and the spirit of piety; so that often they increase to a good man, in his last moments, the difficulty of parting with these tender objects of his affections; with the companions and partners of his purest joys, with the sharers and soothers of all his griefs, with whom he has mingled his soul, and who are become the dearest portions of himself. Ah! how hard the trial, if he knows that he must leave an afflicted and unprotected widow, orphan and helpless children, in the midst of a deceitful and ensnaring world. He has himself keenly suffered from its afflictions; he has experienced its coldness, perhaps its enmity, and to protect them from the same ills, and ward the anguish from their hearts, he would willingly encounter alone its severest assaults, and bare his own breast to receive all its shafts. But when he thinks of them, and that

he can no longer be their shield or their guide, his spirit faints.

Above all, the vices which are continually presented to youth in the manners of the world; the seductions which assail them, the snares which encompass their inexperienced years, fill him with afflicting apprehensions. If Heaven should prolong his life, he could protect their weakness, and direct their footsteps in the path of virtue; a thousand pangs he could ward off from their bosoms; but he is about to leave them, he knows not to what lot: on earth he shall see them no more, and he knows not if he shall meet them in Heaven. Ah! painful separation! how must it rend the heart of an affectionate parent, husband, or friend! Ah! the pang which must mingle itself even with the hopes of heaven in the last look which he casts on these precious objects of his love. In the midst of these overwhelming emotions, however, the believer finds a refreshing consolation in the faithfulness of the divine promise. *The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children. Leave thy fatherless children, and I will protect them, and let thy widows trust in me.*

Although the love of these dear connections, which have so powerfully twined themselves about his heart, forms the strongest tie that binds the believer to life, yet the love of God is, in his breast, a superior principle. Although his heart bleeds at the stroke which separates him from them: yet, leaving them in the hands of a merciful Saviour, he is resigned, and will-

ing to go to that land of vision, where he shall more clearly behold all the gracious designs of their heavenly Father toward them unfolded, and where, waiting for them, he shall drink eternal consolations from the river that, springing from the hill of God, carries immortal life and joy through all the regions of the celestial Eden. *My flesh and heart*, may he say with the holy Psalmist, *doth faint and fail, yet God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*

4. In the last place, the language of the text implies an earnest aspiration of soul to attain the perfect vision of God, the blessed fruition of his heavenly inheritance.

It is not the language of resignation merely, that the apostle speaks: it is the sighing of a labourer to finish his toils and be at rest—the anxiety of a traveller agitated with tempests, and worn with fatigue, to find again a secure and settled home—it is the prayer of a regenerated soul to escape from this region of temptation and sin—it is the longing of an exiled child to return to his father's presence, and to taste again in a father's love, those pure and heart-felt joys which, among strangers, he could never find.

Such will frequently be the aspiration, also, of all sincere believers during their passage through this afflicted pilgrimage, or as they are approaching its serious and interesting termination. In God their affections are centered. With him they daily hold delightful communion. But impeded by the weakness of the flesh, and the obscurities of sense, they often have reason anxiously to exclaim, *Oh that I knew*

where I might find him! Oh! that God would rend the veil that hangs upon my mortal vision! Oh! that the time were come *when I shall know even as also I am known!* when, released from all earthly attachments, my soul may be filled only with God! And now, O Lord! through all my remaining pilgrimage, so help me to live above this world, that, whenever it shall be thy will, I may with the holy apostle be ready and willing and desire *to depart and be with Christ!*

2. I now further request your attention, for a few moments, while I point to some of the principal reasons for which a humble and devout christian may justly desire, when such is the will of God, *to be absent from the body and present with the Lord.* These may be reduced to a very few and simple considerations. 1. The imperfection of the world viewed as the portion of the pious soul. 2. The afflictions with which the world abounds. 3. And finally, the hopes of a higher and immortal life, when the transient scene of the world shall have passed away.

The imperfection of the world will weaken his motives for continuing in it. Its manifold afflictions will render him more willing to depart from it—And the hope of eternal life beyond all its painful vicissitudes, will awaken his holy desires to take possession of his heavenly inheritance.

The imperfection and vanity of the world as the portion of a rational and immortal mind has, in all ages, been a fruitful theme of moral reflection. And the experience of all who have ever pursued it with the greatest eagerness, or enjoyed it with the great-

est pleasure has, in the result, confirmed the humiliating testimony of the sacred preacher; *vanity of vanities, all is vanity!*—Far would I be from indulging the complainings of disappointment, or the mistaken spirit of ascetic mortification, as if the present state furnished no sources of lawful enjoyment to a sincere christian. Pleasures undoubtedly, of a very elevated kind, he may derive from the consolations of piety; though greatly impaired from the frailties of a corporeal and sinful nature, and from our inadequate conceptions of the glory of God, and the boundless mercy of the Redeemer. Many exquisite satisfactions he may taste from the temperate gratification of all the senses in their proper place, though from the same sources often spring his keenest pains, and his most severe afflictions. And pleasures of a more refined and exquisite nature, he often enjoys from the delightful sympathies of society, the confidential intercourse of friendship, or the tender endearments of domestic love. But, ah! how short lived! and how often the spring of deep, and exquisite suffering! With infinite pain the dearest ties are torn from our hearts. The most cruel separations divide us from those whom we have most tenderly loved, and rend us as it were from ourselves, till death consigns them, one after another, to the house of silence, and leaves us, at length, nothing more to wish, but to follow them.

On the other hand, the happiness which the warmth of our hearts had once taught us to expect from the pleasures of society, and still more from the sympathies and endearments of friendship, is, but too fre-

quently blasted by the chillness of indifference, and the treachery of selfishness. Suspicions and rivalships, vanity or pride, rise up and poison the cup of human felicity. The whispers of malignity, the arts of dissingenuousness, infuse jealousies and distrust between the nearest friends: and each, aware of the insincerity of all, learns to surround himself with an atmosphere of selfishness, which blights the early blossoms of social happiness. Hence few have lived long in the world who have not contracted a distrust of the world. And often it happens that the most open, candid, and benevolent hearts, having met the most ungrateful returns from a false friendship, are liable to fall into the most sullen misanthropy, and to wrap themselves up in unsocial retirement.

In what, indeed, consists the greater part of the commerce of society? A good man finds in it little besides associations for criminal pleasure; parties of frivolity and idleness, comedies of ridicule and scandal; every thing that wounds the feelings of sincere piety, and genuine benevolence. With so many causes of dissatisfaction with the world, is it wonderful that a real disciple of Jesus should sometimes sigh to leave its infected atmosphere and be at rest with his Redeemer? Is it wonderful that, wearied with the insincerity, the dissimulation, and malevolence of mankind, he should long to be translated to that immortal society who are forever united in the blissful charities of Heaven?

2. I remark, in the next place, that our impotence to gratify the ardent thirst of divine knowledge, awa-

kened in the heart of a believer, by the Holy Spirit, may become a powerful reason why he should be willing to emerge from this sphere of darkness and error into *the light of his countenance*, in which is the perfection of knowledge, and *the fullness of joy*. The thirst of knowledge is natural to man; but piety seeks to turn this powerful propensity to the purposes of devotion. It aspires to understand God our Maker, that it may more profoundly adore him; to form just ideas of the ever blessed Redeemer in his eternal existence; in his descent from Heaven to redeem the world; in his reascension to his primitive glory, that it may continually pour forth to him the devout effusions of its gratitude and love; it aspires to investigate the astonishing works of God, and the awful mysteries of his providence, that it may derive from them more abundant materials of admiration and praise. But, ah! how small a portion of his works can we understand! Every object which we behold, baffles, in a thousand ways, the weakness of the human mind. With what laborious efforts she strives to enlarge herself to embrace the idea of God. She would penetrate all her powers with *the love of God in Christ*. She would mingle her essence with that Being of Beings. In these painful efforts to unite herself with him, she would almost burst the dark and narrow sphere in which she is confined. But she is imprisoned; she is encompassed with thick clouds, she is oppressed by the weight and the corruptions of the body; and in submissive faith, is constrained to retire into herself, waiting till *this corruptible shall have put on incorruption*.

But in these ineffectual endeavours to raise our nature to God, and to mingle with that infinite fountain of being and of love, in these ardent but impotent desires to penetrate into the spiritual and eternal world, the christian finds new reasons to be willing to forsake this imperfect lodgment where *we know only in part*, and to look forward with hope to that higher condition of existence, when that which is *perfect is come*, and *all that is in part shall be done away*; and where we shall no more *see through a glass darkly*, but *face to face* in immediate vision.

3. If the world offers few enjoyments which should render the sincere disciple of his Saviour reluctant to leave it at the call of Heaven: the afflictions, on the other hand, with which it abounds, may well reconcile him to the stroke which parts the frail cord of life, and brings them all to an eternal period.

The portion allotted to man from the beginning, was labour, and toil, and sorrow, till he return to the dust from which he was taken. Innumerable pains are continually avenging upon him the sin of human nature. And, in the order of Divine Providence, we not unfrequently behold the most virtuous of mankind subjected to the severest sufferings, which constrain the humble penitent to exclaim with the holy Psalmist; *verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency; for all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.*

But our personal afflictions, are far from being the only evils which urge the believer to seek, beyond this desolate empire of pain, disease, and death, a more

peaceful habitation with Jesus Christ *who has conquered death*, and opened the gates of eternal life. Our sympathies intimately unite us with our fellow men: and often, in the families of our friends, do we see one desolating calamity, or a succession of afflicting bereavements, turn a pleasant garden into a disconsolate wilderness, and impress a face of mortal gloom on all the prospects of life? How often do we perceive those who yesterday were at the summit of the wheel of earthly fortune, to day precipitated to the bottom, and plunged into the depths of wretchedness? Here the head and stay of a lovely family is removed from them; and those who were lately accustomed to competence, ease, and respect, are left to want, to dependence, to the cold neglect of the world, to a melancholy which will never cease to prey upon their hearts. Here you behold Jacob *rending his clothes, and putting sackcloth on his loins*, his heart pierced with an inconsolable grief for the loss of his beloved Joseph: *and though all his sons and his daughters rise up to comfort him, he refuses to be comforted, saying I will go down into the grave to my son mourning.* Are these rare examples of human misery? Far from it. They are calamities which every day almost obtrudes upon our sympathy. What is usually the effect of long life, but to have the heart broken by breach after breach, till it has hardly the power of enjoyment left? To have one comfort, and one friend after another taken, till we are left almost alone upon the earth, and the world becomes to us, a vast and melancholy solitude. In the midst of so many, and such deep afflictions, how naturally does

piety cast a longing look to that land of rest where *sorrow and sighing shall flee away!*

The catalogue of these evils I shall conclude with one which, however can be truly understood only by a soul fervently touched with the love of God, and glowing with zeal for the glory of his Redeemer. The sins that are in the world, the madness and folly of mankind who seem eagerly bent on pursuing their own destruction, the desperate impiety of sinners, who are labouring to extend the kingdom of darkness, often occasion to sincere piety the sentiments of a profound grief. *Rivers of water, saith the Psalmist, run down mine eyes because they keep not thy law.*

But if the humble disciple of Christ is affected with grief at being a witness of the sins of others, much more sensibly will he be afflicted by the evils which lodge in his own heart. The apostle Paul speaks in the name, and addresses himself to the feelings of every christian, when he complains;—*Oh! wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*

Is it surprising, then, that, under the full and penitent impression, of these sentiments, he should ardently desire to arrive at that state of perfection in which he shall know God in a degree infinitely more clear, and serve him in a manner infinitely more complete than he can do in the present life? Is it surprising that he should long to quit the church below, with its obscure ritual of types and symbols, for the sublime and immortal devotions of the temple above; this cold, and dark, and imperfect region obscured with the mists of ignorance, and the clouds of human corrup-

tion, for those habitations of everlasting light and truth where he shall behold *the Sun of Righteousness* in all his glory?

For the strongest of all reasons for which a true believer should ever desire to be absent from the body, is the hope of possessing that immortal inheritance which the gospel reveals to an enlightened faith. Instead of being surprised, therefore, that in the closing scene of life, he should *desire to depart and be with Christ*, may we not rather wonder that this devout aspiration is not constant, and almost impatient. It is the ardent wish of a traveller wearied with incessant agitations, to find a secure and settled rest—of an exiled child, who feels himself *a pilgrim and stranger upon earth*, to arrive at a settled home, and return to the embraces of a father's love. *Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.*

But the blessedness of Heaven consists, not merely in exemption from the sorrows of the present life, but in the possession of a glory *which eye hath not seen, and which it has not entered into the heart of man to conceive*. But, oh! in what language shall we describe; by what images represent that celestial city, the distant outlines of which could only be sketched by the Spirit of inspiration? Yet, in those happy moments in which faith can attain even a faint vision of that land of peace, all the evils of life are forgotten in the blissful prospect. All the splendid temptations of the world fade, as the stars are lost in the radiance of the day.

Often have these principles displayed a divine power in minds constitutionally the most feeble and timid, and in circumstances the most formidable to human nature. Often have they enabled the martyr to triumph in the midst of flames; and often have they shed a glory on the dying bed of the saint. Happy the humble and pious soul who, in descending into *the valley of the shadow of death*, can say, with the apostle, I am now ready to be offered up, and the time of my departure is at hand; I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but to all them that love his appearing.

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord! Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours, and their works do follow them! Amen! Even so come Lord Jesus!

RELIGION NECESSARY TO NATIONAL PROSPERITY.

I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me, and showing mercy to thousands of those that love me and keep my commandments. *Exod. xx. 5, 6.*

THE immediate government exercised by God over the people of Israel, was the visible model of that secret Providence which presides over all the nations of the earth. The text discloses one of the most certain and invariable rules according to which the divine administration is conducted; which is, that the prevalence of virtuous manners among any people, and their respect to the institutions of religion, is usually connected with national prosperity; and on the other hand that impiety, and a general dissolution of the public manners prepares the way for a succession of national calamities, which are followed, at length, by some disastrous and fatal revolution.—Various interpretations have been given to this passage, and various attempts made to illustrate and vindicate the principle involved in it, expressed by visiting the iniquities of the fathers upon the children; but any application of it which has ever been made to the case of individuals, and their offspring, is evidently unfounded, and wholly unsupported by the state of the world. For, neither the sufferings of the posterity of vicious men, nor the prosperity of those who have descended from pious ancestors have verified the application of this sanction to

them in the extent which the terms obviously imply. We do not always see the children of the most profligate miserable to the third and fourth generation; still less do we see the descendents of the virtuous and pious invariably happy. The strained explanations which commentators are obliged to employ, and the exceptions they must necessarily admit in order to support this interpretation, demonstrate that the object of the Divine Legislator has been wholly misconceived. But when we regard it as indicating a general principle in the government of divine Providence over the nations of the earth, no fact is more certain, or more decisively confirmed by the universal testimony of history; that *righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is the reproach of any people*; which last expression in the sacred scriptures, signifies the righteous chastisements, and, often, the total excision inflicted by God upon a sinful generation; when he visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the full accomplishment of his just displeasure. When a nation has abandoned religion, the firmest basis of civil government is dissolved. Voluptuousness and effeminacy, avarice and prodigality, a restless ambition, dark treacheries, and a universal disregard of justice, which are the natural consequences of a general impiety, accumulate every species of misery on a wretched people, forsaken of God, and lost to virtue. The precious ties of society are broken; the national imbecility invites insult and invasion from abroad; it perishes under a fatal internal weakness,—and hastens to sink them in irretrievable ruin. Such is the course of divine Providence over

the great communities of the world; such, according to the universal testimony of experience, is the rapid, and fatal career of impious and corrupted nations; and such, appears to me, to be the genuine interpretation of this divine denunciation, which has commonly been so ill explained.

If it be asked how this great political doctrine can be derived from a law which is aimed primarily against idolatry; and what connexion exists between this law, and the sanction with which it is armed? To answer this inquiry, it is necessary to recur to the constitution of the government of Israel. Being administered by God himself, through the oracles pronounced from the sanctuary of the Holy of Holies, it has not improperly been denominated a theocratic institution, in which Jehovah was regarded as the immediate ruler and king. Idolatry, therefore, in that nation, is not only to be considered as treason against the commonwealth of Israel, but was, in truth, the public and open dereliction of God; the abandonment of their religion, and the introduction of all that corruption of manners which is the natural consequence of the utter destitution of religious principle. This law, therefore, having an immediate reference to the establishment of the national religion and government of Israel, its sanctions, also, in order to their right interpretation, should be regarded as having chiefly a national aspect. They rest, however, upon principles, in the moral government of the world, which are common to all the great communities of mankind. When a nation has become conspicuous for an open and avowed neglect and con-

tempt of the principles and institutions of religion, and for those profligate vices which are the natural consequences of impiety, it is hastening to be chastised by those direful calamities which usually attend the decline and fall of nations. Almighty God *visits* upon the guilty inhabitants their *iniquities*, with the *iniquities of their fathers, to the third and fourth generation*; and the accumulated sum of their crimes and punishments sinks them in deep and irretrievable perdition. Do you ask again, where is the justice of this order? and if it does not involve a principle inconsistent with the benignity of the divine nature, and unworthy of the Father and Judge of the universe? No, christians! it is a principle immutably ingrafted into the system of nature. And the language of the text points to a fact in the moral order of the universe, and in the conduct of Divine Providence over the nations, acknowledged by all wise and good men, and verified by the whole history of the world. Obvious it is, however we may explain the equity of the arrangement, that children every where suffer from the vices, the follies, and even the misfortunes of their parents. And it is the infallible order of human society, arising out of the constitution of man, that, when nations have sunk into speculative or practical atheism, and the public manners have grown generally corrupt, each race becomes by a natural progression, more profligate than the past. The crimes and disorders in each preceding generation become only the foundation of new crimes and disorders in the following, till, in a few descents, an impious and abandoned progeny is ripe for a terrible

and accumulated destruction. The limitation of the sacred writer to the third and fourth generation will be found to correspond with the usual course of the decline and extinction of empires. After they have fallen into gross impiety and corruption of manners, seldom do they pass that period before they suffer some disastrous revolution, or before they cease to be a nation.

On the other hand, where have we seen a people, under the full influence of religious and moral principle, in the full vigor of frugal and virtuous habits, which has fallen a prey to internal disorders, or to foreign domination? *While they love God, and keep his commandments*, the blessing of Heaven will be upon them; their prosperity will be coextended with the reign of virtue and religion in the midst of them.

Having brought the subject to this point, I lay down the following proposition, as resulting from the preceding illustrations, that the belief of the principles of religion, and the practice of its duties, under some form which is calculated profoundly to impress the public mind with the sentiment of God, and the righteous government of his Providence over human affairs, is essential to the prosperity of nations; whereas national impiety becomes, at once, the parent and the nurse of disorders and crimes which hasten their approach to destruction.

The principle, then, which I have laid down, and which I suppose to be embraced in the text, derives force from the opinions of all wise legislators; and I may add, the unequivocal testimony of experience. We

need but open the pages of antiquity: the historians, the poets, the legislators, the philosophers of all nations concur in one sentiment, that religion forms the only solid basis of states. It is but in very recent times that this maxim has ever been called in question. In every region of the earth, priests have been coeval with magistrates; and in the earliest periods of the world, we often find the sacred united with the regal functions. The wandering tribes of barbarians could never have been reduced to social order, and softened to civilized manners by any power less than that of religion.

On such minds laws could have but a feeble operation, and abstracted principles of civil policy, so opposed to all their former ideas and habits, could never have induced them by any anticipation of the benefits of civil order to renounce the wild liberty of their native forests.—As examples of what took place in all other nations, let me recall to your mind those illustrious priests, who first civilized Bœotia and Thrace? putting the principles of their moral, civil, and religious institutions into verse, they subdued the savage spirits of the natives by the authority of religion, and softened them by the united influence of poetry and song. The more we examine this subject by the purest and best lights of antiquity, the more we shall be convinced that to religion alone the world, in the beginning was indebted not only for its social order, but for its arts, its morals, and the elements of its science.

I have said that the proposition I have laid down derives confirmation from experience as well as from the

concurrent testimony of the wiser portion of all nations. Where do we find a people in history who have abandoned religion, and become sunk, in consequence, into effeminate and profligate manners, who have not been, at the same time, treading on the brink of destruction. To this cause Polybius ascribes the loss of Roman liberty—to this cause Greece having become effeminate and factious, owed her subjugation to Rome—this was the fatal cause which subjected impious and idolatrous Israel to a long and distressful captivity to the empire of Babylon—and this finally exterminated them from the land which, under the favour and protection of Jehovah, they had enjoyed for so many ages. And, have we not recently seen, in a great nation, a bold and impious attempt to govern without religion, by the speculations of philosophy, and the brute force of violent and momentary laws? What has been the result? Bursting from order, she plunged into an abyss of crimes. Philosophy herself perished in the tempest which she had raised; and religion has been again invoked to restore justice and peace to an unhappy people. Her mild but powerful voice alone could calm the raging of the storm, which despotism found herself unable to control, and say to the waves of that furious sea, peace! be still!

So strongly were the philosophers of Greece and Rome persuaded of the connexion of religion with public happiness that, though far from being themselves believers in the popular superstitions, they esteemed it essential to the interest of the republic that the reverence of the people for these forms should be preser-

ved for the sake of that awful sentiment of religion connected with them, which threw its majesty over the laws, and imparted its energy to the great principles of morals.

The necessity of religion to the interests of civil society arises out of the necessity of morals. Without religion, on what could the public morals rest? On the laws? The laws depend on morals for their own force.—On reason? Are the abstractions and doubtful conclusions of reason able to combat with the force of the passions? Were reason a more accurate standard and efficient principle of duty than it is, I hesitate not to maintain that, where the mind, in its moral reasonings, is not under the commanding influence of an authority believed to be divine, its refinements, its abstractions, its deductions will forever be only more ingenious vindications of its own passions. Will politicians, then, rely on the native sentiments of justice, of temperance, of chastity in the human heart, to give effect to those laws which are most necessary for the order and happiness of society? I acknowledge the existence of these sentiments; and will, farther, maintain that all the principles of natural morality, in the popular mind, are the dictates of feeling rather than the results of reasoning. But, as they exist in nature they are vague and indefinite. It is religion which, impressing a divine authority on the sentiments of nature, its moral instincts and feelings, gives clearness and precision to all the laws of duty. By reducing them to a few simple and positive precepts, it reaches, by a single word, an end which could hardly be at-

tained by volumes of disquisitions. *Thou shalt not steal—Thou shalt not commit adultery—Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour—*Nay, entering into the very fountains of action in the heart, *thou shalt not covet*, or extend thy *desires* to any of the possessions of thy neighbour. What a circle would be necessary to establish these principles by reason? And to how many exceptions, would they constantly be liable! By one word, religion determines the rule, and cuts off all the modifications and evasions of the passions. When the question is to practise all our duties, as men and citizens, could any cold and general considerations of political convenience produce obedience to them in opposition to those warm impulses which are continually urging men to their violation? Does it not require all the majesty,—does it not require all the sublime motives,—does it not require, if I may speak so, the omniscience of religion, which no secrecy can escape, which no deception can elude, effectually to enforce them? Religion has a power which no other considerations possess, by entering into the heart, and rectifying its principles, and by arresting the very beginnings of vice in its desires and intentions. Where religion is respected, and virtuous moral habits are established under its influence, the seeds of justice, of civil order, and obedience to the laws, are already sown in the heart.

If reason and political convenience are the only foundations of obedience to the laws, will not every citizen be disposed to examine them by the narrow scale of his own understanding? Will he not be dis-

posed to make his own feelings of convenience the test of his duties to the public? Have the mass of citizens, and those too who are placed in the most disadvantageous positions in society, comprehension of mind sufficient to combine the general interests of a nation? Can they be supposed to have that high regard to an abstracted idea of public good, which will dispose them patiently to sacrifice to it their private feelings of humiliation and want, while others seem to reap exclusively all the benefits of society?—But do your philosophic politicians rely for obedience to the laws, in the mass of the people, on their native sentiments of justice? What then! does the actual state of political order, and civil justice in any country, perfectly coincide with the natural sentiments of equity in the popular mind? Will the poor forcibly perceive the justice of that order in which, by the effects of time, and the operation of the laws, indolence, imbecility, and vice, have come into the possession of the most enviable stations in society, and have amassed together the greatest portion of wealth, which no labours and no merits can wrest out of their hands, or even share with them? No, the sentiments of justice, as it exists in the minds of the people, would militate against the views of the legislator; and, without the control of a divine power, would rather impel the multitude to perpetual revolutions, and reorganizations of the state.—On the other hand, religion assumes the laws already existing, and recognizing the authority from which they emanate, enjoins obedience to them. While she invigorates the sentiments of justice in the heart, she,

at the same time, associates them with the rules of justice and order established in the state, and impresses the awful seal of her authority both on the laws, and on those sacred sources from which they are legally authorized to flow. With silent majesty she presides over the peace of the republic, with an influence infinitely more powerful than that of the laws themselves.—Will these same politicians, in the next place, rely on the rigor of tribunals to supply the defect of moral principle?—In vain; for, without virtue the tribunals are impotent. The efficacy of laws depends upon opinion. And impiety soon breaks down all the barriers which restrain the indulgence of vice, and impairs the moral springs which give energy to the laws.

Impiety is purely and absolutely selfish. And, if there be no God, will not his own indulgence be, to each man, his chief good?—the centre to which he will point all his actions? If there is no moral law, no judge, no future state of being, why should we not devour the present moment which alone is ours? why should not sensual pleasure be our only good? why should we submit to the painful self-denials, the useless sacrifices of virtue? Why should the poor man permit the rich to enjoy unmolested all the benefits of society? Why should he not with a bold hand, equalize their conditions? Why should the voluptuary abstain from the delicate honors of chastity? Or why should chastity disdainfully reject his pursuit? Why should not all, with one consent, plunge into those brutal pleasures which alone are worthy of a sensual na-

ture?—pleasures which dissolve the bands of society, effeminate and weaken the public force, and, absorbing every thing in the vortex of self, abandon the care of the public interest, and fill the nation with assassinations, murders, adulteries, incests, unnatural crimes, and all the basest and most horrible vices. Such have ever been the fruits of impiety where it has infected the mass of any people;—such has been its tendency to national prostration of manners, and to national ruin.

One benefit of a public and positive religion, and that far from being the least important, is its impressing, by sacred rites and forms, the principles and habits of piety and virtue profoundly on the heart. If man were purely an intellectual being, ceremonies and rites would be useless; perhaps they would only clog and encumber the active and fervid energies of the soul. But, constituted as he is, the heart must be seized through the senses, and the imagination. The influence of principles will soon evaporate unless they are fixed and strengthened by form. Weak is that mind, and ignorant of the true principles of human nature, which affects to despise the rites and forms of religion; which is not, on the contrary, deeply impressed by them.—But what institution can be more favourable to virtue, to civility, to humanity, than that of the Sabbath? In the church men meet in the name of God to recognize their common fraternity. Every social affection is cultivated, every unsocial passion is repressed by the very ideas of the place where they are assembled, by the instructions which are received.

and the objects presented to them in the house of God. The most important truths are brought down to the level of the weakest understanding by the simplicity of the gospel; and they are brought profoundly home to every bosom by the authority of God, in whose name they are published, and by the grandeur of the hopes and fears of religion. If then society is governed more by manners than by laws; if laws themselves derive their principal force from the good morals and virtuous habits of the people, of what importance, even in a civil view, are the public institutions of religion!—On the other hand, what instructors would philosophers prove? Of what instructions would the people be capable, if they did not come to them clothed in the simple precepts, and sanctioned by the sacred authority of religion? The experiment has been tried in a great nation which put itself into the hands of the philosophers, to be moulded by them according to their fancied ideas of perfection. What has been the effect of this trial? Hear it from the people themselves—hear it from the universal voice of all their best and wisest men assembled in the general council of the departments.—“We find, say they, there can be no instruction without education, and no education without morals, and no morals without religion. The instruction of the last ten years has been of no effect, because it has been separated from religion. Children have been let loose to a most alarming state of vagrancy. Destitute of any idea of the Divinity, they have grown up without any true notions of justice and injustice. Hence have ensued among us savage and barbarous

manners, and the mild and polished French are in danger of becoming a ferocious people.”—Such are the ideas which have resulted in a great and enlightened nation from a decisive experiment made on the principles of this national irreligion.

From every view which we can take of the subject, this conclusion continually meets us, that religion is absolutely necessary to the peace, the order, the solid interests, the durable prosperity of a nation.*

What then is the conclusion which we should draw from the preceding illustrations? That religion is the only solid basis of morals, and of the republic. On that people the blessing of God will rest among whom religion continues to maintain its practical influence. He has so laid the plan of divine Providence, and arranged the moral course of things, that piety and virtue lay the surest foundations of social happiness and civil order; vice and irreligion infuse into the state the principles of disorder and ruin. Need we recur to his-

* Will it be said that religion tends, on the one hand, to superstition, and on the other to fanaticism—that superstition debases human nature, that fanaticism disturbs civil society? I answer, that religion does not *necessarily* lead to the one, or the other. If we find it sometimes connected with superstition, superstition itself is preferable to atheism, a cold and selfish principle which destroys all certainty or obligation in morals; which first relaxes, and finally bursts asunder the bands of society. If religious zeal sometimes kindles into fanaticism, it is a fervor which soon spends its force, if it is not unjustly opposed, and the human mind, in that case speedily returns from its highest paroxysms to its natural and reasonable tone. Fanaticism, however, is not peculiar to religion. It is a flame of the soul which may be kindled by any strong public passion. There are fanatics in literature; there are fanatics in politics; and have we not seen that there are fanatics even in atheism, infinitely more dreadful than all others?

tory, the whole train of which demonstrates these infallible and experimental conclusions? The consequence is involved in the nature of things. Public virtue rears impregnable barriers against internal tyranny and foreign domination, and plants the most immovable foundations against the tempests of revolution. "Blessed is that people whose God is the Lord."

But, when the ties of religion are once broken from the mind, all the most effectual restraints of moral principle are instantly dissolved; public sentiment is absorbed in private interest—public virtue is lost. Sensuality insulates every citizen; he has no country but self; all the energies of patriotism are enfeebled; and voluptuousness, in its progress, creates a base servility of soul which is prepared to submit to any master who will favour its indolence, and afford it the means of indulging its effeminate pleasures. Mutual faith is perished—vows are broken without scruple; for what remains to enforce their obligation? Deceit and treachery are but ordinary means to accomplish unworthy ends. Lust, jealousy, and dastardly revenge disturb the order and destroy the happiness of society. When manners have arrived at this stage of degeneracy, they can then be purged only by the destructive power of a foreign master, or by some dreadful internal and exterminating revolution.—Such has ever been the ultimate progression of national dereliction of morals and religion—republics have fallen a prey to internal tyranny, empires to foreign conquest. To cite to you proofs of this truth would be to repeat the records of universal

history. Nor is it applicable to nations only, but is illustrated in the fortunes of individual families. Profligacy of manners, poisoning the very fountains of life, a vicious and debilitated race becomes extinct in a few generations.—This is the curse which God has inflicted on practical atheism, and its constant companion, extreme corruption of manners. He has so laid the plan of his providence over the world, that the course of nature shall avenge the violated majesty of his law, and become itself, the minister of his justice. When universal depravity of morals has invaded a people, each race becomes, by obvious causes, more corrupted than the last; the evils of the preceding are still accumulated upon that which follows, and seldom, as I have before said, does the third, or the fourth generation pass away till they are ripe for the exterminating judgments of Heaven. Thus does a righteous and *jealous God visit the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those that hate him.*

In the conclusion of this discourse, let us briefly review the state of our own country. Considering the recent origin of the American nation, have we not just cause to deplore the declension of religion? Is not the holy zeal, and the primitive discipline of the churches of all denominations lamentably relaxed? Is not domestic education and government reproachfully neglected, to the infinite injury of the public morals, and the hazard of a total dissolution of manners? With what unreasonable jealousy has religion been viewed in the establishment of all our political constitutions! How little is the sacred charter of our immortal hopes studi-

ed and understood! With what avidity have the doctrines of a licentious philosophy, which emancipates the heart from all moral control, been received even by the multitude, although unable to comprehend its speculative principles! Have we not especially to lament the prostitution of the Sabbath, which, if rightly used, is one of the most excellent institutions ever established in any nation? And what is the consequence of this irreligious tendency in our manners? The public mind is agitated with the most violent and uncorrected passions.—Deadly and murderous quarrels are multiplying beyond all former example. Station and virtue are indiscriminately attacked by the most atrocious slanders. Every man of sentiment and feeling will soon be driven from all public functions. Worth will seek to hide itself in profound retirement; and the state, unless Heaven, in mercy, interpose to preserve us, will be tossed between alternate factions of unprincipled men, who will stop at no measures for their own aggrandizement,—of audacious demagogues who are restrained by no moral sentiments,—of vile intriguers who will stoop to any baseness to advance their mercenary and ambitious aims. Licentiousness is in danger of proceeding to atheism, and atheism of aggravating licentiousness, till a miserable people, lacerated by their own crimes, and tired with the misfortunes which they bring upon themselves, will be willing, at last, to seek a dreadful refuge in the despotism of a master. Do you say these are idle and visionary predictions? They are predictions founded on the nature of man, and the certain and invariable course of human things. Remem-

ber the same predictions already verified with regard to the dreadful fate of France. And yet, perhaps, even this fate is less dreadful than the horrors of their abused liberty, the consequence and the curse of a delirious impiety, which they proudly and ignorantly called by the name of philosophy. These evils are the curse which God has worked up in the very order of the universe as the punishment of public and national vice. But, brethren, let us, in the language of the apostle, *hope better things of you though we thus speak*. May that God who has so often extended his arm in our favour yet arise for our salvation! Religion still has a powerful hold of the public mind—among the great body of the people its institutions are still respected—the public manners are hitherto comparatively simple. O God! arrest, in thy mercy, the spirit of impiety, and restore among us in all their purity and energy, the primitive institutions of the gospel!

Behold, my brethren, in these reflections, new motives to animate your pious zeal. I speak not here of those motives derived from peace of conscience, from the hope of the divine mercy, from your eternal interests; but from the interests of your country. Your piety, your virtue has an important aspect on its felicity. Even in a corrupted age the piety of a few individuals may sometimes delay the execution of the judgments of God; and may prove a cement to society which will long serve to bind together its disjointed fragments, and prevent it from being utterly dissolved. Five righteous men would have saved the devoted city of Sodom. Every good man contains in himself a large portion of

the public safety. How consoling, how sublime is the reflection that, by his virtues he is promoting the happiness of millions, and that, by his christian graces, however imperfect and unworthy, he is drawing down on millions the blessings and protection of Heaven.

What then christians! is your duty, in this respect, to God, and to your country, as good citizens? I might recount all the sacrifices of piety which you owe to God—all the offices of justice and charity due to mankind, but to confine my view to a single object—it is the faithful discipline, the virtuous and pious education of your families. Families are the elementary parts of the republic. While domestic manners are preserved pure, particularly while parental government and instruction on the one hand, and filial duty on the other, are maintained in their vigor, these are the surest pledges of the public virtue, and the public felicity.

This idea leads to the true meaning of that commandment, which has been as little understood as the words of our text;—*Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.* Not surely, that filial duty shall be a pledge of long life to the individual, which is not warranted by the course of human events; nor, according to the answer in the Catechism of the Westminster assembly, that excellent compilation, in general, of christian science, “that it shall be a pledge of long life, and prosperity, as far as shall serve for God’s glory, and their own good, to all such as keep this commandment,” which is saying nothing more than is equally true of every other precept of the decalogue. But, ad-

dressed to the nation of Irsael as a universal law, it evidently implies, that, if in its proper spirit, it were incorporated into their national manners, and domestic habits, they should long prosper in that happy land into which Jehovah their God had brought them. A wise and virtuous education is the only true ground of filial duty, and filial duty is the genuine principle of all the domestic virtues. By such a discipline, religion, and good morals will continue to be handed down from race to race: and the state, strong in the virtue of its citizens and purity and innocence of the public manners, will continue to flourish for ages. The days of such a nation, or their continuance on the land of their fathers shall be prolonged, under the blessings and protection of Almighty God,—*to thousands of generations*, saith the divine legislator, *of those who love God, and keep his commandments*. Be ours then, christians and fellow citizens, the praise of the patriarch Abraham, whose resolution and glory it was, that *he would bring up his children, and household after him to fear the Lord*. Be ours the pious purpose of the heroic and patriotic Joshua, “as for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

Christians! on your fidelity and care depend the most precious interests of your beloved children. In every child an immortal soul is entrusted to your charge. And may I not add, though an inferior, yet a most important consideration, a sacred pledge is committed to you for the commonwealth. You have a deep stake in the happiness of your country. And remember that its prosperity is most securely bottomed upon religion

and virtue. Train up virtuous citizens then, for the republic, immortal heirs for the kingdom of heaven.

From reflections such as these, ought not every citizen, animated by the spirit of true piety, to regard it as among the first, and most important of his social duties, by his example, by his instruction, by all his active energies, to extend the practical influence of vital religion, and to multiply the means of religious knowledge through every grade of the people. On such a nation God will shower his distinguished blessings, and spread over them the shield of his holy protection.

Christians! we see men sufficiently concerned about their political constitutions, and the administration of their government. Indeed, they suffer themselves to be inflamed with an excessive and culpable zeal on these subjects, as if the public felicity depended exclusively on the laws, and on the men appointed to administer them. But be assured, and it is a truth vouched by the experience of ages as well as by the word of God, that the prosperity of republics depends infinitely more on their religion, than on their legislation. When the public morals are pure, even bad laws hardly produce any sensible ill effect; but when the general manners are corrupted, the best laws often operate the most injurious consequences. Regard not the vices, then, which prevail in society, as evils which affect merely the guilty individuals who practise them; but deplore them as containing the stores of accumulated calamities which threaten one day, to fall upon your country. Silently they diffuse a contagion which is infecting the whole mass of society; they are gathering in secret,

a fearful cloud over our heads, which, in God's appointed time, that is, when it grows dark and heavy with our iniquities, shall burst upon us and upon our children. Deeply should it be borne in your minds, christians, that every good man is, in proportion to his rank and influence, a pillar and a bulwark to his country; but that every vicious and profligate citizen is, contributing to undermine the foundation of its happiness and safety.

It is unusual to urge the duties of religion, or to declaim against the prevalent vices of the age, from considerations drawn from our public and national interests? Listen to the addresses of the prophets to the people of Israel; are they not replete with exhortations and remonstrances derived from the same source? Let me, however, conclude this discourse by making an appeal to your hearts from a different quarter. If your piety and virtue be useful to your country, how much richer a blessing is it preparing, through the mediation of your Redeemer, for your own souls, in the everlasting habitations of the righteous? If your iniquities contribute to bring down the judgments of Heaven on a guilty land, remember a more awful truth, that every impenitent sinner is treasuring up for himself "wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." If, in the national dereliction of morals and religion, God visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children;—if we see pestilence and war, wasting and desolation afflict the guilty nations, does not a doom infinitely more dreadful await the sinner in that world, where justice, freed from the restraints which arrest its course in a probationary

state, shall pour its vials with unmitigated vengeance on the reprobate children of folly and vice.

Christian brethren, this is not the picture of a gloomy fancy which delights in fearful images, nor the declamation of a tragic eloquence which loves to try its skill upon the passions of men; it is the word of God, which in its greatest simplicity, carries with it the greatest majesty and terror; "he that believeth not shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

THE ORIGINAL TRIAL,
AND THE
FALL OF MAN;
OR,
THE FIRST SIN, AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. *Gen. ii, 17.*

THE introduction of moral and physical evil into the world, has been a subject of anxious and fruitless speculation among men, ever since the origin of philosophy.—That a Creator, who was himself good, should form an impure and vicious being, seemed impossible—that a Creator who was omnipotent, as well as good, should suffer the introduction of evil into his works seemed improbable. Reason, involved in darkness, and fatigued with inquiries that only ended in disappointment, had recourse to the wildest conjectures. For, so painful to the mind is a state of uncertainty and doubt, that often, it would rather rest on any fancy, however extravagant, than continue unfixed, and vibrating in perpetual suspense. Some of the eastern nations maintained an eternal principle of evil as well as of good, the confines of whose respective dominions met, and were blended together in this world, and in the nature of man.—Many of the Greeks believed in the eternity, and the essential perverseness of matter

which could not be corrected even by the omnipotent hand of the Divine power of the universe, and which gives the body such a vicious ascendancy over the purer faculties of the mind—And not a few of the moderns, unable to reconcile the miseries of the world with the goodness of a Deity, or the vices of men with infinite moral perfection in the Creator, have boldly denied his existence, and sunk their doubts in the gulf of atheism.—Reason, indeed, if we rely on it alone on this subject, soon plunges us into endless hypotheses and doubts, and can propose no satisfying solution of the difficulties which arise out of its own conjectures. God alone is able to unfold to man his own works; and we must trace the source of our corruption, of the afflictions with which the world is filled, and of our universal mortality, in the history of the *fall* which he hath dictated to Moses.—But, does this history remove every difficulty, or answer every inquiry which human curiosity has raised with regard to the existence of evil? No, the mind of man is not yet sufficiently expanded to take in the principles of the Divine government, which have a relation probably to the whole universe; and, certainly, to a much higher condition of being than the present. We resemble children attempting to judge of the economy and discipline of families, and the policy of nations. A few facts, or a few didactic precepts, is all that we can receive on this sublime and complicated subject, so far in advance of its present improvements.—Some inexplicable questions must still remain: but the history of Moses recommends itself by its simplicity and its

probability before all the fabulous traditions of the Pagan nations, which seem, however, to rest upon the same basis with his; and far before those idle conjectures which have ever amused, perplexed, and divided the schools of philosophers. Does an enemy of religion ask, why God should have left any difficulties in a revelation which is designed to teach us his will? For this plain reason that it is impossible to be otherwise. We are extremely limited in our powers of knowledge. Ignorance will forever be the source of difficulties. And if a thousand questions had been solved which we now raise on the subject of religion, they would only have given rise to ten thousand more equally embarrassing. Nor could this process ever stop, nor inquiries and difficulties come to an end till we should arrive at omniscience. God has, therefore, revealed only so much as is necessary to our present duty—the rest he has reserved to gratify our thirst of knowledge, and to feed our intellectual pleasures in the career of an immortal existence.

Having made these preliminary observations in order to prepare our minds for the following illustrations, and, at the same time, to prevent too much from being expected in the discussion of the present subject, I proceed to say that, according to the sacred history, God originally formed man a pure, a holy, and immortal being, a work worthy of the power, the benevolence, and the holiness, of the Creator—he placed him in a garden filled with the purest delights of nature, but not wholly without the necessity of being cultivated by human industry—along with the privileges which he

conferred on man, he mingled temptation to try his fidelity, and, in trying it, to confirm his virtue—he established a physical law that children proceeding by ordinary descent from their parents, should derive from them their whole nature, its perfections or defects; so that the first man became, by this law, the federal as well as natural head of his whole posterity. They would have partaken of his virtue and his immortality, if he had persevered in his obedience—they have been subjected to sin, and to death by his fall. The test of his obedience was his abstaining from eating the fruit of the *tree of knowledge of good and evil*, a name probably derived from its fatal consequences—the denunciation was, *in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die*.

On this subject I shall consider,

1. In the first place, the test which God established of the fidelity of our first parents, &c.

2. Secondly, the consequences of their disobedience to themselves, and their posterity.

1. The test of their fidelity, the temptation which was to try their persevering obedience to the Divine command, was the fruit of *the tree of knowledge*.

Of every tree in the garden they were permitted to eat both for pleasure and subsistence, except of this alone. One immortal tree was planted in the midst of Eden, either appointed by God as a visible symbol of life—or, perhaps, containing some ineffable virtue to repair forever the decays that must necessarily happen in such a material system as the body. Opposite to it was placed this fatal tree, the fruit of which seems to

have contained a subtle, but delicious and intoxicating poison that created such irregular movements in all the senses, the appetites, and the passions, as tarnished the purity, and destroyed the virtuous and holy power of the soul over its own actions; and that became the natural mean by which the offended Creator inflicted on the body the curse of mortality which he had denounced on their disobedience.

Piety has sometimes humbly inquired why was the trial of man's fidelity rested upon, apparently, so trivial a command? Ignorance and infidelity have demanded with a sneer, if virtue and vice, if the safety and ruin of mankind, could depend upon the eating of a little fruit? Christians! attend to the circumstances of the period and of our great father, and you will see that, far from being a trivial, it was a most important prohibition—and if not this, at least something of the same kind, was, perhaps, the only trial that, in the state of primitive man, could be made of his obedience.—So that if sin *could* destroy our nature, its ruin might depend, in the language of the objectors, on *the eating of a little fruit*. Remember then, that animal food was not yet necessary for man—even the culture of grain had not yet taken place—that his whole sustenance consisted of the fruits which Eden as yet spontaneously produced. And if the importance of an object is to be measured by the interest which men have in it, what in life is of so much importance as the provisions by which it is sustained? To what else are almost all the labours and cares of men devoted? And, what faults are greater in them-

selves, or lead to greater crimes, than the abuse of those provisions, in intemperance, that is, in depraving the appetite, in inflaming the passions, in corrupting and sensualizing our whole nature. What does God punish, in the course of Providence, with more distinguished severity? Fruit was, to the original pair, every thing that the taste, the appetite, the body demanded—It might be all that the most tempting viands of luxury can now offer to the epicure. And the fruit of that forbidden tree was probably of such a nature as to render the use of it a high intemperance, and the only intemperance, of which they could then be guilty. I said, likewise, that it was, perhaps, the only kind of trial which could then be made of man's obedience, if any peculiar test were proposed at all.—Go through the decalogue, and what command is there which Adam could have violated? Could he have denied God with whom he conversed every day, and whose works were shining in all the freshness of their glory before his eyes in the recent creation? Could he have dishonoured his parents, who had no parent but God?—Could he have murdered, or injured, the only companion of his existence? Could he, who possessed the only wife in the world, be guilty of unchastely violating the right of another? Could he steal, or defraud, or envy, or covet, when all things were his, and he was already lord of the universe? It would seem as if his trial could relate only to some act of personal purity and temperance—such as appears to have been the object of this precept. Many very pious writers indeed have supposed that the trial of man's obedience

consisted in absolute submission to the sovereignty of God, without any other reason or ground for the command. If it were so, I do not know that we could dispute the right of the Supreme Creator to impose such a test. In either view, it is evidently a command of much higher importance than the cavillers at christianity have affected to represent it—and much higher than christians themselves, who have not maturely considered the circumstances of the case, have often conceived.

This command our first parents disobeyed. It has frequently been asked how minds so innocent and pure as theirs could fall into sin, or entertain, for a moment, the first temptation to offend their Creator?—We are too imperfectly acquainted with the complicated and rapid movements of mind, to explain precisely how this was effected. But, wherever moral liberty exists in a being not infinitely perfect, there exists the possibility of change. The great enemy of God and of human happiness, who had previously fallen from his glory and fidelity in Heaven, abusing the form, or the body, of the serpent, led our primitive mother into the transgression. He seems, from the very name of the tree, to have awakened her curiosity and thirst for additional knowledge, which at first view appeared not to be a criminal motive, that could startle her by its guilt: but was calculated rather to lull and throw off its guard her pious vigilance. He called in question the ground and, therefore, the reality of the Divine prohibition, and, probably by his own example in eating the forbidden fruit, brought into doubt at least, the cer-

tainty of the Divine threatening. In an unhappy moment she was surprized—she fell without yet being conscious of her state. Intoxicated by her imaginary success, and, perhaps, by the spirit of the fruit, she brought a portion of it to Adam; and adding the force of her persuasions and her charms, he yielded to the multiplied temptation, and fell with her—And alas!

2. What a train of evils, both to them and to us, have followed the fatal action!

When the delirium of that mortal fruit was past, they became conscious for the first time of their true situation, and that they had lost the favour of God. They feared him whom they had so often met with confidence and joy, pouring at his feet the grateful and delightful homage of their hearts. They fled, and vainly thought to hide themselves from his sight.—They felt that shame in the presence of one another, which is the disgraceful effect of vice, and they attempted to cover themselves with fig leaves. This is a remarkable fact which deserves your attention. The nakedness, which, in the age of innocence, never affected them with any emotion but such as was pure, now began to cover them with blushes.—Was it that the glow of a celestial beauty which surrounded the primitive body of man was lost, and the deformity of a fallen nature began to appear? Or, was it that, formerly, the sentiments of devotion, of friendship, of a virtuous tenderness, of a sublime sympathy, of a high, intelligent, and noble conversation which reigned between them, absorbed their minds, and made every sensible pleasure only a gentle heightening to more pure and refined

sensations—but now the tumults only of a gross passion filled their hearts, always shameful, and, in their situation, incapable of being subjected to the control of decency? Perhaps, both these causes contributed to this striking and singular incident in the history of the fall. Their nature, which had made a near approach to the angelic, was now sunk and becoming brutal.

But this was a small part, it was but the commencement of that dreadful sentence which had been denounced on their transgression—in *the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.*

Theological writers have, not unjustly, distinguished in this sentence a threefold death—that of the soul to virtue, and the high and celestial life of holiness which it lived in Paradise—that of the body in its dissolution, and that of both soul and body in their eternal rejection from God. The Supreme Judge called the trembling criminals before him, not to receive their apology or hear their defence, but to convict them of their guilt—and, having pronounced his fearful decree, he ordered his angel to expel them from the garden, the abode of innocence, the theatre of so many sublime beauties, the scene of so many happy and exquisite hours; and, the more effectually to cut off all hope of return, he commanded him to plant at the entrance a flaming sword, the awful symbol of their separation, and of his inexorable justice.—Stripped of their primitive glory, retaining little of their former nature, but the memory of joys that were now forever lost, they descended, oppressed with their grief and their guilt, into a world rendered barren and unkind, to draw their

subsistence by the sweat of their brow, from the reluctant soil. The serpent, the instrument of their temptation, was ordered to follow them, to crawl upon his belly, and to lick the dust, not so much as a punishment inflicted on the senseless animal, as to keep them humble and penitent, by a perpetual image before their eyes of their degraded state, and to be a constant monitor of the fearful evil of sin which involves in ruin its instruments, and every thing connected with it. Through life they were subjected to labour and toil—to the tumults, the conflicts, the shame, the remorse of sinful passions—to disease and pain—to bereavement and disappointment—and, finally, they yielded all the remnants of worldly enjoyment and hope to the dreadful dominion of death. But this was the lightest portion of those calamities which have succeeded the fall. His whole posterity were involved in the same ruin. This would drive the sting of guilt tenfold deeper into his own heart. He looked down through the long series of ages and behold nothing but a fearful succession of crimes and miseries—the world, destroyed by his fault, turned into a field of blood, a place of skulls. One son he saw destroyed by the hand of his brother,—the beginning of so many fraternal murders which were afterwards to stain the earth—and he lived to be a melancholy witness of the commencement of those crimes which prepared the deluge that overwhelmed the guilty race in the age of Noah. We this day, and mankind in every period have felt the fatal effects of the original transgression. We derive thence a corrupted nature—we derive

thence an existence that groans under innumerable afflictions—thence have flowed the crimes and the miseries which have filled the world—and thence the universal empire of death. Oh! how fearful was that transgression! how dreadful, how desolating, how extensive was that sentence!—Adam stood at the head of his race—they were to partake of his nature, and to be involved in his destiny. This was fixed by God as the certain and immutable law of our being.—We see the existence of this law demonstrated in the whole state of the world—we reap its lamentable consequences in our own experience.

This doctrine has been boldly arraigned by the enemies of religion. Is it consistent with the goodness and the justice of God, they ask, that one should stand in so important a relation as the representative of all? That the fate of so many beings, not yet in existence, should depend upon the doubtful conduct of an individual who may happen to be their progenitor? My brethren, those of you especially whose minds have ever been shaken by the scruples of infidelity, listen to me for a moment with patience and attention. It is an interesting subject. It shows us our origin—It is the hinge of religion. The human mind, then, is too weak to penetrate into the reasons of the divine government, or the causes of things either in the physical or moral world. It is only by effects and events that we can arrive at any knowledge concerning them, or judge of them at all. But, wherever we see a fact clearly exist in nature, we justly ascribe it to some law established by the Creator; and whether

we can penetrate its principles, and discern the reasons on which it is established or not, *one truth is clear*, according to the just and beautiful idea of the poet, *in spite of erring reason, whatever is, by his appointment, is right*. And when one fact, or a chain of correspondent facts are decisively ascertained, we may safely reason from them by analogy.

In the first place, then, do we not see that vice, that misery, that death, exist universally in the world? On the subject of universal vice which is the most doubted, I appeal to the whole history of man—I appeal to every man's consciousness. Whether, then, is it more conformable to reason, and to our ideas of divine goodness and justice, to suppose that these evils are the direct and immediate work of God; or, are derived to mankind through a progenitor who abused his mercies, and forfeited his immortality along with his virtue? Is it more difficult, or, on the other hand, is it not much less difficult to account for them on the scripture doctrine of representation, than on the principle of direct creation? If God can be justified in giving them existence without the supposition of the original innocence and the fall of man; can their introduction by the fall render them unjust? But to produce almost demonstrative evidence for this doctrine laid down in the history of Moses, and confirmed by the whole authority of the sacred writings, is it not conformable to the laws of nature in all similar and analogous cases, that is, to the system of God in the government of the world? Do not children inherit the nature of their parents? If the first parents of the race, then, possessed only a fallen, imperfect, corrupted, and mortal nature, could they have

communicated to their offspring one that was pure and immortal—one that resembled their original and paradisiacal constitution? Must not those then who sprung from them, have partaken of their degeneracy? that is, have suffered the same evils which they had brought upon themselves by their unhappy catastrophe? Again, do not children inherit the poverty, the humiliations, the ignominy of parents? Do we not even see them inherit their diseases? Is that in consequence of their own faults? or is it not in consequence of that universal law of nature, of which our doctrine affords only the principal example? Does not mind, in this case, follow the law of body? Take other examples—In a vicious, profligate and effeminate age, are not the children who are born, placed, by the order of Providence, without any antecedent crime of their own, in a situation in which it is almost impossible for them to acquire the manly and noble virtues? See the Copts, the descendants of the ancient Egyptians, the modern Greeks, the dispersed and wandering Jews, the wretched remains of so many other nations—degenerate, vicious, miserable, contemptible, are they not suffering under the very law which is called in question by this objection of infidelity? Children among them spring from their fathers under every circumstance of wretchedness and baseness. And, if an individual, if a nation, why not a world? Do you ask me how I vindicate these appointments, these laws of the Creator? That is not my present duty. It is sufficient for me that they exist, to vindicate the sacred scriptures. What then is the import of this threatening to us? It is to the children

and parent the same—death spiritual, temporal, and eternal. We derive from him a nature not merely imperfect, but corrupted—we are doomed, after many sufferings, to return to the dust—we are liable to everlasting perdition, *being by nature*, saith the apostle, *children of wrath*. From these fearful evils we can be delivered only by the virtue, and the glorious power of the Second Adam, the promise of whose coming was interposed by the compassion of God, to relieve the terror, the distraction, the despair of our wretched first parents, when they perceived their abandoned state, and saw the extent of the misery which they had created.

Let us, then, contemplate, for a moment, the deplorable state into which we are fallen, that, feeling our miseries and our guilt, as we ought to feel them, we may be persuaded more earnestly to flee to the refuge, and embrace the hope of the gospel. “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and death hath passed upon all men, because all have sinned. Behold,” saith the Psalmist, “I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. Marvel not,” saith the Saviour himself, “that I said unto you, you must be born again—that which is born of the flesh is flesh.” Would you know the full import of this last expression? Saint Paul interprets it, when he says, “the carnal,” that is, the fleshly, “mind is enmity against God—it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” We are born then inclined to evil when we begin to act—subjected to the impure dominion of sensual appetites, and disordered passions—unholy in the sight of God—

and in ourselves, and separated from our relation to Jesus Christ the promised Saviour of men, subjected to the fearful curse of his righteous law. I do not enter into the inquiry whether sin is seated in the soul, in the body, or in both? the decision of it is little material to the vindication of the justice or the goodness of God, for which it was instituted—I do not say that we are born in the actual exercise of malignant vice; but that we are so constituted as to tend to sin as soon as we grow to be capable of moral action—I do not say that we are absolutely and totally corrupted without any remaining tendency to good, for then we should be devils, but that we are so depraved in all our moral powers that evil predominates over the good—we fail in every point of the law of God, and therefore are subjected to its holy, but its fearful curse; “for it is written, cursed is every one who continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.” These are gloomy and humiliating ideas. indeed, and therefore, not only have unbelievers denied the original depravity of man; but many christian writers, and many hearers of the gospel, endeavour to soften this mortifying picture of human nature. They conceive of its corruption merely as its frailty—and of its sins as foibles easily pardonable in a being so frail. But, my brethren, the whole scriptures represent man as naturally impure and unholy, and needing to be sanctified and purified by the blood and the Spirit of the Redeemer—as guilty and capable of salvation only through the great victim slain from the foundation of the world—as liable to death, from which he could be delivered only by him

who acquired the right to conquer Death by first submitting to its power in our room. And is not this the language of sacrifices, of ceremonies, of the means of grace, of that precious seal of the covenant, the emblem of cleansing and purification, impressed upon the offspring of believers under the dispensations both of Moses and of Jesus? Was it not to the lost that a Saviour was necessary? to the blind that light was sent? Is not this the foundation of the duties of repentance, and of faith, and of the indispensable doctrine of spiritual regeneration? Is it not the voice of the whole history of man—of the pangs of the mother—of the cries of the infant—of the discipline of childhood—of the passions of youth—of the restraints of government—of the vices of society—of the desolations of cities by famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes—of the eternal murders which have deluged the earth with blood under the name of wars—nay of that consciousness of guilt which speaks in the bosom of every man?

From this view of the state of human nature, what is the first and most urgent of our duties? Is it not sincere repentance? Is it not an entire change of heart—of our moral conduct and principles of action? Is it not a deep conviction of the corruption of our nature—of our alienation from God our Maker—and of the sentence of eternal death which his law continually pronounces against the sinner? What is the fearful import of the declaration of the apostle, that *we are by nature the children of wrath*? Thy wrath, Almighty God! who can endure? Thy displeasure, Creator! Father! Source of life! who can support? My brethren! has

one sin destroyed the universe? cast man down from an immortal and almost angelic nature, into the depths of corruption and death? And, what is the desert of so many actual crimes added to all the forfeitures of the first transgression? Our state is surrounded with unspeakable danger and terror—but the gospel opens a door of mercy. It has prepared a sacrifice in our room that has satisfied all the claims of divine justice. O Sinner! hasten to this altar—Cover yourself under the merits of this precious victim. Make your peace again with God through him. By him you may regain your lost holiness, and your lost immortality. He has conquered Death and Hell which had extended their dreadful dominion over us—He has triumphed over the grave that we might live forever. Believe in his name—confide in his mercy—obey his laws. All the evils of the fall will be repaired by him—and the primitive innocence and glory of man will be more than restored in the celestial Eden. AMEN!

ON THE LOVE OF PRAISE.

Whatsoever things are of good report,——if there be any praise, think of these things.....*Phil.* iv. 8.

THE supreme motive, in the heart of every good man, to honorable and worthy actions, is, the pure love of goodness and of virtue. The spirit of God, however, has not disdained to employ, as an auxiliary principle of duty, that love of praise, or of standing well in the opinion of our fellow men, which though common to mankind, is often felt most sensibly by generous and noble minds.

As virtue presents to us only what is amiable in disposition, what is honorable and manly in conduct, or what is useful to society, it is not wonderful that it should be the object of general approbation. In like manner all the noble endowments of our nature, all distinguished acquisitions in science, all extraordinary efforts of genius, all great talents for the management of affairs, if they are seen to be directed by disinterested and virtuous principles to public good, command the applause of mankind. And, in return, the approbation and esteem of our fellow men; being among the most precious rewards of virtue, in this life, are also justly ranked among its most powerful and laudable incentives. Youth are particularly susceptible of the influence of this principle. And praise may justly be held out to them, as a motive to stimulate every improve-

ment of their natural talents, and their moral powers. Not that false praise which vanity solicits for superficial or frivolous attainments; not that corrupted praise which vice bestows on the ingenuity which is employed to defend its pleasures; nor those mistaken plaudits which the ignorance and passions of the misguided multitude too often yield to the art and cunning which mislead them;—but the praise which is bottomed upon piety and virtue; upon solid goodness and usefulness; the praise of actions which God, which conscience, which the world, when all their ends and motives are known, will approve. For this reason the apostle has said, “Whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are *honorable*,* whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are lovely,” before he adds, “if there be any *praise*, think of these things,”—that is, let your desire of praise be connected with truth, with honour, with justice, and with all that is amiable in life and manners. But this principle, however justifiable and laudable, when properly directed, is susceptible also of great perversion and abuse; and, instead of invigorating and unfolding the germs of goodness and worth, or of greatness and nobleness of character in the hearts of youth, may be made the instrument of misleading them into the most pernicious deviations from duty, or inciting them to vice.

Let me, then propose to your consideration *the love of praise* under two views.

* This is the meaning of the original word translated *honest* in our version,

I. As it is a laudable and useful principle of action—and,

II. As it may be corrupted, and possess a dangerous influence on the heart.

I. The love of praise has, evidently, been intended by our Creator as one of the most powerful incentives to actions great and honourable in themselves, and beneficial to mankind. No principle raises human nature to a higher tone of exertion. And when all its activity is directed to good and noble ends, it may justly be expected to lay the most solid and sure foundation for reputation and esteem in every sphere of life. The collisions of interest, indeed, or the predominance of party passions may, for a season, depress merit, and elevate imbecility or vice to distinction;—Vanity may, for a time, be caressed by the insidious flatteries of those who despise, while they court it;—Wealth, though acquired by crimes, may receive a deceitful and interested homage from dependants; the splendor of conquest may dazzle for a while the misjudging world, and cover with a false and temporary lustre, the iniquities by which they were achieved, and the miseries which follow in their train; but, they are talents guided by wisdom and piety, and directed to promote the interests of humanity, which unite the suffrages of all mankind, and embalm to posterity the memory of good men, and the fame of the benefactors of nations.

In examining the principles of human conduct we will often find this passion pervading with a useful influence all the active springs of our nature. It serves to polish the manners, and to circulate those amiable

attentions which contribute so much to the pleasure and enjoyment of life. The delicacies of conversation, the elegancies, the refinements, the charms of social intercourse which distinguish civilized from savage man, all spring from the mutual desire of pleasing and the reflected hope of being respected and beloved. Praise often cherishes in the youthful breast the seeds of future worth, and infuses into them the principles of a vigorous growth. And a generous emulation to excel is usually regarded, at that period, as the presage of all that is wise, and virtuous, and manly in after life. Praise has trimmed the lamp of the student, has guided and animated the hand of the artist, and often administered the noblest incentives to the fires of genius. To what, indeed, do we owe the poets, the orators, the statesmen, the patriots, the heroes, who have adorned, and shed a glory on the respective nations which have given them birth? I will not exclude the operation of other, and of higher principles in the formation of many of these great characters; but certainly one, and that, by no means the weakest in its influence, has been the proud hope of being rewarded with the esteem of their country; or the still prouder hope of enjoying that immortality in the memory of men which genius so often confers on its possessor; or which the public gratitude sometimes endeavours to bestow on illustrious services rendered to the interests of humanity. Those nations have, accordingly, flourished most who have best known how to touch this powerful spring of great and honorable actions. A statue, a tripod, a triumph, even a laurel crown, or an oaken wreath,

bestowed as a mark of the public favour, contributed to elevate the genius of Greece and Rome, above that of all other nations.—What dangers will not men encounter, what labors will they not undergo, what self denials not endure, in order to obtain a high place in the esteem of mankind? None can be entirely insensible to it except those who are conscious to themselves that they want worth to deserve it. Base and malignant must be that heart which is wholly indifferent to the opinion of the world.

The love of praise, therefore, when cherished in its due degree, not only incites the youth to useful improvement, and prompts the man to the performance of actions of conspicuous merit, but is intimately connected with those respectful and benevolent regards to mankind, which form the finest ties of human society. *Whatsoever things, then, are lovely, in themselves, and in the esteem of the world, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise resting on these amiable and solid foundations, think of these things.*

From so many considerations does it appear that the love of praise, when directed to proper objects, and preserved within proper bounds, is a legitimate, and a laudable principle of action. Our blessed Saviour himself, who was the most humble and self-denied of men, has not disdained to employ it as a motive and reward of good deeds in the example of the grateful sister of Lazarus, who had just given him a costly testimony of her affectionate attachment:—"Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman

hath done, be told for a memorial of her." And God hath denounced it as a curse on the wicked, that "*their name shall rot;*" but, "*blessed shall be the memory of the just;*" "*They shall be had in everlasting remembrance.*"

As a noble encouragement to piety, to virtue, to philanthropy, to the cultivation of all your intellectual and moral powers, remember that these are the qualities which chiefly command the esteem of mankind, and procure for their possessor that "good name which is better than precious ointment;" and is infinitely more to be valued, than the splendor of riches, or of power. The one is exposed to envy, the other begets affection and confidence; the one may excite admiration, the other commands esteem; the one may awaken in the bosom the pride of superiority, a cold unsocial sentiment, the other attracts love, than which a sweeter consciousness comes not to the heart. Riches and honors pass away, or descend to others who enjoy the benefit, and forget the favor—the memory of a good man is precious. While he lives he marches encompassed with his virtues, which attract round him the hearts of his fellow citizens; and when he dies, he carries with him their regrets and their tears.

Ah! did the princes and rulers of the earth know wherein their true glory consists, they would find it, not in the splendors which dazzle the eyes, and repel the groans of a miserable people: not in the power which imposes its yoke on subject nations; not in the mercenary flatteries with which they are worshipped in life; nor, at death, in the magnificent monuments,

and proud inscriptions which lie to posterity; but in the felicity of their country, in the blessings and prayers of nations made happy by their wisdom.—Those who have extorted by arbitrary force, or stolen by insidious arts, a false glory during their lives, shall be held up in their true light to posterity. Their private faults, the public evils which have flowed from their vices, will be dragged from beneath the veil with which power, or dependent adulation had attempted to cover them; and condemned, by the faithful severity of history, to the reprobation and contempt of future ages. But the justice and magnanimity of great rulers, the wisdom and integrity of able legislators and statesmen, the illustrious actions, or the generous sacrifices of patriots and heroes, the talents which have adorned the age in which they flourished, the extraordinary mental powers which have given direction to the great movements of the world shall, in the language of the sacred writer, *be had in everlasting remembrance.*

In every station of life, then, in which men may be placed by divine providence, they may justly regard an honest fame as among the purest and holiest motives of a noble and virtuous conduct. *Whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think of these things.*

That a fair reputation is a valuable possession, that the love of praise, when directed by just principles, and preserved within due bounds, is not only an allowable but a laudable motive of action, will not be denied. But, like all the best propensities and powers of our nature, it is capable of being perverted and it of-

ten is perverted, to ends very different from those for which it was implanted in the heart of man by his Creator.

II. Of its abuses, therefore, permit me next to speak.

It may be excessive. It may be ill directed, and become the minister of vice.

The praise of men, as has been already said, far from being the governing motive of our conduct, should only be auxiliary to the pure love of virtue, and a pious submission of heart to the will, and the law of God. It should be subordinate, as a principle of action, even to the approbation of our own consciences, and to that self respect which it will ever be the care of a wise and good man to cultivate. The noblest enjoyment of virtue and piety, next to the sense of the favor of God, is derived from the conscious rectitude of our own conduct; and that inward tranquillity and peace which a self approving conscience sheds through the whole soul. A good man will always be able to rest upon himself, if the caprice of the world should deny him his honest fame, or even the malignant arts of his enemies should succeed for a time, to overwhelm him with calumnies.

The desire of praise, when it becomes excessive, and this is its first abuse, puts your happiness too much in the power of others, both for your comfort and your duty. For although great talents will generally be admired, and virtue esteemed; yet, many events may occur to rob the best of men of that reputation to which their merits justly entitle them. They may be sunk in obscurity; they may be thrown, in the course of Pro-

vidence, into situations unfavourable to the display of their talents, or their virtues. Ignorance may not be able to appreciate them; prejudice may distort them, misfortune may cast them under a cloud, party passions may taint them, slander may tarnish them, envy may corrode them, the unsuspecting candor, frankness, and honesty of the most innocent minds may often lay them open to the attacks of artful and designing enemies. Beware, then, of setting your heart too fondly on a possession so perishable and uncertain. For if you fail to attain it, by having formed a wrong estimate of your own powers, or the opinions of the world; or if you should be deprived of it, by the arts of rivals, or of enemies, you will be overwhelmed with anguish. But, seek first the praise of God, and of your own hearts. Hence you will derive the truest and most lasting happiness. And although the approbation of your fellow men would be a sweet ingredient in the enjoyment of life; yet, the want of it will, in that case, inflict no fatal wound on your peace; you will have a happiness secured above the arts of malice and the storms of misfortune.

It deserves to be particularly remarked, in the next place, that when this passion becomes too visible, mankind often take a pleasure in disappointing our vanity. And the truth is, vanity forfeits a great part of the esteem which would otherwise be paid to the virtues with which it is sometimes connected. Not even the splendid talents and illustrious services of Cicero, could save him from the contempt and ridicule of his cotemporaries. When he would have it believed that he was wholly devoted to the republic, he seemed to be

not less devoted to his own glory, and was thought by many of his countrymen, to be a patriot only for fame.

To repress still further the criminal excess of this passion, which invades that supremacy of duty and love which we owe to God, reflect how often, is praise unjustly withheld, by ignorant or envious men from your most deserving qualities, or your most meritorious actions: how often it is injudiciously bestowed upon the undeserving; how often it is given to the most frivolous accomplishments: how often it is won by the most superficial appearances of merit; how often it is stolen from the multitude by base compliances, and hypocritical professions; and how often, if you possess power, or wealth, or beauty, it is impossible to distinguish sycophancy from esteem, and flattery from sincere attachment. Reflect moreover, that the breath of mortals, however soothing to our vanity, cannot soothe the cold ear of death, or follow us beyond the grave. If it hangs over our tombs for a few moments, like a light vapour, it is soon dissipated by the passions which occupy and agitate the surviving world, or sinks down in the chill night of an eternal oblivion. Nothing but the testimony of a good conscience, and a sincere trust in the Redeemer, can support the soul when all human things are passing away, and it finds itself entering alone through the valley of shades* into the eternal world. Let not the praise of men, therefore, if you receive it, unduly elate you; nor if it is withheld, be too

* *The valley of shades*, was the name by which a dark vale not far from Jerusalem, was distinguished, which furnished to the sacred poet, the illusion contained in this figure.

much depressed, if you have the higher praise of your conscience, of your works, and of God.

As the love of praise, when it is suffered to hold too high a place in the heart, will necessarily disappoint you, and will often defeat its own aims; so, by receiving a wrong direction, it becomes the minister of sin.

If the applauses of those with whom you associate are the chief objects of your ambition, what temptations do they not lay in your way, when you happen unfortunately to be connected with men who substitute fashion for duty, and who justify vice by example? Your contempt of religion, and of sober manners will, in such connections, often outrun fashion itself; you will be ambitious to obtrude your example among the first in every modish scene of dissipation.

But, most dangerous is this passion in the associations of young men, who are yet in the full tide of folly; whose reason has not been enlightened, and whose passions have not been chastened by experience; who mistake sprightliness for wit, and effrontery for talent. Here, he who can point out new roads to pleasure; he who can most ingeniously defend the vices of fashion, or with the greatest dexterity wield a stroke against the authority or the doctrines of religion; he who is most daring in his own conduct to overleap the bounds prescribed by the prudence of wisdom, and the caution of experience, will always be encouraged with thoughtless and giddy applause. Leaders in vice who are bold and assuming, ever meet with followers and imitators, sooner perhaps, than the patrons and examples of virtue and piety, who are modest and retiring.

Here, in the noisy plaudits of your companions, you will learn to drown the voice of conscience, and the awful menaces of religion; here will you soon be incited ostentatiously to trample on the restraints, which you miscall the prejudices, of a pious education; and to condemn the sober opinion of the world. You will affect to be more impious and profligate than you are, till you become as profligate and impious as you affect to be. Ah! how many unhappy youth, aspiring to distinction among such associates, have precipitated their own destruction.

Looking a little higher, among the ranks of literature, and turning over the volumes of infidelity and immorality, which the press has so copiously poured upon the present age, I say to myself of these pernicious writings, that spring from the corrupt affections of the heart; how many have their immediate source in that vanity which aspires to gain the reputation of superior wit and strength of mind, by attacking all ancient systems, by boldly assailing the sacred doctrines of religion, and maintaining every extravagant novelty of opinion. All the libertine, all the vain, all who *are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*; that is, unhappily, the greater portion of all the higher circles of society, are ready to extol with excessive praise, and crown with the laurels of genius, the authors who would emancipate them from the thralldom of religious fear, and lay the spectres which haunt the gloom of the grave. In an age of luxury and pleasure, this misapplication of talent opens an easy path to that airy temple which false wit, and superficial science, have erected on an

humble eminence, decorated with artificial flowers, in opposition to the genuine temple of Fame, planted on the summit of an arduous cliff, the ascent to which is always difficult and laborious. The incessant applauses of the giddy throng who surround it below, seduce a crowd of authors, who hasten thither to offer their works on the altars of vice. Alas! deplorable talents! corrupted while they corrupt! Applauded by those only whom they are helping to destroy!

In the false and pernicious direction given to this passion, we may find the cause of many of those disorders, which have disturbed the tranquillity of free governments. Often it created the most dangerous ferment in the little republics of Greece. And we do not want examples among ourselves of the most odious factions, excited and nourished by this principle. It is not always the love of *a little brief authority*, nor even the mean avarice of gaining a few extraordinary emoluments in the public service, which sets your restless demagogues on work, (although not a small proportion of our pretended patriots are governed by such unworthy motives), but, frequently, vain men, with no other talents than presumption and loquacity, are ambitious of obtruding themselves on the public view. Ambitious of vulgar praise, they study to seize on some popular topic to stir the commonalty into violence and frenzy. The best characters are the subjects of their slander; the best measures they find some low and mercenary ground of defaming; while they strive to raise into a flame a fickle, envious and ignorant populace, with whom a violent and worldly zeal is too often the proof of

patriotism. Little scrupulous of the means they employ to accomplish their end, the public good, which is their loudest pretence, is their least concern. All their object is to rise into favour on the agitated tide. And, for a while, perhaps, they ride in triumph, supported on the bubbles they have raised. The bubbles break, and leave them to sink into their native obscurity; other favourites, not less ambitious and possibly more unprincipled than themselves, agitate this multitudinous ocean by a new storm. They hurl their predecessors into the troubled waves, in the midst of which, like them, they ride, for a little while, till, in their turn, they are precipitated by new pretenders. In the mean time, their country suffers innumerable evils; till at last, they make the very name of patriotism be abhorred: and the distracted, and so often deluded people, seek some dreadful remedy for political disorders at length become intolerable.

Perhaps, a still more deplorable effect of this misguided passion, is seen when it ascends to the very seat of Moses and the apostles, and corrupts, in the mouths of the teachers of religion, the purity and simplicity of its truths. On this subject two opposite evils often dishonour the sanctuary of truth. While some, studious only to please the circles of polite fashion, *prophesy smooth things*, and bring down the standard of evangelic morality to what fashion prescribes, or the delicacy of luxury will bear; others, destitute of talents to edify the church of God by the extent and variety of their knowledge, or the powers of a cultivated elocution, address themselves to catch the applause

of zeal from the misjudging multitude, who seldom are able to distinguish an assumed fervor from the genuine warmth of sincere piety. With noise, with rant, with terror, by whatever engines will move and agitate rude minds, but equally distant from the genuine spirit of religion as the vicious complaisance of the former, they pursue their unworthy ends. There are demagogues in religion as well as in politics, whose chief aim it is to render themselves conspicuous in a party. But all the flashings of their fiery zeal cannot conceal from a true discerner of the human heart, the unworthy passions which, under the mask of humble devotion, are helping to blow the flame, for the purposes of their own vanity. Among all impieties, hardly can one be mentioned more odious to Heaven, and to all good men, than to stand up in the temples, and in the name of the Most High, only to seek our own glory. To soften down to the taste of fashionable pleasure, on the one hand, those holy and eternal truths on which depends the salvation of immortal souls; or, on the other, to convert the humble, devout, and reasonable service of the living God into the frantic howlings of the idolatrous worshippers of Moloch, or of Dagon. I know not which should most shock a rational and pious mind, to see an Adonis present himself, like a servant of the Graces, before the awful altars of Jehovah; or to see an ignorant and presumptuous mortal throwing himself into a counterfeited frenzy; dealing out the denunciations of Heaven on his fellow creatures, according as his own passions impel him; approaching his Creator and Redeemer with the most indecent familiarities of expression; and pouring forth

his own incoherent rhapsodies, instead of *the words of truth and soberness*;—Those divine truths which we ought always to touch with the same reverence and awe, with which the priests of Israel approached the ark of the covenant, or Aaron and his sons entered into the holy of holies.—Oh! impiety! thus hypocritically to employ religion to serve the base purposes of our own vanity! to dare attempt to make God, if I may speak so, pander to our vile praise!

Thus the love of praise, when it is excessive, or ill directed, may, in many ways, corrupt the heart. We have often seen it, when lavishly and indiscreetly bestowed, deprave those excellent dispositions which at first deserved it. Acquired, in the beginning, by the exercise of the most modest virtues, it has at last inflated the heart with an odious vanity, and created a spirit self-conceited, arrogant, and intractable. Ah! how little does vanity, or pride, become a man in the midst of his fellow men! a brother in the midst of his brethren!—above all, a worm of the dust in the presence of the infinite Creator!

But though the love of praise when it is excessive, or misplaced, is attended with so many evils and dangers, yet have we seen it, when properly regulated, ever united with a generous emulation to excel, and become the parent of the most valuable improvements in society, and of the highest virtues. Separate it from the pernicious principles with which it is often conjoined, and I will again and again repeat, with the apostle,—“Whatsoever things are of good report; if there

be any virtue, if there be any praise, think of these things."

But, it is time to address myself to the last duty of this day, giving my parting counsels to those youth who have just finished their course of studies in this institution, and offering up for them my most fervent prayers.

Young Gentlemen,

We now touch on the last moments of our union as instructor, and as pupils. It is a moment always accompanied with many serious reflections. You are parting from the retirements of your studies. The vast, and various prospect of life is before you, with all its uncertainties and dangers, its hopes and disappointments, its rivalships and contentions, its labors and its duties. I look upon you like a mariner who has just passed an agitated ocean, while you are, as yet, only launching amidst the waves. He hopes, he prays for the success of so many young and ardent adventurers; but he trembles at the hazards in which he knows you will presently be involved. At a moment, then, in which many recollections and anticipations naturally press upon the mind to dispose it to solemnity, and to awaken in our bosoms many tender, as well as serious emotions, may I not hope that instructions to which you have often listened with deference, will make upon your hearts a more lasting impression than on ordinary occasions.

In the course of your studies it has ever been an object with the government of this institution to nourish

in your bosoms a generous emulation to excel, and to far that love of praise, which, united with the love of science, and the nobler sentiments of duty, would stimulate you to the highest exertion of the best powers and faculties of your nature. Still continue to cherish that useful principle which will impel you forward in the career of honourable improvement. In the youthful breast it can hardly be excessive. Not yet tainted by the envy of rivalry, or the intrigues of ambition, which so often corrupt the passions of riper years, its earliest tendencies are to lead you to virtue; to prompt you to the cultivation of every talent, the acquisition of every accomplishment which will awaken in your favor, on all sides, the voice of praise. How lovely is youth when we behold in it all the symptoms of a virtuous sensibility; all the ardor of a generous emulation; all the noble purposes of duty; all the modest consciousness at once of worth, and of the imperfection of its attainments! all the auguries of future honor, and usefulness!

Cultivate a generous love of praise. At your age, it will be a powerful incentive to virtue: to genius it will be like the animating rays of the sun, which give life, action, and energy to the whole creation.

What then are those qualities which procure for their possessor the highest honor and distinction among men? Are they not the great endowments of the mind, and the good affections of the heart? On a noble magnanimity, on diffusive benevolence, on unshaken integrity, on a warm, rational, and dignified piety, on extensive science, on a powerful and manly eloquence,

on the masterly ability of combining and applying all the branches of knowledge for the purposes of public utility, are founded the most solid claims to public esteem. Superficial talents, and showy but hollow pretensions, may deceive the multitude for a moment; but experience and time, which disclose the true characters of men, and the sounder judgments of the wise, which ultimately prevail over hasty and ill founded opinions, will strip from them the laurels with which ignorance had crowned them.

It is the union of talents with virtue which forms the true foundation of lasting praise. Virtue will procure for you higher confidence from your fellow citizens, talents spread round you greater lustre. It is on the union of both that you should build your hopes of honour and esteem.

Be not in haste, then, to enter on the exercise of those various liberal professions to which most of you intend hereafter to devote your faculties. Wait with patience the development of the full powers of your minds; and continue long to collect, with persevering industry, from every source, the treasures of knowledge, which are necessary to fit you to appear with distinction and eminence, before you advance into the public theatre of life. A prudent delay will, in the end, be gaining both time and reputation. But if you are impatient to display your talents, or to enter on the acquisition of a pitiful gain, and therefore content yourselves with hasty and superficial preparations, you will probably march through your whole course with feeble, nerveless, and obscure efforts, which, if they do not co-

ver you with contempt, will, at least, leave you sunk among the vulgar throng who make up the mass, or drag at the tail of their respective professions.

Whence is it that we hear from the pulpit so many insipid, and common-place discourses, without illumination to gratify the understanding, and without energy to impress the heart? Seldom, perhaps, is it to be ascribed to the absolute defect of natural capacity, but to the want of due preparation for discharging honorably and usefully the functions of this holy office. Whence is it that many a young preacher, after being well received for a few discourses, becomes at last spiritless, and insipid, and addresses only fatigued and listless audiences? He has exhausted his scanty intellectual funds, and has nothing new to produce from his impoverished treasury.

Whence is it that the noble and dignified science of justice, so often degenerates into a pitiful pettifoggery and chicanery? Young men without diligence and application, meanly furnished with juridical knowledge, and destitute of the rich and varied powers of eloquence derived from a general acquaintance with other arts, have addicted themselves only to the meagre forms, and the dishonourable quibbles of the law.—And is it not lamentable to see, in so many instances, men, ignorant of the first elements of civil and political science, presuming to prescribe laws to the republic; and pretending, without the smallest consciousness of their own insufficiency, to direct the relations, and settle the jarring interests of the state with foreign nations! Interests, relations, laws, which require a con-

summate knowledge of the principles of civil society, the most extensive information concerning the political, commercial, and military state of the civilized world, the most vigorous powers of combination, a penetration which pervades at a single glance the most complicated systems; a comprehension able to embrace at one view the most remote consequences; a perspicacity fitted to unravel the most intricate questions of policy.

Among your most valuable attainments let me add, that it is especially important, in a free country, to cultivate a forcible and persuasive eloquence. I may surely address myself to an American scholar in the language which Sir William Jones has used to a young British nobleman whom he was desirous of training up to the knowledge and management of public affairs. "I am fully convinced, says he, that an Englishman's real importance in his country will always be in a compound ratio of his virtue, his knowledge, and his eloquence, without all of which qualities little real utility can result from either of them apart."

But, remember, it is not the noisy declamation of a town-meeting, nor the crude and incoherent garrulity which so often fatigues the attention, and delays the public business, in our legislatures, which will enable an orator to combine the great interests, and guide the movements of a nation. To perform this with success he should thoroughly comprehend those interests, he should possess a perspicacious mind, clearly to develop them, he should be able to foresee, and to obviate all difficulties which will oppose the execution of his plans, he should derive light and information from all ages,

he should understand the true character, powers, and resources of his country, he should discern the best means of drawing them into operation, he should know how to touch all the springs of human action. Behold what a field is before the real statesman! These were the powers which gave Demosthenes so great an ascendant over all the corrupted politicians, and noisy demagogues of Athens. These were the powers which made even the most polished orators, who knew only the modulation of periods, and charmed the ear without enlightening the understanding, yield to his superior illumination and energy. He did not deem it sufficient to declaim with angry and boastful vehemence against the public enemy. This would have been an easy task to a far inferior orator. He penetrated and displayed the artful designs of the Macedonian king;—he unfolded the true interests of Greece: he portrayed in strong colours the storm which impended over his country, he pointed out, at the same time the resources with which she was able to meet and dispel it; he showed to Athens her own strength: he entered into the minutest details of her finance; he understood the views and intrigues of every state which could affect the interests of his own country; he knew how to resuscitate from the slumbers of luxury, the ancient vigor of the republic; all the stores of history were open to his use; all the lights of science, all the powers of language, were summoned to his aid.—Were these mighty effects the fruit of superficial attainments, of hasty studies, of precipitately intruding himself into the management of affairs? You know his history—his la-

bors; his long continued and intense application; his obstinate conflicts with the difficulties which nature opposed to his success. But he resolved to become the first statesman and orator in Greece; and he became so. But, why propose such an illustrious and transcendent example to young men who, as yet, are only entering on their literary career?—Because every young man, who desires to excel, should, from the beginning, have his view and his ambition fixed on the highest models. But this example, while it is calculated to excite the ardor of your emulation, is fitted also to encourage your hopes, and may serve to show you how much is in your power. For it is a maxim which ought to be engraven on the heart of every ingenuous youth to whom nature has not been extraordinarily deficient in her gifts, that, like the Athenian orator he can accomplish whatever he is firmly resolved to do.

But, let me add, that the love of praise, when it is not made the handmaid of vanity, but is modest and well-directed, will make you studious especially to gain the approbation of those whom it is your duty, and whom it will be your chief honor and happiness to please. To be ever ready to do good to the lowest of mankind is an exalted virtue; but to be ambitious of the applauses of the ignorant and fickle multitude is a low aim; and to collect them is not a difficult task to those who can stoop to the dishonourable arts which are requisite for this end. Be it your ambition to deserve the esteem of the wise and good, whose opinion will stamp a worth upon your name. Cultivating their esteem, you will be supported also by the conscious-

ness of your own hearts;---that noble consciousness which God has made, next to his own approbation, the most precious reward of virtue; and which will console you like Socrates, and like Phocion, or, to take a higher example, like Daniel, if, at any time, the malignant arts of rivals or of enemies should prevail against you.

Prepare to deserve, hereafter, the approbation of your country by meritorious and distinguished services, as so many of the sons of the college have done who once occupied the place in which you now stand. Men who have not enjoyed the advantages of liberal culture are permitted to confine their views to a narrow sphere. But education imposes higher duties on her sons, and enforces them by sublimer examples. Patriotism was the first of virtues to a Greek, or a Roman. He sucked it in with his first milk; he inhaled it with his vital breath; to strengthen this passion all his studies, his discipline, his exercises were directed.

But passing all other considerations, permit me to press upon you one which cannot fail to touch the heart of an ingenuous youth. Among your highest aims let it ever be, to deserve the praise and the love of those to whom, immediately, you owe your existence; and who have the deepest stake in your honor and felicity.

The sweetest recompense which, as dutiful sons, you can receive for all the self-denials of your early virtues, must be to witness the happiness, and the honest pride of those who have loved you with supreme tenderness, whose hearts have throbbed with ten thousand anxieties over your inexperienced years, who have

made so many painful sacrifices to your education. when they behold all their sacrifices, their anxieties, their love, repaid by your duty, and rewarded by your improvement. I seem to participate with them the tender delight, the sweet rapture in which they are dissolved, when on your return they believe they are embracing in their arms their worthy sons. If the world were filled with your praises, methinks the idea dearest to you, must be the delicious pride which your reputation and honor must reflect to the heart of an affectionate parent. Ah! what a motive to improvement! what a reward for excelling! The most amiable trait in the character of the great Epaminondas was his filial piety. Being asked which was the happiest circumstance in a life distinguished, as his was, by illustrious deeds, and the admiration of his countrymen; "it was, says he, that after my victory at Leuctra my father and mother were both living to enjoy the honors paid me by my fellow citizens." If this virtue displays a more resplendent lustre surrounded with the glory of heroic actions, yet this lovely sentiment, in my opinion, confers more real greatness on the Theban hero than all his victories. The thought of rendering happy a father, or a mother by our own virtues and honors, how precious to the heart of a dutiful son! There are no personal gratifications he would not forego, there are no sacrifices he would not make, to enjoy it. But why do I speak of sacrifices? When it is your own virtue, honor, reputation, when it is, in a word, your own happiness which makes them happy.—Imagine you see the tear of tenderness and delight start in their eyes at these your first honors; and, with their venera-

ble and beloved forms before you, resolve that they never shall have cause to blush for their sons.

But if, in any instance, they have already descended to the tomb, and left you to maintain the honor of their families, let your virtues prove the noblest monument to their memory.

Would to God that I could inspire this pure and virtuous sentiment into the bosom of every American youth! It would, along with religion, to which it is intimately allied, be the surest foundation of the prosperity and glory of my country.—“Honor thy father and thy mother, saith the Spirit of God to the people of Israel, that thy days, that is, thy existence as a nation, may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”

I have recommenced the praise of your friends, of your country, and of mankind, as a motive to duty; and pointed out the good effects that may result from your desire to obtain it. Bear with me however, a few moments, while I caution you against the dangerous consequences which may spring from the abuse of this passion.

Many young men who have early discovered a certain promptness and vivacity of parts, courted and caressed as the life of every gay company, have cultivated only those superficial talents which made them entertaining companions, and attracted the unthinking applauses of levity and mirth. Having glittered awhile in the circles of fashion or of dissipation, they have afterwards sunk into insignificance and all their early promises have perished.

Their vanity, nourished by the praises of their friends, led them to imagine that they already shone with the lustre of genuine wit at the summit of the mountain, while they only flashed like meteors at the bottom for a few moments and disappeared. Between sprightliness of parts, and the capacities of a great mind, between promptness of wit, and solidity of understanding, between the brilliancy of certain companionable qualities and mature wisdom, there is a wide difference. And young men fascinated by the noisy plaudits bestowed on these frivolous accomplishments, have too frequently misapplied their time, and given a wrong direction to the early efforts of their genius. Thus have been blasted all the opening blossoms of hope; and the first rich promise of fruit has withered and dropped from the tree before it came to maturity.

When vanity assumes a merit to itself for the novelty, the extravagance, or impiety of the principles it maintains, it presents to us one of the most fatal symptoms of a depraved heart. It is dangerous even to sport opinions of which you are not firmly persuaded, in order to gain the praise of ingenuity and wit. But lost, and commonly beyond recovery, is the unhappy youth whom the vanity of receiving the applause of loose and profligate companions leads to place himself at the head of associations for vice. Stimulated by their flatteries, he outgoes even his own desires for indulgence; and far outgoes his convictions of what is consistent with reason, or with duty. In proportion to the ascendancy he has assumed among them, must he be more profligate than they; aim a more poignant

ridicule at virtue, more impious scoffs against religion. Oh! fatal vanity! which is hastening the perdition of the soul, and laying up for them the eternal execrations of those whom they have ruined by their example, and who are now ruining them by their guilty praise. “*Of you, I may say with the apostle, I hope better things, though I thus speak.*”

But in the conclusion of this address, suffer me to repeat to you, that, however laudable in youth is a generous love of praise, it should never hold the chief sway among the motives of your conduct. It should ever be subordinate to a pure and ardent love of virtue, and reverence for religion, and even to a just and noble respect for yourselves. But, the first object of desire to every reasonable being should be the approbation of God. He who embraces all being in himself is the sovereign good. What is the transient breath of mortals compared to *his favour which is life, and his loving kindness which is better than life*? Vain is all human glory, separated from virtue and from the love and service of the living God. The laurels of the conquerors of the world have long since withered on their brows—the proudest monuments of princely vanity have been long since levelled with the dust, the most splendid works of genius and of art consecrated to the fame of illustrious men, are continually passing to oblivion, and the world itself shall perish; but those who love God shall *inhabit with him the praises of eternity*.

Never can you too profoundly impress it on your hearts that God your Creator possesses the supreme right to all the powers of your being. From him they

are derived, to him they ought continually to tend. How amiable and lovely in youth is piety, which draws down the spirit of heaven to earth; which opens on the beginning of life the fairest blossoms of hope; which consecrates to our adorable Creator and Redeemer the bloom of existence; and is preparing in the heart the ripened fruit of a blessed and glorious immortality. The early contact of the soul, if I may speak so, with infinite purity, which is effected by the power of devotion, at once ennobles and purifies its being, and prepares it for those holy and ineffable joys which perfect spirits taste in the presence of God.

Retiring as you now are from these studious retreats in which you have spent many hours of refined and social pleasure; and dissolving many pleasing ties which have hitherto united you with your literary associates, let these separations remind you of that more serious moment when you must part with all human friendships; and when the world fading from your view, shall leave you no support in the conflict with death, and no consolation at the bar of Heaven, but the mercy and grace of your Redeemer, and the review of life spent in obedience to his holy will. So live, and employ the talents which God has given you, that the supreme Judge, assembling round you in that day your good works, may, from this tribunal, proclaim them to the universe, to your everlasting glory and praise.

As I am now performing the last office which my station requires in superintending this period of your education; for your diligence, for your laudable ambition, in any instance, to excel; for all that you have

done well for your own honor and interest, or for the general interest of morals and letters in the college, accept my thanks. For nothing is dearer to my heart than the improvement in every useful and ornamental endowment of those whose education has been committed to my charge.

If, in the course of your studies, I have, through inadvertance or mistake, injured the feelings of one person in the class, I trust that my motives, and the arduousness of my situation will excuse it. All that is past is forgotten, except your virtues. Henceforward I regard you as equals, and, as men. One emotion only occupies my heart in a fervent aspiration to heaven, for your honor and usefulness in life; and for your everlasting salvation. O blessed Jesus! Saviour and advocate of mankind! who dost offer the sincere prayers of thy people before God, deign to present this prayer with acceptance at the heavenly throne!

ADIEU!

ON RULING SIN.

And the sin which doth so easily beset us. *Heb. xii, 1.*

FREQUENTLY, in the sacred writings, the self-denials, and the arduous duties of the christian life are represented by images drawn from the athletic exercises, so customary in that age, for which the combatants were obliged to qualify themselves by a vigorous preparatory discipline, and in which during the actual conflict they were obliged to exert the utmost powers of nature in contending for the honorable prize. In this passage the apostle borrows his allusions from the race; a contest for which they prepared themselves by an exact temperance as well as by a long course of previous and active exercises. In the race itself, they disencumbered themselves of every weight, that, being free from whatever might obstruct their speed, or depress their energies, they might have better hope to gain the goal in triumph. This analogy the apostle applies to the progress of a christian through the present evil world. It requires all the vigor of soul, all the self-denial, all the earnestness and zeal which were ever exerted in the best disputed race. Heaven is the glorious prize proposed to our activity and perseverance in duty. But, inheriting as we do a degenerate nature, placed in the midst of innumerable temptations,

we are impeded in our course by the weights which our corruptions hang on all the devout and pious tendencies of the soul. It is a course in which we are obliged continually to ascend towards the heavenly hills against all the propensities of a corrupted heart, and in which we are obliged, too often, to struggle under an oppressive load of worldly and impure affections, which weigh down the soul, and hinder its advancement in its spiritual course. Christians! if you would obtain the victory in this race, if you would gain the immortal prize which is set before you, *disencumber yourselves of every weight, but especially, says this great apostle, of that sin which doth so easily beset you.*

Every sinful propensity, every excessive and worldly attachment and care, all our unsanctified passions and pursuits, form so many impediments in our christian race; so many dangerous obstacles to the attainment of our salvation. But, there is commonly some one passion, indulgence, or pursuit, to which each man is chiefly prone, which enters more into his character than other sinful propensities, which may be deemed his constitutional or prevailing evil, and which this great writer calls *the sin which doth so easily beset us.* Infecting all the powers of the soul, and mingling with all its movements, it forms the principal hindrance to the return of a sinner to God by sincere repentance, and is the principal obstruction even of a believer in his progress towards Heaven. It often hangs as a heavy weight upon the soul; it retards his speed and

slackens his diligence, and oppresses within him the springs of the divine life.

That we may the better understand this sin, and be enabled to comply with the exhortation of the apostle, let me—in the first place, point out its distinguishing characters—and in the next place, offer to the penitent sinner some means to deliver him from its dangerous power; and to throw off its oppressive weight.

1. In order to point out its distinguishing characters with the more precision, let us consider it both in its operations and its causes.

1. And first in its operations.—

These you will find in your thoughts, your sentiments, your affections, your pursuits. Your predominant evil then may often be learned by considering what are those objects and images which most frequently offer themselves to your thoughts? which most readily move your affections, or at the view of which your passions now quickly kindle. What are those gratifications on which you are willing to bestow the greatest portion of your time, for which you are ready to make the greatest sacrifices? What is that which most readily offers itself to your mind when free from other engagements? What is most apt to obtrude itself into the midst of other engagements, and even into the most serious moments of devotion? To give some examples; do you find these images and objects in your worldly gains? in voluptuous pleasures? in sensual indulgences? in the vanity and ostentation of your person? Or, do you find them in the malevolent passions, the resentments, the envy, the revenge which

are continually rankling in the dark and malignant bosom? Like Haman does the honor of Mordecai disturb your thoughts, and rob you of your peace? Like the envious children of Jacob, are you always conceiving, planning, or wishing some evil towards a more fortunate brother? Like Nabal, do you deny yourself to all the sweet and pious offices of charity and humanity, for the sake of hoarding up a vile treasure? Like Sampson ensnared by the wiles of an artful seducer, are you willing to desert virtue, and honor, and reputation, for an unlawful pleasure? Like the sons of Belial, do you find your supreme delight in riot, intoxication, and debauchery? Like the saunterers in the parable, is it your chief gratification *to stand all the day idle*, to gape at the corners of the streets for news, for anecdote, for slander, and indolently to herd with those who have nothing farther in view than to pass the time? Like the young man in the gospel, though you may have many amiable qualities, are you notwithstanding, so devoted to the world that there is still one possession which you cannot sell, one pleasure which you cannot renounce that you may follow Christ? The purport of these inquiries is to ask if worldliness and idleness, if the love of sensual pleasure, if avarice, if envy, the irritable and wrathful passions, give the prevailing features to your character? Behold then the evil against which the holy apostle earnestly exhorts you to struggle;—the power against which he encourages you to contend;—the weight which he commands you to lay aside.

Again, you may know the sin which most easily be-sets you. Examine your convictions, when, at any time, the divine word has been applied with power to your heart.—When convinced of your duty, when penetrated with the sentiments of religion; and almost persuaded to be a christian; what is that sin which you forsake with the greatest reluctance? To which you cling with the fondest attachment; for which you are most desirous to find apologies to your own heart? which you strain the language, or the examples of the scriptures to justify? or which, in the face of the Scriptures, you press your reason to palliate or excuse? What is that pleasure for which you will go the most doubtful lengths in your conduct? that, in a word, for which you would be willing to make the sacrifice of all your other sins if you could be permitted to enjoy this in peace? By such inquiries, and such reflections upon your own heart and character, may you learn to know and distinguish that sin which is the most dangerous enemy of our salvation; which requires the most holy resolution and fortitude to tear the heart from its influence; and which, more than all others, demands unceasing self-command and watchfulness over our thoughts and actions.

Other discriminating characters of this sin we may derive from considering its sources. Not unfrequently, it seems to flow from a certain natural temperament of constitution, we see men at different times who appear by an original propensity of nature, to be strongly addicted to avarice, to lust, to envy, to revenge, or pride. These vices display themselves with the first

passions of childhood, and strongly mark the first openings of the character. Having struck their roots deeply into the soil of nature, they grow almost without our consciousness, and require the greatest vigilance, the greatest self-command, and even the greatest powers of divine grace to subdue them. If they are only neglected they increase by those continued impulses from within, which are forever pushing them on to excess; and they soon add the force of habit, to the tendencies of nature.—Habit often becomes, itself, an independent and powerful principle of the sin of which the apostle speaks. Even where nature has given no peculiar bias, what strength, what almost irresistible force do certain vices acquire by the influence of habit alone? Is it not from this principle rather than from the remaining vivacity of sensations and appetites which have been long cloyed and blunted, by excess, that debauchery and profligacy, still retain their power over old and debilitated libertines? But let me instance in two vices to which mankind are, perhaps, never led by original propensity; or taste. I mean intemperance and profanity. Intoxicating liquors are, in the beginning, almost always tasted with disrelish? But company, but example, but sollicitation, but gayety and levity of spirits, but idleness which requires some excitement to the indolent and relaxed powers of nature, allured on the drunkard by degrees, and at length created that destructive and almost unconquerable appetite, so ruinous to health, to interest, to peace of mind, to domestic happiness, to social order, to every worthy and respectable quality of human nature. And

hardly can he now see his idle companions, and never can he taste the ensnaring and poisonous draught, but, at once, he loses all self-command, and to his shame and ruin he is dragged *as a fool to the correction of the stocks.*

In the next place, is there any natural impulse or temptation to profanely using the holy name of Almighty God? Yet, do we not see it, by a shameful and pernicious habit, incorporated by certain individuals into the whole tissue of their discourse? Hardly can they address one another, hardly can they express their resentments or their pleasures, hardly can they breathe but through the medium of profanity. Although religion loudly prohibits it, although their own reason condemns it, although it is an offence against decency as well as against God, and to make the mildest apology for it, which can be made, it is an unmeaning vulgarity of language, which those who possess any just sentiments of propriety as well as of duty, frequently resolve to lay aside, yet the unworthy habit still cleaves to them. It is a sin which besets them at every moment, and is speedily tending to destroy in their hearts all veneration for God their Creator, and all regard to his holy and awful inspection.

If our ruling sin sometimes arises out of original propensity and taste, if it is more frequently created by habitual indulgence, does it not often spring also out of situations and connexions into which in the course of Providence, or by our own imprudence, we may have been thrown in life?—Is not poverty, for example, and a state of dependence exposed to the sins of

envy, of discontent at the dispensation of Divine Providence? Is not wealth exposed to the sins of presumption and pride, of luxury and voluptuousness? How often have unhappy reverses of fortune fatally tempted men to dishonesty and fraud? How often has sudden and unexpected wealth immersed them in worldly cares, or in dissipated pleasures, which have induced, at length, an entire oblivion of God and of the duties of religion? How often have unworthy friendships, imprudent and vicious associations engaged men, unwarily at first, and at length, habitually in a fatal course of folly and of crimes? Where has the dissolute youth contracted those vices which, in spite of his own convictions, are dragging him captive at their will? Where has the worthless gambler learned his infamous trade? Where has the contemptible loungee acquired his habits of idleness? The prodigal, the intemperate, the profligate, where have they depraved and corrupted all their powers both of body and of soul? Was it not in that vicious society into which accident first has thrown them, and which imprudence afterwards has cherished?—In innumerable ways may accidental connexions, circumstances, situations contribute to form the characters of men, and to create that dominant and habitual sin which becomes, at length the tyrant of the soul, and the principal hindrance to their salvation.

2. But, it is not enough to expose to you this sin, and to represent its dangers; it is not of less importance to consider by what means we may be enabled to overcome its power, and lay aside its weight in our christian course. Our first study it should be then, by

diligent, serious, and faithful self-inquiry to discern this complexional and characteristic evil which the scriptures emphatically call *the plague of our own hearts*.

Truly to understand, and sincerely to be disposed to confess it to ourselves and to God, is already more than half the victory gained. Against it chiefly, in the conflicts of the Heavenly race, should the vigilance and the holy zeal of every believer be directed, that he may thoroughly eradicate it, and obtain the entire command over all the passions and appetites of nature which impel to its indulgence, or which tend to cherish it and increase its strength. But, if you endeavour only, or principally to correct and restrain other sins to which you are less enslaved, while this beloved and dominant lust still holds the throne of your heart, however you may thereby promote many of the decencies of life, the essence of the character remains unchanged. It is lopping off a few branches from a poisonous tree, while its root is suffered to remain fixed in the earth.

How then? do you ask, are we able of ourselves *to lay aside the weight of this sin* which so easily besets us, the principles of which we carry with us, and which is incorporated into our whole nature? Can a corrupted heart cure itself? It is true that, for this end, we must obtain the aids of the Holy Spirit. But there are duties on our part to which in the order of Divine grace, those aids are mercifully attached by God. And God may be said to have placed our salvation in our own power; because he has put it in our power always to obtain his aid.

Of these duties the first in order, and perhaps in influence, is fervent and continual prayer. God is ever ready to impart his grace to those who ask in sincerity, and persevere at his footstool with a holy constancy. He has promised in his blessed word, and the experience of the saints has verified his promise, that *he who asketh shall receive, he who seeketh shall find, and to him who knocketh it shall be opened*. These are only accumulated images to express the holy prevalence of prayer. Prayer, at the same time that it obtains the merciful assistance of God, invigorates all the energies of the soul in its conflicts with the world, and the power of sin. In aid of prayer, employ those holy precautions which your frailty requires, retire from the scenes which awaken your passions—from the temptations which inflame impure desires—from the opportunities which favour indulgence—from whatever would excite or call into action that *sin which so easily besets you*. Measures of precaution are necessary to be combined with the most active and vigorous resistance. It is necessary sometimes with Job to make a covenant with your eyes.

To prayer, to vigilance, to all the precautions of prudence, unite habitual and profound meditation on divine things. Assemble in your minds all the considerations of religion, all the motives to duty, which can either weaken the force of the passions, or encourage and animate your ardor in the christian course. Often profoundly occupied in the contemplation of God in the courts of his house, or the retirements of your private devotion, let every unhallowed passion be silent before the

purity of his holiness and the majesty of his glory. In the infinite changes, and the approaching dissolution of all earthly things, seriously consider the vanity of the world, the temptations of which nourish and keep alive the power of that dangerous sin. Place before your mind in all its grandeur and solemnity, in all its terrors and its joys that eternal existence on which you are shortly about to enter. Behold in the universal experience of mankind, recognize in your own experience, the worthlessness and imperfection of all sinful pleasures, the emptiness of all sinful pursuits, the deplorable issue of all those proud honors, and those vain splendors with which sinners have dazzled the eyes of their fellow sinners, that they may not acquire any dangerous hold upon your heart. Above all, profoundly meditate on those high rewards, those crowns and palms of glory which are proposed to the christian victor at the end of his race, and shall adorn his hands, or encircle his head in the immortal kingdom of God. Could a simple wreath of laurel, could the shouts of the agitated and impatient spectators, inspire with such resolution, with such perseverance, with such extinguishable ardor, those who contended for the glory of swiftness in the olympic course? For these frivolous honors, would the eager combatants endure so many self-denials, and lay out all the powers of a generous and noble nature in such arduous conflicts, and, christians! when celestial mansions, a celestial triumph are before you, how great should be your holy zeal, in your Heavenly race? Shall immortal joys, shall the approbation of the Universal Judge, shall crowns of

glory, and the applauses of an *innumerable company of angels*, and of the countless myriads redeemed from the earth, reward your victory in this course, and what self-denials, what pious labors, should you not be willing to endure, what active exertions in duty, should you not be willing to make, in order to gain that everlasting goal? Your unholy passions, your false and guilty pleasures, will you not be ready to sacrifice them in this conflict to the glory of God, and the salvation of your souls? will you not *lay aside every weight* and encumbrance, and above all *that sin*, however dear to you, *which doth so easily beset you, that you may run with christian perseverance* and finish with Heavenly and everlasting triumph, *the race set before you?*

In the conclusion, permit me to observe that this subject bears a relation to the state both of convinced sinners, and of sincere believers. In the one, this ruling sin is the principal obstacle to an entire and unreserved submission of the heart to the grace of the gospel, in the other it is the chief cause of the imperfection of their obedience, who fail at last, and of the tardiness of their progress in the Divine life who loiter in their way. When the sinner, penetrated with his guilt is endeavouring to escape from the wrath to come, is it not the power of this sin which holds him a miserable captive, almost against his own will? When he seems on the point of giving up every other lust, and making his peace with God, what is it that seems to dash him back from the throne of grace but the consciousness of this sin which still keeps him enslaved to his corruptions? Every thing else, perhaps, he

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