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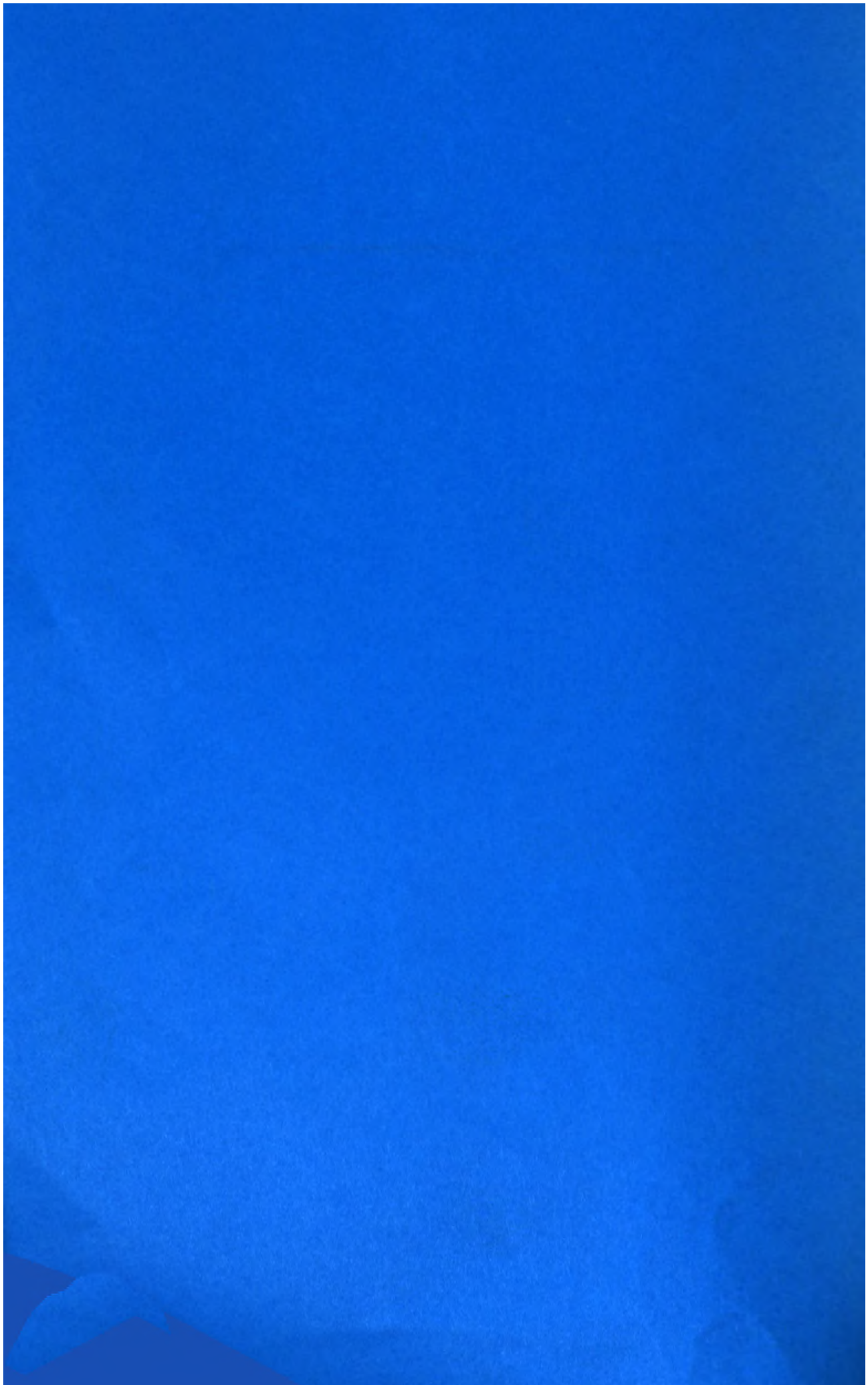
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14*

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

PARISH CHURCH OF EASEBOURNE,

NEAR MIDHURST SUSSEX,

ON OCCASION OF

THE DEATH

OF THE

REV. SAMUEL ARNOTT, A. M.

PERPETUAL CURATE OF THAT PARISH, AND LATE FELLOW
OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD.

BY THE

REV. JOHN SARGENT, A. M.

RECTOR OF LAVINGTON AND GRAFHAM.

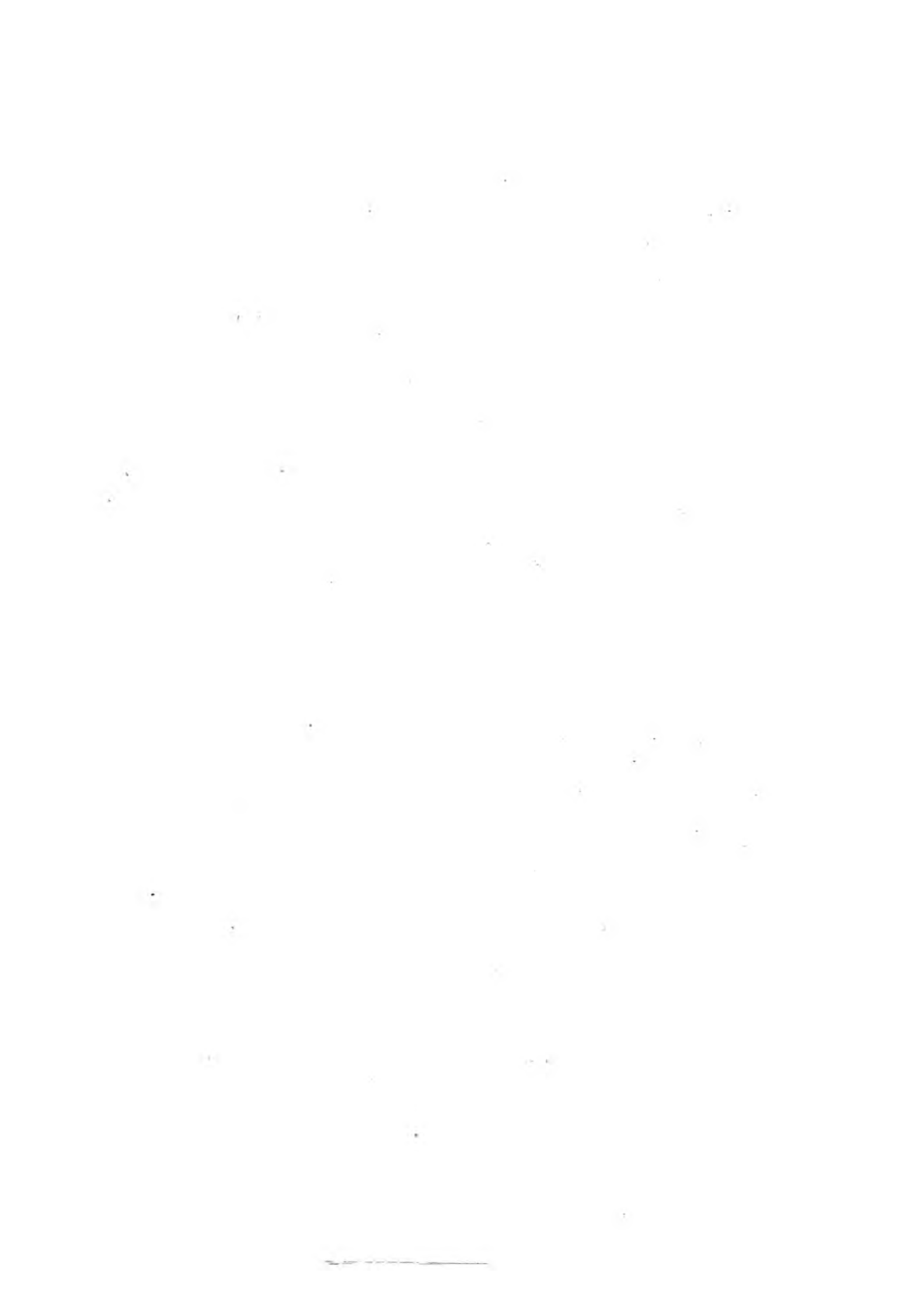


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S E R M O N .

ST. LUKE, VI. 47. 48.

“ Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like : he is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a Rock : and when the floods arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it : for it was founded upon a rock.”

IN these words we have a summary of the constituent parts of true religion—an illustration of its nature and a display of its excellence.—In the circumstances under which this Parish is placed, deprived as you are my brethren of a Pastor who for many years has lived and labored amongst you, but whose face you will see no more till you behold that of the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven—the passage chosen for the text has been selected as comprehending the substance of the doctrine he taught and as descrip-

tive of his own character which was in accordance with his doctrine. I shall take occasion from it to consider

1. In what real religion consists.

2. In what respects a truly religious man resembles a wise Builder.

And lastly, I shall point out the exemplification of all this, afforded by him whose departure we deeply deplore. And may God for Jesus Christ's sake grant us His Holy Spirit! May the glory of God and not of man be our sole object! May I so preach my brethren, and may you so hear as to please Him who trieth the heart and who one day will as certainly summon us hence as he has called the Minister away from this congregation!

1. Real religion consists in these three important particulars—*coming* to Christ—*hearing* Christ's sayings—and *doing* those sayings.

Coming unto Christ is an expression equivalent to believing in Him—trusting in him—resting upon him. He that *cometh* to me shall never hunger, and he that *believeth* on me shall never thirst. That this is the true interpretation of the term in this place seems clear from that passage in St. Peter where he represents those who had “tasted that the Lord was gracious” as “coming unto Him *as to a living stone* disallowed indeed of men but chosen of God and precious”—where we have not only the same mode of diction but the same

figure also that we meet with in the Text. In the parallel passage in St. Matthew we do not indeed find the same term adopted, but there it is manifestly involved in the word "sayings"---one of Christ's most merciful and consolatory sayings was "come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest": and in fact all that he has "*said*" either presupposes our having come to Him, or is uttered as an inducement to us to come. This then is the primary step in religion---to approach the Saviour feeling and confessing our need of all those blessings he is commissioned to bestow---confidently persuaded that he *can* bestow them on whomsoever he pleases, and that he *will not fail* to bestow them on those who seek them sincerely and exclusively at his gracious hands. This act, the effect of the omnipotent grace of God, marks the commencement of true religion in the soul---and the simplicity and constancy with which it is performed are indications of its progress within us.

Connected closely and indissolubly with this state of mind *is a reverent attention to the word of God*. The truly religious man hears Christ's sayings, whether Christ speak by himself, or by his Prophets, or by his Apostles, or by his Ministers, whether he speak words of invitation, or warning, or instruction, however opposed his words may be to the pride of the understanding, or to

the carnal desires of the flesh, or to the sinful maxims and customs of the world. The language of a christian to his Saviour is that of the child Samuel when God called to him from Heaven, "speak Lord for thy servant heareth."

For it is his unfeigned purpose *to do* these sayings---He does not wish to have his head filled with mere notions however correct, nor to have his mouth opened in vain and loud professions which are wholly unavailing in life, and still more so in death: he desires that every part of the word of God which is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" may have its end answered in him, that he may be a "man of God perfect and thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Whether it be a promise, or a precept, or a threatening, he prays that it may affect practically and influence habitually his heart and life. Far is he from presuming that he ever does Christ's sayings as he ought; but though he never obeys the will of God perfectly, he daily endeavours thus to obey it, and hopes in heaven to be one of those of whom it is declared "his servants shall serve Him."

This is true religion, and whoever is a partaker of it is compared by our Saviour to a wise builder. Let us inquire

2. *In what respects this similitude holds good.* Many points of resemblance might be adverted to,

but there are three prominent and obvious; *fore-sight of an hour of trial, provision against that hour, and security when it arrives.*

The man who builds an house especially if it be (as is here supposed) near some mighty river, subject to sudden and impetuous inundations, where the soil is loose and sandy, will bear in mind that the stream calmly and smoothly as it may glide along its channel, will at some future time rise and rage and pour its torrent over the surrounding country. The force of the current he knows must *try* the fabric of his house. He is not aware *when* the flood will assail it, but he is convinced that the river *will* overflow its banks and deluge the plain, and that then the solidity of the projected fabric will be brought to the test.---In like manner the Christian *foresees* that temptations and afflictions await him; and that besides all this, according to the righteous strictness of the universal appointment *he must die and be judged.* And as the man about to build *provides* against future danger and ruin, so does the Christian. The builder seeks for a stable and sound foundation, without which he is convinced that his edifice firmly as it may appear to be fixed, strongly as it may seem to be cemented together, will fall and crumble to pieces when exposed to the violence of the flood. To obtain therefore a good foundation he spares no expence or trouble; he

removes carefully all the soil that will prove unfit to support the weight of his structure, but having come at length to the rock he *there* fearlessly commences his work. He "digs deep and lays the foundation on a rock." Thus the Christian is equally assured that no merit nor strength of his own, no merit or strength of any other than the Lord Jesus Christ who "died for his offences and rose again for his justification," and who "ever liveth to make intercession for the transgressors," affords any basis and support either for *his works* or *his hopes*: he "digs deep" therefore, he renounces all dependence on his own righteousness and stability and he places his foundation on the rock---for he solely rests all his expectations of happiness, and raises the whole superstructure of holiness upon the righteousness, the power and the faithfulness of his Redeemer. This, which the Apostle St. Paul calls "Godly edifying which is in faith," is the *provision* the Christian makes through the grace of God against the troubles of this life and the terrors of the next.

Mark now the *security* with which this *precaution* is attended. The wise builder sees the waters rising, and during the darkness of the night he hears them roar and dash against his dwelling in safety, though it be with a greater or less degree of consciousness of that safety. "*The flood arises and beats vehemently upon that house and it*

cannot shake it, for it is founded upon a rock." The true believer in like manner, the practical Christian in the season of danger and alarm when temptations, and sorrow and sickness, and the great water-floods of death and judgment come rolling onwards and seem ready to overwhelm him, is *always* in safety, and he has *often* vouchsafed to him *such an assurance of that safety*, as he himself previously could not have conceived, which administers matter for admiring adoration and fervent thanksgiving to God his Saviour, who fulfills towards him that promise "because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him—I will set him on high because he hath known my name—he shall call upon me and I will answer him—I will be with him in trouble—I will deliver him and honor him"—and who yet further adds what in his own time he abundantly makes good—"with long life will I satisfy him and shew him my Salvation." So great in the hour of trial is the security of the man who reposes all his hopes, and grounds all his works, upon the rock of ages, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Such my brethren is true religion and such its blessedness. This the excellent Minister for whom you mourn exemplified as well as exhibited whilst he labored amongst you here below, and when he was called through sickness and suffering to exchange these labors for the higher employments of the sanctuary above.

From his earliest years, as soon as he was old enough to discern good from evil he gave signs of a heart impressed with a sense of divine truth. Like Timothy *from a child*, he knew the Holy Scriptures and during the season of youth, he conscientiously kept the commandments of his Saviour. O that every one of the children and young persons of this Parish whom he has so often instructed, may have grace to imitate him! May you my dear children and young friends, *now even now* in the bright morning of your days prepare for the night when no man can work—O may you instantly begin to build for eternity as he did who has entered into that unchangeable state! His life was not long—yours may be much shorter. “Remember” said your Minister when dying, to his little daughter* whom he dearly loved, “Remember you say your prayers every night and morning—pray to God—pray to Jesus Christ---Remember that Jesus Christ loves little children as young as you are.” You see my dear children that he would have his own little ones begin without loss of time to serve God through Jesus Christ---and you surely cannot forget that he has often given you the same good and affectionate advice. May it sink into your hearts! O happy is it when children “come to Christ and hear his sayings and do them!” and yet more so when Christian principles grow with their growth

* About four years of age.

and strengthen with their strength, as was the case, my brethren, with him who whilst living shewed you by pattern and by precept how you should live, and in dying has taught you how to die.

That he instructed you by *his example* as well as by his public and private exhortations you well know. “He took heed to himself and to his doctrine.” Personal religion was with him, as it ever ought to be, the *first concern*. He did not exhort you to remember that “other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ,” and to “take heed how you built thereon,” without charging his own soul to prize and practice what he declared to you, as of such prime and fundamental importance. The necessity of sound doctrine to supply *motives* for obedience, and the necessity of good works to evince the reality of faith, he enforced both by word and deed. Pretences to faith without holiness, and pretences to holiness without faith, were what he was as anxious to shun himself as he was to guard you against them. All such pretenders, he considered as “builders upon the sand.” In the self-indulgent sentiments of the Antinomian, and in the self-righteous opinions of the Pharisee, he saw equal insecurity: the vain imaginations of the one and the empty external parade of the other, he beheld as leading to nothing but ruin inevitable in the day when the

floods should try the building. For myself confidently may I assert that I never was acquainted with any man whose religion was of a more sober, solid, substantial, practical kind than his. It was the very opposite to that which is notional enthusiastic, specious and speculative.

You my Brethren who have most diligently attended to the constant strain of his preaching and marked most closely the even tenor of his conduct, will most readily acknowledge the honesty of this testimony.—You cannot but recollect how he would have you trace out, and how he duly traced out himself all the doctrines of the christian religion into the relative duties of life; you know that he was a pattern to others, not merely as a Minister—but as a Husband—a Father—a Master—a Neighbour and a Friend. His children are too young to be sensible of this—but there are others who can testify it from their own experience, and who on that very account feel his separation from them the more acutely.

I may appeal to you my Brethren and ask also whether his *spirit* as well as his principles and practice were not eminently Christian.—We are to aim not only at doing what is right—but at doing it in a becoming manner.—Here he singularly shone.—He was a humble man, a meek man, a man of love.—This “servant of the Lord” did not “strive” but

“was gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that opposed themselves”—with strict propriety may it be affirmed of him—that he was “gentle among you even as a nurse cherisheth her children.”

In this way, my dear brethren, did your departed minister build upon the Rock.

You will not wonder to hear then that when “the flood arose and the stream beat vehemently upon the house,” he was in perfect security and possessed a most comforting *conviction* of his security: so much so that these words of the Psalmist, were perpetually on his lips, “God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.”

His illness the characteristic nature and tendency of which (if I am informed aright) is to depress the spirits—came upon him *in one sense* most unexpectedly. But a very short time before, he no more expected the *immediate* approach of death, than you or I may be doing at the present moment.

The announcement of his danger though made with the utmost tenderness and consideration, was *sudden* and who can deny that it was *awful*. But he received the communication says the friend who with sorrow imparted it, “*with perfect composure.*” And what was the source of this composure?—it sprung not from the review of any goodness that was in him, but it arose from fixing

the eye of his faith intently upon the cross of Christ. Many *evidences* may be adduced of the reality of religion, many were there in him, but he deemed it most honourable to his Saviour and most conducive to his own comfort, instead of referring to them in the hour of death, by an act of simple faith to look to him who died for his Salvation.* “ I find that this is not the hour (he observed) to look for evidences, but as a miserable sinner to look to Christ.” Where my brethren you have an illustration of the Apostle’s words—“ to whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious.” You perceive that the christian comes to the Redeemer, who “ is the first and the last, the Almighty”---exactly with the same sort of affiance at the *last* as at the *first*. And let no one here draw a false inference against the existence of evidences or their use—for there is often a consciousness of general sincerity, without a power of recalling particular instances of it ; and it does not follow, that the man who *has* evidences yet does not look to *them* immediately *but to Christ* and who *thence* receives consolation, would receive the slightest comfort, were his religion of an unsubstantial and hypocritical kind.

When on the evening of the day that he was ap-

* “ The simplicity of faith which is in Christ consists in taking the naked promise and there resting.” HOOKER.

prized of his danger, approaching his bed, I used the words of the Patriarch, and said "underneath you are the everlasting arms," with a calm and deliberate, and indescribable emphasis, he replied—"I feel that they are." Truly had this holy and humble man a peace within him, that "passed all understanding," which not only continued without the slightest abatement, but seemed to strengthen as the body became weaker, and was nearer to dissolution. "O what am I" said he to me, "that when so many of God's dear servants have severe conflicts, I am spared them; I should have had reason to adore God were I 'saved so as by fire.' I will not dissemble," he said the first day "that a thought crosses my mind, that I yet may be thus tried; but I remember that God is faithful, and after all I think far higher of what a man's previous conversation and conduct has been, than of any feelings or expressions on a death bed!" which shewed plainly that he had within him that consciousness of integrity which no hypocrite in a dying hour could enjoy.

How full of peace must his soul have been, when to his Father who visited his dying son after having just consigned his wife to the tomb; the first words he uttered were "Father it is all well:" Who answered in a similar strain of peace and piety, "I know my son that all is well."

It is a yet stronger proof of the composure of

his mind that he could comfort his afflicted wife, in these words, "weep not but let us thank God and take courage!" Repeatedly did he say to her, "seek Jesus Christ, he is all sufficient, I have sought him."

The difference between a well founded and a fallacious peace, which in themselves are as distinct as the natural sleep of a child is from that of a lethargy, is to be seen here. "The peace of God which passeth all understanding" is accompanied by humiliation before God and submission to his will. Penitence and a readiness to justify God in all his proceedings; a zeal for His glory and a concern for the spiritual welfare of others are ever found in conjunction with it.

In your deceased pastor my brethren, a lowly penitential spirit appeared in his dying moments. "I cannot fix my mind to pray for any length of time," he remarked to me the last time I saw him, but, I can say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." To another friend he observed, "I find with Bishop Beveridge---'that my repentance needs to be repented of.'"

In reference to his illness, he quoted the 12 v. of the 94th Psalm, "blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O Lord, and teachest him out of thy law:" which shewed that he neither murmured at the chastisement nor fainted under it, but took the cup of suffering as a child from the hand of a Father.

His zeal for God's glory caused him to be pained sensibly by hearing some oaths uttered in the street, when adopting again the Psalmist's words, he exclaimed, "mine eyes gush out with water, because men keepnot thy law!"

Constantly was he seeking to be useful to those who entered his sick chamber. To some christian friends for whom he felt a deep interest, he said, "never let go your hold of Christ; Christ is all; I feel him to be so: He lived and died to save us; and when you come to a sick and dying bed, you will experience the comfort that I do; I am very happy in my mind."

Upon his attendants in general, he urged "remember Christ is all; He must be all your trust; give heed to this now; do not leave it to a dying hour."

In this placid, unshaken, scriptural tranquillity, having those words verified in his soul, "thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee"---praying much himself and inviting others to unite with him in prayer, listening to the animating promises of the Book of God, different portions of which,* he chose and desired to be read to him; praising God for his mercy and his grace---having received also the communion of the body and

* Psalms, 23, 68, 103, 138;—John, xiv, 1—6

blood of Christ, disposed of his worldly concerns, and given directions for his funeral, he at length fell asleep in Jesus, when his soul passed doubtless into his blissful presence to the enjoyment of eternal felicity.

What remains, my brethren, but that we follow him thither in our thoughts, and that we strive through the merits and might of our Saviour to follow him finally in our own persons into the rest of the people of God.

Before God do I feel that I shall have a very special account to render Him, for the privilege granted me of witnessing a death bed so awakening, instructive, and encouraging.

You too, my brethren, whatever may be your age or station, will have to answer for the advantages with which you have been favoured, in the life and death of such a Pastor.

May God pour out his Holy Spirit on every individual! May those who are in an unprepared state become prepared for their great, their lasting change! May they remember that it is an unfavorable season for building, when the floods are rising! May those who are living unto their Saviour and who love his appearing, be more faithful and more vigilant! May you all experience all that your late minister himself experienced---In the prospect of his speedy departure, "I desire," said he

referring to an holy man* of old "to add my dying testimony to his, that true religion brings a man peace in life, peace in death, and peace that is everlasting."

* Philip Henry.

THE END.