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THE HISTORY OF THE  
CITY OF BURY  
FROM THE EARLIEST PERIODS  
TO THE PRESENT TIME  
BY  
GEOFFREY HAMPDEN  
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OF BURY  
IN TWO VOLUMES  
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DISSERTATIONS  
ON  
VARIOUS INTERESTING SUBJECTS,  
WITH A  
VIEW TO ILLUSTRATE  
THE  
*AMIABLE AND MORAL SPIRIT*  
OF  
**CHRIST'S RELIGION;**  
AND TO  
CORRECT THE IMMORAL TENDENCY  
OF  
**SOME DOCTRINES,**  
AT PRESENT,  
*POPULAR AND FASHIONABLE.*



—◆—  
BY  
THE REV. THOMAS WATSON.

—◆—  
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## **ERRATA**

### **IN NUMBERING THE SECTIONS:**

**Page 4, line 12, erase 3.**

**Page 47, line 19, for 6 read 5.**

# DISSERTATIONS, &c.



## CHAP. I.

### ON RELIGION AND SUPERSTITION.

1. **RELIGION**, which implies our belief and knowledge of the Supreme being, of a future state of rewards and punishments, and the duties arising from those principles, constitutes not only the distinction, but also the glory and ornament of our nature. Religion, in its principles, lays the foundation of our duties, becomes the guide of our lives, and is intended to prepare us for a more perfect world. Religion unites us with other worlds, and higher intelligences, forms our connections with the greatest and best of beings, and with the more pure and perfect society above.

But religion, like many of the other gifts of heaven, is liable to be corrupted and debased.— In its pure state, it exalts and adorns our nature, renders men amiable and excellent; but, in its



deformed state, it degrades and debases man, and renders him the object of aversion and horror.— True religion discovers itself in rational acts of piety; in prosperity, it keeps the mind calm, feeling grateful acknowledgements to the author of all good, and in the height of its gratitude keeping clear of intemperate exultations, deeply impressed with the uncertainty of all earthly joys. During sufferings and trials, religion teaches a patient submission to God's will: in our intercourse with the world, it manifests its influence, by honesty, integrity and charity; and in private life by purity in all our thoughts, words and actions. True religion produces humility; it claims not exemption from error; it treats with candour and toleration, those who differ from us in some principles; and shews its superior excellence by a readiness to do good even to enemies. True religion exemplifies that sublime and extensive charity so much celebrated by the Apostle, and acted up to by Jesus Christ.

2. False religion has many branches. Hypocrisy is false religion, assuming the name and the cover of religion, with its external services and appearances, to conceal the workings of an evil heart. The hypocrite covers himself with a mask, and acts under disguise. The hypocrite looks one way and acts another, keeps always in view some selfish purpose or some gratification, which he wishes to conceal. The hypocrite is



always the foremost and the loudest in his professions. The character given of the pharisees by our Lord, presents us with a finished picture of hypocrisy.

False religion sometimes discovers itself in bitter zeal, acting under misguided views of the supreme being and of duty; then it becomes bigoted, intolerant, prepared for the greatest crimes, violent in rooting out heresy, and all the while thinking they are doing God service.— Paul, before his conversion, belonged to this class; he was no hypocrite; he was honest and sincere; and when doing many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, he believed himself acting for the interest of religion. He was an example of fiery zeal and bigotry.

False religion extends far and wide; and is not confined to Pagan superstition, but has been witnessed in its greatest horror and deformity among those who profess to believe in Jesus Christ. What name must we give to that religion, which has so often encouraged persecution, and practised deeds the most savage and cruel? And it is necessary to remark that such false principles, when once they take possession of the mind, overpower men of the strongest understandings and of the best education. Such was Paul, when he persecuted the Church of Christ.

3. Enthusiasm and superstition are two spurious children springing from religion. When the

mind, in acts of devotion, rises above the guidance of reason, and giving loose reins to imagination, soars to high flights of rapture and extacy, she conceives this is not the work of her own creating, but produced by some superior power. Being accustomed to give way to such rapturous excursions, such people despise the ordinary guidance of reason and Scripture, and believe themselves to be under the direction and influence of some internal guide. This is a species of enthusiasm.

3. Of superstition, it is not easy to give a correct definition, though, when instances of it are produced, we are seldom wrong in the application. It is founded on unworthy ideas of the moral perfections of God; as if he had delivered up the world to some secret influences, impressed on certain things, and under certain circumstances, and with a power almost irresistible. And under the strength of this persuasion, men are disposed to attach certain benefits to the performance of certain things, without being able to assign a reason, and some harm to the neglect. The compliance with such observances gives satisfaction to the mind, and the failure creates uneasiness and apprehension.

But this will be best illustrated and understood by some examples, only first observing that fear is a necessary ingredient in superstition. Popular or vulgar superstition is found every where,

and among all people. Superstition attaches good-luck or ill-luck, sometimes to particular days of the year, and at other times to particular days of the week. Many people have particular days of the week for their fortunate or unfortunate days; but as every day of the week is included in these lists, by combining the opinions of different persons, it would appear hence, that the luck does not depend so much on the days as on the persons themselves. Certain things, likewise, have good or ill-luck attached to them, and in the same arbitrary way. The Romans prognosticated the event of their undertakings from the appearance of certain birds, and from the nature and direction of their flight; and the moderns resemble the ancients also in this respect. The superstitious draw prognostications from beasts crossing their road on a journey, from the flame of a candle, and sparks from the fire. The superstitious find prognostics every where, and render themselves sometimes miserable by such follies. You may banish a bad habit that has got possession of man, or cure any thing that is ridiculous in his gait, or in his dress; but a superstitious opinion or habit, sheltered under the sacred name of religion, cannot be conquered. The *Spectator*, in his 7th paper, ridicules some of these vulgar superstitions in a vein of the most pleasant humour.

4. Besides the vulgar, there is a learned superstition, which contains different sciences, and requires much study and knowledge to understand them. In the class of scientific superstition may be comprehended, astrology, magic, augury, and amulets. Judicial astrology attributes to spirits a dominion over the planets, and to the planets a dominion over men. Astrology was a science much cultivated in former times; and the cultivation of it brought men more early acquainted with the true system of the world. We have many learned treatises on this science. Astrology took its rise among the Chaldeans, and from thence was transmitted to the Egyptians, the Greeks, and the Romans.— We find some extraordinary instances of men's proficiency in this science in ancient times.— The Emperor Tiberius consulted the astrologers; and he himself arrived to great eminence in that science. Tacitus, the excellent historian, was certainly a believer in astrology, and records some extraordinary stories of the proficiency of Thrasullus, an astrologer; and whose skill Tiberius put to the trial by a severe experiment, related by Tacitus, in the 6th book of his annals. In modern times, the Bramins, in India, by the practice of this art, procure to themselves great influence and authority. But this science, and its influence on the minds of men, have declined greatly, as other sciences have improved.

· · · **Magic** is another of the learned superstitions. This is founded upon the belief that certain demons or spirits have great power over men; and the study of this art is, to render these demons propitious, or to avert their displeasure. Amulets is another species of superstition. These are charms employed not only as preservatives against evil, but also as conveyances of good.— They are various, according to the purpose for which used, and are made of wood, stone, metals, &c. Sometimes they consist of characters or sentences, among the Mahometans from the Koran; or texts of Scripture among the Christians. They are applied according to the state and condition of those persons for whom they are employed. Sometimes the amulet is fastened about the neck of a sick or enchanted person, and sometimes to the bed on which he lies. The Jews most probably made use of their phylacteries for this purpose. These were slips of paper, whereon was written some text of Scripture, which the more devout people wore on their forehead, the breast, or the neck, as a badge of their religion; and the Pharisees aspiring to greater sanctity, wore them broader than other men. And, at the same time, that they were considered as the badge of their religion, they might be regarded as charms to avert evil or to procure good. The agnus dei of the Pope is a cake of wax stamped with the figure of a



Lamb supporting the cross, and being consecrated by him, is supposed to contain great virtues; and for this purpose is distributed among the believers. These are amulets. The sponge that wiped his table was once sent in great solemnity to effect a cure on the Duke of Aquitain. Mr. Boyle, the great philosopher and good man, was not entirely free from a belief in amulets; and our great poet Dryden was under the influence of the same superstition. Joanna Southcot's seals were amulets to her followers. It is a strong testimony of the weakness of human nature, that we find some of the most eminent men, slaves to different kinds of superstition. Socrates, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, was not altogether devoid of it. His demon, which directed him, seems to have been one of the children of superstition. Lord Bacon believed in witchcraft; and the enlightened Cudworth went so far as to say, that those that denied witchcraft must be Atheists. Dr. Johnson, with all his learning and vigour of mind, could not resist the influence of superstition. The long dominion that these different kinds of superstition have held over the minds of men, and not yet completely destroyed, tells us how difficult it is to eradicate errors that are once established, when they can, by any cord, attach themselves to religion. I might have brought forward as further instances of superstition, the auguries practised

by the heathens of old, their omens, their oracles, and all the other ways employed to ask counsel and direction, in matters of importance; but I have brought forward sufficient to illustrate the influence of superstition.

5. But it is to be lamented that the influence of superstition is the most extensive and powerful in matters of religion; and it will be found not easy to expel her from this strong hold; for the great bulk of mankind are guided the least by the principles of reason, in matters even of the highest importance. This we see to be the case among all nations. The religious services of the heathens were totally superstitious; for one error pervades almost all religious services; men act upon the principle, that the whole business of religion is to appease the supreme being, and not to profit and improve men. They act upon the supposition that God is a vindictive being, and must be pacified. Hence the multitude of sacrifices employed for this purpose. He is viewed as a malevolent spirit, that takes pleasure in mortifying his creatures, and not as a benevolent parent, who seeks the happiness of his children in every appointment. The whole of the gospel presents us with the most amiable representations of God; and every doctrine which Christ delivers, and every precept which he prescribes, is with a view to promote both the temporal and the eternal happiness of mankind.

**But in opposition to these very plain truths, the services that a great part of the christian world pays, is under the conception, that God is always angry and must be appeased.**

The ceremonial law of the Jews was instituted for the wisest of purposes, particularly to preserve them a separate people, and, by this, to preserve them from the idolatry of the neighbouring nations; but in the days of our Saviour, the whole of their religion consisted in the rigid observance of this law, to the neglect of the moral law of God, this law of eternal obligation. They complied with a number of painful, and some of them expensive services. They submitted to the rite of circumcision, to various sacrifices; they considered that the blood of bulls and of goats was necessary for taking away sins; they regarded the distinction of meats and drinks, and days, and fastings of different kinds, and of mortifications, as services to procure the favour of the most high. What connection can there be between these services and the objects to be attained? They did not serve to make the comers thereunto perfect; they could have no tendency to promote a good life, which ought to be the great end in view, in all our religious services. On the contrary, by encouraging men to a reliance upon such services, they check his endeavours after real goodness; and, as our Saviour observes, they make the law of God of none



effect, by their traditions. All services of this kind were done away by our Lord, both by his precepts and by his example. Sacrifices were disannulled, all ritual observances, circumcision, the religious distinction of meats and of drinks, and of holy days. He gives to us the most amiable view of our Heavenly Father: he places love as the foundation of all the duties we owe to him; and love to man, in the next place, as the foundation of every relative duty; and lays the greatest stress on a good life. But all this has been found of no service for rooting out superstition. Superstition has insinuated itself, not into the Christian system, but into those systems which men have delivered as coming from the Scriptures.

6. In the first place, as the ground work of superstition, they give to us a very different view of the supreme being from what we receive from Christ. One of the leading principles of the gospel is, that God so loved the world, that he gave to us his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. This is a pleasing and encouraging doctrine; but some men tell us that mankind are divided into two grand classes, one part is destined to eternal happiness, and another part to everlasting misery, without any regard to their conduct, and that no man has it in his power to reverse this eternal decree of Heaven.

Does such a doctrine as this render the supreme being the object of our love? How then are we to come before the Lord? No religion can give a more unjust and a more discouraging image of our Father in Heaven. Here is a sufficient ground-work for superstition, and to cause men to have recourse to services not rational, and to lay stress on things different from a good life, things, not only not commanded, but unwarranted by Christ.

7. Superstition shews itself in two ways, first, by practising, as religious duties, things not commanded; and, secondly, by carrying duties, rational in themselves, and sufficiently countenanced by the word of God, to an unreasonable degree. In the first place, laying stress on practices, which have no intrinsic value in themselves, is superstition. It will be very difficult to shew what moral good can arise from different kinds of meat, and what religious virtue it can communicate. We have no command from God for the observance of Lent, and for keeping the particular fasts that the Catholics enjoin. The general observance of such things cannot promote any kind of edification, nor can it be serviceable for health. If there was any view of policy in the original institution of these fasts, to prevent the too great consumption of animal food; if they were intended to prevent the destruction of the young of the cows, or of the

sheep, for the benefit of future times, there may have been some good reason for the appointment, and the end would justify the observance. The reason of the thing may be lost and buried in oblivion, and placing it as a religious observance, is securing the duty. But as it stands at present, the observance must be put down to the account of superstition, whilst, at the same time, it presses as a great inconvenience, in many cases, on individuals. Praying to saints, who can neither hear nor help, is gross superstition. We can with reason offer up prayers only to him who is ever present, and always has his ears open to the supplication of his servants. The sign of the cross is superstition. We see in the early ages of Christianity, innumerable instances of this offence: the hunting after reliques; the enjoining of pilgrimages; the taking a journey to the holy land. Some of these things, curiosity might act upon us to observe, but religion cannot, in such things, have any concern. They are irrational in themselves, without any benefit; and, by fixing the mind upon such things, men neglect duties rational, and which lead to edification and improvement.

8. But there are duties plainly enjoined, rational, and which lead to edification, but the superstition lies in expecting more from them than any promise encourages, and placing a reliance upon them unwarranted, and where the

means do not justify the expectation. Thus the two sacraments, baptism, and our Lord's supper, are converted into superstition by this very abuse. Baptism becomes a rational ordinance, when it is considered as a solemn admission to the christian profession, by an ordinance of Christ's appointment; and more so, when it may be regarded as laying christian parents under a solemn obligation to bring up their children in the religion of Christ, to give them a christian education, and to give them also a good example. But it is not always taken in this rational view. It is often so administered as if this ordinance was to wash away all original impurity, and to convey some efficacious grace. Now there is no clear and direct promise to this purpose. By applying literally some things spoken figuratively, ingenious and fanciful men may impose upon this ordinance, such a construction; but these are no grounds to justify an improper reliance.— But if there be no express and clear command for such benefits, we certainly never can infer that, from the form, the ceremony, or by any part of the service, it is in the power of man to convey such benefits by his immediate act.— Admitting such doctrines into the articles of our faith, is inspiring christians with an unjustifiable confidence; and encouraging them to rely on such ceremonies for the security of their everlasting happiness. Can this ordinance, by the bare

compliance, create any holiness in man? Can it make him more acceptable to the supreme being, or more fit for the kingdom of God? It may be of benefit to press him to christian duties, but so far from being a benefit, it must be matter for condemnation to him who acts not up to the christian character.

The same general observation that I have made, in entering upon the ordinance of baptism, I have now to repeat in taking a review of the Lord's supper. It is, in itself, a very rational ordinance in several points of view. The institution carries us back to the origin of the christian faith, to the night in which christ was betrayed, and tells us what past on that night, and serves to confirm some of the material parts of his character: thus, this ordinance becomes an evidence in favour of the christian religion in general, and of one of its most important facts, by the uninterrupted observance of it in Christ's church, to the present time; and its agreement, also, with facts mentioned in prophane history, strengthens greatly our faith in Jesus Christ.—The Roman historian, Tacitus, tells us that Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate; and the evangelists not only mention this, but relate a number of interesting circumstances relating to Pilate, and his interference to save Christ, founded on the perfect innocence of his character; but, after an ineffectual struggle, he gave



way to the violence of the priests and rulers, and the clamour of the multitude, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to their will.

In the reign of Trajan, we find a manifest reference to this ordinance, given by a person of no mean rank, Pliny, the younger, then pro-consul of Bithynia, in his epistles.

But another advantage of this ordinance is, that it implies in it a prediction of the success and duration of the christian religion, which has been wonderfully accomplished. The observance of this ordinance, when you take in all the circumstances with which connected, is enjoined to all his disciples in all ages; and this injunction implies an assurance, that he should have a church and people to commemorate his death and sufferings to the end of the world: and it gives additional credit to this prediction, when it is recollected, that at the time when this was given out, he and his followers were in the lowest state of depression, for soon after this, one of his disciples betrayed him, another denied him, and all the remainder forsook him and fled. But this prediction has been accomplished, and, we trust, his church shall remain till time itself shall be no more.

Again, there is a simplicity in this ordinance well adapted to mankind in general, practicable, and at all times convenient. You may remember Christ at all times, and in every place. The

Jewish passover was expensive, the paschal lamb was to be prepared: it was inconvenient to repair to Jerusalem from the remotest part of Judea; and it was celebrated only once a year, and at a stated time. The christian ordinance is instructive; for nothing can be so proper to excite our love and obedience to Christ, as to remember his death and sufferings; and it holds out to his followers, an edifying example, how to support trials, how, at that time, to behave to friends and to enemies; and with what temper we should address our Heavenly Father; and how to conduct ourselves in the hour of death.

But men, not content with this plain and simple view of this ordinance, so well suited to the knowledge and convenience of all the followers of Jesus, seek for something beneath this plain covering. It has certainly been a prevailing temper among men in all ages, to seek for something dark and mysterious in religion; and this ordinance could not escape the effects of this temper: and what a dark and unintelligible ordinance have they made of the Lord's supper! How many mysteries have they found in this institution of him, whose aim it was to bring all his doctrines and precepts down to the common understanding of men! What volumes have been written upon this institution, to remove it from the knowledge of the bulk of the people! And to injure it more, and to destroy its useful-

ness, they have represented it as an awful and dangerous service, and, by such terrors, have driven many good and serious people from its observance. They have fenced it round with other difficulties and tedious preparations.— Again, one church asserts that you partake of the real body and blood of Christ, in this ordinance, and that the elements of bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood : other churches say, that along with the bread and wine, which undergo no change, you still partake of the body and blood of Christ ; and others, again, who are not able to digest their absurdities, still hunt after some mystery, and maintain that you receive the body and blood in some mystical manner ; and thus they think they evade the difficulty. Never was there such a plain ordinance so disguised, and its effects destroyed by a most monstrous superstition.— But this is not all, they, after exalting this ordinance above all other ordinances, bring it into disgrace, by appointing it to be a kind of passport to eternity, in administering it to the dying man ; and even to the most worthless of criminals before execution. For all these they can find no authority ; and, by such acts, they injure greatly the influence of practical religion, by making men believe, that if you can obtain this passport in your dying moments, and, by administering the same to the dying malefactor,



whatever your life may be, here all the account is settled. But there remains still another disgrace to be heaped upon this institution of our Lord, of itself so excellent; and that is the employing it as a test on admission to several offices; compelling men, as a qualification, to take the sacrament according to the rites of the church of England. And whatever the character of the person be, who applies for the sacrament, the clergyman has it not in his choice to reject him; though he should know him to be of the most infamous character, and an avowed atheist, he must be received: What a shameful prostitution!

How are we to account for those corruptions of the christian religion, and for such superstitious doctrines and practices? Were men to make use of their reason in matters of religion, all these corruptions would not have found a place; but so many wild notions have sprung up in the christian world, that cannot be defended upon the principles of reason, that it has been laid down as a fundamental principle, by the supporters of such doctrines, that reason ought not to be admitted in religion; and that we are to walk by faith alone. It is necessary, therefore, to combat a doctrine, the parent of every thing that is wild and extravagant, and to support the claims of reason; and, next, to examine what faith is, and what share it has in our salvation.

The abandonment of reason furnishes us with the most satisfactory account for the existence of superstition, and the numerous corruptions in the christian religion.



## CHAP. II.

### ON REASON.

1. **IT** certainly must seem strange, that a question ever should have arisen, whether we should exercise our reason on matters of religion.—Enthusiasm wishes to banish reason from religion, and no wonder, because if reason be permitted to maintain her influence and exercise her authority, enthusiasm cannot subsist; but if you once abandon reason, there is no saying to what degree of extravagance and wildness you may arrive. But, besides enthusiasts, some men of sober reason have insinuated, that when revelation is once established, man must bow down to this authority, and follow implicitly its dictates.

But before we arrive at this conclusion, there are other things to be taken into consideration. The first is, how are we to judge of revelation,

and what faculty are we to exercise in this judgment, and in its evidences? Men certainly exercised their reason in examining the christian religion; and Jesus Christ appeals to our reason, and summons us to make use of this faculty in judging of those doctrines and precepts which he delivered to the world. He wrought great works in attestation of his divine commission; reason inferred from those works, that he came from God, for no man could perform works so great and so good, unless God had been with him. Reason draws the same inference in finding many prophecies accomplished in him.— Reason also examines the nature of his doctrines, his precepts and their tendency, and the perfection of his example; and finding all these so favourable to the pretensions of Jesus Christ, infers that he was that divine messenger so long promised, and who had now, in the fullness of time, made his appearance on the earth. But if there had been found any thing, either in his doctrines, his precepts, or example, contrary to reason, then every wise and honest man must have rejected his pretensions, and disallowed his claim to the Messiah.

2. But allowing that the Scriptures are acknowledged and established as a revelation from Heaven, it is well known that all christians are not agreed in the meaning of a vast variety of passages: great and important are their differ-

ences upon particular doctrines. What disputes and controversies, both in former times and in the present, have been maintained about the meaning of many passages in the Scriptures? To these differences we owe the numberless sects and divisions into which the professed followers of Christ have split; and though, in the main points, christians are generally agreed, yet in others, which each party deems essential, they are divided and sub-divided into endless distinctions. Many of these divisions are upon subjects so trifling and unimportant, as ought not to have disturbed the harmony of a single family, and yet these have agitated and shaken the civilised world. In all these divisions, the passions and spirit of party enter, whilst all the while they affect to be supporting the cause and interest of truth. It is not material to enter into the consideration of the manner, how these different systems have been constituted; all parties refer to the Scriptures as their source, and appeal to them as their authority; and each party labours to support, by argument and reason, the side which they have espoused. And to what else can they refer? For if they should insist that the Scriptures are writings inspired by God; yet this declaration is of no avail to settle the dispute; for most of christians support the same principle; but yet they are compelled to have recourse to reason in different ways, sometimes

by producing the different senses that the original words will bear, or, again, by bringing forward parallel passages, and labouring to ascertain the true meaning, by the meaning which these words evidently bear in other parts. And all this is done by the right use of reason. The acknowledged inspiration of the Scriptures is of no avail in occasions of this kind; for it would require the interpreter to be inspired, to ascertain the meaning. It is great comfort, in such discussions, that very little doubt affects doctrines of importance, and very little hangs over our rules of life. The warmest controversies and the most violent disputations, are maintained about matters of no consequence to the everlasting happiness of men. And it is one of these instances of ludicrous absurdity not unfrequent in matters of this kind, that the enthusiast, who denies the use of reason in matters of religion, endeavours to support his principles by arguments drawn from reason itself. To such contradictions do men reduce themselves, when they abandon the plain path of common sense, to follow after their own wild imaginations.

3. Again, what are the weapons by which we are to defend ourselves against the assaults of unbelievers? Or to shew the superior excellence of christianity, in comparison with the religion of Mahomet? Or, what instrument must we employ in recommending the religion of Christ.



to those nations totally ignorant of this divine blessing? We have nothing but reason to assist us. To unbelievers you have to prove the necessity of revelation, to conduct them to the knowledge of divine truths. The light of nature and of reason are great blessings, yet when man had nothing but these instructors to go to, he was grossly ignorant of his maker. He worshipped Gods many, and Lords many; but he was ignorant of the one only, the living and true God. And if, in some instances, we meet with men of superior understanding, coming to the knowledge of these great truths; yet the knowledge imparted by some solitary discoveries of this nature, was soon lost to the world, and proved not of the smallest benefit to mankind at large. And this was the case, not among barbarous nations only, but among people the most polished and learned, and whose works have, to this day, remained as the standard of excellent writing and taste, to all the succeeding ages and nations of the earth. By arguments of this kind, and by the right application of reason, we are called upon to defend religion and its excellent truths from the attacks of infidelity. Were we to make use of any other instruments; were we to tell them, that they must bow to inspiration, and trust to faith, language of this kind would only expose our cause to the sneers and insults of unbelievers; and no rational friend to christianity

could justify such means. If doctrines so disgraceful to reason, should universally prevail, the world must soon be reduced to their former ignorance and superstition.

By the same means must we support the christian religion against the inroads of the imposter Mahomet. Reason would expose his pretensions to be a prophet of God, from the ridiculous account he gives of himself, of his journey to Heaven, and all the extravagant particulars of what he saw in the mansions of bliss. Every man of sense among his followers, must blush at the enthusiasm or the knavery of his prophet.

But nothing exposes more the fallacy of his pretensions, than the means which he employs for the conversion of the world. This was not by reason or by argument, but by the strong arm of power, and the terrors of a numerous army. Never was reason employed to greater beauty and advantage, than is done by an excellent and eloquent prelate, (Bishop Sherlock, sermon 9th,) in this very argument, when combating the pretensions of Mahomet to be a true prophet. This beautiful argument, where you see the triumph of reason, I cannot help quoting. "Go," says he, "to your natural religion: lay before her, Mahomet and his disciples arrayed in armour and in blood, riding in triumph over the spoils of thousands and tens of thousands, who fell by his victorious sword: shew her the cities which

he set in flames, the countries which he ravaged and destroyed, and the miserable distress of all the inhabitants of the earth. When she has viewed him in this scene, carry her into his retirements, shew her the prophet's chambers, his concubines and wives; let her see his adultery, and hear him alledge revelation and his divine commission, to justify his lust and his oppression. When she is tired with this prospect, then shew her the blessed Jesus, humble and meek, doing good to all the sons of men, patiently instructing both the ignorant and the perverse. Let her see him in his most retired privacies; let her follow him to the mount, and hear his devotions and supplications to God. Carry her to his table to view his poor fare, and hear his heavenly discourse. Let her see him injured but not provoked: let her attend him to the tribunal, and consider the patience with which he endured the scoffs and reproaches of his enemies. Lead her to his cross, and let her view him in the agony of death, and hear his last prayer for his persecutors. "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!*" When natural religion has viewed both, ask which is the prophet of God! But her answer we have already had, when she saw part of that scene through the eyes of the centurion, who attended at the cross; by him she spake and said *truly this man was the son of God.*"

In propogating the gospel among nations



totally ignorant of the name of Christ, and the blessings which he conferred on man, you are still under the necessity of proving the reasonableness of the doctrine which he taught, the purity and excellence of his precepts, and how well adapted they are to carry forward men's happiness in this life, and to conduct him in the path of virtue and true goodness, to everlasting happiness. In departing from this rule, you cannot expect success. If you propose to those nations, ignorant of almost all religion, doctrines that are unreasonable, that are inconsistent with the conceptions we entertain of the all perfect being, you cannot expect that even these ignorant people will pay much regard to doctrines or duties, contrary to reason. Reason, at the same time, recommends, that the plain and simple truths of the gospel will be not only the most useful, but also the most acceptable to mankind in general, but particularly to the unlearned and to the poor, to whom the gospel is preached.— Acting upon different principles will best account for the little success of modern missionaries, who in propagating, or in their endeavours to propagate the gospel, dwell chiefly on the darkest and most unreasonable parts of their creeds, with a view to convert a miserable and ignorant people, who can scarcely count their fingers.

4. Jesus Christ makes use of reason in recommending his religion, He appeals to his works

in confirmation of his commission, and condemns the Jews for resisting the clearest evidence.— We find how closely our Lord reasons with the Jews, John x. 37. “ *If I do not the works of my father, believe me not : but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works, that ye may know and believe, that the father is in me, and I in him.* To the same purpose he reasons, John v. 36; xiv. 10; and xv. 22.

It is upon the same principles of reason, that he says, that it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gommorah, and for Tyre and Sidon, in the day of judgement, than for those who were favoured with such high privileges and opportunities, but have neglected them. The excellent parable of the talents, is grounded upon the principle of the strictest reason. We have to answer for our privileges, and to whomsoever much is given, of them much will be required. And how are we to understand those interesting declarations, that men shall be judged according to their works? For God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness. Are not all these according to the principles of reason? And how then can it be advanced and maintained, that reason is not to be made use of in religion? To what then can we go?

We may see the great difference, in this respect, between the conduct of our Lord, and

that of Mahomet, or any other imposter. Mahomet delivers his doctrines to his followers, and commands them to believe on him without any evidence. He produces no great and good works in behalf of *his* commission. Neither can he appeal to his life; for *his* life was a series of murders, adultery, and the grossest sensuality.— His religion was imposed upon the world by the strong arm of power. But Jesus Christ invites his followers to search into the Scriptures, for they do testify of him, to examine his works, which bear all the character of one commissioned from God to deliver his will to the world.— They are required also to examine his doctrines. “*Jesus (John vii. 16,) answered them and said, my doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*”

He appeals also to his example. One of the great ends for which he came into the world, was to give an example; and to this he often refers. I have given you an example that ye should follow my steps; and this example was of the greatest purity and perfection, not only in active goodness, distributed, without distinction, to friends and to enemies, but also of the most patient forbearance; so that when he was reviled, he reviled not again; he returned blessing for cursing, and good for evil. He appeals to his

enemies for the purity of his character, John, viii. 46. "*Which of you convinceth me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do you not believe me?*" And when standing before the tribunal of the high-priest, and the high-priest asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine,—John, xviii. 19.—He makes this bold and noble appeal.—"*Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? Ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold they know what I said.*" Upon this, one of the officers struck him with the palm of his hand, saying—"*answerest thou the high-priest so?*" Jesus answered—"*If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?*" This is the triumph of reason. Here is dignity and conscious innocence, worthy of the ever blessed Son of God!

5. But there is another way by which we are to judge of religion, and this also by the assistance of reason. We are to examine into the nature of the doctrines and duties there taught.—If his works had been ever so great, and ever so benevolent and good; yet if his doctrine had been contrary to reason, and to the ideas we form of the Supreme Being, no rational man would have hesitated to reject them. Thus, if Jesus Christ had taught us that God was not powerful

and not wise, that he was liable to errors and mistakes, we would instantly have denied his authority, because looking upon Gods works, they bear the undeniable testimony of the most perfect power and wisdom. If he had said that his Father was a respecter of persons, without any regard to their conduct; that he was not good; but that he was cruel and vindictive; that he was not pure and holy; but intemperate and prone to sin: here reason interferes and rejects with indignity, every such imputation. And, if in this book, which is said to contain a revelation from Heaven, we find any principle, or precept, or doctrine, that looks as if the Supreme Being countenanced wickedness, we seek immediately for another interpretation, because reason says, this cannot be the truth.

All the evidences brought forward in favour of christianity, are direct appeals to reason, and an acknowledgment of its authority.

But faith is generally brought forward as the rival and opposer of reason: yet faith itself must be built upon reason, as its firmest foundation, and without which, it cannot stand.— Reason conducts step by step to belief; and then those truths, when firmly established, become active principles; and faith thus supported and purified, becomes the perfection of reason.— Faith of every description must be founded upon reason. Our belief in God is produced by a



survey of his works, under the guidance and direction of reason. But there is a faith which originates in testimony, which gathers evidence and strength by circumstances, till it produce full conviction. Then what is at first said to be a faith founded upon testimony, by this process, becomes a faith equally founded upon reason, and a faith which may be acted upon.

The faith of the christian is founded upon both these principles. In the first place, the doctrines, precepts, sanctions, and example, in the religion of Jesus Christ, are, in themselves, all highly reasonable. This is part of the internal evidence of the gospel, and cannot fail to make a great impression on all, who seriously examine the contents of the gospel. Then the testimony given by the Apostles, and other concurrent circumstances, give additional credit to this internal evidence. They publish to the world this religion immediately after its appearance, and among those very people with whom Christ lived and died. This they would scarcely have ventured to do, unless they had been fully assured of the truth of the doctrines, and of the reality of the main facts. They bear testimony to these facts at the risk of their lives, and every thing valuable to men. They supported their testimony by great and good works, and all performed in the name and by the power of Jesus of Nazareth. Their lives were irreproachable;



and they were the most disinterested of all men; for they sought neither power, nor worldly interest, nor fame: and some of them sealed their testimony with their blood. In short, they gave every evidence in support of their belief, that the nature of the subject could admit. Reason, we see employed in the whole of this process.— They did not follow cunningly devised fables, when they made known to the world, the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye witnesses of his glory.—2. Peter, I. 16.— By what other principles could we arrive to these conclusions, but by reason, that excellent gift of God?

6 We are called upon to the exercise of reason in another way, and equally important, to detect the impositions and superstitious observances, ingrafted by men on the plain duties of the gospel; and to expose the substitutes, invented by men, for personal righteousness and holiness.— Superstitious observances have, in all ages, intermingled themselves with religion. Very early we see a superstitious spirit growing up in the church of Christ, and deforming the beauty and simplicity of his gospel, which reason must ever disown, and which disgraces christianity. Not content with setting apart a particular order of men, to devote their whole time to the solemn services of religion, and to be duly qualified to administer public and private instruction, they

countenanced great numbers of able bodied men and women, in withdrawing themselves voluntarily from the common labours and duties of life, and in retiring from the world to caves and dens of the earth, under the pretence of serving their maker with more effect and purity. Can reason countenance such seclusions? Or can it be made appear that services of this kind can be more acceptable to our maker? This kind of life is not countenanced by any precept of Christ; and they are certainly discountenanced by his example and his treatment of his disciples. He discouraged fasting as a religious service, all ceremonies, and all kinds of austerities.

And to see how fast superstition lays hold of the mind, and what influence it maintains over men; when at the reformation, men were endeavouring to extricate themselves from the trammels of popery, their unreasonable and superstitious view of the Lord's supper, retains still its authority in most churches. The idea of the real presence, in one shape or other, is interwoven with many of their accounts of this ordinance. The attempt to relieve themselves from the absurdity, and the desire of still adhering to the mystery, give a dark and confused image of their meaning in all these accounts. They keep as far as ever from the plainness and simplicity of the original institution, and reason is not permitted to touch this solemn service.

7. One of the most important offices to which reason has been called, was to settle the canon of the Scriptures. At a very considerable time after our Lord's resurrection and ascension, different accounts were given of his life and doctrines. And it must be expected, that on such an occasion, some false and spurious writings were brought forward; and, at the same time, there might be many others composed by well intentioned people, which might get into pretty general circulation; but being the works, perhaps, of persons not sufficiently informed, and not properly digested, they were not deemed fit for the general instruction of christians, and were, therefore, not received into the canon of the the Scriptures of the New Testament. It is not certain at what precise period the present canon was settled. Some suppose that it was completed before the end of the first century, though this is not the general opinion. It is in the fathers only of the second, or rather the third century, that we meet with the catalogue of authorised books, such as we now have them.

The mode of collecting and settling this canon, is what I am principally concerned with in the present enquiry; and this will be found to be by the exercise of reason alone. Inspiration could not direct; for it would require, in the first place, an assurance upon proper evidence, what books

were really inspired, and what not. There were two principles by which those who were employed in this important work, could be governed. The first was to examine what books were acknowledged by the primitive christians, particularly by the fathers and eminent writers, who lived nearest to the time of Christ. And this was done by examining what books were regularly quoted by them, in their writings, as authentic ; and by collecting together those so quoted and allowed, into one body. Thus, by this example and authority, they were recommended as those books, which contained the genuine doctrines of Christ. Proceeding upon this principle, some of the books in the present canon were universally allowed, and very early. Others appeared for some time, of doubtful authority, and were received much later among the authentic books of the christian code. This process is upon the principles of reason alone, without any authorised or superior guide.

And the other principle by which they were directed, was by a proper attention to the contents of these books ; and such as bore on the face of them, any history that was extravagant or ridiculous, or any doctrine that was absurd or unreasonable, were of course rejected. Here then reason supports the most conspicuous part, and is that best guide also to direct us in the

interpretation of those sacred books. Upon what principle could we, after this, reject the use of reason, after being called upon to act this highly important part?

If we abandon reason, then to what or whom can we go? If to some inward director and guide. This is a guide very precarious and indistinct, speaking different languages to different people, and opening a wide door to every thing wild and extravagant. If we refuse reason for our guide in matters of religion, I know of none other acknowledged and named by all ranks and degrees of men. Those, who own inward guides for their direction, have not yet found an express name to designate them, nor tell us by what marks they are to be made known; nor in what language they speak; nor in what way, or by what channel they convey their instructions.— This is turning man adrift to the world of imaginary beings, to seek for some hidden counsellor and director, forsaking reason, the clear gift of Heaven, which all men feel, and which all acknowledge. There is no saying where such things may end. At present it operates greatly to the disadvantage of religion, and offers every advantage to the unbeliever. This stream of enthusiasm will perhaps flow on, till it divides into two branches, rational religion on the one hand, and infidelity, with all its evils, on the other.



## CHAP. III.

## ON FAITH.

1. **I**N offering some plain reflections upon a subject of this importance, you have to encounter many violent prejudices, as men have been taught to consider faith as a matter of deep investigation. The definitions given to us of faith, are very various : some make it only an assent of the understanding to such truths as are delivered to us in the gospel, concerning Jesus Christ ; whilst others make it to consist not only in the belief of these truths, but including in its nature, the effects inseparable from this belief, and, consequently, the whole of moral virtue. If this should be admitted, it puts a stop to all controversies about faith and works. This is certainly carrying the idea of faith too high. By faith, in its original sense, we are to understand the assent which the mind gives to a proposition founded on evidence. Believing on evidence, distinguishes faith from credulity. This evidence may be of different natures, and different also in degree.— Our belief may be founded on testimony, or it may be a deduction from first principles. Our belief of the existence and perfections of the Supreme Being, is generally derived from the



contemplation of his works. The evidences of christianity are of a mixed nature ; and divide themselves into two branches. There are the external evidences, such as the testimony of the Apostles, accompanied with the circumstances under which they gave this testimony ; the evidence we collect from history, concerning Christ, and the great change which took place in the world, on his appearance ; the evidence from the accomplishment of prophecy, and from miracles. Then we have the internal evidences, which arise from the doctrines and precepts delivered in the gospel ; his doctrines are perfectly adapted to our nature ; they are simple ; they are brought down to the common capacity of men ; they are directed to the government of our lives ; and, in short, are possessed of all the qualities, which we expect of a revelation from Heaven. I do not mean to enter upon a detail of the evidences, but briefly to state what ought to be the objects of our faith ; and then returning to the nature and degree of evidence to consider faith as a rational principle of action.

2. The objects of faith ought to be of that nature, as to have effects of importance upon our hopes and our fears, and to influence our lives. And such things as cannot have that influence, however important they may be in themselves, yet they have no right to have a place, among the objects of faith ; but, on the contrary, should

be absolutely excluded, because the only purpose they can answer by being introduced, is to be subjects of useless discussion or contention.— And if we exclude useless things from being objects of faith, with much more reason still, ought we to banish such subjects as may give us unworthy representations of the Supreme Being, or serve to damp our exertions. If it were, for instance, required of us as an article of faith, to believe that the planets moved round the sun, and that they were inhabited by rational beings: this, to philosophers, is a subject of rational discussion; and it may help to give us more correct or more enlarged views of the works of the creator; but to us, as christians, it is a subject of no interest, and therefore is among those articles which should be rejected. There are also some religious principles, that have been, at different times, warmly agitated in the church of Christ, and continue their interest to the present day, that, however decided, can have very little effect on the hopes or fears, or on the life of the christian. What violent disputes, and even bloody wars have been occasioned by the controversies about the nature and person of Jesus Christ? And yet, when we examine the merits of this question, which ever way it be determined, it cannot effect our hopes or our fears, or have the smallest effect upon our lives. Will we obey the laws of Christ better, or be

animated more powerfully by the hopes of the gospel, by being able to determine to what class of these controversialists we belong; or may it not be sufficient to believe in Jesus Christ, as the messiah and saviour of the world, without being able to determine precisely about his nature and person? And should a man with an honest heart and a diligent and enquiring mind, not be able to make up his opinions to correspond exactly with those who call themselves orthodox in all these dark and disputed points, will he, for this defect, be rejected by Jesus Christ, and excluded from the number of the elect? I know of no authority from Scripture, that any man can have to pronounce such a decision: and they appear by no means consistent with the charitable sentiments given to us by our Lord. A man cannot believe every thing that he may be commanded to believe. He may profess to believe any thing; but this is very different from real and substantial faith. A man has no more command over his faith, than he has over his affections. He cannot believe without evidence; and he cannot believe contrary to evidence. Besides the things proposed as objects of faith, should be of service to practice. By this I mean not only as motives to action, but as acting upon our hopes and our fears. If we should take this principle along with us, it would lay to rest a great number of

those idle contentions about useless subjects, which have very often disturbed the peace of the christian world.

3. But what makes this the more unreasonable, is, that it is out of the power of man to guard against such heresies; and the more honest and upright that a man is, the more is he exposed to a condemnation of this nature. A man that is indifferent, that never examines what he professes, and what he asserts, can easily escape every kind of heresy; but a man who is sincere, who searches and examines, who will not profess what he does not believe, is most in danger of falling under reproaches of this nature. Heresy is a relative term, as may be seen by attending to those doctrines which form the distinguishing character of the different divisions of christians, where the same principle is exalted to the highest point of value, by one class; and with equal bitterness is rejected by another.—The Roman catholics require its votaries to believe in Christ's real presence in the sacrament of the supper; whilst others say that the communion is no more but a simple commemoration of Christ's love, in this ordinance of his appointment. Predestination in one church is orthodoxy, in others it is heresy. The Arminians, in their creed, assert the freedom of the will; but the Calvinists call this heresy. All these dark and disputed subjects are pressed upon christians

for their belief. To obtain the mercy of God, and to be duly qualified to receive his grace and favour, you are commanded by some churches to entertain the most humbling opinion of yourself and of human nature in general; and next, to make a confession of your total inability to do any thing that is good. And these conditions are required not of reprobates alone, but of all men, whatever their former life has been. Such language is not countenanced by Scripture, with respect even to the converts. Some of those who came to Christ even before they had embraced the gospel, were men of the greatest worth, and acknowledged as such, by Christ or his apostles. Nicodemus was a respectable character; Nathanael was the Israelite in whom there was no guile. The centurion, who applied to Christ for the cure of his servant, receives the highest praise for his faith, and from the Jewish elders, a character the most excellent. Cornelius, the heathen centurion, is represented by the sacred historian, as a person of the most exalted goodness: and neither Jesus Christ nor his disciples enjoined them to acknowledge their own unworthiness, or to call themselves the vilest of sinners. From whom then have men received that authority which they have assumed, for thus libelling all mankind? I trust there are many men in the present degenerate days, who will stand up for the dignity of their nature, and



repel such insults. Without arrogating to ourselves any high degree of perfection, yet many men, I trust, feel in themselves, many good wishes and inclination, and are capable of doing many good actions; and though fully sensible in themselves, of many imperfections, and many neglects, yet, in the general tenor of their lives, they pay a regard to the law of God.

Men extricate themselves from the difficulty of believing in these dark and difficult tenets, by asserting that faith is a divine and supernatural gift, conferred upon the godly without research or labour. There is no combatting unsupported assertions of this kind, but by contrary assertions, and by maintaining that this is inconsistent with the whole strain of revelation. What end can it answer, to give us a revelation from Heaven, if man is not capable of profiting by it? But that each man, with the Bible for his guide, must still seek after a special revelation.

But I return to ask what good end can be answered by this false and affected humility, in calling themselves wicked and worthless, and in thus libelling the whole human race? So far from this being an advance towards holiness, it is a preparation for wickedness: convince a man that he is vile, and you make him wicked. And this opinion that he entertains of himself, will, in the first place, be the cause of wickedness; and next, it furnishes him with an apology for



its commission. Can it be to honour God, to approach him and say, that this is the situation in which we came from thy hand? Thou hast given us a nature the most perverse, which we have it not in our power to correct; and thou requirest of us duties which we cannot perform. Is this to honour and glorify God?

But the fact is, that most of those who profess such principles, do not admit them in practice. So far from giving proofs of their conviction, of their own unworthiness, and of their total inability to do any good; there are no people more confident of the rectitude of their principles; none more positive of their being in the right way; and none more secure of eternal happiness. They are saying to their maker, in the language of the pharisee of old. "*God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.*" Stand by for I am holier than you. Here is no token of their own unworthiness, no consciousness of their inability.

4. After taking notice of these errors concerning faith, I come now to offer some observations on faith, as a powerful principle of action, and what ought to be its principal objects. The apostle says, "*he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is the rich rewarder of those who diligently seek him.*"

The belief of God must be a powerful principle of action ; the belief of his providence extending to us and to our concerns, of the power that he has over us ; and the belief of his infinite goodness and love, are principles addressed to our best affections. The belief of the immortality of the soul, and of a future state of rewards and punishments ; and that we are accountable creatures ; and that this world is to be judged in righteousness ; and men to be judged according to their works, must have a powerful and commanding effect on all such who receive them.

We can devise no principles that can produce such powerful effects on our hearts. Every feeling is here addressed, our fears, our hopes, our desires and aversions and all those springs which can move or guide the heart of man. Faith then is a most rational principle. It is not the dictates of enthusiasm, but the dictates of reason and of eternal truth. To these principles just now stated we are to add all those springs which arise from the contemplation of the love and goodness of God, from the views given to us in the New Testament, of the character and example of Jesus Christ, and all the proofs given to us that he came from Heaven, the views of his death and his triumphant resurrection from the dead ; and the hopes and promises conferred thus on man. And whilst we are presented on

the one hand with the highest proofs of his love, we meet also with a representation of the greatness of the benefit. We are not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and spot. Here then Jesus Christ, his doctrines, and what he did and suffered are presented as the objects of our faith.

Now laying all these objects of our faith together, and collected into one point, they deserve our most serious attention. And, certainly the more firm, that our conviction of these important truths do grow, the more effect will they produce in our lives; and will enforce more and more our trust in God, obedience to his will, a steadfast regard to holiness, love and gratitude to him, who first loved us and loved us even unto the death.

6. But faith has been misrepresented and abused, and this has exposed this rational and excellent principle, to much contempt. It is abused by a misrepresentation of the manner it is produced, not as a rational principle, but an enthusiastic production instantaneously and perfect; and it has been extended to embrace many objects, which it cannot comprehend, and which cannot be converted to any good purpose. Not content with those simple and highly interesting principles, men have erected many things into articles of faith which can be of little service to

man as a principle of action. The nature and person of Christ furnishes a number of articles, the doctrine of predestination, of original sin, of liberty and necessity, of the power of man and of the grace of God, of the manner how believers are adopted, justified and sanctified, of the nature of regeneration, and of the imputed righteousness of Christ, all these, men are called upon to receive and believe. These have been the subjects of controversy for many centuries and are likely to continue such whenever brought forward. The learned have differed about them at all times, and yet the illiterate part of mankind are called to believe such tenets as essential to their salvation. But may not men be good men, firm believers in the general principles of the gospel, and regulating their lives by Christ's precepts and example, without being compelled to embrace all these points, and without coming to a specific settlement and declaration of their opinions upon these contentious articles? Such subjects are more proper for discussion in the schools of philosophy or metaphysics, than to be brought forward to disturb the faith and the hope of the plain christian.—By laying such stress upon them, serves only to excite strife, contention, and wrangling, and by no means to minister to hope or comfort, or a good life. And several of these subjects being unreasonable in themselves, have a tendency to

produce an aversion to christianity, among those, who have no great inclination to the christian faith; and this aversion is nourished and supported by the advocates for these principles, insisting that such doctrines are the clear doctrines of revelation. To believe that Christ came from God; that he did such works as never man did before; that he preached the doctrine of pardon for sins, upon condition of repentance; that he gave every evidence of a future state, which men are capable of receiving; that he lived a life, not only of purity, but of the most active goodness; that he ascended up into Heaven, and that he will come again to call the dead from their silent mansions, and judge the world in righteousness; in these principles, all christians, I think, do agree. Now may not men rest satisfied with these important principles, without cramming down their throats, so many dark and unedifying doctrines, that can be converted to no good purpose? And may not christians hold communion with one another, whilst they may differ in their speculations on dark subjects? Plain articles do best suit the bulk of mankind, for whom the gospel is intended; for to the poor the gospel is preached. And let not such be discouraged with reproachful aspersions, such as that these are only heathenish principles. Your saviour met with similar treatment from the popular religionists



of his time. If the principles be just and reasonable, let them call them by what name they please, only I must observe, that the heathens had no such clear views of the perfections and providence of our Father in Heaven, of his goodness and love ; and they had not life and immortality brought to light by their gospel.

6. The next subject of enquiry is whether these principles, the objects of our faith, are to be produced instantaneously, or to be attained as other subjects are, by study and research into the fountain of knowledge. In the days of our saviour, we have instances of an instantaneous influence being produced upon the minds of men, and a firm and lasting faith arising without any study or research. But then, in that day, they had evidences which we have no right to expect now ; and which, from the very nature of the evidence, created an instantaneous belief. Our saviour, in the calling of his disciples, acted immediately on the minds of men. And this was done in two ways, first as a consequence of his great works. What must have been the powerful effect upon the minds of those, who saw him by his bare command, give sight to the blind, strength to the lame, rebuke diseases, command the winds and waves, and raise the dead ? This was an immediate appeal to the common understandings of men, without the aid of reason or reflection. And who could resist



this all powerful evidence! It produced its effects like the lightening. It struck dead all opposition. Faith then was instantaneous.— But these effects were produced, in the second place, by that power which Jesus Christ maintained over the hearts and minds of all men.— He had that power which none other ever possessed, and the exertion of it was seen in the call of his disciples. He only said “*follow me,*” and they left all and followed him. But we are not to expect similar acts of faith in the present day, because we have no powers equal to the power of Jesus Christ. We cannot work miracles; we cannot expel evil spirits; we cannot penetrate the hearts of men, as Jesus did. And this is not required of us; it is not necessary in the present age of the church: we have the word of God in our hands. This we are to study, for this book does testify of Christ. We have a record of his great works; we have his doctrines; we have his precepts; and we have his admirable life. All these we are to study, and implore God’s blessing on our studies. We are to look for no miraculous act of faith, for the day of miracles is past. And those who set up such pretences, to give credit to their cause, are imposters and deceivers, and ought to be treated as such.

We may, indeed, meet with instances of sudden impressions made on the minds of some

people, sometimes by afflictions, by sudden deaths, by some awful visitations, &c. which give to some people a serious and thoughtful turn; but this is very different from an instantaneous faith. These cases, when the cause which called them forth, subsides, return, in general, to their former state, and become the very same as they were before. We must seek for faith in the evidences, and with the same care and diligence, as we would do other attainments. Faith is represented in Scripture, in its progress, as a slow, a reasonable, and progressive work. Rom. x. 17. *“ Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”*

7. The next head of enquiry is, whether we have a right to expect faith in perfection, faith without any apprehension and doubts. This may easily be answered, if we had to deal only with reasonable people. Is human nature perfect? Neither can any of our virtues be perfect. Our evidence is not perfect; for we must here continue to see darkly, and therefore our faith must be imperfect; and in this it partakes of the nature and imperfection of all our other virtues. Our love is imperfect, our holiness is imperfect, our charity is imperfect, and so, also, is our faith. Enthusiasts and hypocrites may rant and declaim on their high attainments, on their clear views of divine things, on the certainty to which they arrive with respect to their sins being pardoned,

and of their admission into the number of the elect. But amidst all these declamations and positive assertions, you see the strongest evidences of the vanity of their pretensions. To whatever degree of faith they have attained, they lose in proportion in their self-diffidence; and they increase greatly in their contempt of other men. And in them you never meet with that meekness and that humility of mind, and that amiable diffidence which never fail to accompany a good character.

This is a point which deserves to be laboured and enquired into with the greatest care, on account of the effects it produces on the timid and humble mind. The high degree of attainment which these pharisees vaunt of, has an unhappy effect on humble minds, in causing them to dread, in not feeling these high joys, that they are in a dangerous way and outcasts from Heaven. But to what I have above observed, it may now be added, that it is a sufficient confutation of their high claims, to refer to the conduct and temper of these boasters.— They endeavour to support their claims by the loudness of their profession, and their pharisaical righteousness, by railing also against the world, and its fashions and follies, against the amusements also of life and its enjoyments. Yet these very people pursue eagerly after the world in their own way, and have enjoyments suitable to

their taste and nature. You see in them, in general, no marks of having renounced the world and its wealth and riches. And they are not in possession of those fruits of the spirit described by the apostle, love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.—Gal. v. 22. And Colos. III. 12. we have the following character: bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, &c. The existence and possession of these virtues indicate the progress and high advancement of faith. But if it do not purify the heart, we cannot expect to find it in perfection. If faith does not implant these heavenly dispositions, whatever their boastings may be, the existence of this principle must be regarded as extremely doubtful. And if we find that their tempers are not perfect, their love not perfect, their resignation not perfect, nor their patience, we may conclude that their faith is not perfect.

The not being able to arrive to full perfection in this virtue, should not, however, discourage us to strive after perfection, but to continue diligent in the use of means, and in the pursuit of holiness; for this course will prove the best means to increase and strengthen our faith.

8. But faith is particularly insisted upon as essential to salvation; and if we are to believe the doctrines of several churches, we are not to

expect salvation, without we be fully possessed of this lively faith in Jesus Christ. I would not wish to advance any thing to diminish our opinion of the necessity of this divine virtue; but certainly many things may be offered to moderate this high doctrine, and to make it more consistent with the equity of the divine administration, and the unavoidable condition of men. In the first place, these churches who advance these high doctrines, differ widely among themselves, in what they advance as fundamental doctrines, each insisting that their principles, and their's only, lead to salvation.— This consideration creates, therefore, some doubts regarding this doctrine. And again, not one of these churches is able to settle what are the articles that are to be regarded as essential, and, without the belief of all and each of which, we cannot attain to eternal happiness. But there is another important point to be settled, before we can establish this doctrine. If no man can be saved without faith in Christ, what must become of all those good men, who lived in the world before the coming of Christ, and who were ignorant of him, not through any fault of their own, but placed in such situations, by the appointment of God himself? And in like manner, what must become of all those, who have been in the world since the coming of Christ, but who have never had an opportunity



of hearing his gospel, or the words of eternal life? And what can be said in behalf of those people adjoining to christian lands, pagans or mahometans, but who are bound down as fast by their prejudices, and prevented from knowing him, as ignorance or darkness can make them? And what is the situation of some upright and honest men, living among christians and professing christianity, and diligent and honest in their enquiries, yet have never been able to arrive at that full faith which they eagerly seek after, and to such a degree, as to remove all apprehensions and doubts? It is sufficient to state these cases, and to leave them to the good sense and charitable decision of those, whose minds and understandings are not bound down by the fetters of prejudice. Is it possible to reconcile doctrines of this kind, with the equity of the divine administration? Or with the liberal declaration of our Lord? In what sense are we to understand, that it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of Judgment, than for those to whom the gospel is preached, but who have not profited by it? These cities were cities of the most abominable wickedness.— Their crimes were shocking to human nature; and if allowance shall be made for them, how much more must we expect it, for those good and virtuous men, who have lived in heathen countries, ignorant, unavoidably ignorant of



Jesus Christ? Men will be rendered accountable for the talents and privileges they have received, not for those which they never enjoyed.

9. Of the existence of faith we cannot judge so correctly, as we can do of other virtues.— Faith is an act of the mind, and none can know this perfectly, but he who formed us. It is easy to assert, and to talk, and to come forward with superior pretensions and claims; and the hypocrite, in all these, may be the loudest; but all these are entitled to no credit, if they be destitute of the best evidence, the peaceable and unostentatious fruits of righteousness. Faith may be only pretence; and we cannot contradict those pretensions, so long as the life is regular and consistent. But these pretensions may be kept up without any sacrifice, and may be maintained, so long as you see no flagrant offences against God's law,

Making faith, this inward principle, the great test, and the sole test of the christian character, opens many doors to impositions; for it is easy for every profligate to set up pretensions to such attainments. And people of this character, without any serious principles of religion, may be more positive and clamorous than the sincere and upright christian. Another unhappy consequence arises from this being the sole test, it encourages bad people to cherish their evil dispositions and vices, as having faith, they are

satisfied that all is well. Further I have to remark, that this doctrine not only leads to impositions on the world, but it causes men themselves to fall into gross mistakes. It is not easy to make plain and simple people comprehend what is meant by faith; and this class is generally the dupes of such impositions. The act of believing may appear to them no more than giving their assent to such and such articles, as their spiritual guides may dictate, without making the smallest efforts to understand them, or any attempts to examine or enquire into their truth or falshood. And they are deterred from examining or doubting, by being assured that their eternal salvation hangs upon the belief of such doctrines. A man may be a deceiver and hypocrite, an imposter, dishonest, fraudulent, an oppressor, and domestic tyrant; yet all these may be overlooked, but to be guilty of this kind of heresy can never be forgiven. We hear much of dangerous doctrines, of damnable doctrines, but not so often of damnable actions.

10. Another subject presents itself at this part, for our serious consideration. Why has more stress been laid upon faith in the doctrines of men, than some other virtues clearly recommended in the word of God, as equally necessary, and of the highest importance? And these are strongly insisted upon by our Lord and his apostles, and which fall in general more under

the comprehensions of men, and of which both we ourselves, and the world, are more capable of judging. It is said, and by him who had a right to command, "*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.*" *This is the first and great commandment, and the second is like unto it. "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."* No command can be expressed in a stronger and in clearer language than this. How comes it that these commands are not brought forward equally with faith? With respect to the first of these, enthusiasts and hypocrites place the love of God in a very high rank. But of this, standing detached by itself, we can form no correct judgment how far men are governed by it.—Many make high pretensions to this attainment, who represent the Supreme Being in their principles, in such terms, as it is impossible to love him. It is one of those virtues easily counterfeited, and the counterfeit, in some cases, not easily detected. But the love of our neighbour is a test much less equivocal, and not so easy to counterfeit. And the apostle John brings it forward, not only as a duty of the highest importance, but as the best test of our love to God.—"*If a man say I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar, for he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?*"—1. John, iv, 20. 21. This

duty of loving one another is, in this chapter, pressed upon us by the strongest arguments, as the indispensable mark of a christian. And if we take up the word brother in its largest sense, it extends the duty still further. If we make it equivalent with neighbour, in that extensive sense stated by our Lord, as explained in the parable of the good Samaritan; it makes every man our brother. And to furnish us with a specimen of what we are to understand by love; he says, iii. 7.—“*But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?*” Faith and the love of God standing by themselves, require few sacrifices: strong pretensions and assertions stand in their room; but love to man requires many sacrifices. If you maintain that you love your neighbour, you must testify this by some act of goodness. If you are unjust, if you defraud, if you oppress, if cruel, vindictive, passionate, &c. you cannot maintain your claim to the christian character—“*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if you love one another.*” This is a much less equivocal mark of the christian character than faith, not so easily attained, and subject also to much less imposition.

But there is another mark given of the christian character, and strongly insisted upon; “*Without holiness no man shall see God;*” and

it is expressed even still stronger by our Lord himself. “*Be ye, therefore, perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect.*”—Mat. v. 48.—This implies holiness in heart and in life. But we never meet with a christian sect laying this down as a mark of the christian character. On the contrary, the general strain and language of popular writers and preachers is, that this is not necessary for admission; the viler you are, the more welcome; and the greatest sinner makes the best saint.

Forgiveness of injuries, and pardon of offences, are other conditions, given to us by Christ himself, and represented as indispensable. “*If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive you your trespasses.*”—But no sect has ever been established, who lay this down as the terms of admission and communion. Now all these are not only perfectly reasonable and easy to be understood, but they are in a great measure practicable. Such is the duty of doing good to our neighbour, the duty of holiness and of forgiveness of injuries. And the attainment of these duties is productive of other good effects. They make men more amiable, bring us nearer to the image of our great master, and even of God himself; and bear a strong resemblance to what we would wish christians to be: whilst faith, or that which men call such, makes man proud, conceited,



self-righteous and overbearing. Such were the pharisees in the days of our Lord. You cannot love a man for the extent of his faith; for this may be in general no more but credulity, or pretence; and in these cases can answer no good purpose. If then we be in possession of the love of God, and the love of our neighbour; if we pay a strict regard to purity and holiness of life, and imbibe that strong mark of the christian temper, to be able to pardon injuries and to forgive trespasses, these will accord the best with the doctrines of our Lord, delivered in his sermon on the mount; and these will help to support our confidence, even though we may not be possessed of that strong and lively faith, which excludes all misgivings of mind and every doubt. A timid and a humble mind accompanied with an inquisitive disposition, will not satisfy itself with merely saying—I believe, Lord help my unbelief, but will endeavour to walk as Christ did. Such humble and modest christians ought not to be discouraged by the boastings and pharisaical pretensions of the hypocrite. Those arrogant claims are no marks of the Heavenly temper and disposition, and of walking humbly with God. Persevere in modest enquiry, in doing justice, in loving mercy, and in a patient continuance in well-doing, and your labour shall not be in vain.

Whatever principles or tenets we admit, the



christian life and temper are the surest criterions, that we are the true disciples of Jesus Christ.— And let us regard those as the greatest heretics, and run the greatest risk of being excluded from the kingdom of Heaven, who deny not ungodliness and worldly lusts, and who live not soberly, righteously, and godly. And to make use of the language of the apostle, Phil. iv. 8.—“*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things.*” In all references to our final judgment, there is not the smallest hint, that we shall be judged by our opinions or by our faith, but always by our works, by our temper, and by our life. And though we should have all gifts, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though we should have faith to remove mountains, and have not charity, we are nothing. And the advantages that such tests of the christian character possess are, that they are easily comprehended, less liable to imposition, and they recommend themselves to all men; they adorn the christian character; they would prevent a number of those quarrels and dissensions, which have so much disgraced the christian world, and marred the progress of that divine religion.

It is an improvement, therefore, devoutly to be wished, that a new sect would arise and distinguish themselves by insisting upon all their members being to be known in the world, by their love to mankind in general, by the holiness and purity of their lives, by their readiness to forgive injuries and pardon offences, and by an extensive charity. This would be of much more service to the christian cause, than all the religious societies that ever sprung up in the world. In all these, there is a spirit of party, narrowness of mind, a contracted charity. It is rather extraordinary that such a society has never been thought of since the first rise of christianity.— But this would require too great sacrifices to meet with encouragement. The whole plan of all the different sects that have successively arisen in the christian church, is to devise some substitute for a good life; something to stand as a substitute for the christian virtues. The history of religious superstition would be a valuable work; and to trace out, and to expose that perpetual war, that all the sects have waged against good works. We hear much about sound opinions and dangerous opinions, but a sound life has seldom been insisted upon as the distinguishing character of the christian.

11. Faith, as I have already observed, must be founded upon evidence. And the objects of our faith have all the evidence of which the

nature of the things is capable. We cannot have the direct evidences of our senses for the existence and perfections of the Supreme Being, so as to see God, because this is an object that our senses cannot take in; and if it were possible for us to see God, such sight would overpower all the faculties of man. What effect would the sight of even a dear friend from the other world, have upon us? Are we sure that we could support ourselves so far as to talk with him, and to put to him any of those interesting questions, which we wish to have answered? And if such a sight be too great for our faculties, how would we be affected, were we to be favoured with a sight of some one of the higher intelligences, an angel, and under such circumstances, as perfectly to satisfy us, that he came from a more perfect state? Would not this be too much for us to support? How then could we be able to contemplate the great father of spirits, the incomprehensible Jehovah!

If, therefore, the evidence we have for his existence from his works and from his word, be not sufficient, of what nature, and of what degree, must that evidence be, that would bring home conviction to our minds? One of its qualities must be, that we can calmly examine it; and in such a manner as to remove every uncertainty and doubt. But this evidence we must not expect in this imperfect state; and not till our

faculties be strengthened ; and all those weaknesses be removed : in short, we must wait till this mortal shall put on immortality.

But we have evidence, if not sufficient to remove every doubt, and to produce perfect conviction, yet we have such evidence as should determine every prudent man to act upon. For the existence of the Supreme Being and his perfections, I cannot conceive any evidence more satisfactory than what we already have, situated and circumstanced as we at present are. The heavens declare unto us his glory, and the earth is full of his goodness. And for a future state, we have likewise evidence of such a nature, that if it does not present to us those clear views of all that we desire or wish to know ; yet it has all these characters, that should determine us what course of life we should follow. If I should say that there can be no doubts, this is holding a language too positive and strong. Men may be, and they certainly are differently affected in subjects of this kind. Some undoubtedly have a faith much more lively than others ; and the way men spend their lives, will have a very powerful effect upon their faith. Those who keep the future world constantly in view in every part of their conduct, are much better disposed and prepared to receive the evidence of that high importance ; whilst those who lead a life, in every respect opposite, indulging in every

irregularity, they have strong interest to wish that such doctrines may not be true; and these wishes may influence their belief. But independent of these considerations, so different is the structure of our minds, that we are very differently affected and influenced by the same evidence.

It is proper to take notice of those things, and to state them freely, because, there no doubt are, and I firmly believe, there are many honest and good men, who may be so minute and scrupulous in their enquiries after these important truths, and in the examination of evidence, that they may not be able to remove perfectly every uncertainty and doubt. It is distressing for them, therefore, to hear, that there is a possibility of arriving to perfect satisfaction: of this, however, every honest enquirer may rest assured, that he who is to be our judge will make all gracious allowance for the unavoidable darkness, that may generally or occasionally hang over some minds; he knows all the weakness and all the strength of every mind.

12. But, again I say, the evidence which we have, is sufficient to direct every man to that course of life, which he ought to pursue. Excepting avowed infidels, all reasonable men will allow, that there is the highest degree of probability for the truth of all the great objects of our faith. A much less evidence determines a



man in most of his important pursuits of this life. The merchant often runs the greatest risk in his pursuit of worldly fortune. He has to encounter the dangers of the great deep, the violence, sometimes, of the enemy, the uncertainty of the market, the danger of remittances; the failures among the monied men become another cause of distrust and apprehension.— But in religion, it may be truly said, that there are no hazardous chances, but a certainty of gain. Godliness is great gain, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This pursuit is the certain path to happiness, for wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness. This course of life is the best plan he can adopt for temporal happiness, to procure the esteem and respect of the world, peace of mind and self-satisfaction; and during the whole of his mortal course, he is animated with the pleasing hope of immortality. Why then should it be thought an unnatural or a visionary doctrine, that the just shall live by faith? The absurd notions which enthusiasts have entertained of faith, and the wild and unintelligible rant in which they declaim upon such subjects, have brought into contempt this most powerful and excellent principle. But, if it be regarded with the eye of reason, no principle can be better adapted for a principle of action, and to obtain a more commanding power and influence over the life.



13. For let me ask, what must the effect be upon a man, who seriously and firmly believes in the existence and perfections of the Supreme Being, and a future state ; and who has attained to just and lively conceptions of the love and perfect character of Jesus Christ? Must not this belief regulate, purify, and animate every part of his life, give lustre to his prosperity, and support him under adversity? This principle addresses itself to the best passions, and the most commanding affections of the human heart, to our fears, to our loves, to our desires, and to our aversions, to our hopes, and to every affection that can influence man. We cannot conceive, and we cannot contrive any other principle that can equal this in its strength, in its extent, and so well adapted to our nature. It places before the mind, and brings home to the understanding, the most sublime objects of nature. The creator of the universe and the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth is presented to us by the eye of faith, as the great object of our fears and of our love. An eternity of happiness without measure or end, is the object of our noblest ambition ; the Supreme Being as the object of our most perfect love, as our portion and exceeding great reward. He so loved the world, that he gave to us his beloved son, to live and to die for men. We see there Jesus Christ as the most perfect character ; his doctrines are

rational and sublime; his precepts pure and perfect; and his example is not only without spot or stain, but of the most active goodness, goodness extending to all the sons and children of men. If these principles get full possession of the heart, they cannot fail to produce every thing that is good. And the man who acts upon them, is not an enthusiast or a fanatic; but governed by the most perfect reason,

In proportion then as they are received, such must the effects be. In some warm and lively minds, men, meditating on those delightful objects, may feel those pleasing and holy raptures, which may give rise to the persuasion, that such men are actuated and animated by the spirit of God. Such principles may produce that joy of believing, which the world cannot give, and which the world cannot take from us.

14. In our researches into this excellent principle, we will find that there are evidences suited to different characters and abilities. To the rational and diligent enquirer after truth, there are evidences sufficient to satisfy every reasonable man; and though they may not be so powerful, and it is not proper that they should be so, as to remove every doubt, yet sufficient to determine every wise and prudent man, which is the safest and the best, and the most honourable course to steer. And then, again, for those who have neither time, abilities, nor learning

sufficient to pursue these evidences, providence has furnished such evidence or influence, as may answer full as well, all practical purposes.— Those, who under the direction of pious and good parents, have received a religious education, brought up from their infancy in the belief of these important principles; and who, when the years of reason have come, have not ceased to frequent the assemblies of the saints, hearing, every Lord's day, the Scriptures read, joined in the devotions, and heard interesting religious discourses; such become christians from habit, and have never learned to doubt any of these important truths. Happy are those of this description, whose minds have never been unsettled by the wild and immoral declamations of the hypocrite or enthusiast; and who have never listened to the doctrines of infidelity, so degrading to our nature, and destructive of our best hopes. In these, Christ seems formed within; and his religion takes possession of the ruling principles of the heart. Let not the unbeliever sneer at such faith. Look at this man in the day of trial, and in the hour of bodily or mental distress, there is a strong principle within, which bears him up, under such trials. Look at him on the bed of death, his composure, his calm submission, his patient resignation to the orders and will of providence, testify the strength of that principle which reigns within. These are

wise appointments of providence, implanting, by a religious education, this faith with that firm root, which no sufferings can tear up.

But in the book of grace, both in the Old and New Testament, there are a vast number of interesting histories, acts of devotion, precepts and examples, that strike powerfully, a well regulated mind, and contribute greatly to nurse faith. Such things often produce a sudden and happy effect.

Some expressions convey to us a striking image of God's power, some convey the finest conceptions of his providence, some of his goodness, and some of his love. In Scripture, likewise, we meet with several instances of the power of faith, as in Abraham, Moses, Daniel, the three children; and in the New Testament, of the disciples of our Lord; and of Paul, after his conversion; and, may I add, of the centurion, whose servant our Lord healed, and of Cornelius, the devout centurion.

But from the nature of this principle, it is liable to great abuses. Being an operation of the mind, it is easily pretended and counterfeited; and as men are ignorant how it may produce its effects, and what are its expressions, imposters may pretend endless feelings, which put in their claim to be the offspring and effects of faith; and these feelings they pass off as the operation of the spirit of God. Thus men rest satisfied

with these, as the principal part of religion, and treat with contempt, obedience to God's commands, personal holiness, and righteousness.— But, after all, the christian life is the best evidence of being his disciples. This will give to ourselves the greatest satisfaction; and upon this evidence, the world, at large, will place the greatest dependence.

#### CHAP. IV.

##### ON CHRIST'S MORAL DOCTRINES, MEN'S PER- VERSION OF THEM, AND THE DOCTRINE OF SUDDEN CONVERSIONS.

1. **THE** great object of religion ought certainly to be, to implant in us, in the first place, such principles as may regulate and influence our lives, and beget in us hope and comfort on a rational foundation. And doctrines and tenets, that can in no respect produce these, can be of no service to us as religious creatures; for granting that we could attain to a firm belief of these things, but cannot apply them to any good purpose, for what use can they be imposed upon us?

If we examine the doctrines and precepts of our Lord, we shall find that it is his constant aim



to avoid dark and useless subjects, and to adhere to what will tend to make men wiser and better. He avoids subjects merely of curiosity, and directs all to practice. And his manner of teaching ought to be the pattern for us. When the question was put to him, "are there few that be saved?" He checks the enquiry by saying, "strive to enter in at the strait gate, &c."—When Peter, prompted by curiosity, asks with respect to the disciple John, "*Lord, what shall this man do?*" Jesus said to him, "*If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.*" See also Mat. xviii. 1. and xxiv. 3.

The doctrines, also, which he delivered, are plain, and of the most interesting nature. He gives to us the most pleasing image of his heavenly Father, not dwelling so much on his natural perfections, that are more obvious to all, but on his goodness and his love to the world, on his providence extending to all his creatures, but directed in a peculiar manner to the care and protection of man.

Now these are principles which lead directly to practice. If God be such, we must love him, we must repose our trust and confidence in him; and we must do his will and obey his commands. Again, he gives us every reason to believe that we are his immortal offspring, that at the conclusion of the present period, good men will



enter upon an eternity of happiness, whilst the wicked shall be banished for ever from all that is great and good. These, again, are practical principles, pointing out to us the consequences of our different lives. He again assures us, that we are accountable creatures, and to be judged according to our works. What powerful influence must such principles produce on those who believe in them? To be judged according to our works, and by him who cannot be imposed upon, and who is no respecter of persons, and who will judge righteous judgment, are principles to command the attention of every reflecting mind.

And that we may labour under no mistake respecting what these works are, he delivers to us his law in plain, but in very comprehensive and strong language in his sermon on the mount, contained in the 5th, 6th and 7th Chap. of Mathew's gospel. And in that sermon, he explains the extent of his precepts, and frees them from the false glosses which the scribes and pharisees had put upon them. His law extends to the whole life, and not only to our actions, but also to our words and thoughts. In his representation of the general judgment, in Mat. xxv. he gives to us a beautiful and affecting statement of the amiable spirit and temper of his religion, and how excellently it is calculated for the happiness of the world. The representation is the plainest

possible; and the duties are of the most extensive benevolence: and we see the true spirit of his religion, in the answers he gives to the excuses of the wicked, when saw we thee a stranger, &c. The king shall answer and say—"In as much as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me." In his sermon, and in this representation, he is delivering general duties, but in other passages, and in his parables, he enforces particular duties. We see how he corrects and condemns a covetous disposition, in the parable of the rich man, whose grounds brought forth plentifully.—Luke, xii. 16. And he exposes the evil effects of luxurious living, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.—Luke, xvi. 19. He gives us a striking picture of riotous living and extravagance, in the prodigal son.—Luke, xv. And never was compassion so finely contrasted and represented as is done by Jesus Christ, in the parable of the good samaritan.—Luke, x. What a strong correction does he inflict on hypocrisy and self-righteousness, in the parable of the pharisee and publican going up together to the temple to pray.

The whole tendency of his instructions is to persuade men to live well, that they may be happy both here and hereafter. And this is done with the greatest plainness and simplicity, without puzzling men with discussions about merit, or the power of man and the grace of

God. And it will be difficult to find any doctrines or precepts, where a good life, and the necessity of it, are kept so stedfastly in view.

2. If this then be the case, what are we to say to those instructions or doctrines, from which it is impossible to extract any one duty, and which cannot be applied to any good purpose? What good end can be answered by declaiming on original sin, and telling us, that we are liable to be punished for the offence of Adam? How is it possible to reconcile this with equity? Is this the judging the world in righteousness? What should we think of that law, that should subject every man to be punished for the crimes, not of their fathers only, but of their most remote ancestor? Can this be called glad tidings, which is what the gospel offers, and which they, who call themselves gospel preachers, pretend that they alone do publish? What idea can we form of God, if this be his appointment? Will this make him the object of our love? And what practical purpose can we derive from this doctrine?

Another of the favourite and popular doctrines is, that man can, of himself, do nothing which is good; but that he is subjected to condemnation for that wickedness, which it is not in his power to avoid. [See *Plain Statement*, p. 147, 2d edit.] He is represented as destitute of every good principle, of every good wish and desire, cor-

rupted to the very *core*. Now this is the situation in which man is placed by his maker.— The consequences arising from this doctrine, which is constantly sounded in our ears, by popular preachers and writers, are inconsistent with every idea that we can conceive of his justice and goodness. Would it be just to punish a man for not doing what is contrary to his nature to do, what he has no power to do, and what his best exertions and endeavours, by the very doctrine of those people, cannot possibly effect? These doctrines place man in a state of total inability, capable of doing nothing which is good, and yet duties of the highest importance are exacted of him. He is called upon to love God; and yet they tell us that man, in his natural state, is at enmity with God, that he hates God, which is impossible even to suppose. This representation is degrading to our heavenly father: he becomes thus the object of terror.— This system, as I have already observed, makes God unjust. Would we think it reasonable, if we should be condemned for not removing mountains, and for not ascending to the stars? And why unreasonable and unjust? Because we have no power to do such things. And how then can it be reasonable or just to condemn men for not doing, what confessedly they have no power to do? People of these principles employ a curious jargon to remove this difficulty.

They argue, that though man has lost his power to perform, God has not lost his right to command. What a horrid idea does this present of our maker?

It may be further observed respecting such doctrines, that they run in direct opposition to the whole strain of Scripture. In the Scripture God, by his messengers, is enjoining to men several duties, pressing and exhorting them, employing both promises and threatenings. What absurdity to deliver such commands to a race of creatures, which have not the least power to obey? How is this consistent with the wisdom and goodness of our heavenly father?

I know it will be answered that men in general, who believe in such principles, lead regular and sober lives, and are men of the most exemplary characters. Allowing this to be the fact, it does not follow that their good lives are founded upon their professed principles. They owe these virtues, not to their religious education, but to the plain dictates of common sense; and the credit and support of their party require this. You will find many professed unbelievers, and who refuse to acknowledge either heaven or hell, men of sober lives, of the greatest honour and probity; and in whose honesty you may place the most complete confidence, and who would not, on any account, swerve from the truth.



Now if we examine the conduct of men of these professed principles, you will find a strange contradiction. The very people who deal so liberally in these principles, in their general manners, furnish the strongest evidence that they do not believe in them.—[See p. 45.]

3. This doctrine is carried further; for they contend that whatever good works a man does, there is no merit in them. If he be ever so just, merciful, benevolent, and compassionate, doing all the good in his power, yet God pays no respect to such services. They even maintain, that all good works done before justification, partake of the nature of sin; and that the vilest of sinners will be more readily received by Christ, than those who have been labouring all their lives, to live soberly, righteously, and godly, and to do all the good they can. Upon this principle, we must esteem as highly, the priest and the Levite, who turned aside from the distressed object, who fell among the thieves, as the tender hearted Samaritan, who, when he saw him, had compassion on him, went to him and bound up his wounds, and took care of him.—Luke, xiv. A Nero and Caligula, these monsters in human shape, are regarded as much by a righteous God, as the celebrated Titus Vespasian, the darling of mankind, who lost that day on which he had done no good, or the benevolent man of Ross,



who lived for the good of mankind. But these very people, who strenuously maintain such principles, belie them in the judgments they pronounce on the passing transactions of life.— They must approve of a good deed when fairly stated to them, without enquiring whether it was done before or after justification. And Scripture furnishes us with facts, which stand in direct opposition to such doctrines.—[See p. 43.]

4. The doctrine of sudden and instantaneous conversions is another of the popular and fashionable doctrines of the present day; and may be set down as one of those very common, but gross impositions, that ensnare the credulous and deceive the ignorant; but, in general, procures great credit to those who have the audacity to pass such off upon the world. Conversion applies to a change, not of any one particular bad habit, but a thorough change of all the errors of our life; a general ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well. But it generally happens, when a person is addicted to some notorious vice, by the breaking off that vice, and by frequenting people of a religious character and profession, this change passes for a complete conversion.— This change I propose to examine, to see what true grounds we have for ascribing such partial and often temporary changes, to a general renovation of the life.

There are some vices that may be broken off with much more ease than others ; and these are such as are not interwoven with our nature, and which do not make such an intimate part of ourselves : drinking is one of this description.— This is a vice not natural, and not fixed in our constitution ; but rather an unnatural habit, assumed often as a relief from some uneasiness, and often from idleness and bad company ; it becomes strengthened by indulgence, but it may be parted with by a vigorous effort and resolution, and a complete and lasting cure sometimes effected. This vice cannot easily be concealed ; it exposes itself openly to the world ; it degrades man ; impairs both his bodily and his mental powers ; is hurtful to him in his worldly circumstances ; makes him not only unpleasant, but hurtful to his family, and, therefore, a change here, may be a great benefit to himself and to all that are interested in him. Swearing, also, is a vice of a similar character. This is a vicious habit, contrary to nature, and inconsistent with our religious profession, particularly those duties which we owe to our maker. This vice may be easily cured : it cannot be interwoven with our nature : it requires no sacrifice to part with it.

5. But there are other vices, which, upon examination, we shall see it is no easy task to root

out: it is not the work of a moment; but requires much perseverance and strenuous efforts, to obtain from them a deliverance. Apply this, for instance, to a covetous disposition. This is a natural vice, and one, the most difficult to be conquered. It mingles with the blood and the vital parts. It is, in some cases, a hereditary vice, and flows in the veins of families. Let a man try to cure himself of this vice; he will find this not to be the work of a day: in spite of all his efforts and resolutions, it will frequently betray its meanness, and very often its injustice; and I believe the instances are few, wherein you have seen a perfect cure. It shews itself in the common transactions of life, in buying and in selling, in paying and receiving, in the œconomy of the family, and in personal œconomy. It will manifest itself, very often, among those who affect to be religious; for, by the mistake or misfortune of our judgment in this, and many other things, covetousness is not always placed in the rank it should hold, and rated as a vice; and hence it is not one of the religious duties or exercises to banish covetousness. You will perhaps find a great proportion of this vice among those who affect much religion. Covetousness is often attempted to be covered by some ostentatious act of charity; and, in the performance of this, they sound the trumpet before them. A drunkard you will not allow to be religious,

though he should be found of a most generous disposition, honest and upright in all his dealings, liberal in his sentiments, not envious, no back-biter, and even attentive to the ordinances; but a covetous man attached to the world and to the things of the world, narrow minded, censorious, exacting what is his due with severity, grinding, in some instances, the face of the poor; yet, if he be a professor, and sober, not addicted to any flagrant vice, and not neglecting the public services of religion, he passes in the world, and particularly in such societies, for a good man.— The covetous man will pray, attend all ordinances, attach himself strictly to all the articles of his faith; but, however urgent the occasion, you cannot compel him to open his heart in acts, not of ostentation, but real good; and, on such occasions, when the left hand is not to know what the right hand doth. But, through all the disguises by which you cover this character, it cannot be concealed, the same disposition remains unchanged.

6. I might further illustrate this difficulty of conversion, by applying it to some of the meaner but common vices, which betray the want of the true christian temper, such as back-biting, under which, or along with which, I would include a censorious disposition, ready to catch at, and to propogate the foibles, or errors, or crimes of our neighbour, and to magnify and to multiply them.

This is a mischievous vice, disturbing the peace and comfort of our neighbour, inflaming discord, and engendering strife and hatred. This, also, is a vice very difficult to eradicate. It cannot be the work of a day; it is fixed deep in the constitution, and will require great pains and vigilance to subdue it. For when in company with the religious profession, it puts on the semblance of virtue, railing at the vices and foibles of your neighbour, and censuring their defects or neglects; it still assumes a zeal for the interest of goodness. Yet this character is found very commonly with religion, and is bitter in its zeal against the vices, the errors, and the heresies of the times. You perhaps have seen but very few instances of this vice being completely extracted. A habit of lying, is another of those unconquerable vices, but which still does not debar a person from mixing with religious societies, joining in all ordinances, and full of zeal for the maintenance of religion. This is a habit, likewise, which is seldom cured. It discovers itself in one channel or other, and never abandons a person, while life and thought, or being last. Were a person fully convinced that he was addicted to such a vice, and set himself down, resolved seriously to conquer it, he must be for ever on his guard, and never cease in this warfare. But, from mistaken notions of religion, this may assume a softer name; it may be called



an immoral habit, but no disqualification for the kingdom of God; though liars are expressly forbidden those pure and glorious mansions.

I have said enough to shew that, with the best inclination and the sincerest good wishes, a change of bad habits is extremely difficult. It is a glorious resolution, but it is an arduous task to cease to do evil, and to learn to do well. Our Saviour compares it to the cutting off a right hand, and to the plucking out a right eye. No wonder then, that many, deterred by the difficulty, may say with Felix—"go thy way, when I have a convenient season, I will send for you." But, if what has been advanced be true and correct, what shall we say to those sudden conversions, of which so much is boasted. In the first place, if there be any conversion at all, it must be, commonly, only partial; a reformation in some of those vices I have referred to above; a reformation in the habit of drinking and swearing, being more scrupulous in the observation of the Sabbath, and more diligent, even over diligent, in attending upon ordinances, making up in these, for defects in moral duties. But are there any reformations in constitutional vices; in those sins which do so easily beset them; any amendment in their temper? Does a man, naturally proud, become more humble? Passionate, moderate and calm? Do you see any change in the habit or disposition of a man

naturally cruel or envious, of a murmuring disposition, or covetous, or jealous, worldly minded, or addicted to lying, or to evil speaking. All these commonly remain unchanged, and mingle themselves with his religious profession. This makes conversion a very short work, and such religion a very easy profession. Most of the pretences then to sudden conversions, upon this examination, are impositions on the credulity of mankind, and bring a disgrace on the great interests of religion. The best chance for a respectable religious character, is to begin early, to form the temper and habits, to regulate our conversations and our actions by such principles. From this, then, arise important duties to the christian parents; not only to teach their children the leading principles of religion, but to initiate them early to the christian morality. A strict regard to truth should be the first and the leading principle, truth in all its branches, and to guard against every breach of this duty, against all kinds of falsehood, all equivocations, all disguising of the truth. Without this, let a man be ever so respectable in other things, he cannot fail to be contemptible to every one that finds he pays not a proper regard to truth.— Cultivate in them, also, a disposition of humanity, and suffer them not to indulge in any thing that is cruel; guard them against every little sally of passion; against every thing that has the

appearance of deceit or dishonesty : against evil speaking, envy, jealousy, and particularly against covetousness, for this is the root of all evil : it lays men under innumerable temptations to commit sin.

7. If we appeal to facts, we will, I believe, find that no great improvement is made upon men, by these conversions. Such tempers and dispositions as the envious, the covetous, the malicious, the proud, the worldly minded, are not suddenly changed, and are very seldom completely changed. Hence, amidst all the noise of religious profession, draw aside the veil of self-righteousness, you see in them the same tempers and dispositions in general, that they originally were.

It would be well if it were to end here ; for besides their share of their original vices, there is a chance of acquiring new vices by the change. I believe, it will be found in general much easier to acquire a new vice, than to quit an old one. There is a chance of acquiring, with their solemnity of countenance, a sourness of temper, which borders, also, on discontent. They generally acquire spiritual pride and self-righteousness, bigotry, and a contempt of others ; and these vices lead to more, to religious calumny, and the pride of favouritism, considering themselves as the peculiar objects of God's regard.— The confidence that many of them thus acquire

becomes disgusting, when they go so far as to believe and assert that, after having passed through this change, they are in a state of absolute security ; that they have the assurance that all their sins are pardoned, and that they are perfectly assured of everlasting happiness. To maintain these, whilst they are partakers of the general frailties of mankind, is inculcating a system of lies and delusion. Balancing, then, these accounts, in point of morals, such people have but small gain, and they become neither more respectable, nor more amiable in society. A man originally of a sober life, and not addicted to habitual swearing, and regular in his attendance upon religious ordinances, receives no improvement by this change. Instead of plain virtues, if he becomes clothed with pharisaical righteousness ; if, instead of modesty and diffidence, he assumes to himself consequence, and becomes troublesome, by pushing forward into view, himself and his religion, you will not be disposed to entertain a more favourable opinion of his principles, to repose more confidence in his word, in his promises, in his charity, or in his good conduct. True religion is humble and modest ; and manifests itself in an amiable diffidence, in esteeming others better than themselves, in doing their alms and good deeds in secret, in praying in secret. Our Saviour leads us to these conclusions, by his precepts and also

by his example. The pharisees courted the applause of men, by the appearance of sanctity in their gait, in their dress, and in their general manners. How much do men, in common life, dislike and despise the boaster, the vain, the conceited? And the same principle will direct them to entertain the same aversion from those who court popularity in their religious profession, by bringing religion forward on every occasion, in their drawling speech, in the affected sanctity of their demeanor, and in making religion the constant subject of their conversation. Religion is meant not to furnish us with subjects for talking, but for the government of our lives: it produces its effect in the heart and in the life, by these silent workings, which wish to avoid the eye and ear of man; striving to approve themselves to him who seeth in secret, and will reward them openly.

Preaching the doctrine and efficacy of sudden conversions, cannot fail to have an unfortunate effect upon the religion and morals of such as listen to such doctrines. They must look upon religion, not as the work of their lives, but as a change that may be effected at any time, by a sudden exertion; that the mercies of the most high, hang upon the will, the humour and caprice of mortals; and that a heavenly inheritance may be procured by a fortunate chance, similar to those, by which men sometimes raise



a rich inheritance in this earth. Such doctrines encourage a perseverance in wicked courses, under the persuasion, that, at any time, when disgusted with the world and the ways of sin, and when they find dangers approach, they can have recourse to those flattering prospects, which those gospel preachers hold out, and warrant to be efficacious, and the operation of which is so sudden, and under the positive assurance that their former wicked lives, so far from being a bar, will be a recommendation to their admission. No wonder that such favourable terms should crowd the courts of those temples!

## CHAP. V.

### ON COMING TO CHRIST, AND A DEATH-BED REPENTANCE.

1. **CONNECTED** with the doctrine of sudden conversions, and forming a part of the same system, is the popular doctrine of the ease with which we may come to Christ, and the readiness with which the vilest of sinners will be received; and that this may be done at any time, and at all times, yea, even at the latest moment of life, and on the bed of death. Such doctrines are

traps to ensnare the weak and the worthless ; and they have an unfortunate effect upon the interests of practical and rational religion ; as they hold out encouragements and promises to the profligate of every description, that they may proceed boldly in their courses, for the door of mercy is open to them at all hours, they have only to knock and they shall be heard ; and God will extend his mercy to them as soon as they are tired of the ways of wickedness, and shall condescend to come and make known to him their situation.

In the phrase of coming to Christ, there is attached something of the highest importance ; but certainly to those who are not schooled in their language and initiated in their mysteries, there is much obscurity. Coming to Christ, does not mean that you are to forsake your wicked courses, and attend to neglected duties ; or, in one word, to obey the commands of Christ.— This cannot be the meaning, for you are to come with all your sins about you ; and the deeper your guilt, and the blacker your character, the more welcome, and the better chance of acceptance. Besides, to obey his commands, implies that you are presuming upon good works, upon your own merit. Good works are stigmatised with every bad epithet.

I know what answer they have ready ; you are to come by faith, and lay hold of the merits of Christ ; and rely on these for your salvation.

But this is no solution of the difficulty ; it is equally unintelligible and mysterious ; and I may venture to assert, that not one of a thousand of their deluded followers can comprehend the meaning. Only they are satisfied, that whatever it be, they are released from all reliance on good works. Every thing is so contrived, as to keep up and increase that abhorrence to a good life. Such doctrines may make men fanatics or hypocrites, but cannot make them honest, benevolent, charitable, pure, or rational christians. They may prevent them from, or cure them of some of the flagrant offences, such as swearing, drunkenness, or Sabbath-breaking ; but will never correct their tempers, or mend their hearts ; will never make them less proud, less ambitious, less worldly minded, less bigoted, intolerant, or malevolent. But the facility of this coming to Christ and embracing his offers, is also one of the very objectionable parts of the system. The ease with which this great work is accomplished, and the quickness of the transition from the sinner to the saint, has more the appearance of the trick of a juggler, than the rational work of a reformer. No rational creature can give credit to these sudden changes. Look at the nature of man ; and consider the statement I have given of the difficulties attending a real conversion, and the actual impossibility of this being done instantaneously : every one must be convinced

of the fallacy and the imposition of such transformations. And I may appeal further to the observation and experience of men themselves, and ask, do they actually know of any instances of a complete change? I except those vicious habits formerly stated. But can you produce an instance of a covetous man being made liberal? Of a rogue becoming honest? Of a sensualist becoming completely pure? I might extend the questions to a great length; and I can conceive the answers that every honest and discerning man must give. But the terms are so flattering and inviting to every sinner, that no wonder that they flock to lay greedy hold of such a religion, which may give them an opportunity to be saved, without the trouble of a good life. And to keep up the delusion of these flattering hopes; on their attendance upon the bed of sickness, or on a death-bed, they infer from sayings put into the mouths of the sick or dying man, from expressions of love to the Saviour, reliance on the merits and blood of Christ, a renunciation of all personal righteousness, joined to a confession of their sins, that all their sins are pardoned, and that they shall have a ready entrance administered to them, into the mansions of immortal happiness. And what will not a man say or do in the article of death, for some hope and comfort? What similar signs have not many wicked men given before this,

in a dangerous illness? What promises have they not made, and resolutions, and even vows? All of which have been forfeited, on an unexpected recovery, by following the same wicked courses, and leading the same profligate lives that they did before. As I have already proved, a thorough change of life cannot be effected instantaneously: you may get them to pray, to confess, to promise, and to talk about religion; but all these may be done: every hypocrite does these, where there is no change of life. The mercy of God is great; but let us not employ it as an encouragement to sinners to put off to the very last moment.

2. The only ground that we have for encouragement to a death-bed repentance, is the case of the malefactor who was crucified along with our Lord, and obtained from the Saviour of the world the promise that "*to-day thou shalt be with me in paradise.*"—Luke, xxiii. 42. Now let us examine what grounds this case offers for a death-bed repentance. In the first place, we have no knowledge of this malefactor, but what is contained in two or three of these verses: we cannot tell what his former life and character were; whether this was his first offence, or whether he was an old and great offender: we cannot tell how long he had been confined in prison, and what opportunities he had then of



thinking on his former ways ; nor have we any thing to inform us, whether he knew Jesus Christ before he met with him on the cross.— These things are all necessary to enable us to form a correct judgment on this case. We are ignorant, I observe, of his former life. One single offence does not constitute a bad character. Some of those recorded for our example, we find not only greatly imperfect, but some of them marked with great crimes. Abraham, the father of the faithful, prevaricated in the denial of his wife ; Moses, the meekest of men, on a particular occasion, manifested great wrath ; Job, the pattern of patience, in the time of his great trials and distress, utters bitter imprecations against the day of his birth ; David, eminent for his general piety and confidence in God, was guilty of two of the greatest of crimes, and the most afflicting to society, adultery and murder. None of the disciples or apostles of our Lord were perfect characters, yet, in general, they are reckoned as good men, and proposed for our example. Now we are not sure but this malefactor, in the general course of his life, might have been a respectable character. The crime of which he is accused, is not one of those of the deepest malignity ; and the crime may be greatly reduced by the consideration of the circumstances, and the motives which urged to the

commission : the preservation of his own life, or the life of those dearer to him, might press him to commit that crime, which, in his heart, he abhorred.

I repeat it then, that one crime cannot constitute a bad character, if the general course of his life shews every kind of abhorrence to such a crime. And if this, or any thing like this, was the case of the penitent thief, such a case furnishes no encouragement to a death-bed repentance. His conduct does, by no means, present him, at his last moments, as an hardened and incorrigible sinner ; on the contrary, he appears humble, penitent, and entertaining a just sense of his situation. His language and behaviour present him in the most amiable point of view. But supposing that he was not a respectable character, in his former life ; and that no circumstances can be found to justify or to palliate his crime : here, again, we are without information, what might have been his demeanor during the time he was in prison, or how long he had been there. He bears all the marks of being possessed with a thoughtful and reflecting mind, of a mind no stranger to religion and its duties. Hence, by deep reflection, and a just sense of the nature of his crime, and with hopes of the mercy of God, he became a sincere penitent, and this penitence not enforced by fear alone, but from a real detestation of his offence.

And if this was the case, and the language he holds, justifies this supposition, then his behaviour on the cross will not come in under the description of a death-bed repentance. And it is this honesty and sincerity that gave him confidence to present that petition—“*Lord remember, &c.*” And he who saw the heart of all men, readily answers—“*To-day, &c.*” It is worthy of being remarked, that our Lord requires of him no conditions to entitle him to that favour. He does not call upon him to repent or to believe; almost intimating that he had done all these; and that what he said to him at present, was a public proclamation of his pardon to the world. *To-day, &c.*

3. Another thing, we know not but that he might have been before this, well acquainted with Jesus Christ and his religion. From his behaviour, we are disposed to judge that this must have been the case, unless we imagine that this knowledge was immediately inspired into him, when he was upon the cross, for which we have no authority and no evidence. He, we find, was perfectly acquainted with the character of Christ, and his innocence, with his power, and with his authority to dispense pardons, and to bestow kingdoms. In his rebuke to the other malefactor, he says—“*We receive the just reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiss.*”—Intimating his perfect innocence.—

Pilate had said before this, he could find no fault in him. These considerations reduce greatly our encouragement to put any trust in a death-bed repentance, from the examination of his character. The doctrine of the efficacy of a death-bed repentance, from this example, is built upon the supposition that this was a wicked man; that he never repented till he came to the cross; and that his knowledge of the saviour of the world, commenced when he was hanging by his side. Now from a fair examination of what we here have of his character, we find that none of these things appear to have been the fact; and the only fair inference that we are warranted to draw from the whole of this history, is, that this malefactor, who is suffering along with Christ, appears to be a person of a humble and penitent mind; that he was no stranger to Jesus Christ, and that he here gives the most honourable testimony to his character; but that there is little or no ground given to any sinner to trust a death-bed repentance will be accepted of, and that a few sighs and tears, and groans, extorted from them in their last moments, God will accept, as an atonement for a life shamefully and negligently spent, and that for these alone, they will be admitted into the everlasting mansions of all that is great and good.

4. But let us consider this case as it very generally has been considered, as a real case of

sincere and accepted repentance on the bed of death ; yet, even in this point of view, it is so circumstanced, that no other person can ever hope to be placed in the same, or a similar situation. In the first place, this malefactor, as is the case of malefactors in general, had his reason and senses in full perfection, when he came to die ; and it may be added, which is not the case often with malefactors, that he was a thoughtful and sincere man. This is a situation not to be expected by men in general, when they approach their latter end. The senses are very often impaired by disease, the reasoning powers greatly affected, the body often racked by pain ; and, therefore, no room for that tranquillity and composure, necessary to take a full review of the past life, and to meditate correctly on the great truths of religion. Many things then occupy and distract the thoughts of the dying man. In the second place, the time of this persons death was correctly fixed, and most likely so fixed, that he had no hopes of pardon or respite, or any chance of a further prolongation of life ; hence, it was now his important duty to set earnestly to work, to prepare for that awful event, and to look out for hope and comfort in his prospect of futurity. On a death-bed, where there is no chance of recovery, and when the patient himself is fully convinced of his situation, and that his case is hopeless ; still the precise hours, nor



even day is fixed : there may be some chance of a little more time and opportunity ; and this dark uncertainty may encourage some still to further delay. Further, and this was the peculiar advantage ; he was dying by the side of the saviour of the world, which none can ever again enjoy. He knew his character, and his power to save : but he was acquainted not only with his power and his interest in Heaven, of which he might attain some knowledge before ; but he had here an opportunity of witnessing his greatness in his sufferings : he saw his piety, for he heard his interesting prayers on the cross.—

What encouragement from these ! What must be the excellence of that heart, which prayed so fervently for his enemies ? He witnessed his patience, which was brought to the most severe trial. He saw him even on the cross, giving examples of the most important duties to his heavenly Father, to his friends, such as providing for his mother and disciple, to his enemies, in bearing all without murmuring or repining, and in that prayer for their forgiveness, with his last breath. How attractive must that sight have been ; and what confidence must this excellent character inspire into this malefactor, to offer up to him such a request ! But no man can ever be placed in such a situation. This malefactor was encompassed, though on the cross, with a glorious light ; but sinners on a death-

bed, are surrounded with darkness. Hence the conclusion is, that there is no good foundation for a death-bed repentance, from this case.

5. I come now, in the second place, to examine what encouragement from the general principles of the gospel, to trust that we may have opportunities in that situation, to obtain repentance, and the grace and favour of God? Such confidence and hope, seem nowise countenanced by the general principles of Christ's religion; and unfounded hopes of that nature expose people to the greatest risks. In the first place, confidence in a death-bed repentance, meets with no encouragement from what our Saviour taught. He certainly proclaims the mercy of God in the most inviting terms; and it must be owned that he sets no limits to the time of their acceptance, and neither ought we; he can extend his mercy to the chief of sinners; and there may be cases, where this mercy may be extended at the very last hour of life. But this is a doctrine not safe to be relied upon; for the risk against it, may be said to be infinite; and certainly ought to be preached with much caution and prudence. It is a weighty argument against these hopes, that they are not only unfounded in the gospel, but are in direct opposition to the laws, and the repeated declarations published there. The gospel says that we are to be judged according to our works; that the righteous shall be ever-

lastingly happy, and the wicked miserable. But this cannot be the case, if men, who have spent their whole lives in wickedness, and in a constant departure from God's laws, should, in the article of death, become sensible of the consequences of their ways, and should express much sorrow and contrition for their conduct, and at last obtain mercy. Such men cannot be judged according to their works.

6. But, to proceed, these death-bed repentances must be, at the least, doubtful, and especially as they want one of the strongest evidences that repentance has taken place, and that is a change of life. All other signs are fallacious; inward feelings are fallacious; they are often the workings of a heated imagination; but a new life is the mark that repentance has taken place. But in the case of death-bed repentances, neither the world, nor the person himself, can be sure that his repentance is genuine. How many instances have we, of men, on a sick-bed, expressing much sorrow and regret for the manner in which they have spent their past lives, accompanied with many bitter reflections and condemnations of themselves, and many promises of a thorough change, if God, in his mercy, should be pleased to spare them? In many instances, God has spared them, and restored them again to health and strength; but all their sick-bed promises are forgotten; they return to

their former life, and die, perhaps, at last hardened and unpenitent. Many a criminal, to whom mercy has been extended at the gallows, and who, during the dreadful uncertainty which hung over them, expressed much sorrow and compunction; but after being turned abroad upon the world again, by pardon, have resumed their former courses; and, perhaps, have suffered at last an ignominious death. So little dependance, do we see, can be placed upon sick-bed vows and promises. And many of those things which are called sick-bed repentances, are equally false and delusive. And if the mercy of God entirely hang upon these, how dreadful is the risk!

But another reason against placing any confidence in them, is the uncertainty of being placed in such a situation, where we shall have the opportunity to repent. Death-bed repentance requires that you continue some time, and under the certain prospect of your approaching dissolution: but deaths often are so sudden, that you have no time so much as to think, and no time to call *Lord have mercy on me*. It requires also that every chance of recovery be gone, for it is the desperate situation that calls forth this last exertion, and the last hope. It requires, also, that the disease be of that nature, as to leave you in the full possession of understanding and memory, and a sufficient degree of thought and

confidence, as to be fitted for such a serious and important work. It requires, also, that you be free of severe pain, which must greatly disqualify a man for thinking properly on God and eternity; that your mind should not be harrassed and distracted with worldly thoughts and cares, setting your earthly house in order, arranging your matters, so as to prevent these disputes and differences which disgrace a family; that your mind, also, should be perfectly at ease, agitated by no distress, at taking your final leave of all that is near and dear to you. All these are requisites essential to the complete performance of that important work. But these requisites and each necessary, there is but a poor chance of ever finding all united in the same person, and on the same occasion.

But death may be, in many cases, so ordered, that there is not the smallest chance of enjoying the opportunity of death-bed repentance: sudden deaths preclude all possibility. Such are all those deaths that come by accidents, deaths on the field of battle, deaths on the great deep, and many others, of which we meet with examples every day: deaths by apoplexy, by palsy, by the bursting of a blood-vessel. In all these and innumerable others, there is no opportunity for repentance. Again, in those deaths where delirium suddenly commences; this takes away all thought and reflection, and the capacity



of thinking either about the present or the future world. But there are other risks; men may be given up to hardness of heart, and a state of impenitence. These are the fruits of a wicked and abandoned life. Many have not only been careless, but have become obstinate in wickedness; and hence, as a punishment, God may have given them up to a state of unbelief, or of confirmed indifference, so that God and eternity are not in all their thoughts. This is a dreadful risk.

Now this doctrine of a death-bed repentance is so circumstanced, that we have no sufficient authority for it in the word of God; and if it were, it is one of those cases that can but seldom occur. Hence, it is a doctrine that should not be much pressed; and when the ministers of religion, or affectionate friends, are striving to administer consolation to a wicked and irreligious man, on the bed of death, let it be so administered, as not to encourage any hearers to place much confidence on such doctrine. In its favour, it is alledged that this doctrine gives to us the most amiable and encouraging representation of the tender mercy of the Supreme Being. But his mercy is always represented in Scripture, as conditional. Sinners have a promise of mercy on the condition of repentance, and this implies a change of life; a forsaking of sin, and turning to righteousness. And this

condition can scarcely be complied with, in the case of a death-bed repentance. If his mercy be to be bestowed unconditionally; and if our aim in preaching these doctrines, be only to exalt his mercy—then it is carrying it a degree higher, by stating, that he will pardon sin, and receive the sinner into himself and into his favour without repentance. This is the only rational principle on which we can suppose mercy administered to sinners at their last breath. Our heavenly Father may see cases so circumstanced, as to extend mercy where there is neither opportunity or capacity for repentance. Man sees only the act itself; man may see some circumstances, but he cannot see all; whereas, our heavenly Father knows all our strength, and all our weakness; he sees perfectly our temper, the situation in which placed; he sees the motive by which we act, what strength to resist, and which is the ruling disposition; and he can make allowance for all these, and extend mercy where it is possible. Upon the bed of death, the belief of the efficacy of repentance at that time, and its practibility, furnish many with a plea for harrassing and terrifying the dying man in his last moments, and for imbittering the pains of death. All this is done out of a concern for their souls. And this is practised not only on notorious sinners, but on many of regular and upright conversation, from their belief that

something of this nature must pass on the dying man, before death, to secure his eternal happiness. This is the very worst of superstitious practices. Extreme unction may give ease to man in his last moments; the administering of the Sacrament may give some ease and consolation; but thus agitating and terrifying the mind can do no good. It presents religion in a point of view, the most irrational; and it represents the greatest and the best of beings, yielding his mercy to a superstitious form or trick; and this encourages sinners to delay and to follow the same course in settling matters at last.

## CHAP. VI.

THE PHARISEES DWELL CHIEFLY ON THE POSITIVE AND SECONDARY DUTIES. JESUS CHRIST ON THE PRINCIPAL AND MORAL DUTIES.

1. CHRISTIAN duties will admit of being variously divided; and such divisions will furnish us with an opportunity of seeing their importance in different points of view. The division into positive and moral is very common. Positive duties are such, where you do not see

the reasonableness of the duty, but it becomes obligatory, by being commanded by God. Such was the whole of the ceremonial law of the Jews. Under the christian dispensation, there are but few duties of this class ; the two sacraments are partly such, and the observance of the Sabbath. Moral duties are those where you see the reasonableness of the duty, independant of the command of God. The duties we owe to God, come under this class, to trust in him, to express our gratitude to him, and to resign ourselves to his will. And the social duties rank under this head, justice, benevolence, truth, and honesty. The private duties come also under this division, temperance, the government of the passions and appetities. In all these we see the reasonableness of the duty, without taking into the account that they are commanded by God.

Duties may also be divided into principal and secondary. The principal and moral duties are nearly the same : such as piety, truth, resignation, and love to God ; and among the relative duties, justice, integrity, truth, charity, or universal love. Examples of the secondary duties, are prayer, the observance of the Sabbath, attendance upon the ordinances, &c. These distinctions are of the greatest importance to be observed ; for this will enable us to regulate our duties so, as to pay the greatest respect and attention to those which are of the highest interest.

2. The first observation I have to offer upon this division, is, that the performance of these secondary duties, if they rest only in themselves, and are carried not to the effects they are intended to produce, imply no improvement, and convey no real excellence to the character.— Thus men may pray five times a day, and pray long and loud, without piety, without purity, or any good moral effect. Prayer is an excellent duty, but it becomes no duty, unless it makes men better. I have illustrated “Plain Statement,” from p. 97, how prayer contributes to our improvement and edification; but it is evident, that from the mere act of saying our prayers, we can derive little or no improvement. Such services cannot be acceptable to God for their own sakes, if they have no tendency to our edification. And he who cannot be pleased with *thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil*, can derive no satisfaction from thousands of prayers, from a polluted and un-sanctified heart. And we can easily conceive, that a man may pray regularly, and with apparent fervour and earnestness, whilst, at the same time, he may be under no impression of the love of God, and be immoral, impure, and addicted to various crimes. The excellence and worth of prayer, must be derived from its effects. The hypocrite attempts to conceal the baseness of his character by prayer. I may make the same



observation on the sacraments, and the observance of the Sabbath. If they produce no good, they are only the virtues of the hypocrite. And I would observe further, that you cannot form a judgment of a man's moral character, of his honesty and sincerity, by his strict performance of these imperfect duties; and they add nothing to the amiableness of his nature, nor do they increase our confidence in that man, or a greater reliance on his promises.

But with respect to the primary duties, or those which we may call perfect and complete duties, a due regard to them, cannot fail to produce improvement, and to command, also, respect. You cannot, without approbation, and feeling also a pleasing satisfaction, look upon a man who calmly resigns himself to the will of God, in the hour of deep distress, and without murmuring. And though you may not be able to arrive at the perfection of such a duty; yet the very endeavour to suppress murmuring, and to beget a complete acquiescence in the will of God, yeild a secret joy to the spectator; and his heart labours to assist the sufferer in the severity of the struggle. How amiable and great does the saviour of the world appear, who, when in his agony, and sweating as it were great drops of blood, says—“*Father, if it be possible, remove this cup from me, yet not my will, but thine be done.*” Benevolence, one of the pri-

many duties, and one of the most amiable, must always command, not only the approbation, but the love of men. How must the spectator have felt, when Job says—“ *I was eyes to the blind, &c. and the blessing of him that was ready to perish, came upon me.*” Such is the power of benevolence, that we cannot help approving of it, even in fiction. We pass the same judgment on integrity, on justice, and a strict regard to truth.

Again, in the observance of the positive and imperfect duties, men lay no great restraint upon themselves, and they require few sacrifices. You may pray; you may keep holy the Sabbath; and you may join in all the ordinances, without any other sacrifices, than by setting apart such times for these services; but you may do all these, and retain your attachment to the world, and to the things of the world, retain pride, envy, &c. But if you obey the moral commands of God, you must part with evil inclinations; you must cease to do evil, and learn to do well.

3. It is an important observation to offer, after this preparation, that false religion, or the religion of the pharisees, press upon the positive duties. The pharisees, by the accounts given of them, by our Lord, were rigid observers of the ceremonial law, even to the washing of cups and of platters, and observing the distinction of

meats, of drinks, and of days. We see with what severity they kept holy the Sabbath. The same they were with respect to prayer: They prayed often; they made long prayers; they prayed loud and in the most public places; they did all their works to be seen of men.

By attending to those distinctions, you will see an evident difference between the subjects upon which our Lord discoursed, and those on which pharisees and hypocrites love to dwell.— He never stops to declaim against dress or amusements, or dancing, and similar subjects.— He leaves these things to men themselves. In dress, to be decent is the principal thing to be observed; and people may join in the innocent amusements of society, without offending God: his gospel is no enemy to cheerfulness. He says nothing of theatrical representations.— They are not necessarily sinful; they may become so, by being abused. But, on the other hand, he dwells much, and returns frequently to subjects, which the pharisees never touch upon; and from which we are led to conclude, that these were the errors of the times, and had the worst effect upon the moral conduct of the people. He censures severely the hypocrisy of the age, their fasts, their disfiguring their faces, that they might appear unto men to fast; their austerity and melancholy, forbidding cheerfulness and gaiety; their making broad their phy-

lacteries, and enlarging the borders of their garments. This description presents us with a finished picture of the character of these hypocrites, and strongly marks our Lord's disapprobation. He condemns the nature of their prayers, which captivated the ignorant and the credulous, of which they took the advantage in devouring widows houses. He condemns their ostentatious charity, sounding a trumpet before them, in the synagogues and the streets. He censures also their rigid and superstitious observance of the Sabbath. They carried this austerity to the greatest length, as may be seen from their history, after the present period. Several instances of this are recorded by Josephus, their historian. We have a striking illustration in the gospel history of zeal for positive institutions, accompanied with a contempt for moral duties.—When the Jews were following up with the greatest injustice and cruelty, the persecution of the *holy and just one*, still they remained strongly attached to their positive institutions. In the progress of this persecution, we are told, John, xviii. 28.—“*Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas to the hall of judgment, and it was early; and they, themselves, went not into the judgment-hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover.*” Here is a striking instance of superstition and its effects. Going into the judgment-hall was a ceremonial defilement, and

would disqualify them for eating the passover; while, at the same time, they feel no moral defilement, no compunction, when persecuting to death, Jesus Christ, in whom they could find no fault, and who went constantly about doing good. It shews that an attachment to the external ordinances, may be kept up, when all sense of justice and goodness is gone. The Jews, during the dreadful siege, which terminated in the destruction of their city and temple, and their political existence, whilst they were guilty of every crime under heaven, yet remained superstitiously attached to the rigid observance of the Sabbath, and their ceremonial law. In the days of our Saviour, the Jews persevered in ritual observances, whilst Jesus Christ was inculcating the plain duties of piety and morality, the love of God, and the love of man. False religion, in all ages, is scrupulously attentive to external services, to the neglect often of the essential duties of the christian life; and you will be much sooner forgiven for a breach of the law of honesty and charity, than an inattention to some positive duty.

4. A remarkable trait in our Lord's character was the severity with which he censures the pharisees, the leaders and the corrupters of the people. In his treatment of these hypocrites, he departs from the usual gentleness of his manners. To sinners, in general, his treatment was mild.



waiting for an opportunity of reclaiming them : but on the pharisees he pronounces the heaviest woes, for their hypocrisy and scandalous corruption of the moral law of God. Names change, but human nature continues nearly the same.— There have been, and there will be pharisees in all ages, corrupters of the plain law of God, undermining plain and practical religion, and substituting other things in its room. The attachment of the pharisees was to the rites and ceremonies of the law of Moses : others may place their reliance on the rigid attendance to ordinances, on an adherence to sound principles ; but all these they may do, and yet be the most worthless of characters, both in public and private ; and the cloak of sanctity spread over the character, is a heavy aggravation of their guilt. Now these characters our Lord openly exposes in terms of the greatest severity. In this part of our Lord's life, he is truly excellent. It required the utmost firmness to deal thus freely with the most powerful and popular sect of the Jews ; and, by his example, he is telling us that we ought not to flatter men, nor be intimidated by their power, their numbers, or popularity, when we are contending for the real interests of religion. The picture which he gives of them is natural, but it presents them in the most hideous deformity.

5. Jesus Christ was not a popular character,

for various reasons : he did not humour the prejudices, nor flatter the errors of the people ; but took every opportunity to expose and correct them. He lays open the character of the pharisees, the corrupters of religion. He was a preacher of righteousness, and censures severely those who made the law of God of none effect, by their traditions. It requires many sacrifices to obtain the applause of the multitude.— Teachers, who court popularity, will be frequently called upon to sacrifice integrity and principle ; unless they should happen to be so weak, as to admit that every thing which is popular must be right. Preachers of truth and morality have often been exposed to persecution. Such was the fate of the prophets of old, when they had to oppose the idolatry and immorality of the Jews. And when our Saviour pointed out to the people their duties, and what was required of them as qualifications to enter into the kingdom of God, they went away and walked no more with him. The reformers were persecuted for opening the eyes of the ignorant and deluded nations of Europe, to the gross errors and superstitions into which they were plunged by the corruptions of popery. Socrates, the great preacher of the Greeks, was persecuted to death for teaching the doctrine of the one true God.— Teachers of righteousness must ever be unpopular, when they have to oppose those, who point

out to the people an easy and safe road to Heaven, by the path of superstition and pharisaical righteousness. How great must be the corruption and delusion of those people, who are pleased to hear moral duties vilified and abused as the greatest of heresies, and a moralist treated as a term of reproach? Jesus Christ was unpopular, therefore, because he taught the purest morality, clear also of those corruptions that had been spread over it by the Jewish teachers; and he proclaimed to the Jews, that *except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of Heaven.*"—Math. v. 20.

6. But he was unpopular not only for what he taught, but also for what he omitted to teach.— He passes no censure on dress, on convivial meetings, on popular recreations and amusements, which furnish subjects for fertile declamation to hypocrites. Neither does he encourage any of those austerities, which superstition frequently encourages, such as fasting, the rigid observance of the Sabbath, and long and frequent prayers. On the contrary, he takes every opportunity to censure and condemn these practices.

On the article of fashionable dresses, which rigid reformers often abuse, Jesus Christ says nothing. It may be a sufficient answer to this, to say that pride does not consist in dress, or in

the observance of the decent fashions of the world. There is often as much pride under the plainest frock, as in the richest robe; and there is often much more pride in the departure from the common fashions, than in their observance. In all these, and in the overlooking of them, our Lord shews his excellent wisdom, and supports the dignity of his religion; and this conduct is one of the strong evidences of his divine mission.

But whilst our Lord intermeddles not with the fashionable dresses of the gay world, yet he condemns the dress of the pharisees, which bore all the marks of hypocrisy, and contrived to attract the attention of the weak and ignorant to their superior sanctity. How wise and admirable is he in all his instructions!

Another cause of the unpopularity of our Lord, was, that he was an enemy to all that melancholy and gloom which has been, in general, the mark of false religion, and which was another striking feature in the portraits of the pharisees. They disfigured their faces that they might appear unto men to fast. Services of this kind, however prevalent, are in direct contradiction to the ideas we ought to entertain of the greatest and best of beings. These gloomy principles took their rise very early in the church of Christ, and from some of the gentile converts. Among other matters, some professed to carry christians to the highest degree of perfection, by incul-

cating upon them, practices of the greatest severity. To attain this high perfection, they were enjoined to keep their bodies under, by watching, severe labour and hunger; and they were prohibited, at the same time, wine, flesh, matrimony, and every similar indulgence; so that, being disencumbered from all gross and earthly things, they might ascend with greater facility to God. This delusive notion of rendering themselves more acceptable to the divine being, by such mortifications, has tempted men, in different ages, to withdraw themselves from human society, and from all the innocent pleasures and comforts of life. Hence sprang the celibacy of the priesthood, the rigor of unprofitable penances and mortifications, and monks and nuns, which disgrace the church of Christ. And more stress was laid upon them, than obedience to the moral law of God. Our Lord's doctrines are in opposition to all these: he enjoins to his disciples no austerities, no retirement from the world, no fasting, but duties the most rational, and which contribute immediately to our comfort and happiness.

Principles instilled into men by a rigid education, reason will in vain labour to root out. In the present day, such doctrines are not fashionable, but the spirit of them, by certain classes, is still retained. Doctrines of a gloomy description still prevail. Great restrictions are laid



upon the common and innocent amusements of life. Gloomy services are imposed upon man, accompanied with a life of hopeless labour, by being assured, that all his duties are unavailing, for that he can do nothing that is pleasing to God; and thus, after weeping and watching and praying, that he is still the child of wrath, and deserving eternal punishment. Nothing can contribute more to the success of infidelity, than such principles; and many of the popular works of the present day, must enlarge greatly the catalogue of unbelievers. And to attempt to open the eyes of men to the evil consequences of such doctrines, you are overpowered by the clamour of heresy. The weak must assent, the honest are intimidated, and the interested are fettered.

Another circumstance which rendered our Saviour unpopular, was his opposing the superstitious observances of the Jews, particularly the pharisees, and counter-acting them also by his example. They were punctual in their attention, among other superstitions repeatedly mentioned, to pay tithe of mint, and anise and cummin, and all herbs, whilst they omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; they neglected none of their fasts; and omitted none of the traditions of the elders. Now our Saviour not only did not pay that respect to such things, but loudly and publicly condemns the pharisees,

for their observance, He preferred mercy to sacrifice, the observance of the moral law of God, to all their ceremonial observances.

7. In nothing did the superstition of the Jews appear more excessive, than in their observance of the Sabbath. This is an institution of the highest importance, for the maintenance of religion; but being only a positive institution, in all cases where any competition arises, the observance of the Sabbath must give place to the moral law of God, which remains unalterable, and the obligation eternal. Some christians equal the greatest follies of the Jews, in such superstitious practices. Our Lord opposes such, in several instances, and, seemingly, with a direct view to correct these follies. When travelling with his disciples on the Sabbath-day, through a field of corn, the disciples were hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. The pharisees were offended with this, and reproved him for this permission, in doing what was not lawful to do on the Sabbath-day. Jesus justified himself from the example of David, and from the example of their own priests; and adds, that in this place, is one greater than the temple: and that the son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath-day.—Math. 12. And he follows this up with a great and good work of restoring life to a withered hand, and this, not only on the Sabbath-day, but in the synagogue.—xii. 10. We

have a similar case recorded by Luke, xiii. 11. of a woman bowed down by a spirit of infirmity; and had been in that state for eighteen years, who was healed likewise in the synagogue, and on the Sabbath-day. These were not cases of necessity, for these good works might have been performed on any other day; but both these works seemed to be done with the express purpose to let us see that our Lord set no value on the superstitious observance of that day; and they stand in direct opposition to the example of the pharisees. Jesus Christ paid a proper regard to the Jewish Sabbath, and to the worship of God on that day. Luke, iv. 16, says, "and he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, *as his custom was*, he went into the synagogue, on the Sabbath-day. But this is different from the superstitious observance of that day; and the following history will further illustrate and confirm these observations.— Luke, xiv. 1. says, "*And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief pharisees, to eat bread, on the Sabbath-day, that they watched him.*" Now he came here by express invitation to an entertainment, which the phrase of eating bread appears, in the present case, to express. For it is said, 7th verse, that he put forth a parable to those which were *bidden*, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; and we are further told, that among the

company there were lawyers and pharisees; and that the company was large, is evident, from the expression of their choosing the chief rooms.— The circumstances, when collected, are these, that on the Sabbath-day, our Lord went by invitation, to an entertainment given by a chief pharisee, where the company was large, which was inconsistent with a superstitious regard to that day; and he took the opportunity of curing a certain man before him, which had the dropsy, and justified his doing this work on the Sabbath-day. The pharisees and the lawyers, in his presence, on this occasion, were compelled to peace, and could not answer him. These several histories seem recorded to present us with a view of the Lord Jesus, in his example of the rational regard he paid to the Sabbath.

8. Such then were some of those doctrines and practices, which contributed to render our Lord unpopular. The prevailing fashion, at present, is an attachment still to the positive duties of religion, attending on ordinances, to an extent, full as great as the pharisees of old; and they even exceed the pharisees, in their abuse of moral duties; and to these, we have to add their reliance on what they call sound principles. The great labour of our Lord was to reform the moral conduct of his disciples, and to implant in them a good life. Sound principles is a *cant* term, and a very vague description,

and differs in its meaning according to the person who makes use of it, and the time and the place of his abode. Every bigot, to whatever description of christians he belongs, calls his principles sound, and allows none to be so, but his own. A very little acquaintance with the human mind, proves how difficult it is to make all men think alike, especially upon dark and obscure subjects. And the greatest part of what are called sound principles, are not only obscure, but useless. You may be mistaken in some doctrinal point, after employing the most diligent research, and with the greatest honesty; but no man can be ignorant what piety is, trust in God and in his providence, resignation and submission to God's will; or what we are to understand by justice, honesty, integrity, compassion, meekness, or charity; or what is meant by contentment, benevolence, fortitude, temperance, patience, &c. Pharisees teach their followers what to talk: Jesus Christ teaches his disciples how to live.

Sound principles are changeable: the history of religion proves this. Before the reformation, the Roman Catholic religion was the religion universally prevalent in Europe; and whoever differed from this established faith, was pronounced a heretic. Antiquity, establishments, and popular opinions, were all on that side: and it had supporters even stronger than those, the



terror of penal laws, and all the authority of the state. And as soon again as the reformation was established in any particular country, a system of doctrines was drawn up for the religion of that state; and this was hedged round and protected by the same works as the old had been. These now were the sound doctrines, and to differ from them was equally criminal, as to differ from the former. From this short statement of facts, we see what were the doctrines which rendered our Lord unpopular: and the popular opinions of the present day, are not more rational, and not more favourable to the interests of truth and universal righteousness.— Sound doctrines are the most vague and undefined of all principles.

## CHAP. VII.

### REFLECTIONS ON THE SABBATH, AND ON PRAYER.

1. **THE** institution of the Sabbath is wisely appointed to call our attention from the world, and to direct our thoughts to heaven; it is necessary to the support of religion; and the institution also bears all the marks of the bene-

volence of our gracious creator, Our services on that day, in celebrating the praises of the most high, and in the contemplation of his glorious perfections, must necessarily produce good effects on our hearts. His power and wisdom manifested in the formation of all things, beget in us sentiments of reverential awe and godly fear. How much does our devout meditations on his eternity and his omnipresence, fill and even overpower our narrow capacities, but, at the same time, increase our confidence and trust, and call forth proper sentiments of humility, and of the littleness and constant dependance of man. Meditations on his moral perfections, on his holiness, his goodness, his mercy, and compassion, produce in our minds, corresponding impressions, and, at the same time, a desire of imitating him as far as such weak creatures can. The doctrine of his providence, which runs through the scriptures both of the Old and New Testament, is a delightful subject: and it is brought home more immediately to our capacity and feelings, when it is described in the plain and interesting language of our Lord. What must be the extent of that care and vigilance which numbereth the hairs of our heads! And when in our social worship, we hear read and pressed home upon us, the love of God in sending his son, the admirable character of Jesus Christ, his goodness, his condescension, and his love;

can the mind meditate upon such subjects, without feeling pleased with its situation, and rejoicing that we are called upon to be the heirs of God, and the joint heirs with Jesus Christ? And, lastly, when in our social worship, we find life and immortality brought to light by the gospel, and our noblest hopes placed upon the best foundation, we rejoice to look beyond the present perishing state of existence, and that we are a part of the great family of Heaven and earth. On these principles we are enabled to contemplate death, not as the destroyer of our existence, but as the termination of the trials, the sufferings and deprivations of good men, and an opening to them, and admission into the eternal kingdom of God.

Here, then, is a short summary of the benefits we may look for in the worship of God, and to which exercises, we are summoned by the institution of the Sabbath. And these are the only means by which, as a society, we can maintain our connection and correspondence with Heaven and the great family there.

2. The Sabbath was instituted for the commemoration of two great events of the greatest interest and importance, the creation of the world, and the redemption of mankind, completed by the resurrection of our Lord and master from the dead. The Jewish Sabbath was instituted for the commemoration of the work of

creation. The first sentence of the Bible is, "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.*" What important truths does this sentence convey? This world is not eternal.— It solves the difficulties which have puzzled the philosophers in all ages, about the first origin of things. It ascribes the formation of all things to God; and this is a doctrine the most perfect and satisfactory to every enquiring mind. This institution confounds the atheist, who says there is no God; for God created the heaven and the earth: and the work itself, in its perfection and wise contrivance, and beneficent design, bears the most evident marks of the supreme architect. To maintain that the world is eternal, is perplexed with many more difficulties than this plain and simple declaration.—"*In the beginning, &c.*" It is full as difficult to account for the eternal support of the universe, as for the first creation of all things from nothing. This requires the constant interference of the same power and wisdom, as were required for the original formation. This institution, therefore, serves as a perpetual monument of the power, wisdom, and goodness of the creator. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth forth his handy works.

This institution should silence the deist, also, who denies revealed religion; for this is an important part of revelation, written in the strongest

characters. *Remember the Sabbath*, is remembering that there is a God supreme in nature ; and that all things are derived from him. The book of nature interpreted by this institution, is a standing revelation ; and the sun, the minister and instructor appointed by the creator, rolls round, and speaks to all lands the power and wisdom of the infinitely great God.

3. Again, the christian Sabbath is a perpetual remembrancer of another work, in which we are still more interested. On this day, the first day of the week, our Lord rose triumphantly from the dead, and proclaimed to us, that we are not the creatures of a day ; but designed for an everlasting existence. The Jewish Sabbath puts us in mind that this earth, and all things connected with it, is the work of our God, and that man, also, is the creature of his power, and derives all his powers and faculties from him. But the christian Sabbath tells us that our Lord and master rose from the dead, and is become the first fruits of them that sleep. And if Christ be risen, we shall rise ; if Christ be in Heaven, we shall meet with him there ; and all good men shall be for ever with the Lord.

In the institution of the Sabbath, we see a display of the benevolence of our creator, and a strong mark of that character, which distinguishes all his institutions, as they regard man. The Sabbath is commanded to be a day of rest,



not to man only, not to the laborious part of men only, but for those cattle, also, which God has given for the use and service of men.—“Thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor *thine ox, nor thine ass*, &c.” In this ordinance, the beneficent creator reclaims a portion of time for their ease and relief. They have no natural protector, and no friend; but God is their friend and protector. The same authority which causes grass to grow for the cattle, commands the Sabbath as a rest from all servile labour. Look, then, through this institution to the infinite goodness of our creator. How intermingled do we find is his care for us as temporal and as eternal creatures! But man has never paid sufficient respect to this part of his command.

4. But besides these, there is another less, but still an important benefit arising from this institution. The observance of the christian Sabbath, gives a polish and refinement to the social life. In the first day of the week, christians meet together in one large society, which helps to keep up a regular correspondence and connection between the several parts. And the purposes for which they assemble, serve to give a favourable turn to the minds of all. They assemble together, as the members of one great family, all as the children of the same God and father; all equally dependant. On this day, they make a renewal of that universal connexion;

whilst it opens to them the prospect of being united again, never to part more. As a proper preparation for the service of this day, we are called upon to wash our hands in innocence, to be reconciled to our brethren, that we may be properly qualified to worship God in spirit and in truth. And such qualifications cannot fail to produce a good effect upon our temper and dispositions, and become the best preparation for our social duties. The services of the Sabbath place all the assembly on the same level. The rich and the poor meet there together, the prince and his meanest subject. This service levels all distinctions; and the distinctions which the world acknowledges, vanish, when all stand in the presence of the majesty of Heaven, with whom there is no respect of persons. The virtuous poor, on that day, are equally honoured as the rich, by him who is the great object of our worship. This, we may say, is that day which the Lord made, and we will rejoice.— This day serves to keep up our intercourse with our fellow men; and were it not for this, men would be greatly strangers to one another.— Other meetings can never be so general, for they are limited to particular descriptions of people, such are meetings for business, meetings for pleasure, and meetings for entertainment. And these meetings may corrupt the moral and the social character; but they give no polish to the

mind, and no improvement, Such meetings do not suit the situation of many descriptions of men. They are not for the poor, they are not for the infirm, for the distressed, for the mourner, for the heart broken down with trouble and with grief. But the Lord's day furnishes services suitable to all. On this day, the good man rejoices to go up to the house of the Lord; and here the wicked is called to repentance. The Lord's day furnishes an opportunity for the prosperous to express his gratitude to him, from whom he receives all; for the distressed to offer up his prayers for relief; for the mourner to seek for consolation; and for the poor to implore the charities of mankind. This service suits the wise and the ignorant, the old and the young, the lame and the blind; all are God's offspring.

But this day, in another way, gives a polish to society. All here come clean, and in decent and suitable apparel. The dress of the labourer, of the peasant, and even of the very drudge of society, gives to them a respectable appearance. The garments which mark the different occupations of life, are, on that day, laid aside, that all may be fit to join in the solemn service of our great Lord and master. This day contributes to the beauty and harmony of the social life, so that we may regard it as a wise institution, not only for the support and advancement of religion, but as the best means, at the same

time, for to give polish and refinement to society. What would this country become, if it were to be deprived of the benefit and advantage of this ordinance. The reprobate character generally commences with neglecting the ordinances of religion. When the French revolution burst forth with all its horrors upon the world, at a very early period, they introduced their mad calendar, evidently with the design of effacing from the people the remembrance of the Sabbath and the ordinances of religion. Mark what followed: atheism was next established by one of their savage decrees; and that horrid assembly, received with congratulation and triumph, a decree, the words of which, must freeze the heart of every man, in whom there is the smallest remains of goodness: "That there is no God; and that death is an eternal sleep." The consequences were what might have been expected: wanton and savage murders followed, of the highest rank, the most virtuous and the most respectable characters: consternation and terror seized all; for none could tell who were to be the next victims. And that period has stamped upon the French character, a ferocity of manners, and a total abandonment of all religious and moral principle.

5. After stating the foundation of the religious observance of the Lord's day, I come next to notice the abuses of this institution. There are

two errors into which men fall on this subject. Some totally neglect the worship of God, and others observe it in a careless and disrespectful manner. Practices of this kind, contribute to the abolition of the principles of religion, and all the duties and comforts built upon them.— Take away the influence of the religious principle, and you dissolve all the ties of society; you set the wicked free from all the obligations, which bridle their evil desires and inclinations; you pull down the props of virtue, the sanctions of human laws: you loosen these bands, which unite the husband and wife; and you contribute to reduce man to a wild and savage state.— These are the consequences that must follow, if the practice should become general, of neglecting the worship of God. The neglect of the Sabbath is the general forerunner of a profligate character, and is a certain token of the want of the religious principle; and when this meets with a character naturally vicious, it becomes a preparation for every kind of wickedness.

Public worship is the first and principal service required on that day. The particular exercises, it is unnecessary to mention, for these depend upon the religious society with which connected. One character it should possess, that it have a tendency to edification. The services of the pharisees, as we learn from some censures past upon them by our Lord, were long



and tedious. Edification does not depend upon the length of the service. Besides the public services, there are various other duties required of us on that day. It may be spent with advantage in private meditation and self-examination. Heads of families have then an opportunity of paying attention to their children and families, in examining into their religious instruction and moral conduct, in forming their habits and their tempers, and in training them up in the way in which they should walk. But as the mind cannot be always upon the stretch, proper relaxations may be admitted, by conversing on other subjects, and applying to such reliefs as are not inconsistent with the services of the day. The proper observance of the Sabbath, does not require of us to be always talking on religion. The Lord's day is the only opportunity which the laborious part of mankind enjoy for conversing with their families; and the several branches of their families may then partake of the company, the conversation, and instruction of their parents; and this leads me to the second error in the religious observance of the Lord's day.

6. The prevailing fanaticism of the times, lead men to fill the whole of the Lord's day in an uninterrupted round of religious exercises.— From the public services, they adjourn to private assemblies, constantly employed in preaching, exhortations, and prayers of different descrip-

tions. People of all classes are dragged along in the torrent ; but they press the hardest on the weak and the ignorant, and the laborious poor. These are cajoled by promises, or frightened by doctrines of terror, to join in such societies, and in irrational acts of religion. Several evil consequences arise from this mode of spending the Lord's day.

Services of this kind are direct acts of superstition, and can contribute little to men's improvement. They are so fully occupied with speaking or hearing, that there is no time to reflect, to digest, or to direct to edification. They act upon the very spirit which our Lord condemns so much in the pharisees. They think God will hear them for their much speaking ; and they measure their merits by the number and length of their services. And some of them fall under a condemnation, of which the pharisees were less guilty ; for that day is often spent in exercises discouraging to real goodness, in railing at good works, and in such doctrines as give countenance to sinners to continue in their wickedness.

Our Lord was not a superstitious observer of the Sabbath, as I have endeavoured to illustrate, p. 122. The pharisaical way of spending that day, fosters that same gloomy and forbidding spirit, which pervades all their services, and leaves them no time to attend to duties of higher importance, to their children and their

families. Whilst the parents are occupied with their religious exercises, the children and servants are left to shift for themselves. The children of such parents labour under great disadvantages; if left at home, they are neglected; or, if, by the command of the more rigid parents, they are compelled to accompany them through the various exercises of the day, and to listen to what they cannot understand or convert to any profit, this creates in them, a disgust for religion itself; and they embrace the first opportunity to throw off the galling yoke. Many of those, who receive this education, flee to carelessness and a contempt of religion. Extremes often meet; and the transition is not difficult from superstition and fanaticism to infidelity.

You can form no judgment of the character of men, of their honesty, their integrity and benevolence, from their rigid observance of the Sabbath. Many carry this to an extreme, who are very far from being correct in moral duties. On the Sabbath, some will scarcely lift up their eyes, as if afraid of being polluted by the light of Heaven, who, next day, will burst forth with avidity, into the pursuits of the world, and will feel no compunction in striking a good bargain, by taking advantage of the ignorance or necessity of a neighbour. As I have already observed, the Jews would not enter into the judgment-hall, lest they should be defiled, but that they

might eat the passover. How much does superstition blind the minds of men, so as to destroy every distinction between what is right and wrong!

The duties of the Sabbath, lead to some remarks on one of the most important branches of that duty, the duty of prayer.

7. In *Plain Statement, &c. from p. 93, 2d edit.* I have considered the obligation, the nature and benefits of prayer; and, at the same time, have offered several remarks upon the abuses; and this subject I now resume, with a view to direct our attention to the prayers of Jesus Christ, and to point out some further abuses of this duty.

Our Saviour, in condemning and censuring the abuses and extravagances in prayer, does by no means condemn the genuine duty: he, himself, prayed on different occasions; on occasions of joy, and on occasions of distress. When he received favours, and when his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. When the disciples returned, and gave to him an account of the success of their mission, how ardently does he express his thanksgiving. "*I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, &c.*" Luke, x. 21. Here, all is excellent, all expressive of the state of his mind. His prayer in the garden, strongly and naturally expresses the dis-

tress of his soul; and what important duties are contained in these few words! "*Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me.*" This teaches to whom we should apply in times of trouble and deep distress. It tells us that we may ask and pray for relief. But then again—"*Not my will, but thine be done*"—presents us with another duty, resignation and submission to God's will; a difficult, but necessary and highly important duty. This is a manifestation of that divine temper and perfect obedience, that guided all the actions of our Lord's life—All this is rational and simple, falling within the comprehension and duty of all men. Our Lord prayed both in public and in private, to teach us that social worship is an important part of our duty; and to tell us, also, that there are times, when we should retire from the world, and hold secret communion with our God—Our Lord prayed also on important undertakings, such as at the resurrection of Lazarus.—There is something peculiar in this prayer.—It is a prayer of thanksgiving, and would seem to imply a reference to some former prayer.—"*Father, I thank thee, that thou hast heard me.*"—John, xi. 41. This appears to be returning thanks for what was not yet performed, as if already finished; and, as such, is a strong expression of his confidence in his Father, and



adds—“ *I know that thou hearest me always.*”—  
 And what must he be, whom the Father heareth  
 always! Nothing can be more edifying than  
 the prayers of Jesus Christ; and they give to  
 us, the most exalted conception of his character  
 and divine mission. His very posture speaks  
 forcibly to our hearts. The introduction to his  
 intercessory prayer, presents us with his posture—  
 John, xvii. 1; and it contains a striking picture of  
 the devotion of our Lord, at that interesting period  
 when he was to leave this world, and go to his  
 Father. It was the last time, before his sufferings,  
 that he prayed with his disciples, to recommend  
 them to the care and keeping of his heavenly father.  
 These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes  
 to Heaven and said—“ *Father, glorify thy son,  
 that thy son, also, may glorify thee.* Both these  
 petitions were granted. Jesus glorified his Fa-  
 ther in his obedience, in the patience, fortitude,  
 and dignity of his sufferings; and God glorified  
 his son, in the testimonies given to the sufferer,  
 at the conclusion of that awful scene. This is  
 the longest of all his prayers, and it cannot be  
 equalled in the tenderness he shews for his dis-  
 ciples, in his strong confidence in God, and in  
 the clear views he here gives us, of soon taking  
 possession of his everlasting glory. He speaks  
 of his sufferings, as if already finished, and anti-  
 cipates his possession of that glory he was to

receive from God. “ *Now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee.*” And again—“ *While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name.*” Nothing can be more instructive, nothing so well calculated to beget that spirit of devotion, which animated our Lord, and runs through his whole life, than his prayers, and particularly this last, this very interesting prayer. And we see, also, his cheerfulness and that heavenly temper manifested in his prayers. He intermingles with devotion, the purest love to men, particularly his disciples. There is an address and an earnestness of language, when he prays for his disciples, that opens to us the workings of his heart—“ *Holy Father, keep through thine own name, those whom thou hast given me. I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil.*” Neither pray I for these alone, but for them, also, which should believe in me through their word, that all they may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee. “ *Father, I will that those, also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me.*” He concludes, also, his excellent and exemplary life, with this duty, keeping God ever before him in all things — Luke, xxii. 46. And when Jesus had cried

with a loud voice, he said—“ *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit ; and having said this, he gave up the ghost.*”

From our Lord's example, we are taught that our prayers should be simple, plain, tending to form the temper, and for the enforcement of duties ; that they should not occupy any improper portion of our time, and that they should not stand as a substitute for other duties.

8. There is not a duty more apt to be abused than prayer. It puts on the appearance of piety, and of all the duties included in piety, trust, patience, and resignation ; and men, by this exercise, fancy they become pious : and yet people may pray for ever, without the least improvement in their piety, in their temper, in their love to God, or in their resignation ; and without the least advantage to their morals, not more meek, more charitable ; nor more honest, temperate, or beneficent. And when it is carried to an improper length, so as to occupy an improper share of time, and to take the place of other duties, it becomes then a point of reliance, and, consequently, it usurps the end for which prayer is commanded.

Prayer is one of the imperfect and incomplete duties : its object is to carry us forward to higher duties, to excite our piety, or rather to be the expressions of our piety ; to produce patience and resignation, confidence in God, and obe-

dience to his commands. Therefore, to pray without producing any of these fruits, is useless; it is worse, it becomes hypocrisy. This is the very essence of hypocrisy, putting on the appearance of religion, when we are destitute of real godliness. You may pray then for ever, and still be no more than a hypocrite. This accounts for a number of wicked and worthless people, joining the assemblies of the righteous. Here it becomes a cloak for their vices. Attendance upon prayer meetings, then, is no justification for the neglect of family duties, of taking care of children, providing for them, cloathing them, watching over their health, their morals, and education. These are duties self-evident, and of the highest importance, and not to be neglected. Prayer is only a subordinate duty; and though it be necessary for the support of social worship, yet you may cherish the habits, the temper and disposition, it is meant to produce, without a perpetual attendance. In your own houses, you may think on God, and set him and his laws ever before you, to regulate your lives, and to add to your comfort and good resolutions.

## CHAP. VIII.



### ON INTERNAL FEELINGS AND MODERN INSPIRATIONS.

1. **INTERNAL** feelings occupy a very distinguished part in the popular religion of the present times. In the "*Plain Statement*" I have paid some attention to internal feelings, and I propose now to add further observations on the same subject. To his internal feelings, the enthusiast ascribes the highest importance; he regards them as the operations of the spirit; and that they make known to him, the true state of his soul. From his feelings, he receives an intimation that his sins are forgiven, and that his name is enrolled among the blessed. By them, an expression of approbation is given for the principles he has adopted, and an assurance of their truth; and, in cases of doubt, he receives from these feelings, directions for his conduct. By these internal feelings, a converse and communion are kept up between his soul and God.

The first thing then is, to enquire what security they can have against delusion, in an affair



of such high importance? There are two conjectures that offer themselves in bringing forward such pretensions. The first is, that these internal feelings may be impositions; and that they experience no such feelings as they pretend. And that this, in some cases, is the truth, there can be little room to doubt: for, in the first place, we cannot see any good reason, why such people should be thus favoured; and their lives, in general, bear no indication that they are under the guidance of the spirit of holiness and of truth. They seem influenced by the same principles, in every part of their moral conduct, as they were before they set up such pretensions. In the government of their passions, no improvement, nor in their temper; they have no more of the spirit of charity and of love. And further, many of those very people occasionally descend from such high pretensions, and complain, in these moments of depression, of their own weaknesses, and feel the pressure of their offences as other men.

But the other supposition is, that many of them may be under the influence of strange delusions. This must be expected from weak and ignorant people, who are often elevated above the guidance of sound judgment, by the rapturous declamations of their preachers, who are ever working upon the passions; and, therefore, they set down as the voice of the spirit of

God, what is no more than the wild flights of their own imagination. This is likely to be the case, when we form our judgments, from the strange and incoherent exclamations which they utter, very unlike what we might expect from the spirit of order and of peace. And when they attempt to communicate what they feel on such occasions, you can gather nothing consistent with the dictates of sound sense, no principle which we can allow to flow from him, who guides the heart of man, nothing that you can direct to what is useful. Now what marks can such people receive, to convince them that it is God who speaks in them and to them? It has a very suspicious appearance, if it contains nothing that can be profitable.

And it strengthens greatly this conjecture, when we call to mind that such are the arts of all impostors. All pretend that God speaks to them, and that they are his favourites. Mahomet, down to Joanna Southcot, all asserted that they were under the direction of the spirit of God. And another strong evidence against all such pretenders, is, that what they utter, bears the marks of the talents or capacities of the organs which utter them. Persons of abilities bring forward things more rational and consistent: weak people utter only nonsense.— If the spirit of God speaks, it would speak things plain and profitable; for if they were dark and

useless, it would be a communication of no value. The spirit of God must bring forward things agreeable to the wisdom which delivers them. If you should hear weak and ignorant people deliver truths of the highest interest and importance, and under circumstances where you are perfectly satisfied, that they could have no assistance, this would give ground to believe, that they had been favoured with extraordinary help. This remark may apply to those who pretend to speak from inspiration. Men of abilities, and habituated to public and *extempore* speaking, may speak much to the purpose, on many subjects; and what they say on such occasions, you will be disposed to refer to their own powers, without calling in the aid of inspiration. No one ever dreams that the able *extempore* speeches of our senators and lawyers are inspired.

2. But another argument against these internal feelings, and which must determine them to be either impositions or delusions, is, that there seems to be no occasion and no necessity for those extraordinary communications. God's revealed will contains every information and every kind of important knowledge, as to doctrines, precepts, or examples; and to this, and this only, we are to apply. From this, we derive our knowledge, our directions, and our comforts. These internal feelings imply that every one has a separate and a distinct revela-

tion ; and that the original and written revelation was not complete. It is presumption in such people to fancy that they are to have special gifts bestowed upon them for their particular satisfaction and guidance. And these gifts are often ill bestowed, for those who pretend to be favoured with them, are not, in general, more respectable or orderly than the rest of mankind.

Nothing can be brought forward so wild and wonderful, under the name of religion, but you will meet with disciples and followers. The number, the rank, and the capacities of the followers of Joanna Southcot, confirm these observations. But neither Swedenburgh, nor Johanna Southcot, nor Jumpers, &c. though they uttered many blasphemies and many absurdities, could introduce any thing more inconsistent with the perfections of God, and more discouraging to real goodness, than the principles now popular and prevalent. Swedenburgh most certainly was an enthusiast, but his doctrines are favourable to the promotion of virtue. Hence we need not be surprised if numerous impostors should arise, for we may be certain they will meet with believers and disciples. The popular sermons of the present day, are many of them insults to the justice and goodness of God, and libels upon moral goodness. In former times, infidelity gained ground in this country, and had disciples ; but now, credulity and fanaticism,

are doing much more harm to the religion of Christ, have more numerous followers, and are labouring more effectually for the disgrace and destruction of the best blessing conferred by Heaven, than even infidelity itself.

3. To set up our internal feelings as the judge of doctrines, and as the test of duties, is to set aside the use of revealed religion, and opens the widest door for every kind of imposture. To what purpose has God revealed to us his will, but to be a guide both to doctrines and to duties? And the interpreting this will, must be the province of reason. It requires no depth of reasoning or of learning, to understand our duty and all doctrines of importance. And if, in revelation, we meet with doctrines that we cannot clearly understand, we have to observe that they are not important doctrines, nor doctrines essential to salvation. All these are plain. If this revelation of God's will for our eternal happiness, be here complete, and this is generally allowed, then this puts down every pretension to private and individual communication. For if these be agreeable to what we already have, they are superfluous; and if they be in opposition to what we already know, they are presumptuous, and ought not to be attended to, without the strongest evidence of their correctness. The listening to these internal suggestions, is shewing a disrespect to God's revealed will. Again, such



revelations, under whatever form they make their appearance, whether in night visions, inward suggestions or communications of some heavenly messenger, can certainly be expected only on extraordinary occasions, and in failure of all ordinary means, of scripture, of reason, and the experience of mankind. And for every man to have his revelation, his inspiration and his special messenger, must create infinite confusion in the religious world. When, on former occasions, God sent special messages to the world, they were accompanied with such evidence as to command the attention of men.—When Moses delivered the ten commandments, and other doctrines and commands, he was invested with the power of working miracles, and this was an evidence, that he was a messenger commissioned by God. And when Jesus Christ came, he did such works as never man did before; and they were works not only of great power, but also of the greatest goodness; and by these characters, clearly spoke that they came from God. *Believe me, he says, for the works sake.* But if they be destitute of this criterion, they ought instantly to be rejected.

4. Now these internal feelings are private communications. They may not chuse to call them revelations; for the world would require evidence to receive them as such. But for what purpose are they granted? For every duty is

plainly revealed, and every doctrine necessary for salvation. And we have all the evidence for these doctrines, that we can receive or judge of, in this imperfect state. But they pretend that they come to them, sometimes in the nature of admonitions, sometimes reproofs or comforts, or assurances to encourage them and to strengthen them. But the occasion, or the pretended occasion, does not justify such extraordinary favours. These private communications are liable to strong suspicions. For it may be asked how are we to ascertain the difference between the suggestions of the spirit of God, our own delusions, or the suggestions of some evil spirit? We see many instances, daily, of the false judgments of men, in such cases, where they are concerned themselves.— An active imagination is both powerful and delusive. The impression may be made so strong, as to appear the work of some superior power, and, as I have already observed, it is difficult to find what good purpose it is fitted to answer. For with respect to the religious and moral condition of man, sufficient notices are given him from the scriptures, and from his own heart. But so far as he wishes to command the belief of the world, it will be impossible, I think, to produce such evidence as will convince them of the truth of his assertions. Miraculous evidence he has none; and if he be called upon to

communicate what he has received, his communications bear all the marks of the natural man, but have none of that clearness and importance, that should accompany a revelation from Heaven.

5. But these pretensions, now so common, open a door for many, and serious impositions. The minds of mankind, or of the weaker part of them, not merely the poor and the ignorant, but many of the rich, also, are so much unhinged by the prevalence of such delusive doctrines, that they are prepared for the reception of the greatest absurdities. Their minds are kept in a state of continual fermentation, by the perpetual round of religious exercises, by pretended visions, by inward feelings, by dark and frightful ideas, with which their imaginations are ever haunted, that they are always in a state of confusion. But the world has been preparing for some time, for these gross impositions, by the propagation of fanatical principles, under different names. That unprincipled impostor, Joanna Southcot, (for an impostor she has proved herself, and not a disordered fanatic,) has paid the debt of nature; but we cannot say how all will terminate, whether the disgrace of this case will check the spirit of delusion that has gone abroad, or her mantle may drop upon some other, and something may arise from her ashes, to whom such people may transfer their

worship; or perhaps, it may be fortunate for real religion, that such delusions have, in some measure, succeeded; for this may give a check to those principles to which they owe their birth; and help to open the eyes of mankind to their consequences. Let new impostors come forward, to bring mankind to think seriously on the shame following such credulity.

When reason and good sense are banished from religion, we are deprived of the best guides, both to principles and practice. The original supporters of these wild principles, were either serious, but weak and credulous, or the designing hypocrite and pharisee. It was a remark made by a venerable bishop, some time ago, that this nation, every half century, was subject to fits of insanity;\* and we are now fallen in with one of the paroxysms; and the insanity of the present time has seized on religion. Fanaticism is now making its way into different orders of the church; and from many pulpits, doctrines of the greatest wildness and immorality are delivered. It is

\* This observation receives some countenance from the later periods of the history of this country. Half a century back from the present time, we meet with a violent political insanity, arising from Wilkes and liberty, which broke out in 1761, and lasted long. The American revolution was the offspring of this madness; and from it sprung the terrible French revolution, which convulsed Europe. Retiring back another half century, to the year 1710, the nation was then seized with another fit of insanity, originating in a trifle, in a sermon preached by Doctor Sacheverell, which agitated the nation for several years. From Sacheverell, another half century carries us back to the common-wealth, previous to its establishment, and during its continuance, the nation was in a state of political and religious phrensy.

creeping even into the state, and into the ranks, likewise, of the army and the navy. In the uproar of profession, and in the various religious societies, established for different purposes, we see much apparent zeal, but not always accompanied with knowledge. And the noise and parade of these establishments, resemble much more the righteousness of the pharisees, than that calm and unostentatious religion, which was exemplified by our Lord and his primitive disciples. The ferment is increasing greatly, and seems hastening to a crisis; and it will be then seen, whether it is to settle in the re-establishment of rational religion, or in infidelity. The transition is short and easy, from fanaticism to the denial of all religion.



## CHAP. IX.

**CHRIST'S RELIGION FORBIDS NOT CHEERFULNESS, NOR THE INNOCENT ENJOYMENTS OF SOCIETY.**

**1. THE** religion of Christ is a friend to cheerfulness. False religion consists of various principles; and the effects must be various.—There have been religious enthusiasts, who have



given the full reins to joy and to every sensual indulgence ; whilst religionists of another description, have retired from the world, and devoted themselves to a life of the most painful mortification. But neither of these were contemned by the precepts or example of our great master. The unjust representations that many religionists have given of the Supreme Being, are inconsistent with cheerfulness.

Christ's religion was instituted for men living in society ; and his doctrines interfere no further with the customs and manners of men than to enforce real goodness. A cheerful man may be a good man, and so, also, may a grave and melancholy man. Cheerfulness is perfectly reconcilable to goodness ; and when man enters into the society of the world, religion should govern him there. When we sit in the company of the cheerful, let us guard against sin ; and if we engage in the amusements and recreations of life, we should take care to keep ourselves from offending, either by shewing a bad temper, by an excess of levity, or by acting a fraudulent and dishonest part : or by devoting too much of our time to recreations. The precept given by the apostle, respecting anger, may be applied with great propriety to other things. "*Be ye angry, and sin not ; and let not the sun go down upon your wrath.*" Anger here is not forbidden, it is often necessary ; but in anger, we are liable

to sin; this, we are to guard against, and we are to guard against its continuance. So, also, in recreations, we are to be watchful not to sin; and, therefore, we are not to continue in them too long.

Again, true religion does not separate our duties in this life, from the duties which are to prepare us for the future life. On the contrary, the faithful discharge of our duties here, is the best preparation for the heavenly mansions: our worldly duties form an important part of religion. The profession of a Christian does not exclude him from filling his station in society. A christian may be a father, or a magistrate, a prince, or a subject. And he who labours at his honest calling, to provide for himself and his family, is, in the eye of God, acting a much more respectable part, and more consistent with duty, than he who retires from the world, under the plausible pretence of serving his God, or he who spends his time in reading religious books, or in a constant round of religious exercises, leaving his children and family to govern themselves.

There is an error which often runs through religious services, as if they were intended only to please our maker; whereas, the great principle that should be kept constantly in view, is, that they are for our own edification; and this is the true way to please God. Such exercises

as have no tendency to our improvement, are not likely to have been ordained by God. Doctrines that cannot be directed to any good, come not from God. Doctrines, which give to us unworthy conceptions of the Supreme Being, or that check our endeavours in a good life, cannot have been delivered by our Father in Heaven.

2. The life of Christ, which was a common life, and intended for a common example, will best illustrate and explain the excellence of his temper. When John the baptist appeared as the forerunner of the Messiah; his cloathing was of the coarsest nature; and his food was harsh and austere. In that case, he was evidently not intended for a general example; though some religionists have copied his manners more closely than the manners of Jesus Christ. But when the Messiah came, he came eating and drinking; and he lived in the society of men. In his food, there was no singularity, nothing to distinguish him from the rest of the world. There was no severity in his manners; and he imposes no unnecessary restraint upon his disciples. The character of Jesus Christ, was different from the character of every other reformer. Some of the most celebrated of the philosophers and moralists, among the heathens, favoured the austere virtues, and encouraged a retirement from the world; but the virtues which adorned

the character of our Lord, were of the most amiable kind; and during his active ministry, he was, in general, found in society, and in the temple, where the Jews always resorted:

Some of the philosophers recommended to root out the passions, and to rise above the affections, not to submit to pain, to pleasure, or to grief. But Jesus Christ expressed a sense of pain; he rejoiced also in spirit, and wept at the grave of Lazarus. If these be the expressions of weakness, they are the most amiable weaknesses, and which all men must approve. The character of Christ was very different from what the world expects, in one who introduces a new religion; and even very different from what the religionists of all ages, form of a good man.— He sat at the tables of the rich, and with mixed company. He was even present at a marriage feast, and performed there his first miracle, in turning water into wine. But with all his accommodation to the customs of the world, we find in him the most exalted piety and sublime devotion, the most unfeigned reverence and love of his heavenly Father, and the firmest reliance on his providence; and we find in him no expressions of murmuring or complaint. On all occasions, we see his most active benevolence and love to men, tenderness towards his friends and disciples, and subjection to his parents in the early part of his life. In him, you see the

happy union of piety, benevolence, and sobriety, with cheerfulness and good will to all men; and yet totally free from every vice. He differed nothing in his manners from the rest of men, but in their perfect purity. He neither practised nor recommended any unnecessary severity.— He lived in the world, as he wished his disciples to live there. How different is his example from the examples of those who are called saints in his church? Their virtues were made up of unnecessary acts of mortification, as if the most high God took pleasure in seeing his rational creatures rejecting the comforts and innocent enjoyments of life, to lie on the damp ground, to be clothed in sack-cloth, to inflict upon themselves, the voluntary discipline of scourging, and to take up their abodes in the caves and dens of the earth. Or can it be acceptable to him, to see his disciples clothed in gloom and sour temper, uttering loud groans and sighs, placing their duty in dark and unprofitable tenets, in praying often and long, and in pharisaical righteousness?

Another part of his character, in which he differs from other reformers, is the cheerfulness which he diffuses over his religion, and which he, in some degree, exemplified. And this, we may collect from several circumstances. In the first place, he severely censures the pharisees, or, as he calls them, hypocrites, for putting on sad countenances and disfiguring their faces.—



And this keen reprobation of such practices, makes known to us the temper he recommends. Every one who affects peculiar sanctity, puts on this garb. What an idea must they entertain of him whom they worship! He is thus made to speak, in his religion, a language very different from what he speaks in his works, and in his providence. This is very different from what our Saviour teaches. He says God so loved the world, that he gave to us his son. He represents him as the author of all mercy, and the God of all grace and consolation, and his apostle says God is love. All his plans are calculated to carry forward our eternal happiness. And is not this cause for joy? God is our father and friend: here again cause for joy. The psalmist says, the Lord reigneth, let the earth be glad. Christ is gone to Heaven, to prepare a place for us: rejoice then, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in Heaven.

A religion, then, which inculcates sadness, down-cast looks and disfigured faces, must be a bastard religion. His treatment of his disciples shews, that he never meant that his religion should be the parent of sourness and melancholy; and wherever these are found, they render the character suspicious. In the 381 paper of the *Spectator*, there are some excellent observations on cheerfulness as connected with religion, deserving the attention of every rational chris-

tian. And the principles of religion, which are found in this instructive and popular work, give us an idea of the prevailing doctrines of that age, very different from what we are accustomed to in the popular doctrines of the present day.

When we read the accounts which the evangelists give of our Lord we see his social character. He appears several times in large mixed companies. He was a guest with Zaccheus, the publican.—Luke, xix. 2. His enemies saw this, and they murmured and said, that he was gone to be a guest with a man who was a sinner. Luke, v. 29, records an instance of our Lord's accepting an invitation to a public entertainment, upon his calling Levi, the same as Mathew, the disciple. Levi made for Jesus, a great feast, in his own house; and there was a great company of publicans and others, who sat down with him. This ready acceptance of the invitation, presents us with an interesting view of the social character of our blessed Lord.

Besides accepting the invitation of Zaccheus, the publican, and the great feast that Levi made for him, we have an account in the gospels, of three other entertainments or banquets, for which he received invitations, and which, also, he accepted, and at all which, he received particular marks of respect. One of these was at the house of Simon the pharisee, recorded—Luke, vii. 36. A woman of the city, knowing that

Jesus was there, brought an alabaster box of ointment, and after washing his feet with her tears, and wiping them with the hairs of her head, anointed them with the ointment. The circumstances are well worth reading, as they lay open some excellent views of our Lord's character. The second of these happened at the house of Lazarus, whom he raised from the dead, recorded John, xii. 2. This took place only six days before the last passover. Mary, the sister of Lazarus, took an ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped them with her hair; and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. The last time he was anointed, was at the house of Simon, the leper, and only two days before the last passover.—Mark, xiv. 3, and Mat. xxvi. 6. It is said, being in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman, having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard, very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head.

3. After reading these different histories, the first question that will naturally arise, is, what what could be our Lord's view, in accepting so readily these several invitations? Several reasons may be assigned. 1st. To discountenance those gloomy ideas, which enthusiasts or hypocrites have spread over the religious character; as if a man could not be religious, without

renouncing the world, and all its enjoyments.— This presents our maker as the severest task-master ; and his service as inconsistent with joy. 2d. He would have an opportunity, by frequenting these convivial parties, to shew to the world how men ought to conduct themselves there ; that they might join in social entertainments, and yet keep free from offending God. His manners, on such occasions, must have been most prepossessing ; his gentleness, his kindness, his lowliness of mind, his universal benevolence, and the tenderness he shewed to sinners. 3d. At these entertainments, he laid his character open to the inspection of his enemies ; for we are told, on some of these occasions, that they were watching him. Now we have the strongest evidence, that they had it not in their power to gain any accusation against him, at these times ; otherwise, such accusations would have been brought forward on his trial. They accused him of eating and drinking with publicans and sinners, but no charge of intemperance, of quarrelling, of blasphemy, or sedition : and, at such times, men are the most off their guard, and liable to expose themselves to censure. Such occasions furnished him with an opportunity of impressing on the minds of men, the excellence of his character, of curing their prejudices, and making them his disciples.

Now the next thing is, how can we account

for permitting these women to anoint him with such costly spikenards. Jesus condescends to receive such marks of respect, not only without displeasure, but with expressions of satisfaction. In this, we may venture to say, that he complied with the innocent and fashionable customs of the world. His example was much more extensive than we could suppose. He complied with the manners of the world, in every thing which was not sinful. It may be said this was a wanton waste : but such things are intended not for use, but for waste. The austere and rigid professors are saying with Judas, why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? And many such, will thus interfere, not that they care for the poor more than others, but to court the favour of the multitude, by this ostentatious sanctity and charity. The wanton waste of meat, of corn, and such things necessary for the sustenance of life, is highly censurable ; but the waste of perfumes, gum, and odours, encourage labour and industry, in the rearing of them ; and it would puzzle the most ill-tempered hypocrite, to find good ground for censuring the use of them : here, also, our Lord shews his wisdom and his exalted benevolence.

4. But we meet with another and decided expression of our Saviour's social character, and a clear demonstration that he was not an enemy



to the innocent joys of society; and that, of course, his religion is perfectly consistent with such enjoyments: and these evidences are found in his first miracle, at the marriage feast. This miracle gives us a very interesting view of his character, and extends greatly his example.— We see him frequently in the exercise of those duties which he paid to his heavenly Father; and we have many opportunities of witnessing his love to men, and his daily exercises of goodness. But here we have him in a new character, and a new prospect of his example. We see his conduct at a convivial entertainment, and this, at his very entrance upon his ministry. He has not given to us, a direct precept for our conduct on such occasions; nor has he expressed himself clearly, whether we are to join with the world on such occasions, or to avoid them as snares and as sins: but he has given us his example to say, that it is not inconsistent with the christian character, to join in public entertainments.

It has been observed, that he has given to us no precepts upon patriotism or friendship; and this omission has been brought forward as an objection to his religion. But if he has not given to us precepts on these duties, he has given to us clear examples. He shewed his friendship to the beloved disciple John, and to the house of Lazarus, in a very extraordinary degree. It is difficult to frame a precept on

patriotism or friendship, that is not liable to be abused. Friendship, in many cases, will lead to a transgression of God's law. In the prosecution of partial friendships, men often commit the greatest excesses. In serving the interest of your friend, you may be guilty of the greatest acts of injustice to others. The same observations will extend to patriotism. The love of country, leads the patriot to acts of cruelty and injustice to other countries. But though he has left no precept on patriotism, he shews the warmest affection for the infatuated nation of the Jews. "I am not sent," says he, "but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." We see him, also, weeping over Jerusalem. He shews his perfect wisdom, therefore, in abstaining from delivering precepts of this nature. So with respect to convivial meetings, and the recreations and amusements that are common there, he has given no precepts; but we have his example; and our conduct in all these cases, ought to be regulated by the principles of his gospel. We are not to transgress against temperance, or offend against decency, or give way to prophane language, or riotous mirth, or to quarrel or wrangle, or to defraud or commit any act of injustice: and if we join in the amusements, most of the common ones are not sinful in themselves, they become such, by the abuse of them; if they excite strife, ill temper, provoking lan-

guage, acts of cheating and injustice. They become sinful, by devoting to them more time than necessary, for recreation.

5. A question might now arise, what could be the reason for our Lord honouring the marriage feast, with this, his first miracle. All his other works have the general character of goodness, if you except his cursing the barren fig-tree, and his permission to the evil spirits to enter the herd of swine, and these, also, may be easily justified. All his other works have the general character of goodness, and were wrought for the most benevolent purposes. What, then, must have been the reason for Christ working this miracle, his turning water into wine, for a supply to the guests? One thing, I think, seems perfectly clear, it was intended to condemn the austerity of the pharisees, who placed religion in the rigid observance and practice of unnecessary acts of self-denial; and, in opposition to their hypocrisy, he carries his example to social and convivial entertainments, a proof that he did not forbid them: but, by this miracle, at the very entrance on his public ministry, he countenances and consecrates the marriage feast.

This miracle may then have been designed to rescue religion from that melancholy and sourness, in which it was clothed by the pharisees, and in which it has been clad by enthusiasts and hypocrites, in all ages. This miracle has

certainly a peculiar character. It agrees with his other miracles, in being a display of power, a proof of his command over nature, and as a manifestation of his goodness. But his turning water into wine, to supply the deficiency at the marriage feast, appears to have been wrought to contribute to the cheerfulness of the guests.— From his history, as I have already observed, it is certain that he was never a popular character; and one reason undoubtedly was, that he never humoured the common prejudices of mankind, in making religion to consist in an abstraction from the common enjoyments of society, in formal manners, and in a sour and sullen temper.— The pharisees reproached him with eating and drinking with publicans and sinners; but here he does more; he exerts his miraculous power, not to relieve the distressed, not to multiply the loaves and fishes to furnish meat for the hungry, but to contribute to the cheerfulness of the marriage feast. Who can contemplate this, and not admire and adore the gracious condescension of the divine Saviour, inviting men to rejoice, and in supplying materials for their joy! How unlike is this to the sour and ill-tempered pharisee, who, in his words, in his manners, and in his forbidding countenance, is an enemy to all joy! Nothing can mark Jesus so strongly for the friend of man; and nothing can present us with a more favourable character of his religion,

than this proof of his cheerful temper, at the commencement of his active ministry. This is rescuing religion from the hands of the austere and gloomy fanatic, and assigning to it its proper station, as the source and parent of innocent joy. I cannot tell what other construction, the most ill-tempered commentator can put upon this great work. How much does this resemble the goodness of his heavenly Father!

There are some circumstances, which the history furnishes, that will help further to illustrate the intention of this miracle. In the first place, it seems to have been a large and mixed company; for his disciples and his mother were invited; and, from the liberties which his mother takes, in giving orders to the servants, it is probable the parties were relations to her family; and this, also, accounts for the presence of Jesus, his mother, and the disciples, at this solemnity and entertainment. In the second place, the quantity of wine miraculously supplied, at the lowest computation of the commentators, amounted to fifty-four of our gallons; and this is to be added to the wine originally intended, and already drunk out: this says that the company was large. A marriage feast is generally a scene of mirth and enjoyment; and so it seems to have been on the present occasion; and we may suppose, likewise, accompanied with music and dancing, the usual expressions of cheerfulness



on such occasions ; and, perhaps, none can be found, at such times, more innocent ; and these, we find from their history, were practiced among the Jews. Such entertainments often exceed the bounds of moderation and temperance ; but this is not always the case ; and it is not necessarily so. And the presence of him, who condescended, on this occasion, to be their guest, and to set them an example of cheerfulness, would contribute to preserve order and decorum, in that large company ; and one part of the design might be, to exemplify how cheerfulness may be kept up in harmony with innocence.

6. Whilst he condemns the supercilious sanctity, and hypocritical austerity of those who make religion to consist in the rigid observance and practice of unnecessary and unedifying acts of self-denial ; he is delivering it, at the same time, from the gloom of the cloister, and making it enter into the innocent enjoyments of life.— How would the pharisees relish this work, and what construction could they put upon it ? An occasion, such as this, furnished them with an opportunity of saying—“ *Behold a man gluttonous and a wine bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.*”—Mat. xi. 19. But to every reasonable enquirer, this must be regarded as an act of the greatest condescension and goodness, and must lead them to admire and adore the ever blessed Jesus. He despises all popular

clamour, and the reproaches of enemies, and comes forward and says by this act, that God has scattered around us many blessings, and invites us to partake of them ; and that we may be cheerful, and take a share of the amusements of this life, and yet not sin. An imposter durst not have risked this, an act so contrary to the prejudices and prepossessions of the bulk of men. They expect that a heavenly messenger will encourage none of these earthly enjoyments.— But in the eye of reason, this is a confirmation of his most excellent character, and shews us the dignity and firmness of him, who courted not the applause of men, but the honour and glory of his Father in Heaven. If God bestows upon men, such good things, he requires of us, gratitude, the temperate enjoyment of them, and to consider ourselves as the stewards of the most high God, and to distribute the bouities of his providence among those to whom providence has given only a small share. That such things may be, and most certainly very often are abused, is no argument against the indulgence. Eating and drinking are often converted into intemperance ; but the sin lies not in the eating and drinking, but in the excess. Many indulgences are innocent in themselves, but become sinful in their excess, in spending too much time in them, and when they occupy the place of important duties. One would be struck with horror to

hear, that prayer may become sinful ; and that this is often the case. there can be no doubt.— Prayer becomes sinful, when employed to cloak wickedness, and deceive men into an opinion that those who use it are truly pious and honest. Prayer becomes sinful, when people indulge in prayer, when they should be attending to their children and families, watching over them, minding their education, clothing them, providing food for them, and in training and forming their moral character. The pharisees, by the representation of our Lord, committed sin in their prayers, making prayer a cover for their hypocrisy, and substituting prayer for essential duties. And other religious exercises become sinful, when they occupy the time and place of important, private, family, or social duties.— There are as much sin committed in the excess of these, as in the excess of music and dancing.

This view of the character of our Lord, imposes on his disciples an important duty, to rectify those false notions of religion, too prevalent, but which are discouraging to the real christian, as if an enemy to joy. Gratitude to God for his favours, and for his daily mercies, calls upon us to rejoice. Rejoice that we are always in the presence and under the protection of our heavenly Father. Rejoice in the hopes which are set before us ; and towards these hopes, we ought constantly to rise. The services

which we pay to the best of beings, should certainly be different from what we should be compelled to pay to a powerful, but malignant spirit, whom we must constantly fear. That Heaven, also, to which we are encouraged to look forward, as the everlasting habitation of good men. is the habitation of happiness and joy; and the hopes which we have, of making a part of that blessed company, should animate us with a joyful exertion to secure these happy mansions. Guard, therefore, against any practice, habit, or expression, that may give to the world, discouraging representations of that religion which we profess, or of that master whom we serve. Lead on youth to a pleasing prospect of Christ and his religion, by a steady cheerfulness, and by laying upon them no unnecessary restraint.

## CHAP. X.

### ON RECREATIONS.

1. **FROM** the preceding part of our Lord's history, and, indeed, from his history in general, we may infer that our Lord was no enemy to the innocent recreations of society, and that he does not debar his disciples from such enjoy-

ments. Recreations properly chosen, excite cheerfulness; and cheerfulness is favourable to health, and to some, also, of the most amiable virtues.

My reason for taking up the subject of recreations, is, in the first place, to contribute what I can, to the removal of that gloom, which some professors throw over religion; and, in the second place, to combat these illiberal prejudices, which suppose that men are guilty of the greatest sin, who countenance the common amusements of society, although among that number, are found many men of the greatest worth, who are not only firm believers in christianity, but scrupulously exact in the performance of its duties; and thirdly, to point out the unhappy consequences of such gloomy principles, thus operating as a discouragement to real religion.

With respect to music, there is no occasion to say much; for this is the least exceptionable of all amusements. This is a delightful exercise and entertainment to many; it enters into the solemn services of religion, and contributes there to exalt our devotion.

But dancing is cried down violently. Indecent dances cannot be censured too severely; and those stage dances have brought the exercise itself under this disgrace. But these are neither encouraged nor practised in our common assemblies, nor in private parties. In such places, all



these things are conducted agreeable to the strictest rules of decency ; and perhaps there are few entertainments more pure, more chaste and correct in every moral point of view.— Some alledge that this exercise excites bad passions ; but those must have very impure hearts, who can find such incitements in the common dances. And nothing can be better calculated to produce innocent cheerfulness, particularly in an assembly of young people ; and nothing can be more wisely contrived to dissipate melancholy, ill-temper, and dissatisfaction, than to witness the grace and elegance of this exercise ; and thus you share in the innocent joys of the rising generation. That mind must be of a very stubborn sulkiness, and of a texture not very favourable to virtue, which refuses its assent to the general harmony of such company. This exercise has been countenanced by many wise men, and even rigid moralists. Music and dancing, entered occasionally, into the solemn services of the Jews. David danced before the ark of God, with all his might. We find dancing recommended in the Psalm cxlix. 3.—“ *Let us praise his name in the dance.*” It was practised by the Jews on occasions of rejoicing. The prophet Jeremiah, xxxi. 13, foretelling the restoration of the Jews, and the approach of happier days, says—“ *Then shall the virgins rejoice in the dance.*” Socrates mentions it often with

approbation. The present morose and gloomy temper which hangs over religion, should be counteracted by directing the amusements of young people to what is different from sulkiness, to excite cheerfulness, which may be maintained in perfect consistency with purity and the most correct morals.

The amusement of the theatre has certainly subjected itself to much censure, by countenancing immorality. Several old plays are highly censurable, on account of the looseness of their morals; and this poison is often conveyed in much wit, which causes the venom to peirce deeper. But to the honour of the present age, and for the interest of morality, we seldom find any thing of this nature in modern plays. They are, in general, chaste and correct in these points; and the morals which some of them inculcate, are excellent, and calculated to do much more good, and much less harm, than many of those declamations which are called sermons, where morality is abused, and the christian virtues treated with contempt.—Amusements regulated by virtuous principles are rational and instructive. The present theatrical representations are, however, in some cases, highly censurable, not for immorality; but for a great deal of nonsense, and sometimes buffoonery, introduced upon the stage.

I have to observe, also, that the theatre has been countenanced by men, not only highly respectable, but even religious. The great Milton is ranked among the writers for the theatre; and the manners of the age, in which he lived, were far from favouring light and profane amusements. The assemblage of elegant writers, at the beginning of the last century, to whom this country owes much, for the improvement of our language, the refinement of our manners, and the cultivation of our morals, and for some of the most beautiful essays on religion, were pretty generally promoters of this entertainment, and some of them, also, were writers. It is sufficient to mention the name of Addison, one of the ornaments of our country. He was exemplary in his life; and in his death, he shewed us in what peace a christian could die. Dr. Young, also, the author of the "*Night Thoughts*," wrote several plays, though, from his writings, we may pronounce him a man of a melancholy temper, and of sincere, but gloomy piety.

But though plays, in point of morals, should be found unobjectionable, yet the attendance upon them should be placed under considerable restrictions. 1st. This amusement may be inconvenient to the circumstances of many people. 2d. Attendance upon the play-house,

may cause men to neglect their proper business. 3d. Young people are apt to contract loose and unsettled habits, from such amusements; and likewise, to form improper connections. Lastly, such as should be examples, may, by their attendance, mislead those who may look up to them, and be accessory to their ruin or misfortunes. The apostle's maxim may be applied to these cases. Things may be lawful, which may not be expedient. I have only now to add, that immoral plays should meet with the strongest expressions of discouragement and detestation.

2. The common games come next to be noticed, and first, to state the plea that their advocates urge in their behalf. They insist, in the first place, that they are not evils in themselves; and that they are not forbidden by any law of God. To such games as depend entirely on skill, this is readily granted. Thus, religious people scruple not to play at draughts, or at the elegant game of chess: Back-gammon is also rather a favourite with many of these people, though it be a game of chance as well as of skill: but they give the best reason for this, because people seldom play at back-gammon for money. And this concession shews, that being a game of chance, is not a reasonable objection. But cards they load with every kind of abuse.— They are called the Devil's books. That they should be held up to general odium, is not to be

wondered. To games at cards, all ranks resort, from the highest to the lowest ; and much time and money are shamefully spent in these, and many sins are here committed. With cards, gambling of every kind is carried forward ; and, on these occasions, many are ruined. So bewitching is men's attachment to this species of gambling, that parties have continued at play for days and nights, without cessation. What ruin of fortune, of health, of family, and peace of mind ! Add to these, the scenes of fraud, of quarrelling, and every kind of dissipation ! How much then do they deserve reprobation ! And the name of a gamester ought to be a name of abhorrence !

Upon what principle are we to account for all these evils ? The common solution is, that they are games of hazard and of chance ; but this is not a satisfactory solution. Some of the most important concerns of life, may be called games of chance. The merchant, in his purchases and his sales, is playing a game of chance. The husbandman, in the uncertainty of the weather, acts upon the same principle. All insurances are deep games of chance. The common bargains, are not only subject to the same law, but arts of different kinds are employed, and some of them not very innocent, to secure some advantage ; puffing and concealment, deceit and disguise, and undervaluing are employed on the



one side or the other, to enhance or depreciate the bargain. Thousands of men, of very *sound* religious principles, scruple not at practices of this kind. In the sight of God, and in the eye of reason, there is as much sin, and as many bad passions deliberately at work, as in the common games; and much more sin, than when such things are employed as a relief from labour and a recreation.

Cheating and quarrelling are not the necessary accompaniments of such amusements, they are the abuse of them. The love of money is the most satisfactory account of these evils. This excites the covetous passion, and all the evil passions connected with it. This accounts for the attachment to gaming, and for spending so much time in what should be an amusement, but is now converted into a serious business.— Many people play without money; young people should always play without money; and better still, if this should be established as a fixed and general rule for all. This would be a high improvement, and would take off the weight of the objection. And if the interest should be found not so strong to the play, yet it would be sufficiently strong to serve the purpose of amusement, whilst it takes away all temptation to fraud, and all cause of quarrelling, and the inducement of devoting too much time to the recreation. The evil does not lie in the game

itself, but in the abuse. Some people would gamble and quarrel about drawing the longest straw. Take away the gambling concern, and you convert these plays into a most harmless pastime. The abuse of a thing does not warrant the absolute prohibition. Eating and drinking are perverted into gluttony and drunkenness; but we are not, on that account, to be debarred from eating and drinking. Well selected recreations are of service to relieve the mind exhausted with labour, or to divert the mind from objects which too much engage the attention. They are of use, also, to preserve idle people from the worse consequences of idleness, from gross and beastly indulgences. Different characters require different degrees of relaxation. Some of indolent dispositions, and those of retired habits, have little or no desire for recreations; whilst the active mind seeks for something in retiring from labour or business, to rest itself upon.—Some have the happiness to find a change of pursuits answer all the purposes of recreation.—The man of a sedantary life, finds relief and health in the labours of a garden. But times and seasons do not always favour this exchange; and there are only some characters that can apply it. Recreations will be still necessary for some; and many good men, men of the strictest morals, and under the government of religious habits, enjoy, in their hours of retirement from

business, in the bosoms of their own family, or with their friends, amusements of this kind ; and have not the least idea, that in these, they are committing a sin. Whilst, on the other hand, many good men, from their religious education, and from the company with which they chiefly associate, cannot look upon any thing of the kind, but as sins, and sins of the most malignant kind. Neither of these parties will be disposed to come over to the opinion of the other. A little liberality would dispose men of moderation to agree to differ ; and it is to be lamented that such differences of sentiment should produce breaches in friendship, or even of christian communion. To those, who use them occasionally, there can be no great sin. But those who cheat and quarrel, and devote the most of their time to such pursuits cannot be justified at the bar of reason, and cannot expect to meet with the approbation of their own hearts, at a very serious and important moment hereafter.

3. But it is argued, that there is no necessity for games and such amusements, as in mixed companies, and in private parties, time might be spent with more benefit in conversation.— But in mixed companies, it is not easy to invent conversation that will be agreeable and instructive to all ; and it is not easy to find persons so gifted, as to support such conversation ; and conversation must often flag and prove insipid,

unless there be a little seasoning of satire and of scandal; and such conversation becomes more immoral than common amusements. I have known substitutes introduced by those who have regarded all games of chance as sinful. At the meeting of young people of both sexes, an amusement has been recommended and practised, where the loser incurs a forfeit, and that forfeit is to be redeemed by saluting the winner of the other sex. This, in point of amusement, may sometimes be more agreeable; but, in point of morals, no improvement on the games of chance.

In the society of young people, when occupied in the common amusements, there is more innocent mirth and gaiety, fewer evil thoughts, and less offensive conversation, than often in grave and mixed companies, or even in companies where religion is the subject. And I can see no good reason, why a religious man should be a melancholy man; and why he alone, should be debarred the innocent enjoyments of life. This is to suppose, that God, in the precepts of religion, employs a language contradictory to all his other languages to man. This would be saying, that the principles of religion tended to sadden, not to gladden the heart. This would be publishing that Heaven, to which all good men aspire, is the habitation of sorrow and mourning.

To educate young people in these unsocial and gloomy principles, is to plan their ruin.—

It is imposing upon them to struggle against nature, and to shut their ears to the voice of joy and gladness, which they hear all around them, from God's works, from all his creatures, from every beast and bird, from the book of nature, and from the book of grace. The laying severe restrictions of this nature, upon young people, is the most unfortunate part of education that can be given. Many, from their dispositions and capacities, from their habits, and the manner in which brought up, cannot, in hours of leisure, find any gratification in reading, in the arts and sciences; and not being fitted for conversation, if they be forbidden the common amusements, will have recourse to secret and grosser indulgencies. Many young people have been ruined by the weakness and bigotry of parents, and by the severity of this austere treatment. If I am not mistaken, the infidelity of the celebrated historian, Gibbon, has been ascribed to this cause; though this is not mentioned in his life, written by himself; but such notice was not to be expected there. Overstrained piety seldom descends far: the son very commonly abandons the rigid principles of the father; and if his own good sense does not direct him to more rational and pleasing views of the great Father of all, he is in danger of plunging into the gulph of infidelity; or he takes refuge with wicked companions, in intemperance and the grossest sensual



indulgencies ; and here end the labours and cares of the parents, and all the principles, the comforts and religion of the hopeful young man.

But, however men may differ in their opinions, in matters of this kind, the following cautions cannot be improper : 1st. In entering upon amusements, there is danger of carrying them to an excess ; and however resolute a young man may be, in the commencement, to confine them to amusement, and to keep from sin, yet he may be led on step by step, from harmless play, to play next for money, and the next step to deep gambling ; then liberty of retreat becomes nearly lost, and the utmost effort of resolution is required to extricate himself from his embarrassment.— 2d. Caution not to be influenced by example, by the example even of good men. There are many wise and good men, who indulge at proper seasons, in this, to them, an harmless amusement ; but such examples may warrant others, not possessed of their moderation and self-command, to join in the same amusements, which may prove to them their ruin. 3d. We are to remember, that amusements of this kind, may sometimes introduce young men to the worst of company, to loose people of every description ; and this is one of the worst of evils. To the above reflections, I shall subjoin the sentiments of men of allowed and distinguished worth and piety, on this subject.

4. Nelson, the pious divine, says—"that he was careful not to drive the young and the gay from religion, by representing it as an enemy to any distinction or enjoyment, in which human nature may innocently delight." And Dr. Jeremy Taylor, a most learned and pious bishop, the author of "*Holy living and dying*," and many other excellent works, and a most rigid moralist, in his "*Ductor Dubitantium ; or, the Rule of Conscience*," treats, at considerable length, this subject, the lawfulness of these games, p. 775, and brings them to this conclusion:—"There is nothing," he says, "in them, but the appendages, which render them suspicious, and these are separable from them; and till they be separated, they are not lawful.—These evil appendages are, spending too much time in them, converting into a business, what should be a recreation, cheating, defrauding, quarrelling, &c. These evil appendages, if they cannot be totally separated, may be greatly reduced. 1st. Let no man's affections be immoderately addicted to them. 2. Let no man play for money, but refreshment. 3d. A man must be dispassionate to play with advantage, and to play without sin."

The author of the "*New whole Duty of Man*," p. 392, says, "a serious christian may sometimes, and at some seasons, use the common games for the relaxation of his mind, and to oblige and divert

his company ; yet every sober man must take care, that this liberty does not exceed the bounds of an innocent recreation ; for instance, that he does not set his affections too much upon it, or play with such concern, as to be put into a passion at his bad success ; that he sit not too long at it, nor come to it too frequently ; that he always prefer his business before his diversions ; and lastly, that he play not for money, but for diversion ; at least, for no more money than what he can very well lose, without the least discomposure of mind, and without the least prejudice to his family or estate. Thus far, I say, and with those restrictions, to use play, is innocent enough." And a little after, he goes on thus—" We should endeavour to keep up a constant cheerfulness of spirit. They disgrace religion, who pretend that it is an enemy to mirth and cheerfulness, or imagine it to be a severe exacter of thoughtful looks and solemn faces ; or that men are never serious enough till they are sullen, or shut up from all company and conversation. Let men say what they will, those hours which are wasted away in indulging in idle sullenness or a mooping melancholy, are no less placed to our account, than those which fly away unperceived in unthinking mirth and gaiety. It has been a great artifice of the Devil, to possess the minds of unthinking men with an opinion, that religion is

a sour, morose, ill-natured thing ; an enemy to whatever is pleasant and cheerful, and that whoever engages in the practice of it, must, from that instant, renounce all the pleasures and enjoyments of this life."

Arch-Bishop Tillotson, in his fifty-third sermon, of which the subject is the education of children, introduces the following remarks.—  
 "Parents often commit great mistakes, in not teaching their children the true difference between good and evil ; as when they teach them, that any thing is a sin, which really is not ; or that any thing is not a sin, which in truth is so ; making that, also, which is only convenient, to be in the highest degree necessary, or that, which it may be, is only inconvenient, or may be an occasion of scandal to some weak christian, to be a sin in its own nature damnable. I have known," adds he, "very well meaning parents, that with great severity, have restrained their children from the wearing of their hair, nay, I can remember when the wearing of it before their ears, was looked upon as a sin of the first magnitude ; and when ministers generally, whatever their text was, did in every sermon, reprove the great sin of wearing long hair, (see I. Cor. xi. 14.) and if they saw any one in their congregation, guilty, they would point him out particularly, and let fly at him with great zeal."

“ I have likewise,” continues this excellent prelate, “ known some parents, that have strongly forbidden their children the use of some sorts of recreations and games, under the notion of heinous sins, upon a mistake, that because there was in them, a mixture of fortune and skill, they were, therefore, unlawful; a reason, I think, which hath no weight or force in it; though I do not deny, that human laws may, for very prudent reasons, either restrain or forbid the use of these games, because of the boundless expence, both of money and time, which is many times occasioned by them.”

I have to bring forward only another testimony in Dr. Lardner, to whom the christian world is under the greatest obligation, for his excellent and learned work “ *On the Credibility of the Gospel History, &c.*” and who, in his life, was an ornament to his profession. In his sermon, entitled “ *A Caution against conformity to the world,*” he gives us the following directions: “ In other things, which are not contrary to reason, or express revelation, we may do as others do: we may enjoy the same comforts, follow the same employments, take the same diversions as others do; and may use the language of the place, the country and town wherein we live. For I do not intend to cast a snare before you, or raise groundless and needless scruples in any man’s mind. It is not my design



absolutely to condemn music or dancing, or those diversions, in which chance or hazard has a part, as well as skill ; or those entertainments, in which are represented the humours or manners of men, or the revolutions of states or empires, or the vicissitudes of particular persons.— These, I do not look upon as, in themselves, always evils. They become evil, only when they are perverted or abused, (as I fear they often are,) or when they are accidentally evil or hurtful to us, for want of prudent circumspection, which is necessary every where, and at all times, and more especially upon some occasions.”

5. These opinions concerning amusements, are delivered by these most respectable authorities, with much care and circumspection ; and whilst they imply that there is nothing sinful in the recreations themselves, no more than in eating and drinking ; yet they may lead to sin, unless guarded by proper restrictions. Hence, they give no encouragement to them ; and they ought only to be used when they serve as a relief from labour ; and, in which, a few friends can enjoy them without offence, without occupying the mind too much with them, when it should be employed on duties, without suffering any bad passions, without strife and covetousness ; or, whilst under the same restrictions, young people may make use of them, for amusement only, and to prevent them from grosser indulgences.—

Men are apt to run into extremes; frightened by the consequences of such recreation, they proceed to an absolute prohibition, and take shelter in services morose and superstitious; forbidding every thing that has the appearance of cheerfulness. This is unfriendly to the more amiable virtues, and inconsistent with our belief in the goodness of God, of which, we ought never to lose sight. Under this cover of solemnity, and an exterior conformity to religious profession, you may retain covetousness, envy, jealousy, and a vindictive spirit; and under a zeal for religion, you may give vent to intolerance and religious calumny; and do much more injury to the mind, and to the moral frame, than a moderate indulgence in the common amusements, can possibly effect. For while they so much sour the temper, banish generosity, candour, social mirth and cheerfulness; they plant in their room, hypocrisy, disfigured faces, and the whining tone of false religion. But extremes meet together: when the minds of young people are bound down by the fetters of overstrained piety; when they are harrassed by the number, the length, and the severity of religious exercises, they must necessarily burst these fetters, and take refuge in religious coldness and indifference, and then settle in downright infidelity. The extravagances of the latter times of Charles the first, and of the whole of the

common-wealth, wearied out and exhausted the religious principle ; and the horrors of that period, perpetrated under the cloak of religion, drove men from religion to infidelity, with all its accompaniments, profligacy, and every species of corruption and debauchery. We are gone back to that period of gloom and fanaticism ; our manners are changed ; cheerfulness has given place to melancholy ; innocent mirth to groaning ; and the harmless amusements of society, to acts of unreasonable and irrational devotion.

The prevalence of these principles presents no pleasing prospect to every thinking man ; for he cannot help recollecting, that these are the very principles which, at a former period, introduced so much misery into his native country, overturned the constitution, brought the King to the scaffold, and spread blood and horror for many years over these lands.

And, in our recollection of what has passed so lately in Europe, the blood and desolation with which it has been overspread, we cannot help noticing the alliance between fanaticism, or false religion, and infidelity. False religion clothed Britain with distress and mourning, in the 17th century ; and the very same effects, but much more dreadful still, because the theatre on which they acted, was much more extensive, did infidelity and false philosophy produce in

the end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century. These principles are much more akin, than people at first sight imagine. There is no great difference, in point of comfort, between false representation of the deity, and denying his existence, or his interference in the Government of the world.

But to whatever cause we are to assign the present complexion of the world, every lover of his country and of mankind, every man possessed of rational piety, cannot fail being alarmed with the representation such principles give of the Supreme Being, and of human nature, the gloom they spread on society, and the abuse constantly poured upon good works; and he cannot help wishing to recal those former days, when there was much less noise and profession, more innocent mirth and cheerfulness, and much more unaffected piety and substantial virtue.

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THE END.



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