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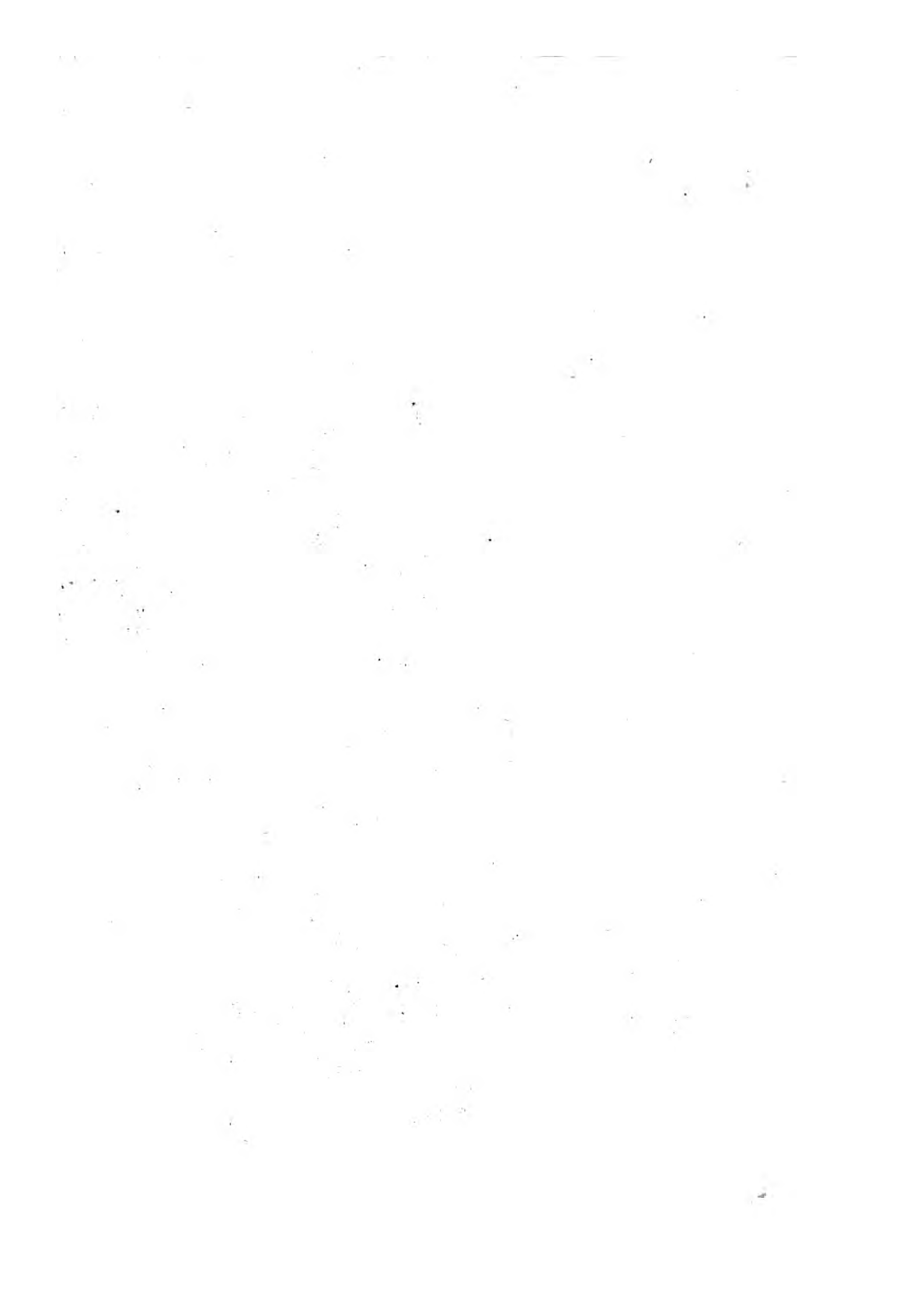


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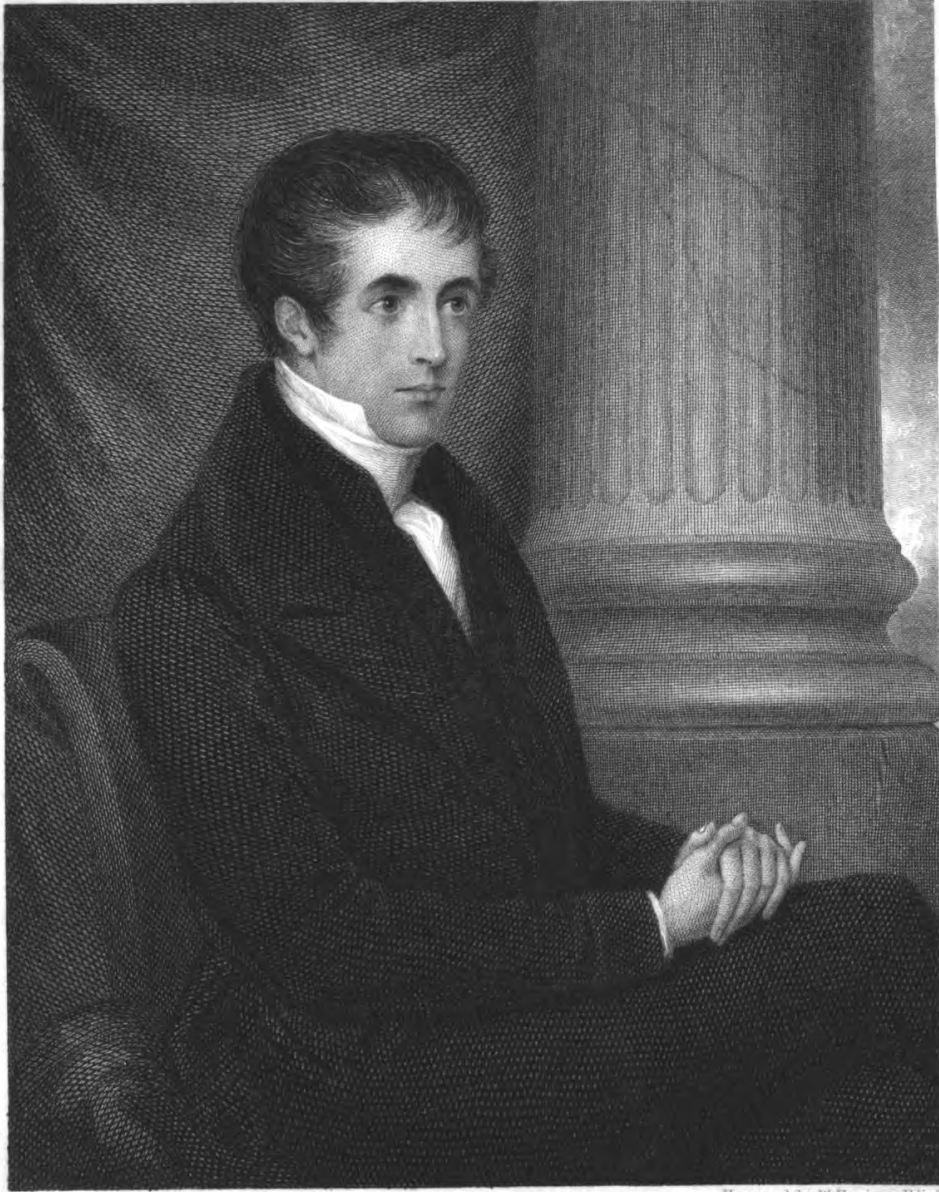


DISCOURSES

BY THE LATE

REV. JAMES MARTIN, A.M.





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REV. JAMES MARTIN, A.M.

LATE MINISTER OF ST. GEORGE'S CHURCH, EDINBURGH.

Published by Oliver & Boyd. 1837.

DISCOURSES

BY THE LATE

REV. JAMES MARTIN, A.M.,

MINISTER OF ST GEORGE'S CHURCH, EDINBURGH ;

AND PART OF AN INTENDED SERIES OF

LETTERS ON PRAYER,

WRITTEN BY HIM WHILE AT NICE.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR.



EDINBURGH :

OLIVER & BOYD, TWEEDDALE COURT ;

AND

SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, & CO., LONDON.

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PREFACE.

By the publication of a selection from the manuscripts of the late Mr Martin, and of a short sketch of his life and character, nothing more is aimed at or desired by those who have undertaken it, than to preserve some memorial of a man of a very pure and elevated mind, prematurely cut off from a sphere of extensive usefulness, and a circle of friends by whom he was greatly esteemed and beloved; which may at once be gratifying to them, and encouraging to those who are engaged in the same sacred vocation to which he so faithfully devoted his short but honourable life.

It may, perhaps, be naturally asked, how a Memoir comes to be published, of one whose course was so brief, and who was comparatively little known beyond the congregations to whom he ministered, whilst we have no biography of others,—some of them old and venerable men,—who, for a

long period, occupied a large space in the ecclesiastical history of Scotland, and whose names are incorporated with the most important transactions which, in the concerns of religion, or in Church affairs, took place during the period in which they lived?

The answer to this is not difficult. To give a full and accurate detail of the whole circumstances and events of the public life of such men, and to delineate with that fidelity which would be necessary, the character which was unfolded in the various situations in which they were placed, and in those interesting scenes in which they distinguished themselves, were a matter of no easy accomplishment; and for this reason we judge that it has, in comparatively few cases, been hitherto attempted.

It might not be a task of very great difficulty or delicacy, to give a superficial sketch of the leading occurrences in the life of a public man, and to describe what he appeared to be in the eye of the world, and the effects which he produced on the popular mind. But this is not all which belongs to the biography of such an individual; and it is quite another thing to develop his true character, to exhibit the real views and principles by which he was governed during a long course of active service in the open places of society, and amidst the agitations and contentions of public life; and to do justice, in

the face of a flippant and querulous world, to his memory and his name.

But in giving a sketch of the character and of the leading incidents in the history of such a man as Mr Martin, the service required is not at all of this kind. It is far less formidable, and may therefore, perhaps without great presumption, be attempted. For, although in the few last years of his life, he was called to fill ostensible and prominent situations in the pulpits of our Church, yet his course was uniformly that of a quiet pastor and domestic minister of the Gospel,—the sphere of whose duties, to the time when his physical constitution gave way, called him but little into public life, or into the high fields of controversy, or of general discussion; but whose labours and services, within the limits to which they were confined, can never be but infinitely valuable in the recollection of those who enjoyed the privilege of his public ministry, or the satisfaction and advantage of his private friendship.

Let it be added, that, in giving expression, in the following Memoir, to any of those reflections which irresistibly arise in the retrospect of the life of one who was greatly endeared by an intimate and constant intercourse, though only for a few years, the strongest desire has been felt to avoid every thing like excess or exaggeration. To indulge in these would be an act of great mockery towards him,

whose own language was always so genuine and sincere. And there is no occasion here to exaggerate ; for, if his character could be delineated in harmony and keeping with its own truthfulness, it were enough.

From the great number of manuscripts which Mr Martin left behind him,—all of them without the remotest view of ever being printed,—it has been found rather an anxious and difficult undertaking to make a selection, and to prepare it for the press. At one time, it was thought preferable to confine it within the range of his very excellent course of lectures on the Gospel of Luke ; and at another, to give only the series of sermons on the successive verses of the fifth chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, to both of which allusion is made in the succeeding Memoir. But after full consideration, it has been judged most suitable, to comprise within this volume, a variety of insulated discourses, preached at different times during Mr Martin's ministry in Edinburgh, which appear to present the fairest specimens of his general style of preaching, and are, at the same time, known to have been highly acceptable and useful to those who, with the greatest regularity, waited upon his ministry.

The Letters on Prayer which follow the Discourses, and the occasion of which is also referred to in the

Memoir, must be considered, not as a complete treatise on the subject, but as a fragment ; yet, in this view, and as forming the very last service that Mr Martin was permitted to render to his congregation and to the Church, they possess an interest which seemed to forbid that they should be withheld.

EDINBURGH, *15th April* 1835.



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MEMOIR.

MEMOIR
OF
THE REV. JAMES MARTIN.

THE subject of this Memoir was born at Brechin on the 30th July 1800. His respectable and excellent parents fulfilled their duty to him in a manner not less judicious than it was affectionate, and reaped their richest reward in the future character of their son.

From his earliest days he was a boy of great spirit and remarkable quickness; fond of play, but when brought to apply his mind to the business of the school, or to any of his prescribed exercises, possessing an intellectual power by which he was enabled to surmount all their difficulties, and generally, in half the time which was required by others. Among his companions he was distinguished by an air of refinement, great ingenuousness, manliness, and activity,—in-somuch, that some of those who remember him as a boy, when trying to recall the scenes of that period, have a distinct impression of his figure and manner, although they can scarcely recollect a circumstance respecting those who were his companions; whom he almost uniformly outstripped,

both in the employments of the school, and in all their private competitions and rural games.

Of the season and scenes of his boyhood, he preserved a very vivid remembrance, and often alluded to them. The watchful kindness and care of his mother were especially imprinted on his heart; and when, in the spring of 1832, and a few months before the state of his health obliged him to leave his native country, he made an excursion for a short time to Rothsay, attended by the affectionate sister who is now the only remaining member of his father's family, his mind was constantly dwelling on the early period of their lives, and, by his conversation, he seemed to find a peculiar pleasure in living, as it were, all their young days over again.

It has sometimes been quaintly said, that the boy is father to the man; and the saying was verified in the case of Mr Martin. For the very same cast of character which distinguished him in his earliest years, was strongly perceptible during the whole of his future course. The instincts of his childhood became the dispositions of his youth, and were gradually ripened into the principles of his manhood. The same quickness and aptness of perception,—the same courage and independence of mind,—the same fixedness of purpose and power of application,—the same ambition and determination to excel in every thing in which he engaged,—and the same steadiness of attachment and warmth of heart which were visible in his youth, characterized his advanced years; and he often remarked to those whom he admitted to his private thoughts and experience, that there appeared to be a spirit astir within him, as if it were a separate part of his moral constitution, which was incessantly urging him onwards and upwards, and would never allow him to be at rest, or to remain satisfied with any de-

gree of attainments or of usefulness which he had as yet reached.

At the early age of twelve he entered Marischal College, in the University of Aberdeen, and was a competitor for one of the bursaries. Upon this occasion, his mother, who well knew his ardent temperament, would not allow him to compete for this privilege, until he had given her his solemn assurance that, should he prove unsuccessful, he would not be discomposed by the disappointment,—a promise which he faithfully fulfilled; for, keen and aspiring as he naturally was, his ardour was always under the control of that regard which he felt for the wishes of his parents, towards whom he was never conscious of having done any thing by which he thought they would be grieved or offended.

His course at College was one of vigorous application and unwearied study. His natural quickness, together with the habit of perseverance which he acquired, rendered him an accurate linguist; whilst the more advanced stages of his academical course, in the departments of mathematics and philosophy, afforded, as was natural to a mind of such a constitution as his, the highest gratification and enjoyment, in the enlargement of his knowledge, the strengthening of his reasoning powers, and the cultivation of an originally fine taste in every thing connected either with science or morals. To judge by one of the note-books which he kept during his course at the University, he seems to have found much gratification from the intercourse which he maintained with his fellow-students; where though there is but little recorded of his own performances, he has copied out several of what he appears to have considered the best of those essays and exercises which were prepared and given in by his companions, either at the Moral Philosophy Class or the Literary Society of Marischal College.

Soon after entering the University, Mr Martin appears to have formed his resolution as to the profession to which he would devote his life; but, with that diffidence and caution which always characterized him, he never mentioned the circumstance until he had made trial of the steadiness of his own purpose, and found that it was practicable to carry it into effect. When at last he disclosed his long-kept secret, and his plans for life were settled, he entered upon the study of theology and its kindred branches with redoubled energy; and the natural qualities of his mind found in these pursuits a most engaging and appropriate exercise. Resolved not to be satisfied with the mere formal discharge of routine duties, or with the attainment of such a degree of proficiency as might be barely sufficient to admit him to the sacred calling which he had chosen, he set himself in good earnest to become at once a thorough scholar and a sound theologian. To the close of his life, indeed, he had, both with respect to himself and others, an almost impatient jealousy of every thing that was superficial,—a high-minded contempt for all mere sciolists and smatterers, and for the indulgence of that feeling which could permit an individual to sit down in a state of indolent contentment with any thing like inferiority, or even mediocrity, in those useful attainments which were within his reach; and he accordingly felt the deepest impression of the necessity of solidity and depth,—of real, as well as apparent learning, in every one who professed to be either a scholar or a divine.

In February 1818, he records, in a memorandum in his note-book, that the previous eighteen months had been exclusively devoted to his graver studies. At that period, however, he had been led to read a popular poem just then published, and upon this circumstance he adds the following reflection:—“I have seldom found such an interruption!

It recalled to my mind much of that amusement which I formerly derived from works of imagination; and I still found that, though my feelings had long been restrained, they were by no means blunted. I know not how, but I feel, after reading such a work, all my love for severer study rekindled, and that every amusement in which I mix, and which has nothing in it vicious or sinful, only leads me to be more impressed with religious sentiments."

One may easily perceive from such an observation as this, that the assiduity of college-studies had considerably tempered the playful dispositions of his earlier days. And yet, on returning home during the vacation, while he inflexibly maintained his studious habits, he entered with the greatest spirit into the sports of his companions at Brechin, and was foremost in all their schemes for exercise and recreation. But he had then evidently reached that period in his mental history, though sooner than is generally the case, even with men of a kindred character, when a contest takes place between the different elements that enter into the framework of an ardent and highly-tempered mind,—that experimental collision between the opposite forces in its original constitution which is rendered unavoidable, when the art of self-inspection has in some degree been acquired, and the habits of reflection are gradually displacing the headlong tendencies of youth,—when the judgment of a person of strong intellect and sense gets fairly into play with the keen impulses of his nature, and the true character comes to be adjusted. It is an eventful period in the history of every such man, and resembles the junction of two rivers,—the original characteristics of which may have been dissimilar, but which, in their blended course,—when the impetuosity of the one has in some measure been controlled by the depth

of the other,—form, both in volume and velocity, one noble and majestic stream.

In accordance with these observations, it may be noticed, that at the close of the University Session of 1818, Mr Martin, in a short memorandum, thus gives expression to his feelings:—"The session, now nearly completed, has flown swiftly, swiftly away. I hope, however, by the blessing of God, it has not been spent trivially or unprofitably. My studies have been pretty regular and constant. They have been on the three great heads of revealed religion,—the Trinity, the Decrees of God, and Original Sin. They have also included a considerable share of Church-history. My spirit has, in general, and particularly when alone, been inclined to the sombre. I have mixed but little in society, yet I am surely inclined to it. My heart participates in the happiness of my fellow-creatures, and pants to increase it to the utmost,—I love to see them happy.

"Yet I have often thought that I could see through the veil that envelopes my present state, and that God was dealing with me in love,—that he was showing me the vanity of the world,—weaning me from its enjoyments, and teaching me to lay up for myself treasures in heaven. I have often found comfort,—might I say instruction? in the idea, that one day on earth I shall be a child of God, and that I shall see the value of his present dealings, as preparatory steps for an important change."

At this period, whilst his character preserved much of its natural buoyancy and elasticity, and whilst he lost none of the relish which he always had for the objects of external nature, the enjoyments of friendship and domestic society, and the simple pleasures of life, his mind became evidently pervaded by a deeper seriousness, and, with his characteristic fixedness of purpose, he redoubled his application to all

those branches of study by which he might become qualified for attaining eminence in the profession which he had chosen. The sketch of the course of private study to be pursued during the summer months of 1818, which he then drew up, and scrupulously followed out, exhibits a striking example of unrelaxing industry. Every thing is arranged in the most exact order; every hour of the day appropriated to some useful purpose; and the impression is irresistible, that, his views for life being now finally settled, he entered in the most solemn manner upon the work of a vigorous and thorough preparation for it, by the acquisition of that complete scholarship and enlarged information, as well as comprehensive theology, without which, no one knew better than he did, that a clergyman can neither be useful nor respectable; and, above all, by the cultivation of that personal devotedness to God which was still more, in his estimation, the great and essential feature in the character of a minister of the Gospel.

Towards the close of this year he became tutor in the family of Mr Ogilvy of Tannadice, within a few miles of his native place; and in this situation he continued for several years, proving himself a most conscientious preceptor to those who were intrusted to his care; while, by his habits of arrangement, and the secret with which he was well acquainted, of economizing and improving his time, he steadily advanced in his own preparation for the ministry.

On the 15th August 1821, he received a license to preach the Gospel from the Presbytery of Forfar, by the hands of a most respectable and venerable minister of the Church, the Rev. Dr Lyon of Glamis, whose son, the late Rev. William Lyon, of Union Chapel, Aberdeen, a young man of great worth and high promise,—and who, too, was cut off in the very beginning of his labours,—had been one of Mr

Martin's most intimate companions at College ; and towards both of these individuals he always cherished the greatest affection and esteem. His first sermon was preached at Oathlaw, from the words, " God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ;" and, in recording this circumstance in a single sentence in his note-book, he adds the following reflection :—" I have to lament much imperfection ; but I hope I have also some right wishes, and that I sincerely lament my own sinfulness, and sincerely confess my need of God's grace."

During the remainder of this and the following year, he preached, as occasions offered, in the pulpits of the clergy in the neighbourhood of Tannadice, where he resided, and was uniformly considered a young man of superior attainments and high promise. The love which he had for the work to which he had devoted himself, and his kind and disinterested disposition, led him, also, for upwards of a year, to give his services in the church of Cortachy, by officiating once a-month for the individual who was assistant to the minister of that parish ; and this he did, without, in any degree, infringing upon the week-day duties which he owed to his pupils.

With Mr Ogilvy's family he afterwards removed to Edinburgh, where he passed the winter of 1821-1822. About this period he formed the desire of undertaking a minute investigation of the writings of the Greek fathers, and of employing the results of his research in clearing up certain intricate and interesting topics of discussion, and determining some living controversies, which had awakened his curiosity and engaged his mind, either in the course of his reading, or of his conversation with others. Had this purpose been prosecuted, it might have given a new direction to his history, and, peradventure, turned his course of use-

fulness into a different channel from that in which, perhaps more appropriately, it came afterwards to flow. For there can be no doubt that, from the acquaintance with the ancient languages which he possessed, his fondness for critical study, and his inflexible perseverance, he might have made a considerable figure in such a department of literature; and by means of the opportunities which some such privilege as a fellowship at Oxford or Cambridge would have afforded, with all its pleasant appliances of leisure, and libraries, and learned men, it is impossible to say what his talents and ardour might have accomplished.

But the winter which he passed in Edinburgh appears to have fixed him in the purpose of consecrating himself entirely to the work of preaching the Gospel. Besides obtaining those benefits which, by its society and institutions, the metropolis must always afford to a young man of a cultivated and inquiring mind for advancing his general improvement, Mr Martin at this time enjoyed an advantage which he highly valued, and to which he uniformly looked back with the greatest gratitude and satisfaction. This was the opportunity which he had of attending the ministry of the Rev. Dr Gordon, then minister of St Cuthbert's Chapel; whose character and example, no less than his public ministrations, appear to have given greater depth to all his religious sentiments, to have filled his mind with a stronger sense of the high and honourable nature, as well as the solemn responsibility of the ministerial office, and to have set him forward in his course, more intensely alive to the importance which attaches to the spiritual interests of immortal beings, and more deeply impressed with the magnitude of his own duties. At any rate, he certainly did ascribe much that he had acquired in the seasoning of

his mind, both with divine truth and devout feeling, to his residence in Edinburgh at this period.

On the 8th April 1823, Mr Martin received a presentation to the church of Glenisla, in the Presbytery of Meigle, and was ordained on the 18th September following.

The parish of Glenisla is a remote and sequestered district, penetrating far into the Grampians, and in its scenery partaking of all the characteristics of a mountainous country. The great proportion of its inhabitants, like the family of Jacob, have ever been shepherds, both they and their fathers; and when Mr Martin was settled among them, he found them possessed of all that primitive simplicity and kindheartedness, which are generally exhibited by a pastoral people. They cherished the greatest respect for the clerical office and character, and evinced the strongest wish to live on the most intimate and cordial terms with their new minister. At the same time, being attached to many old notions and natural prepossessions, it could not be concealed that his delicate form and youthful appearance, his gentle though not familiar manners, and the first impression of his character, led several of them to fear that he was not altogether suited for the situation to which he had been appointed; and that he was of too slender a frame, and too ethereal a mind, to enter into such a state of society as existed among them,—to sympathize with their habits, or fall in with their homely mode of life. Among other things, upon his first entrance into the parish, and in the prospect of commencing his ministry on the following Sabbath, he was warned that the parishioners would hope to see him on that occasion “with nothing before him in the pulpit except the Bible.” In this wish,—founded on an opinion very general in Scotland, and by some persons called a prejudice, but having a deeper foundation in our mental con-

stitution, and in the reason of things, than is always perceived,—the young minister of Glenisla did not disappoint his congregation.

In the course of a short period, every apprehension on the part of the people was dispelled, and Mr Martin steadily advanced to the attainment of their entire confidence and affection. *They* were unsophisticated, and *he* was sincere, faithful, and judicious ; and without compromising one principle, far less winking at any sinful practice, he commended himself to their respect and esteem, as one who had their real interests deeply at heart, and the primary object of whose life and labours was to do them good. Suiting his ministrations and intercourse to their real character and circumstances, with that tact, discrimination, and kindness of nature, which he so eminently possessed ; being regular and diligent in his course of visiting and catechizing, in the superintendence of Sabbath-schools, in his attention to the sick, and in waiting by the bedside of the dying ; and particularly affectionate and encouraging in his admonitions to the young to seek after God,—every one of his flock, who was not utterly reprobate, came experimentally to know the value of possessing such a pastor,—a course of conduct, which uniformly operates with the same effect upon a simple-hearted people, and gains the homage even of those who may not be permanently benefited by it in their most important interests. There were two practices prevalent in the parish of Glenisla at the time when he became connected with it, which he felt had a most demoralizing effect on the minds and habits of the people, as they ever must have. The one was the encouragement given to illicit distillation ; and the other, the mode in which funerals were conducted, involving a great waste of time and substance, and tending to induce or to confirm habits of dissipation. Con-

vinced that the moral influence of truth, the enlightening and quickening of the conscience, and the solemn considerations which religion alone presents, when brought to bear upon a community, through the agency of a minister whose motives are properly understood and appreciated, are far more effectual than any prohibitory denunciations or sumptuary laws, he set himself with vigour to the removal of these evils. A complete extinction of them could not indeed be expected to be the immediate result of his anxiety and efforts; yet, in this, his wisdom and decision were far from being fruitless. And before his connexion with the parish was dissolved, he had the satisfaction of knowing, that not only the habits of many had undergone a perceptible improvement, and the duty of family-worship was more regularly observed, but that some were brought in good earnest under the power of godliness; while the occasional opposition and resistance that he experienced from the enemies of all religion, only served, as it will ever do with minds of a similar mould, to stimulate him to redoubled zeal in his own appropriate work.

It was only, however, when the tie which united Mr Martin to his first flock came to be broken, that the affection of his people towards him, and the strength of the corresponding interest with which they were regarded on his part, were properly felt. Attached to their minister as were both the congregations among whom he was afterwards settled, they could not be more so than were the people of Glenisla. It is no exaggeration to say, that many of them mourned over the separation, as if it had been that of a beloved relation; and the strongest reverence for his name and his usefulness is felt throughout the parish to the present day. On the other hand, his attachment to the first flock of his care was no less sincere and abiding. As the

period of his removal from them approached, his spirits became much depressed; and when, after delivering his last sermon, he paid a short visit to his intimate friend and neighbour, Mr Loudon, then minister at Lintrathan, his mind was in a state of great agitation and perplexity. Often, after he had been settled in Edinburgh, did he revert to the quiet and tranquil scene of his labours at Glenisla, to the kindness and honest-heartedness of its people, and to its rural scenery, in which he had found so much enjoyment. And when he again came in contact with any of his former parishioners, no one could witness their meeting without having a strong impression of the peculiar nature of that tie and that intercourse which had subsisted between them. On their part, there was exhibited a respectful but irrepressible joy at again seeing one who had been so strongly endeared to them; and on his, all that benignity and tenderness, which told how much he still had them on his heart.

Although, in many respects, nothing could be more dissimilar than the spheres of his first and of his after services in the Church, yet the few years which Mr Martin spent in the seclusion of the country, formed an invaluable preparation for the labours of the city. In its quiet retreat he had enjoyed the opportunity of having his talents matured, his knowledge of himself and of the human heart enlarged, his resources as a theologian augmented, and his whole character as an industrious and assiduous clergyman fixed and established. This must ever be an incalculable advantage to any man who is afterwards called to labour amidst the incessant distractions of a crowded community; and hence, when Mr Martin came to Edinburgh, young as he then was, and humble and diffident as he always was, he commended himself to those who had proper access to ob-

serve him, as no raw or unfurnished youth, who had obtained a premature advancement, but as a man, the solidity and steadiness of whose character, and the extent of whose qualifications were very rarely to be found at his time of life.

The circumstances connected with his translation to Edinburgh are not without interest, and may shortly be stated.

In 1827, the prospect of a vacancy having occurred in St Cuthbert's Chapel, at Stockbridge, the Kirk-session very soon thereafter unanimously resolved to invite Mr Martin to undertake the pastoral care of this congregation. To him their attention had been directed on a former occasion, when a vacancy had occurred in Hope Park Chapel, by the removal of Dr Gordon to the New North Church, and when they had been disappointed in securing the services of the Rev. John Bruce of Guthrie. In declining the nomination, he, however, strongly urged upon their notice the high qualifications of Mr Martin, who had been mentioned to them from other quarters, as an individual altogether worthy of their choice; and founded his recommendation on a long course of the most intimate friendship and intercourse. Some of those members of the Session of St Cuthbert's, who were in consequence induced to take an opportunity of hearing Mr Martin in his little church among the mountains, will not soon forget the Communion-Sabbath which they spent at Glenisla, or the fervour with which he addressed to his pastoral people the words of eternal life from a passage in the eighty-fourth Psalm. Circumstances, however, led at that time to the selection of the Rev. John Forbes, now of Glasgow; but on the opening occurring at Stockbridge, in the following year, the Session, after being again disappointed in the hope of inducing Mr Bruce to accept of it, at once fixed on Mr Martin,—a choice which was immediately and cordially responded to by the congregation, among whom he was settled on the 16th May

1828, and commenced his labours on the following Sabbath, with a short but energetic discourse from the Apostle's words,—“ I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.”

It is not a very easy task to describe or to characterize the labours of Mr Martin during the three years and a half of his ministry at Stockbridge. It seems almost as if the record of them might be more appropriately looked for and read in the tablet of many a heart, than in the pages of a book,—so deep was the impression which they made, and so little the noise. And yet it is not only due to his memory, to give testimony to his fidelity and unwearied ardour in this sphere of his usefulness, but may tend to refresh and re-invigorate the minds of some who were then the objects of his pastoral care, and for whose spiritual benefit he spent his strength.

He was not long settled at Stockbridge, until the mode of his preaching and his whole character laid a powerful arrest on the minds of his congregation. At first he showed a considerable degree of reserve, arising from the natural unobtrusiveness of his disposition,—that delicacy which made him instinctively retreat from every degree of observation, which was not required by his real duties,—and from his antipathy to every thing like display, or to be made the object of a merely ceremonious deference, or of that bustling attention which is so often paid to those who are invested with the clerical office. But after the lapse of a short time, by his uniformly calm and dignified demeanour, he commanded the respect of every one who had occasion to observe him, and was regarded as a man of lofty integrity and independence of mind, as well as truly a man of God. There was a quickness and discernment, as well as a solemnity and impressiveness, accompanying all his intercourse with his people, which

went beforehand, as it were, to gain an entrance to the mind for every thing he said; whilst his pulpit-discourses ere long discovered to those who attended to them, distinct traces of much thought and scriptural study, and were delivered with so much sincerity and simplicity, as made almost every one feel how much *he* ought to be interested in the truths to which he listened, seeing that the preacher was himself so earnest in inculcating them.

During the first year of his ministry, he delivered a short series of discourses on the character of Elijah, another on that of John the Baptist, and a third on the history of the Apostle Paul, which were peculiarly instructive, and greatly esteemed by many in his congregation. These, as well as not a few others, were especially interesting to a large number of young persons, who became strongly attached to his ministry, and waited on it with the greatest advantage and delight; feeling almost impatient during the week for the coming Sabbath, when the subject was to be resumed, and returning to the exercise with that feeling of appetite and relish which is so favourable a symptom in those who are privileged to hear the Gospel faithfully and affectionately preached. In the following year he commenced a course of lectures on the Gospel of Luke, which were the result of much anxious study. These were uninterruptedly continued during the whole period of his ministry at Stockbridge,—the one on our Lord's Ascension, founded on the closing words of the Evangelist's narrative, being the last which he delivered in the chapel, when he took leave of his congregation on the 11th September 1831.

Those who had the advantage of statedly hearing this course of lectures, and who attentively followed Mr Martin through his delineation of our Lord's life and character, may possibly recall that period with the deepest gratitude for the

blessing communicated in such instruction. They cannot have forgotten the illustration of the separate petitions contained in the Lord's Prayer, which was remarkably impressive; or the deep insight into the Redeemer's character, which was discovered during the exposition of the leading events of his life, and more particularly of the closing scenes of his history. In the contemplation of One, as he himself expressed it, who was "almost too holy to look upon," his spirit seemed bowed down in the lowliest abasement, whilst it was also elevated and filled with the most ardent desire of showing forth to others his blessed Master in all that majesty and glory in which he himself beheld him, and of unceasingly urging upon all hearts his claim to that love, and reverence, and obedience, which his own truly rendered.

It has already been observed, that the time which Mr Martin spent in the comparative retirement of a country-parish had tended greatly to enrich and mature his mind, and formed, therefore, a most valuable preparation for the very different sphere in which he was afterwards called to labour. Yet, from his pulpit at Stockbridge, he delivered but few of the sermons which he had prepared at Glenisla, and scarcely any of them without writing them anew. This circumstance not only indicates the judgment and fidelity with which he discharged the duties of his new situation, but serves also to mark the progress of his own mind, and his rapid advancement in all that constitutes the highly-furnished and accomplished spiritual instructor. No one who attentively followed the course of his public services could avoid observing the successive steps of his improvement in the true art of preaching. He gradually threw off every thing that was juvenile, either in matter or manner,—he cast away all inflated expressions, all mere ornament in the illustration of his subjects; he dealt but sparingly in ima-

ginative description, and not at all in mere generalizing or empty declamation. Textuality, he often said, appeared to him to be one of the chief excellences of a sermon,—the bringing out by deep, and patient, and prayerful research, what was the mind of the Divine Spirit in the Word,—and, after having exhibited it in all its meaning and force, pressing it home on the understandings and consciences of men. He was always afraid of being guilty, and of being thought even capable, of giving fanciful interpretations or adaptations of Scripture. If, in the course of his illustration, he met with any striking truth, any important principle, or ascertained fact, in verification of which he could appeal to something which was obvious and undeniable in the experience or consciousness of his hearers, upon this he seized, and, as if anxious to render it the prominent point on which their minds should rest, and that it should become a permanent element in their reflections, or interweave itself, as it were, with the hidden workings of each individual bosom, he recalled it again and again in the course of the application of his subject.

This it was, and nothing merely adventitious or external, which formed the chief ingredient in his mode of preaching, and rendered it so interesting to those in whose hearts he succeeded in touching those chords that were in unison with the feelings of his own; which, indeed, is the true secret of the success of any public speaker. Founding his arguments upon ascertained facts or acknowledged truths, and referring to something in his hearers with which these correspond, and of which they themselves are intimately conscious, he finds access at once to the seat of conviction and the springs of conduct. By telling aloud all that is in their hearts, he makes them feel as if he not only had been privy to their thoughts, but had been the witness of certain processes in their minds of which they themselves

had hardly been aware, but which are now vividly recalled: they wonder, perhaps, how this man comes to know so much of their secret character, or how, at least, they had never heard these things brought home to them before. And hence, in cases where there is guilelessness and honesty, the preacher comes insensibly to be intrenched in their affections as if he were a bosom-friend. If any one, therefore, is desirous of knowing what it was that rendered Mr Martin's preaching so interesting to those who regularly waited on his ministry, and to whom it was blessed to be so useful, it may be said, that, along with the humble and dependent spirit in which the whole was done, and which gave to all his studies and discourses their appropriate character, it consisted in nothing more than this,—after drawing forth what is in the Word of God, and then what is to be found in the depths of the human heart, making the one of these, in some penetrating, instructive, or consolatory way, as the case might require, to bear upon the other. With this remark, however, it is necessary prominently to conjoin another,—that, one of the uniform characteristics of his preaching, was to be found in the strictly evangelical strain by which it was pervaded. His own mind being conclusively arrested by the great doctrines of the Cross, and his heart moving invariably under the influence of an overflowing sense of redeeming love, he was constrained, by the moral impulse of the new nature which was strengthening and maturing within him, habitually to present and to enforce upon others, that which was both the food and the cordial of his own spiritual being. And this being done in perfect keeping with good taste and propriety, and with the classical and academic style of his whole mind and character, the manner and outward form of it at least could give no offence to the most refined or cultivated hearer.

There was one circumstance, with regard to his sermons, which sometimes pressed upon his mind,—the solemn apprehension which he felt, of speaking in certain cases above the range of his own experience. He often remarked, that surely this thought must be harassing to every good man; and that it seemed a very awful thing for a servant of God to be proclaiming truths in which he himself did not fully and perfectly sympathize, or representing the various features in the character of true believers, the spiritual nature of Christ's kingdom, and the deep exercises which occur in the hearts of Christians, far beyond what he has ever found to be true in his own case. In like manner, after having been called into some scene of heavy affliction, he frequently observed, that he was afraid he was unfit to be a minister of comfort, seeing he himself had never known the depth of any such sorrow. Whilst there is something both very quickening and affecting in these thoughts, they must be considered as affording no equivocal proof of the tenderness and humility of the mind in which they dwelt; and it is nevertheless most true, that one reason why Mr Martin's discourses in public, as well as his exhortations in private, were so impressive to those who heard them, is to be found in the fact, that they came to their hearts as being evidently the result of his own practical knowledge, and the real transcript of his own feelings.

Take, as an example, the first sermon in this volume, which has been selected as affording a fair specimen of the author's doctrine, and of his ordinary manner of preaching on a practical subject, but which seems also peculiarly illustrative of his own habit of mind. The view which it contains of the Shunammite is a fine delineation of her character, but is also, in the points to which it relates, very much a portrait of his own. The same remark is applicable to his

sermon on the words, " Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me ; nevertheless, not my will but thine be done," which some individuals may recollect, though they have not here the opportunity of reading it. It contained an impressive representation of the mind that was in the Divine Redeemer, under circumstances of the most intense suffering to which he was subjected for the sinner's sake, as if it had been the picture of that spirit of submission and of humble acquiescence in the Divine will, which, dwelling in the master, was in the course of being transfused into the disciple's heart.

Again, if any one who regularly heard them, recalls to his memory the discourses he delivered in St George's during the summer of the year 1833, on the consecutive verses of the fifth chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, he cannot but recollect that they seemed to embody the sentiments of a man who had the strongest sense of the reality of eternal things, and of their nearness and immediateness to himself, and were delivered with an intense feeling of the infinite importance of the truths they contained.

The method which has now been alluded to, of incorporating with his pulpit addresses the suggestions of his own experience, and of identifying himself with his people, was very consistent with another circumstance which may here be noticed. In the selection of his subjects, and his manner of preparing his sermons, Mr Martin generally adopted a mode which, in as far as others may judge, was well fitted to secure the primary ends of his ministry. The intercourse which he had with his people most frequently suggested the topics on which it seemed profitable that he should address them ; and having fixed upon his subject, it became the matter of his own meditations for a few days ; it was then pondered in his

study in connexion with the light which all Scripture brought to bear upon it, and when his mind had become fully charged with the results of his own reflection and investigation, he proceeded to commit them to writing, which he generally did with a degree of rapidity that seemed to render this last the least part of his labour. Rapt in the truth and importance of what he was desirous of communicating, he hurried on to the expression of it, comparatively regardless as to the precise form in which it was conveyed, provided the substance was preserved.

This circumstance will account for any carelessness of composition which may be observable; and if any one considers that his discourses were written solely for the ear of his people, and that each of them was entirely a new preparation,—never made up of extracts even from his own writings,—and reflects, moreover, on the number which he wrote,—being, with great regularity, a lecture and a sermon in each week,—it will not appear wonderful that he could attend but comparatively little to the rules of polished composition. Notwithstanding this, however, every attentive listener generally felt that he was addressed in the natural language of true feeling.

With regard to the manner in which he conducted the public prayers of his congregation, Mr Martin was a great example. His addresses at the footstool of mercy were the true *cardiphonia*,—the genuine utterance of a heart warmed with devout feeling, and weighed down with a sense of his own and of his people's wants,—the outpourings of a soul which felt itself very near to the Divine presence, and was replenished with the knowledge of the varied forms of Christian experience, and of all the promises of Scripture which were suitable to be pleaded in behalf of each individual of the flock. And there cannot surely be one who suitably entered

into the supplications which he publicly offered up, who will not respond to this representation.

In the performance of the more private, or domestic duties of a clergyman, he was not less exemplary. The visiting of his congregation, and especially the families of the poor, was performed with the most untiring constancy, and nothing was allowed to interfere with the discharge of this part of his work. It was seldom possible to prevail on him to enjoy a single day's relaxation, let the occasion be ever so inviting; and that never, if the case of any one of his people was at all pressing on his mind, to whom his visits might prove of the smallest comfort or advantage. In dealing with those in the lower ranks of life, his kind yet dignified manner immediately gained their confidence and respect. They never could recognise ought in him but the clergyman, and the clergyman in no other light than that of their real friend. His remarkable tact in this department of duty exemplified how possible it is for a wise and good man to win his way to the affections even of the most insensible and vulgar, when he comes to them with a single-minded concern for their spiritual interests; for there is in the very roughest form of human nature something which commends a sustained course of kind and judicious dealing, first to the attention, and gradually to the heart. Although there was occasionally a boldness in his reproofs, and a fidelity in his exhortations, amounting almost to sternness, yet there was not an individual among the many for whose good he thus privately watched and laboured, who did not feel the strongest reverence for his character, and very few who did not entertain towards him a kindlier sentiment. In addition to his course of domestic visitation at Stockbridge, he established a Home-mission in the district, with two agents to conduct it, the fund for maintaining which

was, to a large extent, supplied by himself, and he frequently preached in the stations during the week. He had also meetings throughout the year for the different classes of the young persons of his congregation, and for those who sought admission, or who had been admitted to the Lord's Table. These occasions were very solemn and impressive; to them, there is reason to think, that not a few can look back with peculiar interest as the period of their first deep impressions of religion; and among the most valued articles in the repositories of some of these individuals, there may perhaps be found the notes of the instructions which then, as well as in public, they received from the lips of their faithful guide and humble-minded pastor.

From the abundant labours in which Mr Martin was thus engaged, it may naturally be supposed that he could have but very little time for any other employments. Yet, whilst he remained at Stockbridge, he went through a course of morning exercises along with a friend and former fellow-student, to keep up his familiarity with the Hebrew language, and contrived also to enlarge his knowledge of general literature, and to become acquainted with the best works of the day. To enable him to accomplish all this, he went but sparingly into general society, and was never to be seen in any place of public resort. Even in the ecclesiastical courts, which his situation as the minister of a chapel did not require him to attend, but in the proceedings of which he could not but be interested, he was very seldom to be found. And he scrupulously avoided interfering in the least degree with other people's affairs, or placing himself in circumstances where he could not carry with him the distinct characteristics of his office. No one could meet with him, even for the shortest time, without observing his consistency in this respect, which certainly formed one chief cause of the pure and un-

blemished character which he attained, as well as freed him from many of those secular interruptions which might have consumed his time. Had he sought them, occasions were not wanting in which he might, with great effect, have mingled in some of those discussions and collisions, whether in spheres of a public or private nature, which are ever and anon arising to kindle the spirits and call forth the energies of ardent men. But, little practised as he was in the ways of the world, his natural sagacity and self-knowledge enabled him to perceive that, even though solicited and appealed to, it was better for him, in the situation which he then occupied, to avoid becoming entangled with questions in which the performance of his own peculiar duties was not involved; and to escape from every situation, by which, however pure his intentions, his character as a minister of the Gospel might even seem to be compromised, or his usefulness impaired. Having found that, in the fulfilment of his own charge, he had sufficient to engage him, he let every thing else alone. Hence he never got into situations of trouble or disquietude; he never gave offence, and his life was placid and serene. And when, from scenes of contest, or from amidst the tossings and distractions of a bustling life, any of his friends broke in upon the *arcanum* of his retirement, it was at once soothing and instructive to witness the calmness and peace in which he seemed uniformly to be shrined. One has occasionally seen upon the shore in a tempestuous day, when the waves beat high and dashed over the rocks that withstood their force,—some quiet little creek or bay, under the lee of a neighbouring reef, to which the wind did not reach, and where the face of the water was smooth and clear, while all was storm in the outer sea. So it ever seemed with Mr Martin,—the little bay of his own room, or of his own

heart, appeared always tranquil, though hurry and tumult might prevail without.

It has been stated that he went but sparingly into company. Yet he was in the farthest degree removed from being of an unsocial disposition. On the contrary, he was susceptible of the highest enjoyment from friendship; and in those circles where he felt no restraint, he was always happy and cheerful, even playful,—full of conversation and anecdote, and the most delicate humour. It was ceremony that he disliked, and he instinctively recoiled from all mere gossiping, or from having his opinions inquired into, only for the purpose of being quoted or repeated. Did any one, however, address him with the simple and transparent view of acquiring information, or obtaining counsel, in order to profit by, and act upon it? He threw off all reserve, entered at once into his circumstances and feelings, and ingenuously communicated whatever he thought likely to satisfy or to guide him. Did any one express a sentiment in which he could not coincide, or allow himself to be supposed as coinciding? He declined entering into any wordy discussion about it, but generally, in a sentence or two, and with perfect suavity of manner, but an aspect of great firmness and sincerity, said what was sufficient to make the individual think at least that he might be in the wrong,—enough always to save himself from appearing to stand pledged to any thing of which he truly disapproved. If his equanimity was ever disturbed, it was in cases when he heard of, or had occasion to animadvert upon, some exhibition of great folly, ingratitude, or want of heart. And even then, his excited look and manner tended only to give a new form to his real character, and to show his innate love of truth, goodness, and solid worth.

In the autumn of each year, he generally spent a week or

two with his father and sister at Brechin. These were seasons of great refreshment to his mind; and to this filial and fraternal visit, he once or twice added a short excursion into some part of the country which he had never before seen, in which, if he could get any intimate friend to join him, he enjoyed it all the more. Then it was that his mind peculiarly exhibited its natural elasticity, and the spring and vivacity of his spirit became almost like those of a boy discharged from school, though, in any thing that he said or did, he never appeared but in his own fixed and proper character. There are those who enjoyed his society on some of these occasions, who will recall, with the deepest interest, the memory of such pleasant days.

Two circumstances, during the latter part of Mr Martin's ministry at Stockbridge, were sources to him of much gratification and encouragement. The one was his being reunited in neighbourhood and constant intercourse with Mr Bruce, who was at length induced to exchange a country for a city sphere of usefulness, and removed from Guthrie to the New North Parish of Edinburgh. The other was the intimacy which he formed with Dr Chalmers, who, having become a member of his congregation at Stockbridge, and appreciating the high qualities of his mind and character, gave him his powerful friendship and assistance during the whole course of his future ministry.

The immeasurable loss which the congregation and parish of St George, as well as the Church of Scotland at large, sustained by the death of Dr Thomson, occasioned, as it might well do, the deepest anxiety as to the selection of an individual to occupy the pulpit which had been long filled by so distinguished a man. Those to whom it was committed executed their difficult and delicate task with exemplary conscientiousness and disinterestedness; and it is enough here to state,

that of those whose services it was possible to secure, Mr Martin was the person on whom, after the fullest inquiry and observation, their minds came finally to settle; and, accordingly, a presentation was obtained from the patrons in his favour.

During the progress of this affair, he could not be ignorant of what was going forward; yet he never made it the subject of a single remark. If others alluded to it, they only perceived, from any thing he said, that of his own accord, or by any instrument which he might employ, to seek for such promotion, was of all things the farthest removed from his mind,—that the bare contemplation of a change like this was formidable to him; and that he was perfectly passive in the matter, committing the issue of it, as he did every thing in his lot, into the overruling hand of God. When, however, the point was decided, he experienced a severe struggle. For it will not be surprising to such as remember what was formerly stated with regard to the elements of his original character, that all those principles were at work which urged him onwards in the path of professional distinction and usefulness; whilst, at the same time, he was satisfied with the place which had been given him, and knew not what a change might produce. But having learned to keep every natural instinct, whether of ambition or of fearfulness, in subordination to higher incentives,—not from any dissatisfaction with the post which he then occupied, or with any of its accompaniments,—not from motives of worldly honour and advantage,—but after seeking direction from Him whom in all his ways he sought to acknowledge, and fully considering those intimations as to the path of duty which arose out of the whole circumstances of the case, and which are, in general, the best exponents of the will of Providence, he judged it right to accept of the offer

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of St George's. And in this he did no violence to his principles. For true humility does not consist in declining a situation to which, without any interference on our part, we are called, but rather in accepting it, doing our best to fulfil its duties, and feeling and acknowledging that it is through Divine grace alone that we can discharge them. To refuse an office on the plea that we are unfit for it, is just as frequently the offspring of pride as of humility.

He was admitted minister of St George's on the 6th October 1831, and entered upon the arduous duties of his charge, with a mind at once modest and courageous,—diffident, yet resolved. This new sphere of activity was, in many respects, different from that which he had left; but he brought to it the same firmness of mind,—the same devotedness to the great objects of the Christian ministry,—and the same gentle and inoffensive disposition which he had uniformly exhibited. The spiritual advantage of his flock was that which above all things he sought, as well as to approve himself faithful to the solemn obligations under which he had come. Had he been a man of vanity, he might have been elated by his advancement to the position which he now occupied, and by the proofs of interest and attachment which were gathering around him. But his principle was that which Jonathan Edwards expressed regarding himself,—“ I desire not to seek for honour in any other way than by seeking to be good, and to do good.”—“ It *humbles* me,” said Mr Martin, to a friend at Brechin, towards the close of his ministry at Stockbridge, where he was daily growing in acceptance and usefulness, “ when I think of so many of the first people in Edinburgh, for respectability and religion, being collected round me.” And the same lowly and unassuming temper of mind pervaded all his conduct and intercourse during the short period of his connexion with the congregation

of St George's. Obtaining more than a ready access to the families of a great many in the higher classes of society, he never appeared among them but clothed in the independence which belonged to his office, and intent upon the primary objects of a Christian pastor; while his attention to the poor and to those in the humbler walks of life, was as unremitting as it had formerly been. For the benefit of a class of his parishioners who resided in a plebeian district, many of whom could not, from their circumstances, obtain access to his church, he established and supported a parochial mission; and, in the admirable school founded by Dr Thomson, he sought, by every exertion in his power, to keep up that efficient system of education, which, combining sound religious knowledge with the best methods of communicating every other branch of instruction, it had been the great aim of his predecessor to introduce and to maintain.

A class of duties devolved on him as a minister of Edinburgh, to the discharge of which he had not been called at Stockbridge. Becoming again a member of the Church Courts, and having a superintendence of the affairs of some of the public institutions of the city, an additional demand was thus made upon his time, which, without great industry on his part, was likely to interfere with his parochial and congregational ministrations. But the prospect of these did not oppress him. Short, no doubt, was the opportunity that was given for the developement of his character in that wider field of activity on which he had now entered; and soon did his strength fail, though from causes which there is too much reason to conclude would ere long have come into operation in any other sphere of exertion. Yet, a few months after he was settled in St George's, and in the practical knowledge of all that was required of him, although his bodily frame had not advanced in robustness, his mind was in its meridian

vigour, and he seemed like a strong man who rejoices to run a race.

Hence, upon being solicited, and when considerable difficulties had occurred in filling up the office, he accepted the appointment of one of the Secretaries of the Edinburgh Bible Society. With the duties of this situation he associated the idea of much honourable usefulness, not only in promoting the primary object of disseminating the Word of God throughout the world, but in upholding the great cause of pure Bible circulation, which had been so intrepidly maintained by the eminent person whom, in this office, as well as in his church, he was called to succeed. The speech which he delivered at the annual meeting of the Society in 1832, and which is printed in its Report, exhibits the purity of principle and Christian judgment by which he was guided in this department of his labours; and the resolution passed by the Directors, when the state of his health obliged him to relinquish the office, is a testimony to the fidelity and zeal with which, though but for a short season, he fulfilled its duties.

An occasion here presents itself for making one or two observations, which will not be thought inconsistent with the views already given of Mr Martin by those who have attended to them, nor considered out of season.

There is a gentleness of disposition, and a courteousness of manner, that are sometimes allied to a character which, on the whole, is spiritless and insipid. And there is a polish and a delicacy, both of inward feeling and of external bearing, which belong only to high-minded and noble natures, and enter into all our best conceptions of the heroic and soldierly character. It was in this latter combination that the milder features of Mr Martin's mind and manners ever presented themselves to those who really knew him. He who was as a lamb in peace, would have been a lion in war;—the

man who, in the tranquil and private paths of his profession, or in scenes of domestic life, was so full of tenderness, and always so unobtrusive, would, when circumstances required it, and at the demand of duty, have snatched up his sword, plunged into the thickest and hottest of the fight, gathered fresh courage from every obstacle that opposed him, and been among the foremost to crown the citadel with the ensign of victory.

And still more would he have displayed this gallant spirit when called to stand upon the defensive. There can be no doubt, from what he often said, that, in the wider and more public sphere into which he was called as a minister of Edinburgh, had his life been spared and his bodily strength admitted of it, he would have laid himself out for taking an active part in the general ecclesiastical proceedings of the times. And in the controversy that has been kindled on the subject of Civil Establishments of religion, and the fierce onset that has been made against the Church of his Fathers, he would never have contented himself with the pusillanimous position of one who beholds the struggle from afar, but would, by this time, have flung himself on the battlements of the Zion which he loved, and been one of those brave spirits who shall yet successfully defend her against the hostile array that have encamped against her permanence and peace.

In autumn 1832, Mr Martin spent a few weeks in the country, and paid his annual visit at Brechin. After a year of considerable exertion in his new charge, he seemed to feel peculiarly the bracing effects of this season of relaxation. But he had scarcely returned home when some very alarming symptoms in the state of his health made their appearance; and, on the 28th September, he was suddenly seized with a violent discharge of blood, apparently from his lungs. This occurrence, though, from the feelings which he had ex-

perienced for several days, did not appear very much to surprise him, yet awakened the greatest apprehensions as to its consequences. He was as calm, however, and composed, as if nothing extraordinary had happened. Being placed in an upright posture, and required not to make the least exertion, or to speak, he presented the very picture of patience and submission. To one of his friends who came to him soon after this attack, he beckoned with a smile of complacency for a slate which he had provided in order to communicate with those around him, and, in allusion to his own circumstances, and with reference to a passage on the subject of faith, in one of Traill's sermons, on which they had been some days before conversing, he wrote down these words,—“When the wearied traveller is unable to proceed a step farther, he can yet lie down when he is bidden,—this is faith.”*

By the blessing of God on the means employed, there was no immediate return of those symptoms which had excited so much concern in the minds of all his friends; but it was impossible to suppress the fears which had been occasioned as to the future state of his health, and the prospect of his being able to sustain the laborious duties of his charge. In the course of a few weeks he recovered considerably from this attack, but was laid aside from much of the active duty which he would have wished to perform,—the only circumstance that seemed to disturb him during the whole of this trial. As far as it was possible, however, his clerical friends in the city and neighbourhood relieved his mind on this sub-

* These are not the precise words, although they exactly express the meaning of the passage to which reference is made; and which will be found in page 269 of the first volume of the edition printed at Edinburgh, in 1810, of the Works of the Rev. Robert Traill,—an inestimable book, and one most highly valued by Mr Martin.

ject, rallying round him with the most brotherly kindness and affection, and engaging to supply his pulpit from day to day, and to undertake the duties of the communion-season which was then approaching,—in which he was able also himself to take some share.

These services, as well as the deep sympathy of his congregation, tended much to tranquillize his mind under a dispensation that, to one so sensitive and conscientious, could not be but peculiarly severe. Still he had many anxious reflections as to the path of duty which he ought to pursue. Perceiving that it was at least possible, if not highly probable, that he should be unable permanently and adequately to meet the claims of so important a situation, he sometimes had almost resolved to demit the charge of St George's; but he was urged by the members of his Session, and from many quarters, to relinquish this idea, and to devote the succeeding months, as much as possible, to the employment of the means prescribed for the restoration of his health. He accordingly engaged an assistant to officiate for him occasionally on the Sabbath, whilst, as far as his strength permitted, and perhaps considerably beyond it, he continued to minister to the afflicted of his flock; and after remaining through the winter without any aggravation of the symptoms of his disease, he removed in the course of the spring for some time to Rothsay, whence he returned so much recruited as to be able to preside at the communion-service in the month of May, and regularly to preach afterwards once every Sabbath.

Being prohibited, however, from making any other exertion, and recommended to reside in the country, he applied for the permission of the Presbytery of Edinburgh to do this, having resolved that whilst he continued in the charge of a parish, he would on no account become a non-resident mini-

ster without the sanction of his ecclesiastical superiors. This, from the nature of the circumstances, was cheerfully granted, and was accompanied with an universal expression of affection and esteem.

In the case of good men, when approaching any season of severe trial, or when they are about to be removed altogether from the present state of existence, it has been observed that there frequently occurs a certain ordering of outward circumstances and events,—discernible, it may be, only in the retrospect,—which seems as if designed to form a course of preparation for the changes that are at hand, gradually and gently to disengage them from life, and to smooth their descent to the grave. The remark is not inapplicable in the present instance. Withdrawing entirely for six days of the week from active duty, and yet enabled on the Sabbath to meet his congregation and to conduct their devotions, Mr Martin, during the last summer of his life, and the few quiet months which he spent in the cottage to which he retired at Gogar, appears as if he had been undergoing that kindly discipline by which he was to be fitted for the scenes through which he had ere long to pass. There was in his state of health what was sufficient to prevent his indulging any strong anticipation of prolonged life, yet nothing so determinate as to produce a fixed presentiment of an early death; and out of this there grew a confirmed spirit of humble acquiescence in the Divine will, and of entire satisfaction with whatever Almighty wisdom should appoint respecting him,—unquestionably, under any circumstances, the highest condition of the human mind. He seemed to have attained the most firm assurance that God would do nothing and permit nothing which he himself would not wish, did he but know the bearing and issue of events, as God knew them.

While at Rothsay, he had remarked to his sister, that he thought his work was nearly finished, and during his residence at Gogar he once or twice made a similar observation. Yet he was uniformly cheerful,—particularly so on the Sabbath after preaching,—and often spoke as if he felt himself improving in health, and entertained a hope that he should yet be equal to the resumption of all his duties.

When he returned home, however, at the close of the season, after paying a short visit in Argyllshire, and spending a few days at Brechin, the symptoms of pulmonary disease returned, though not with the same violence as before; and his medical friends came decidedly to be of opinion, that it was necessary he should remove to a warmer climate, and recommended his spending the winter at Nice.

The circumstances connected with such a determination could not but be most painful. In an infirm and uncertain state of health, to be severed from every one of his friends, and from all connexion with the sphere of those employments in which he found his highest satisfaction, was no ordinary trial. But his Christian faith, and the manly virtues of his character, triumphed over the misgivings of nature; and having placed himself in the hands of those in whom he had implicit confidence, his mind was at once made up to follow their advice, as the only means which it was left him to employ for the restoration of his health, and attaining the chief object for which he would desire to live. Having made the best arrangements which were possible for the supply of service in his church and parish, in doing which he experienced the greatest kindness and friendship from his brethren in the ministry, he left Edinburgh on the 28th September 1833.

The advantages of foreign travel are turned very differently to account by different individuals. Where some men see

only persons and pictures, landscapes and works of art, others, besides this, form opinions and principles, and acquire enlarged information and practical instruction. The result must, in every case, depend on the natural qualities, and on the progress of individual minds ; and, had the circumstances in which he was placed admitted of his fully enjoying it, no one could have been more favourably constituted or better prepared than Mr Martin, for profiting by the opportunity which he now unexpectedly possessed of extending his knowledge of men and things. Even though his health was broken, and his mind necessarily anxious, it is evident, both from the letters which he wrote and the observations contained in a journal which he regularly kept, that he entered France with much of that keen and ardent feeling which had characterized his earlier years.

In his journey from Dieppe to Paris, he experienced all those emotions which are natural to an inquiring and reflecting mind on first visiting a foreign country. The manners and habits of the people ; the conversations in which he mingled ; the villages and chateaux he passed ; and the scenes which he witnessed, particularly in the Cathedral of Rouen, were all invested with a novelty and interest which kindled up many latent emotions in his breast ; whilst Paris itself awakened all his historical recollections, and in its galleries of sculpture, and especially the Hall of the Romans, his mind reverted to the descriptions of Tacitus, and employed itself in comparing the busts of the Emperors with the various images which had long been imprinted on the tablet of his imagination.

The following are the reflections which he makes on visiting Notre Dame :—“ Worship was going on while I was in Notre Dame, but there was hardly any present, except the choir,

who were chanting the Psalms, and an old woman or two counting their beads, or mumbling over their prayers at some particular shrine. Sometimes a person would come in for a moment, kneel on the pavement, and go out again. One is ever ready to lose sight of that simple declaration of the Saviour,—‘ The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth ; for the Father seeketh such to worship him.’ Alas ! how much is this forgotten every where ; and how entirely lost amidst the ceremonies with which the Church of Rome has invested religious worship !”

During his stay at Paris he spent a very agreeable day in visiting Versailles, along with Mr Pyt, one of the Protestant ministers at Paris, with whom he had formerly corresponded on the business of the Bible Society, and in the public worship of whose congregation he found much satisfaction in joining.

On the 16th October, he left Paris, and seems to have suffered considerably in his health during his journey to Chalons, from the state of the weather and the nature of the roads. At the latter place he took the steam-boat to Lyons ; the sunrise on the morning of his departure, and the scenes throughout the day, possessing a great charm for an eye like his. The following is part of his description :—
“ The autumnal tint was on all the trees, and I could well conceive how the name of La Belle France was no more than what this country deserved. I was often reminded of that noble sail down the Clyde, which nobody can have seen without admiring. But much as I love the scenes of my own dear land, I must confess that the scene to-day far surpassed it. The Saone is a nobler river than the Clyde. The range of country much wider than about Dumbarton ; and beauty

and magnificence were so happily blended, that I can hardly hope the Rhone will surpass them. I shall never forget a magnificent and even rocky mountain, of no mean elevation, rising from the very edge of the river, some miles before reaching Lyons."

In the steam-boat he met with a priest, from whom he obtained much information as to the nature of the education of the young men who were training for the priesthood, and other matters in which he was interested. But their conversation dropped when they approached Lyons, so absorbed was he in the scenery which every where met his eye, and especially the remains of the Roman aqueduct, which are to be seen about a league and a half from the city. At Lyons he met with several Christian brethren, to whom he was introduced by Mr. Monod, the Protestant minister, and in whose society he was much gratified.

On the 24th October he left Lyons, taking the steam-boat on the Rhone as far as Avignon, and travelling from thence to Brignolles by the *Diligence*. On the journey his mind appears to have been intensely engaged in admiring the Alps, and, according to his natural habit, in comparing them with the mountains of Scotland. As was usual with him also, one endeared itself to him peculiarly; he describes it as "one mass of living rock, of a grey silvery colour, with not a lichen apparently to be found on it, which reminded me of the everlasting hills of which the Psalmist speaks."

At Brignolles he went into a church during worship, and remarks,—“It was about three-fourths full, almost with women. I question whether a much better week-day congregation could be assembled in Edinburgh. I read part of the diocesan address, by the Bishop of Frejus to his priests and people, on the church-door. So far as I read, it was ex-

cellent,—exhorting them to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, in whom alone was eternal life. The greater part of it, however, was torn down, in which I hope there was nothing to interfere with the sentiments in the commencement, which were truly apostolical; and I am pleased to indulge the hope that this good bishop may be one of those truly Christian pastors that the Church of Rome has sometimes seen.”

At Antibes he experienced the greatest delight in gazing on the deep bright blue of the Mediterranean; and, on obtaining the first view of Nice, hailed it with emotions of no ordinary kind, as the place to which, in the course of Providence, he had been conducted, for the trial of an experiment on which so much of his future history might depend.

He remained at Nice three months. During this period he was generally able to ride out every day, and found great enjoyment in the scenery of the country, and the various objects which attracted his attention, of all which he gave a most animated description, both in the letters which he wrote to his friends and in his journal. Here, too, he met with some Christian men, from whose company and conversation he derived much satisfaction and enjoyment. Besides the English clergyman of the place, and some others, he alludes particularly to a gentleman from Scotland, another from Ireland, and a third from America, sojourners for a season, like himself, in this land of strangers, whose friendship and fellowship were eminently soothing to him. And it was here, also, that he employed some portion of his time in fulfilling a request that had been made to him by a member of his congregation at St George's, whom he greatly esteemed, in embodying, in the form of a few letters, his thoughts on the subject of Prayer, which conclude the present volume, and which formed

part of the manuscripts that were transmitted to his friends after his death.

During his continuance at Nice, his health did not become worse; yet it is too evident that it did not undergo any material improvement, although he was most scrupulous in attending to every thing necessary to secure the end for which he had been sent thither; and this, less from any selfish feeling, than from the conscientious conviction that it was a duty which he owed to others. His letters were uniformly cheerful, though there were occasional indications of a want of confidence in the ultimate success of the means which he was so faithfully employing for his restoration. The following passages from one of them, and from his journal while at Nice, exhibit different views of his state of mind:—

“ I am just as happy as I could be at such a distance from my field of duty, and most thankful for past and present mercies. The Sabbath is the day when I feel my exile most. Last Sabbath, and during the Psalmody, when some note was struck that brought my own dear flock before me, I do confess that I wept bitterly in the chapel, and could hardly get myself composed again. Surely I have been most self-willed and rebellious, when no less severe and bitter a chastisement than this would reclaim me !”—“ To-day I went to the Protestant Chapel built by Lady Olivia Sparrow, and after service visited the little cemetery. It contained the tombs of several of whom I had heard, and of Lady Maxwell, one of the last, who has left a sweet savour of piety and charity behind her at Nice. A mournful place this little burying-ground is ! Why it should be more so than any other burial-ground is not very clear to reason or to faith; and yet it is one of the last feelings with which a man

parts, the desire of mingling his dust with those of his kindred; though the poet has truly said, that a man can have only one country, but he may any where find a grave."

Being recommended to leave Nice at this season, he did so on the 10th February, in company with part of the family of the Earl of Dalhousie, of whose kindness and attention to him during the winter he was deeply sensible, and, parting from them at Genoa, took the steam-boat for Leghorn and Civita Vecchia, and arrived at Rome on the 22d. From the severity of the weather, however, and the fatigue of travelling, his health had suffered during this journey and voyage, in a degree from which it never recovered. "Alas!" he said in one of his letters, "there is no inspiration in Rome to me at this moment, and never did ignorant *Paysan* tread the *Via Sacra* with more indifference than I have done. Yet I bless the Lord for many mercies. When I was pondering how I should do living alone, I met the two young gentlemen with whom I travelled from Edinburgh to Lyons, and as they wished much that I would join them, and had a spare room, I have done so. They are more than kind, and one of them is a surgeon,—an object at present. I have found here also a Christian friend to whom I was much attached at Nice, and I have many introductions to excellent people, if my health permitted me to deliver them. What an interesting thing it is to find little knots of Christians wherever you come! At Nice, Leghorn, and Rome, St Paul might still find brethren with whom he might be tempted to tarry certain days. I am thankful to say that my own spirit has been wonderfully sustained during these past weeks of trial. I trust it is beginning to be divorced from all creature things. I have been seeking to live by the day, and not trouble myself with to-morrow, which I may never see. I cannot al-

ways venture to face the thought of not seeing Edinburgh again; but I am seeking to familiarize my mind with the thing as good, if the Lord appoint it."

The chastened and submissive state of mind which these reflections indicate, was not inconsistent with his enjoying much that he met with and saw in Rome. On the contrary, his journal abounds with the most vivid descriptions of the principal objects,—St Peter's and the Vatican,—the colleges and seminaries of the priests,—the apartments of Ignatius Loyola,—the villas, gardens, and terraces, which appear to have afforded him peculiar pleasure; and even the spectacles of the Holy Week, which were naturally contemplated with very different feelings. One day in March, when he was unable for much exertion, he records, that he took a drive to the spot, about two miles distant from Modern Rome, where the Apostle Paul is said to have been beheaded. After giving a description of the place, he remarks,—“ There can be no doubt that the whole is a fiction. St Paul, I should think, would be beheaded in prison; but one may be pleased even with an imaginary spot for a moment, and so I was disposed to be. Rome is strongly associated with St Paul, as the place from which he wrote so many of his epistles. It is almost certain that he suffered here; and who would not be willing to believe for a moment that he stood on the very spot where the heroic Apostle finished his course, after having so nobly kept the faith! The whole of the last chapter of 2d Timothy was fresh in my recollection; and who can doubt but the blessed Apostle found himself strengthened and supported in his last moments, as he expresses himself in the prospect of them? ”*

* These reflections may, perhaps, remind those who are familiar

One additional extract must close all that can here be given from his own pen; and the reflection with which it terminates will not inappropriately lead to the short sequel of his history. It is dated on a Sabbath, when, from the effects of cold and fever, he was unable to leave his room; in reference to which he says,—“ I have been falling off ever since I came to Rome, and now find myself so weak that I can hardly walk. This new affliction is very trying, especially at the time on which my friends had built so much. Yet I bless God, though I have never been worse than I now am since my first illness, when I was very differently situated, that I feel no disposition to question the wisdom and goodness which run through this dispensation. Sometimes there was a shrinking from suffering, and a wish that all were soon over rather than have many such conflicts to meet; but generally my mind has reposed upon God, as the present help in time of trouble, and left all consequences to him. I cannot forget the total freedom I have enjoyed from all anxiety about my journey homewards, or how I shall be able to travel. I mention this, as so contrary to

with the life of HENRY MARTYN, of his description of a similar exercise of mind, when, during his travels in Persia, he arrived at Mount Ararat, and fancied many a spot where Noah might possibly have offered up his sacrifices. There are other points in the life and character of that distinguished and devoted man, which one can hardly avoid recalling, when thinking of the subject of the present Memoir. For they were not only kindred spirits in the general end and great aim of their existence, but there is a striking resemblance in several of the circumstances, both of their early and their latest days, as well as in some of the forms in which the zeal and ardour, the humility and tenderness, of their minds were manifested, in their fondness for philological studies, their love of simplicity, and the pure and elevated enjoyment which they both appear to have derived from the objects of external nature.

my natural disposition, which is so anxious. I hope it is not indifference or recklessness, but springs from confidence in God, who will order all things aright. O how small a matter it is where one dies, if he dies in the Lord, and falls asleep in Jesus !”

He continued at Rome for some weeks after this was written ; and the following extract of a letter from Mr Vesey Colclough, the gentleman from Ireland with whom he had become acquainted at Nice, will communicate an impression as to the state of his mind, as well as of his health, both while he remained in that place, and during his continuance at Rome :—

——“ We arrived at Nice about the same time, and I was permitted the privilege of making his acquaintance immediately on our arrival. For nearly two months I enjoyed the advantage of his society, during which time, his health, though evidently in a delicate state, was not such as to excite alarm, or debar him the advantages of horse-exercise, and the enjoyment of the climate and scenery. Our conversation was generally on subjects of religion, and his mind seemed uniformly in a tranquil and happy frame, except as regarded his flock. This subject at first seemed to give him much anxiety ; which, however, was graciously removed after some time, of which he gave me repeated assurances.

“ He joined me again at Rome, but with visible marks of increased debility. Here I was permitted, in a slight degree, to administer to his comfort, and daily to witness the consolations he enjoyed in his Saviour. During my stay at Rome, our intercourse was uninterrupted ; and I, therefore, had an opportunity of remarking his state of mind, which was eminently raised above the world, and seemed divested of almost every earthly anxiety. His rejoicing in

Christ Jesus increased with his debility. Walking one day with him outside the walls of Rome, he said, that ‘ he found himself so far on the way, that, had he his choice, he doubted if he would return ;’ and he often expressed a wish, that if it pleased the Lord to remove him while on the Continent, it might be at Leghorn, as there were many pious persons there, whose acquaintance he had made in passing from Nice to Rome.”

Feeling himself gradually declining, he became anxious to leave Rome, if, peradventure, he might yet be enabled to reach his native country. He, accordingly, proceeded to Leghorn, where he arrived on the 7th of May, much exhausted ; and took up his residence in the San-Marco Hotel, kept by Mr and Mrs Thomson, most respectable natives of his own country, in whose house he had remained a night on his way to Rome ; upon which occasion, it is not a little remarkable, that, from the Christian and considerate attention which he experienced, and the strong association with home which he here naturally felt, he had expressed himself, as if this were the house, should it be the will of God that he was not to return to his native country, in which he would prefer to die ! The deep interest which Mr and Mrs Thomson felt in the humble and heavenly-minded Scottish Pastor, who had, in fact, returned to die under their roof, and their affectionate care and kindness to him in his last days, can never be remembered but with the warmest gratitude on the part of those by whom he was loved and esteemed. There were others, also, whose names might be mentioned, who, not more from sympathy in his situation, than respect for his character, strove, by every means in their power, to sooth and alleviate his sufferings ; which it was mercifully ordered should neither be long nor severe. His intention on arriving at Leg-

horn had been to embark in the first vessel that should sail for England; but when this was found impossible, it was displaced by a desire to depart and to be with Christ, accompanied with the most devout thanksgivings for all the Divine mercy and grace which he had experienced. His mind continued uninterruptedly tranquil and serene. To Mr Hare, the English clergyman of the place, who waited on him with the most brotherly affection, he expressed from day to day his firm and unwavering dependence on the Lord Jesus Christ, for that eternal life into the possession of which he was about to enter; and his preparation for this blessed inheritance being completed, and his Master's work with him fulfilled, he peacefully fell asleep on the afternoon of Thursday, the 22d May.

The following passages, in the letter in which Mr Hare communicated to his father the intelligence of his death, and in others from Mr and Mrs Thomson of the Hotel, furnish a few particulars of the closing scene:—

Mr Hare writes,—“The decisive change did not take place until the 20th, when the physician who attended him apprized me of his approaching dissolution. From that time, the progress of his disease was rapid; but it was unattended by bodily suffering, and he retained his faculties to the end. On Thursday he breathed his last, without a groan or a struggle. I was not present, but Mr and Mrs Thomson were with him. As soon as they saw his end approaching, they thought of sending for me; but before they could do so, he was no more.—I used to visit him every day,—sometimes two or three times in the day,—but he was not able to converse much, and could not hear me do more than read a few verses of the Bible, or make some observations, and pray. He seemed free from pain during his stay here,

—even his cough was not very troublesome. He was perfectly peaceful, and appeared earnestly to desire to depart. It will be a satisfaction to know that every attention was paid him, not only by the people of the hotel, but also by many of our fellow-countrymen, who felt a deep interest in him.—I can fully sympathize in the heartfelt sorrow into which this sad event must plunge the many friends of my dear departed brother. The loss is, indeed, of no common magnitude, both to them and the Church of God. But it ought to be a great assuagement to the bitterness of their grief, that he over whom they mourn, has but made a transition from a scene of much tribulation to a state of untroubled rest and unclouded felicity ; and that he is separated from them by a very slight, and, it may be, a very temporary partition.”

——“ On the Sabbath morning,” says Mr Thomson, in a letter to Mr Colclough, “ I drew his attention to the serenity of the atmosphere. ‘ Yes,’ said he, ‘ this is the day which the Lord made,—you are to have the communion to-day,—“ I was glad when they said unto me, Go ye up unto the house of God,”—will you come back and tell me what you have heard?’—I did so, but found him unable to attend.

“ About three hours before his death, on awaking, he found me leaning on his bed, made an effort to get out his hand, and said, with a most pleasant countenance, ‘ How kind this is !’ I went in again about three o’clock, when he requested me to read a portion of Scripture. I read the fourteenth chapter of John,—when at the last verse, he made a motion for me to stop, and then fell asleep. In a few minutes, he started hastily, and said, with a strong voice, ‘ What is meant by a free port ? my reason for asking is,

that I wish to import a hundred Bibles here.' These were his last words. About five, I found him dying, took him by the hand, and felt the last feeble pulse. His spirit left its earthly habitation at a quarter after five o'clock."

In another letter, to Mrs Ogilvy, Mr Martin's sister, Mrs Thomson adds,—“ On our first sight of him, when he was on his way to Rome, our affections were drawn to him,—there was something so expressive in his countenance. He was only one night with us, and in the evening joined us in family-worship; he was unable to read or explain any part of the Scriptures, but gave us a most excellent prayer. On his return from Rome, he was unfit for any fatigue; so we had not the pleasure of hearing him again. He did not like to see many people, but rather to be alone, to commune with his God; he had great faith, and said that Christ was all in all. His favourite Psalm was the thirty-ninth. He told us how mercifully the Lord had dealt with him, and that his parishioners were so kind and affectionate, and so unwilling to let him give up his church. Dear man! I do not wonder they were much attached to him,—he was so noble-minded, pious, amiable, modest, grateful, and afraid to give trouble. He said very frequently,—‘ What reason have I to be thankful that I suffer so very little pain;’ and his death was a very happy one,—just as if he had gone to sleep,—so very calm.”

His funeral took place on the following evening, and was attended by the English then resident at Leghorn; and his ashes repose in the English burying-ground, where a monument is now in the course of being erected, inscribed with the following just and characteristic tribute which Dr Chalmers has cheerfully paid to the memory of his esteemed and lamented friend:—

HERE ARE INTERRED
THE EARTHLY REMAINS
OF
THE REV. JAMES MARTIN,
OF THE
CHURCH OF SCOTLAND,
LATE MINISTER OF ST GEORGE'S CHURCH, EDINBURGH.
BORN AT BRECHIN, 30th JULY 1800.
DIED 22d MAY 1834.

IT WAS AMIDST THE LABOURS OF A VOCATION WHICH HE ADORNED
THAT HIS STRENGTH GAVE WAY ;
AND THOUGH HE CONSENTED TO TRY THE RESTORATIVE EFFECTS OF A MILDER CLIMATE,
HE SUNK UNDER THE POWER OF DISEASE,
TILL IN THIS PLACE,—TO HIM A LAND OF STRANGERS,—
HE BREATHED HIS LAST.

TO THE HIGH CULTURE OF AN ACCOMPLISHED GENTLEMAN AND SCHOLAR,
HE ADDED THE CULTURE OF A STILL HIGHER AND HOLIER DISCIPLESHIP IN THE
SCHOOL OF JESUS CHRIST,—
AND HENCE AN UNION OF THE MOST REFINED SENSIBILITY
WITH THE DEEPEST SACREDNESS.

IN HIS OWN LAND, MANY ARE THE FRIENDS WHO HAVE BEEN SADDENED
BY THE TIDINGS OF HIS DEATH ;
AND MANY AMONG HIS SORROWING PEOPLE,
WHO REVERED HIM AS THEIR FAITHFUL AND CONSCIENTIOUS PASTOR WHILE HE LIVED,
AND IN WHOSE HEARTS THE SENSE OF HIS WORTH, AND PIETY, AND GOODNESS,
WILL LONG ABIDE AS ONE OF THEIR DEAREST AND MOST HALLOWED RECOLLECTIONS.

—BUT CHRISTIANITY SPEAKS AN UNIVERSAL LANGUAGE ;
AND THERE IS A FELT AFFINITY BETWEEN ITS DISCIPLES
THROUGHOUT ALL THE CLIMES AND COUNTRIES
OF THE WORLD.

THIS HE RICHLY EXPERIENCED ALONG HIS JOURNEY ON THE CONTINENT OF EUROPE,—
THE PILGRIMAGE FROM HIS HOME TO HIS GRAVE.
IN THE LEADINGS OF THAT MERCIFUL PROVIDENCE WHICH DIRECTED ALL HIS FOOTSTEPS,
HE, AT PARIS, AND NICE, AND ROME,
WAS BROUGHT INTO CONVERSE WITH FOLLOWERS OF THE LORD JESUS,
WHO SOOTHED HIM ON HIS WAY ;
AND AT LEGHORN, THERE WERE CHILDREN OF THE SAME SPIRITUAL FAMILY,
WHO OWNED HIM FOR A BROTHER,
TENDED HIS DYING MOMENTS,
AND CLOSED HIS
EYES.

DISCOURSES.

DISCOURSES.

DISCOURSE FIRST.

2 KINGS, iv. 13.—Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host? And she answered, I dwell among mine own people.

SUCH was the answer of the Shunammite woman to Elisha, when he sent to inquire in what way he could recompense her care, and the attention which she had shown to his comforts and his wants.

Of the circumstances connected with her introduction to the Prophet we read in the preceding verses; and they are set forth with all the simplicity and truth for which the narratives of Scripture are so remarkable.

It would seem that the occasion of their first meeting had been purely accidental; that the Prophet, on passing Shunem, the place of her residence, had been respectfully invited, and even constrained, to share her hospitality: and finding himself welcomed with that unaffected kindness which was so conspicuous in her whole demeanour, and pressed no doubt to repeat his visits, he had not unwillingly taken advantage of the offered kindness so often as he had occasion to pass that way, which would appear to have been frequent, as Shunem lay between Mount Carmel, the place

of his own residence, and Bethel, the residence of the sons of the prophets.

Whether the Shunammite woman had been aware of the rank and character of her guest at their first meeting, the history does not state; nor is it of any consequence to determine. It is certain, however, that she soon came to know both; and the way in which she manifested her regard for the Prophet showed as much consideration and reverence for the office which he bore, as it did of real kindness of heart. Wishing that he might possess at her house every thing requisite for his comfortable accommodation, and enjoy at the same time that quiet and retirement which would be exceedingly desirable in his circumstances, and which she probably saw that he valued more than any thing else which it was in her power to bestow;—and, as if to rid him of every feeling of restraint during his stay, and to leave him entirely to his own pleasure in the choice of their society, she said to her husband, who seems to have been like-minded, “Behold now I perceive that this is an holy man of God which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither.”

We cannot wonder that the Prophet was struck with an attention thus considerate, which had anticipated all his wishes, and provided alike for his refreshment and his privacy; and that, impressed the more with it as kindness shown him by a stranger on whom he had no claim, and by a person of rank and consequence,—for the history informs us that she was a great woman,—he sent his servant to inquire what return he could make for her kindness, or in what way, most agreeable to her, he could manifest his sense of the obligation under which she had laid him. Aware that her station rendered her independent of any reward such as he could offer, and that she possessed in abundance the comforts and even the luxuries of life, he was naturally led to ask whether his credit or influence, which

were by no means inconsiderable at the court of Judah, could procure for her any such favours as, to those of her rank, were naturally objects of ambition and desire, and how far he could, by interesting himself in her behalf, either gratify herself or any of her friends. And it was to a question of this kind,—“Wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?”—a question which, in an ordinary mind, would have excited a thousand ambitious wishes, but which excited not one in hers,—it was to this question that, without manifesting any disrespect for the Prophet, or any insensibility to the motive which prompted his offer, she returned the answer in the text,—an answer indicative of a disposition rarely exhibited in the world, and rarely exhibited, I will say, among those who profess to be superior to its honours or gratifications,—“I dwell among mine own people.”

After the explanation now given, it is hardly necessary to premise, that the person by whom this language was uttered appears to have been under the guidance of religious principle, and one who, in spite of the growing degeneracy of her age and country, truly revered and feared the God of Israel. Of this we may perhaps find that there was greater evidence in the language of the text than many may at first sight be aware of; and there is something in the whole of her intercourse with the Prophet, as already detailed, which powerfully impresses us with this feeling, that she was governed by higher motives than mere natural or instinctive benevolence,—that there mingled with the kindness which she showed him no selfish concern for her own interests,—that she had no wish to do herself honour by entertaining a prophet,—and that she made no affectation of respect for him in order that she might be respected and gratified in return. When we find it, indeed, so directly stated that the motive which prompted her proposal and dictated her little plans for the comfort and accommodation of Elisha, was reverence for his character as a holy man of God, and the desire to do honour to one whom God had so signally

honoured as his servant, it can hardly, I think, be questioned, that the attention which she paid him arose from her reverence for the Master whom he served;—that it was not Elisha, so much as the God of Elisha, to whom she felt that she was on these occasions doing homage; and there is, therefore, as much evidence as we could reasonably expect to find, that God had held that place in her heart which led her to honour him in every one who was connected with him, and that, amidst the ease and consequence attached to a high station, she felt it to be her privilege as well as her duty, to employ herself in any way that might evince her regard for his character and will. It is in connexion with this observation that we are now shortly to consider the answer which the Shunammite returned to the inquiry of the Prophet. And there is, to our mind, such a right conception of her own duty, and so much sound, and I had almost said Christian discrimination, as to what properly belonged to her own place, that I do wish that we might all be made to imbibe the spirit which pervades this brief but expressive answer, “ I dwell among mine own people.”

I therefore remark, in the *first* place, That the language of the Shunammite indicates a mind strongly alive to the duties of her own peculiar sphere.

I can easily conceive such language as that of our text to have been uttered without containing any sentiment so important as that which we have now stated to be implied in it, and terms nearly similar may often be employed, and would perhaps be the very first to suggest themselves to many in answer to such a question, without being prompted by any feeling of duty or obligation to those with whom in providence they are connected.

Living in the midst of a society endeared to them by many ties, with minds sensibly alive to all the sympathies of human life, gratified by those kind attentions, and indulging those warm and social affections which are a source of so much happiness and enjoyment, it cannot be wonderful though many may, through mere selfishness, and without

any stronger or better principle, refuse an offer which might in the very smallest degree interfere with such a condition, though the bare idea of being moved away from it should be instantly rejected, and though thus the weakness, instead of the strength of their sense of duty, should lead, in their case, to the same result as occurred in that of the Shunammite.

Had this been the amount of her character, however, we had not deemed it at all necessary, or even proper, to commend it to your imitation. However amiable or engaging her conduct might in this case have appeared, there had been nothing in it peculiarly deserving of Christian approbation; and she had only added another to the many examples that may be found of a refined selfishness, which, instead of indulging or tolerating, the word of God entering into the heart, would in a moment expose and expel. To guard you, therefore, against what we believe a very inadequate conception of her answer, and of the character which that answer indicates, we have already taken occasion to state, that she appears to have been under the government of religious principle, and that the strong impression left upon our mind by her sentiments and conduct is, that she was one in whom the fear of God ruled. The view, accordingly, which one possessed of these feelings and dispositions would take of her situation, and of any change proposed in it, was not likely to be hastily formed, or when formed, to be separated from a regard to what might be, in the particular case that was presented to her, the line of her duty. Regarding her answer under this light, it cannot therefore be considered as an attempt to draw out of it a sentiment which was never present to her mind, if we say that it indicated her to be strongly alive to those peculiar duties which God had called her to discharge, and with which the acceptance of the proffered services of the Prophet might in no small degree have interfered.

Had she, in answer to the question of Elisha, merely stated that she had no wish to be introduced to the notice of

the king or the captain of the host,—that she had no ambition to be known to them, and no favour to solicit from them,—there might have been nothing peculiarly striking in her language; but when, on the question being proposed, her mind reverted so simply to the state of her own people,—to those who naturally looked up to her for assistance and protection,—when the consideration of these presented itself so readily, and her mind rested so fixedly upon it,—when, without adding a single word in explanation, she settled the point in a moment,—“ I dwell among mine own people,”—it will hardly, I think, be questioned, that the thought of their condition and advantage had been most familiar to her mind,—that she had never been accustomed to think of her own gratification apart from their comfort and well-being,—and that, in the brief sentence in which she declined the Prophet’s kindness, there was compressed what, if expanded and fully brought to light, had only disclosed how important she felt her sphere of usefulness amongst them to be, and how sensibly alive she was to the claims which they had on her attention and regard. Brief as that sentence is, it is not too much, I think, to infer from it, that she had sought to be what God designed her to be,—that in the circle of those over whom her influence extended, she had endeavoured, by every dutiful attention, to encourage and incite them to whatsoever was lovely and of good report,—that she had sought to diffuse among them all that kindness of affection, and all that reverence for God and his will, which pervaded her own mind,—that she had been the example and pattern of every good word and work,—and that any thing that would have broken in upon these, had been felt as diverting her away from the serious purpose and proper business of her life.

It is not to be supposed, indeed, that when Elisha inquired “ What can be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?” that he intended to remove her from the sphere in which God had placed her; and the question was probably asked with the

view of ascertaining whether she was as selfish in the attentions she had shown him as many others, though at the same time, I make no doubt, with the sincere desire of gratifying her in any matter that might promote her advantage, and that his influence could command. Neither could the most sanguine mind have anticipated, that, in return for her little kindnesses to the Prophet, she could receive such favours or be honoured with such attentions, as had drawn her forth from her retirement, to mingle in scenes of ambition and greatness. She probably felt, however, that the admission of such thoughts as the inquiry of the Prophet was very ready to suggest, would of themselves tend to withdraw her from what she saw to be her own peculiar charge,—that she could not allow her mind to rest on these objects without being led in imagination to scenes from which she would return less qualified for the humbler duties that were assigned her,—that the temptation thus brought before her could not be yielded to without seducing her, she knew not how far away, from those whose interests and well-being were her peculiar care ; and aware that it was easier at once to resist than to withdraw from temptation,—persuaded that no situation could be half so honourable as that in which God had designed her to honour him,—that she had enough, and more than enough, in her own comparatively retired and humble sphere, to require all her exertions and exhaust all her energies,—that she would only dissipate the talent which had been given her by employing it on a wider field, whilst, if she would lay it out to advantage, it required to be concentrated on the field that lay around her ; aware of all these things, and with a spirit which indicated how much her mind had been trained to regard the path of duty, and how habitual and familiar a thing it was to subordinate every thing to its performance, she instantly put the thought of ambition and honours away from her, and met the inquiry of the Prophet firmly but modestly in the expressive sentence, “ I dwell among mine own people.”

It can hardly be expected that the observations now made

will commend themselves to those who have no feeling of their obligations to honour God in the station in which he has placed them, or who may have no distinct or serious conviction, that the place which they occupy has any thing to do with the Divine determination and appointment. To such persons the sentiment which breathes throughout the Shunammite's answer will appear to savour of meanness and littleness of mind, rather than of any thing else ; or they may consider that a mere narrow concern for those whom she denominates her own people, an exclusive and almost selfish spirit, was at the foundation of all ; and not a few, perhaps, whose opinions on other points may be more correct, but for whom nothing, unless it is showy, and attractive, and imposing in outward appearance, has any charm, will feel no sympathy with the mind that possessed her.

But these things, which in others may excite little else than pity or disgust, constitute to us the peculiar excellence of her character ; and let others admire what they may, we do conceive that there are few things, to a Christian mind and a Christian taste, more worthy of admiration, than the example of an individual seeking, in her own place, to honour God and to serve him ; and few characters more truly great, according to the only right estimate of greatness,—the estimate of the Bible,—than the character of those who, keeping within the sphere in which God has fixed them,—concentrating upon it all their regard,—laying themselves out to do their utmost within, it may be, its narrow boundaries, whether it be the little circle of their own domestic duties, or the wider circle of their neighbourhood, or the sphere of their engagements in the world,—are giving resistance to all the daily and hourly solicitations that might lead them away from these, and are contentedly, and without envy, leaving to others their honours and their pleasures, and even their superior talents and wider opportunities of usefulness,—satisfied if they may, through the Divine blessing, do the work which God has assigned them, and contribute, it matters not in how small a measure, if it be in the way and measure in

which God intended it, to the promotion of his honour, and the advancement of his glory in the world.

Such a spirit is, I am aware, very different from that which is found among men, and not a little different from that which is very generally found among Christians. Sin hath introduced such a confusion into our moral perceptions, that it is even difficult for us to conceive what would be the aspect of things, were all to be as God designed it. But could we turn from this world, where there are so few traces of his presence, to a world where every thing continues to be as he at first ordained it, I doubt not that we should find the same devotedness to their own peculiar duties, and the same resistance to every solicitation that would lead them away from these, to be the characteristics of those blessed spirits that live and rejoice in the light of God's countenance. There are, we know, differences of rank and authority among them, one being differing from another, even as one star differeth from another in glory. There are angels that occupy a high place around the eternal throne, and there are angels to whom is assigned the humbler place of watching over the interests of our world, and of ministering to those who shall be heirs of salvation. And yet I doubt not that the angel that is appointed to watch the footsteps of a little child through this weary world of suffering and of care, feels his station to be as important and as honourable, because the station which God has assigned him, as the very highest of the cherubim or the seraphim, who veil their faces with their wings continually in his presence, and transmit through countless multitudes of adoring spirits the behests of the Eternal One; and that, habitually impressed with his own insignificance, there is not so much as a wish felt that his place were exchanged for any other, either more important or more distinguished than that which God has assigned him. It is, in fact, by the habitual recognition of such a principle as this, that the order and the harmony of heaven is maintained. And conceiving that this was the principle which animated, however imperfectly, the individual so often alluded

to, we cannot cease to press upon your regard and imitation the spirit of her humble but expressive answer, “ I dwell among mine own people.”

II. I remark, that the language of our text indicates, not only that the Shunammite was strongly alive to the duties of her own place, but found her happiness in honouring God by the discharge of these duties.

This point, though it may be that which many may be disposed first to remark, I do not conceive to be really the first in importance, or even the most conspicuous feature in the history of this woman. It appears, I think, not more from a general consideration of her religious character, than from the staid, quiet, and unobtrusive nature of her answer, that the feeling and sense of duty,—the duty which she owed to her people,—was uppermost in her mind, and prompted the decisive language which she uttered ; and that, fortified by this, she felt it comparatively an easy thing to bid every solicitation away from her.

For all this, however, you must be aware, that the conscious happiness which she enjoyed in the place which God had given her, if it held not the first, held at least the second place in her mind at the time ; and the readiness with which she set every other consideration aside,—the entire composure of a spirit, the serenity of which was hardly ruffled by any ambitious thoughts, if these did intrude themselves,—the ease with which she shook herself free from the temptation that to others of a different mind had appeared so inviting, as if it had found nothing in her on which it could fasten,—argued her to be in possession of a peace and enjoyment which could arise from nothing else, than from having found,—as I doubt not every one who acts in the same way will find,—that, in honouring God as she felt that he required her to honour him, he had effectually satisfied all her wants, and really left her nothing more, comparatively speaking, to desire.

You will observe the language which is now employed,—

“honouring God in discharging the duties of her own sphere,”—and I employ it, because there may be a disposition very like that of our text often manifested, without any regard to the principle in which I have no doubt that this originated; and because there are many who, either from natural constitution, or from the circumstances in which they are placed, may seek their happiness in the sphere in which God has placed them, without being alive to the claims of his authority, or really having the thought of God present to their minds at all; and who will, I doubt not, manifest in some degree the same contentment and satisfaction which so eminently distinguished the Shunammite.

It was for this purpose that we sought, at the very outset, to impress upon your minds, that she gave evidence of being governed by a regard to the Divine will, and that the first thing manifest in her character, was a strong sense of the duties which God had peculiarly called her to discharge. And it is only now, coming reinforced, as it were, by this testimony to the rectitude of her character, that we state, in the second place (for this is the place which our own happiness must ever hold, and by which alone it can be secured), that the language of the text affords abundant evidence that she had found, as God indeed had promised, that, in honouring him, as he requires us to do him honour, her own peace, and comfort, and well-being, were effectually promoted.

I know very few subjects, indeed, on which it would be easier to declaim, or easier to carry the feelings of many along with us, than on the spirit of contentedness and entire satisfaction with the arrangements of Divine Providence, which the Shunammite's answer so conspicuously displayed. There are very few, I am persuaded, who are insensible to the happiness of such a spirit, let it be as far as it may from their own; and there are very few who are not disposed to regard it as the ultimate object of all their ambition; and no subject, therefore, may have greater charms, than the example of one giving up, and that, too, without a struggle, or with-

out the feeling of a sacrifice, every thing that to the natural heart is an object of desire.

We feel, however, that to excite your minds by any view of this kind, were to minister to a false and chimerical disposition. The mind which the Shunammite manifested, instead of arising out of her peculiar circumstances, is that which may be evinced in any station in which God has placed us, provided the principles which dwelt in her mind dwell in ours ; and indulge what hope and expectations you may, of one thing you may be sure, that it will never be yours, unless you are brought to know, what there is every evidence that she knew, the blessed hope of the Divine favour,—and brought to know also, what her language so strongly indicates,—the deep and strong persuasion, that it was only in having her mind thus brought into subjection to the Divine will, and made to seek its happiness in fulfilling the end for which God designed her, that she could ever expect, truly and lastingly, to realize it. We are far from saying, indeed, even though she had felt the temptation more powerfully than she appears to have done, that she would not, through the strong sense of duty which she possessed, have at once checked and resisted it ; but when she did this so readily and without effort,—when there is so little,—I would say no appearance of conflicting interests,—it can hardly, I think, be doubted, that she had found what she saw to be her own place, to be, at the same time, the place of her own enjoyment and blessedness ; and that she had felt the care of her own people, and an attention to all the claims which they had upon her regard, to be not merely the scene in which every human affection had its proper and healthful exercise, but to be the scene in which every divine affection also, and every divine grace had its healthful and happy growth.

I am aware that this is no more than a mere inference from the point which we have already had occasion to press upon your attention, and that the unvarying rule of the Word of God, true to uniform experience, is, that it is only by preferring or giving the chief place to the honour of God,

in all our plans and purposes, that we become the heirs of its promises, or come actually to realize the comforts it bestows. It is still a point, however, which has a prominent place in the character of the Shunammite, and which requires to be prominently presented to you ; and I know few things more salutary, or more necessary to be kept in view, for the daily habit and practice of a Christian life, than this,—that, though the performance of our several duties is neither to be your confidence nor mine for eternity, nor to be the source of our peace, or the foundation of our hope, still these can never be separated,—that they have a reaction upon one another,—that whilst faith produces all the fruits of holy obedience, by these again is faith perfected ; and the mind thus kept awake upon its proper objects, and moving in the sphere which God hath assigned it, is made to taste that blessedness, the possession of which, I am persuaded, makes it no sacrifice to put all the vain and empty pleasures of this life away.

There is a support, indeed, communicated by the consciousness of walking in the path of appointed duty,—a confidence towards God imparted, wherewith we may look up for his approving, which is as much a blessing in itself, as it is fruitful in strengthening every holy disposition within us ; and the great reason why Christians enjoy so little of the real contentment and peace of mind which the individual referred to in our text experienced,—why they are so ready to find a thousand temptations seducing them, and leading them away both from peace and from holiness, is just the want of a settled conviction, that the path of duty, however humble and retired, is the only path of real happiness,—that it is in knowing and keeping the place which God hath assigned us, that we are to realize the blessedness to which God hath called us,—and that it is in vain to expect that this will or can be our portion, whilst we are not seeking, in all humility of mind and simplicity of heart, to give ourselves to the least as well as the greatest of those things which God hath peculiarly given us in charge. Such was evidently the spirit which possessed the Shunammite, when she expressed, in lan-

guage already so often quoted, the regard which she felt for those with whom God, in his providence, had been pleased to connect her, and evinced also, that she had found the reward which God had generously attached to such a spirit, when she could so simply, yet so firmly, resist all the solicitations that were made to lead her away from it.

Such are the chief things worthy of our notice in the expressive sentiment of the text ; and I have already so far anticipated those reflections which the example of the Shunammite woman may naturally suggest, that I might almost leave it to yourselves to pursue them. If there is one thing more remarkable than another in her character, it is the correct estimate which she had formed of her own place, and of her own sphere of duty and usefulness, and the sober and chastened spirit which it evinces her to have attained. And though this may be passed over without awakening a single feeling in the minds of many, I know nothing more important, for all the business of a Christian's life, than to be animated with the mind that possessed her. It was not the case with her only, it is so with all of us, that God has given us a sphere of duty and of usefulness,—something which must be done by us, or it is left altogether undone. In her case this lay among her own people,—among those who naturally and rightfully required the assistance and protection which she could give, and where her influence might be daily employed for promoting their temporal or spiritual interests ; but it may be found by each of you as determinately laid down in the discharge of your domestic and social duties, and in the fulfilment of those engagements which employ you in the world,—in the little circle in which Providence has fixed you, and over which he has given you an influence to be exerted for his glory. In like manner, the temptation to which she felt that the offer of the Prophet subjected her, and which she was enabled so firmly to resist, is to be found assailing you every day in the numberless occasions which present themselves, whether of indulging your own ease, or your love of self-gratification, or, what is no less dangerous, of extending,

as it may seem, your usefulness,—any thing, in short, by which the humblest of the duties committed to you may either be neglected, or carelessly and imperfectly performed. She felt that she had a special trust given to her, and that this trust it must be her object, in dependence, I doubt not, on his blessing, to manage for God ; and believe me, or rather believe the Word of God, that you have each of you a charge equally special and distinct,—that God has not left it to your pleasure, any more than it was left to hers, in what way you are to serve him,—that there is to be no will-worship in your obedience to him, any more than in the way of approaching him,—and that it were vain to plead what you had done to cultivate another man's vineyard, provided your own had been left neglected and unimproved. It will not be required of you, at least in the first instance, how far you have laid yourselves out so as to be widely and generally useful to your brethren of mankind,—how far you have expended your strength in great and extensive designs for their good, whether in promoting, as every Christian will seek to do, even to the very uttermost, their temporal or their spiritual advantage. Perhaps God gave you no time or talents for the attainment of so large and generous ends ; but it will first of all be required of you how far you have sought to honour God in the discharge of every domestic and relative duty,—how far you have sought to devote yourselves to him in your families,—how far you have, by your example and your precepts, endeavoured that they should be the sanctuaries of genuine godliness,—how far you have made the Christian instruction of your children and servants the objects of your serious and prayerful attention,—how far you have been faithful and conscientious in your service,—and how far, with the feeling of a delegated trust, you have sought to be approved of God in all.

There is a dignity attached to every sphere of duty, however narrow and however humble. The feeling that God has given it to me dignifies every thing ; it is the grand character of heaven, that every one,—every angel,—has his own

place, and is satisfied; and it is the strong perception of these truths which endears to us the example of the Shunamite; whilst, for your encouragement to dwell among your own people, as she did,—that is, in your case, to be found in the path of appointed duty, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left,—we see in her experience those blessed fruits of contentment and satisfaction, which such a spirit brings along with it; evincing how truly God has, in every case, identified our duty with our happiness, and how, in having made us willing through his grace, to be, or to do, or to suffer any thing for his sake, he is not unrighteous to forget our work of faith or labour of love, but will recompense us even here an hundred fold.

DISCOURSE SECOND.

PSALM lxxviii. 34.—When he slew them, then they sought him ; and they returned and inquired early after God.

THESE words were spoken of the Israelites during the period of their sojourning in the wilderness ; and they contain the statement of a fact which may be authenticated, as any other fact concerning them may be, by reference to their history.

Of the truth of the declaration, examples might be given from the various calamities with which God visited them for their transgressions,—calamities which never failed, in some degree, to awaken in their minds the remembrance of their guilt and unworthiness, and to bring them to God, that they might deprecate his wrath, and express their desire to return to him and live. The particular fact, however, which it presents, and which is not less verified by their history, is, that whilst, on these occasions, they sought God, it was only then that they did seek him ; that they neither turned to him nor inquired after him, when there was no such urgent and pressing necessity ; that with the removal of the calamity their prayers and their inquiries passed away ; and that they remained very much in this condition, till they were again roused, by some new and pressing danger, to bethink themselves of him whom they had forgotten in the day of ease and of enjoyment.

I cannot suppose it necessary to illustrate, at any length, a feature in the character of God's ancient people, which

the most careless reader of the Old Testament, particularly of that part of it more immediately referred to in the text, can hardly fail to have remarked. The whole course of the history of the Jews may be characterized as consisting of alternate periods of ingratitude and compunction, according as they were either enjoying the blessings of the Divine goodness, or suffering under the infliction of the Divine judgments,—of alternate examples of departure from God in the season of peace and prosperity, and of professed return to his fear and obedience whenever the day of visitation and trial came. And no one acquainted with the mere outline of their eventful history as a nation, can mistake the truth and correctness of what may be given as a general summary of their religious character,—“ When God slew them, then they sought him; and they returned and inquired early after God.”

I consider this language, however, as not merely applicable to them, but as expressive of that kind of religion which is natural to all men; and their history, in this point, only exemplifies what the history of every man, in his natural ignorance of God, will be found to exemplify. I shall first, therefore, endeavour to illustrate this truth from the appearances of the world around us, preparatory to the second point which will then present itself,—the affecting view which this gives us of human nature, and of the sentiments and feelings which men generally entertain towards God.

I. In touching upon the former of these points, I may almost take it for granted that there are few now present who have not found something in their own experience answerable to that which is declared of the Israelites. There are few, I daresay, who have never, in some shape or other, been visited by calamity; and, without supposing that it was to be compared with those visitations which God sent upon the Israelites, it may still have been such as to make them feel their own weakness and helplessness under it. Living in a world such as that in which we dwell,—a world in which

we are so often visited with personal afflictions, and so often made to suffer through the sufferings of others,—a world so full of change and uncertainty, where our brightest prospects are so ready to be overcast, and our fairest hopes to be blighted,—there are few who have not experienced those feelings of danger and insecurity which an Israelite must have felt so deeply under the awful visitations which God at times sent upon him on account of his iniquities, and who have not been made to see that every thing which they held most dear was at the mercy of a power over which they possessed no control, and before which they might be crushed in a moment.

Taking for granted that something of this nature has been experienced by many whom I now address, it can hardly have been experienced by any to such an extent as to make them feel their own helplessness, without also bringing along with it the thought of God, however strange his presence or his power may have formerly been to them. Insensible as our minds may naturally be to the Divine existence and agency, and easily as we live without God in the world, it would argue more than ordinary insensibility to suppose that this could continue when the hour of trial and calamity came. There is wrought in us a conviction of the truth that we are in God's hand, and compassed by his power, which it becomes as difficult then to banish, as it was before difficult to produce; and you could not take the most hardened and ungodly sinner perhaps,—the man whose whole life may be a melancholy blank in every thing that relates to God,—the man whose way may have been as opposite to that which God requires him to follow, as if God had left him to walk as he listed,—and bring him into a situation of deep distress and danger,—a situation in which he trembled for his own life, or trembled for the life of those that were dear to him,—without finding, that even he who seemed scarcely to acknowledge the existence of a higher power, had then his deep thoughts and his solemn apprehensions of God, and that even he might be forced to feel the presence

and to own the supremacy of Him who ruleth in the kingdoms of men, and giveth to every man severally as he wills. Whatever the man may be at other times, unless he is resting in a cold and remorseless atheism, he then feels that he has to do with God,—he cannot resist the thought that he is in the hands of one who has power to kill and to make alive,—he cannot but feel that with him it resteth either to crush him or to bring him back again,—and, though void of any true conceptions of the Divine character, or of any true reverence for the Divine honour, and without any feeling, more than ever he had, how much he had been pouring contempt on God by his disregard of him, he could not then but feel, though it were nothing better than the force of a natural instinct, something which sent him to God as naturally as the sense of danger may, in any other case, prompt him to seek for deliverance, and for the surest and the speediest way by which deliverance may be obtained.

Now in all this there is nothing mysterious, or which can need explanation; for it is the very same kind of inquiry after God which is attributed to the Israelites, under the pressure of those calamities which threatened their destruction. There are few who, in such a situation, have not shown the very same desire to be saved from the miseries with which they were visited as did the Israelites, and who have not betaken themselves to God for deliverance with the selfsame feeling that their help must come from him,—who have not besought with equal fervour the removal of that wrath which they were conscious they had provoked, and who have not, with the same seriousness as they evinced, professed their resolution to live more mindful of him. But too often, also, has it been seen, in the case of multitudes as in theirs, that when moved by tender pity for their wretchedness, God has removed the apprehension and the dread which overwhelmed them, the recognition of his presence and of his working has passed away,—that with the removal of the suffering they have forgotten him whose compassion they had besought,—that every conviction of their guilt

and undeservedness has been lost when the present danger which awakened their consciences has been withdrawn,—and that the fruit of all their inquiry after God, and of all their professed return to his fear and obedience, has been as evanescent as the morning cloud, or the early dew which passeth away.

I cannot suppose it necessary to authenticate by examples a state of things which does, I am persuaded, commend itself to every man in the sight of God, not merely as that which he has often seen in others, but which he has too often experienced in himself; and melancholy as it may be to think that we should require to be brought into distress and extremity in order to feel the reality of the Divine presence and working,—that there should be so little, I had almost said nothing, in the mercies which we enjoy at the hand of God to awaken in us the feelings of affectionate dependence,—the case is yet more melancholy when, after this indifference has been overcome, and we have been made to feel how truly we are in his hands, and that he compasseth all our ways, we should yet so easily relapse into all the regardlessness of which we were before guilty,—that the very circumstance which gave God new claims upon our obedience, should prove, by the perversity of our nature, the very circumstance that led us to disregard him,—that the very blessing for which we supplicated and for which, if withheld, we had continued to supplicate, when freely and graciously imparted, should prove the occasion of shutting out God from our thoughts,—and that, as if we owed him nothing, and had no cause either of gratitude or of obligation, we should return to our former indifference to his authority and supremacy. Who would have thought, for example, had they seen a tender and affectionate family weeping round the sick, or, what they feared, the dying bed of one of their number,—had they heard the sentiment which every one of them was forward to utter,—that none but God could avail them in the hour of their extremity,—or had they heard the earnestness with which their cry was uplifted to

God in behalf of him in whom all their affections at such a moment centred,—had they witnessed the strong sense which they had of their entire dependence upon God, and the readiness with which they listened to every representation at that moment presented to them on the subject of Divine things, and the confessions which they made of their ingratitude for all the blessings which he had so long bestowed, and which they had so long abused,—who would have thought, I say, that the very thing which should dispel all these hopeful appearances of a return to God, was simply that God should grant them the desire of their hearts,—and that he in whose safety they felt so profound an interest should, in answer to their prayers, be restored? And yet the very blessing most fitted to conciliate their hearts to God, may have proved the very occasion of shutting out God from them all! With the restoration to their society and endearments of one in whom they were so much interested, they may have returned to all their worldliness and all their former indifference about spiritual things,—and they who were all attention and earnestness to hear, and to be instructed and comforted by the declarations of the word of God, may have met the man who came to put them in remembrance of the vows which they had made, and the mercy which they had experienced, with a coldness which told but too truly that the interest which they had once felt in the message which he brought had passed away, and that they had now no wish to be reminded of the obligations under which the Divine goodness had laid them to live not unto themselves but unto God.

I am persuaded that such a case as this is one of no rare occurrence, and that the kind of religion which it exemplifies is that which is generally found in the world, and which really must be found so long as men only fear and tremble at God. Whatever profession they may make of regard for God and for his will, the only occasions, perhaps, on which they have seriously realized the Divine presence, or felt that they needed any thing at the hand of God, have

been those on which, to use the language of our text, "God slew them;" and the only occasions on which they ever manifested any disposition to inquire after God, or to return to him, were those on which they were exposed to some pressing and instant danger, such as to make them alarmed for their own safety or the safety of those in whom they were naturally interested. What may have been the impressions then made, the inquiry then excited, and the penitence then professed,—they can tell better than we can express; but this has been the too frequent and painful result, that, with the removal of the calamity which awakened it, their earnestness has died away,—they have returned to their former insensibility, only to be roused from it by some new occasion of Divine judgment; and, instead of being conducted onwards, as we might have anticipated, to a ready and unreserved dedication of themselves to God, it has been with them as with the Israelites, "When he slew them, then," and only then, "they sought him, and returned and inquired early after God."

II. In stating, as we proposed to do, in the *second* place, the view thus presented of human nature with reference to God, I can hardly suppose that those who have most fearfully exemplified it will seek to defend it; for every man must be aware that this is not the state of things which should be found in our connexion with a Being on whom we continually depend,—that there is in the Divine character, and in the blessings which we daily receive at the hand of God, that which should call forth a very different return. And we judge that there are very few who can look back on scenes similar to those which we have described, and think of the sad contrariety which there hath been in their conduct to all which they then felt they required to be, and then resolved to be, without being conscious of their ingratitude and disobedience. The fact is, however, that men do, for all this, shelter their guilt under names and forms of speech which serve very much, in their view, to detract

from its heinousness ; they are satisfied with admitting that they are both very thoughtless and very ungrateful,—that things are not as they ought to be, and that the kindness of God ought to have ensured a different return ; yet they never pursue the subject so far as to see, in its true light, what all this proves as to their own characters, and as to the feelings which they are habitually cherishing towards God. However criminal may be the charge of thoughtlessness or forgetfulness, in so far as God is concerned, we apprehend that were the same treatment to be given to a fellow-creature, it would be held to argue something of a far more hateful nature, and that they should at once affix to it a character far more deserving of reprobation. If a son could be found so lost to all right feeling as never to evince any regard for his father, except on those occasions when the just indignation of that father was roused against him, and he was threatened with the loss of all that his paternal goodness had conferred,—if he could, without scruple and without remorse, live forgetful of all his obligations, and persevere in those courses which he knew to be in opposition to his father's will,—if the only thing that awakened him from his regardlessness, or moved him to show any sense of dependence on his father's kindness, was when he saw that that kindness which he had so long enjoyed and so long abused was about to be withdrawn,—if the relentings which he then expressed for his conduct only continued so long as he felt that there was any danger of his incurring the ruin which he had provoked,—and if, so soon as he had hopes of having pacified his father's anger, and induced him to relax from the threatened severity, his old indifference and disregard of every paternal feeling should return, I think that we should account this to argue something much worse than forgetfulness,—that we should at once hold it as proving the utter absence of any right filial disposition, and as evincing a mind under the dominion of the most entire selfishness, in that very relation where selfishness was of all other things the most hateful and the most deserving of abhorrence.

Again, should a benefactor experience, at the hand of the man whom he had befriended, no expressions of gratitude so long as his benefits were continued, but, on the contrary, see every thing in his conduct to tell that he felt no obligation, and deemed himself to have a right to the blessings which he had of his free goodness conferred,—if even to preserve in the mind of him who was the object of his kindness any feeling of his dependence he required at times to withdraw it, or threatened him with its withdrawal,—if it was then, and only then, that he could bring him to any sense of his ingratitude, or awaken any expressions of sorrow for his abuse of the favours he had received,—and if, so soon as he gave him new assurance that he would not deal with him according to his deservings, it was seen that all his compunctions and all his sorrow passed away, we should have little difficulty in determining what was the character of those supplications which he had presented, and of that sorrow and repentance which he had professed to feel; we could not but see that they were drawn from him as much by concern for his own interest, as by any concern which he felt for all the ingratitude of which he had been guilty, and that the sense of his unworthiness had never been very painful or very troublesome, had he not been brought into a situation which made him feel, that without some such expression of guilt and undeservedness, he could not hope to move the mind of his benefactor still to pity and to spare him. And when such is the judgment which we naturally and at once pass upon a case like this, it were only cloaking the guilt in which every man, more or less, shares, were we to say of our own ingratitude for the Divine mercies, that it was merely the result of thoughtlessness,—or were we not to acknowledge that, in the case of multitudes, their religion may be described in the brief but expressive language of the Psalmist,—and that the God, whose character and whose ways towards them were fitted to conciliate their affections, and render him the object of a ready and grateful homage, had no other hold of them than

by means of their fears,—and that they knew of no other channel through which his character and his presence might be recognised, than the selfish anxiety which they felt for their own safety, and their own natural and instinctive dread of the dangers from which he alone could grant them deliverance.

I really do not think that, on the ordinary principles of human nature, or according to the judgments which we every day pronounce, any other conclusion than this could be formed ; and a single experiment might, I fear in too many cases, prove the soundness and correctness of this judgment. For were all those motives withdrawn which may induce a merely worldly mind to make a profession of reverence for God, which it has never truly felt,—were those calamities removed from the sphere of human life which compel something more than a merely nominal recognition of the Divine existence,—were there to be no afflictions,—no trials,—no death,—none of those occasions when we cannot but think of God,—were we subject to none of those changes and vicissitudes which visit our families, and were we to be favoured with the most enduring and unmingled prosperity, and upheld in the fullness of every blessing which the natural heart could desire,—were God, after having thus swept at once and for ever away from the face of human things all that could awaken any feeling of dread and apprehension, and to proclaim from heaven that, however men might live, and however they might disregard him, he would never punish them for their sins, and that they should continue to exist for ever in a state of unchanging security ;—were he to do this, such a thing would be hailed by multitudes as the state which was above every other object desirable. And although even then their obligations to honour him would not be less than ever they were, I fear that all this would only be regarded as a dispensation from obedience, and that men would be found to repay their benefactor for placing them in a condition so enviable,—and which was no less of his bestowing, because he had promised for ever to uphold them in it,—only by an eternal forgetfulness of his grace, and even by

striving to blot out every thing from the face of the world, which remained to give testimony to the existence or the providence of God.

I am persuaded that this is no exaggerated statement of what would, in these circumstances, take place ; and it is justified by that which we see every day taking place in the world around us. The atheistical sentiment which at first led men to propose to make unto themselves gods, however false, shows us that naturally the Divine existence has with them no other foundation than in their fears ; that, in the mind of man, naturally, fear is the only principle which leads him to recognise or do God homage ; that, in so far as any homage is given, it is compelled by his dread of God ; that were this principle withdrawn, though God would not surely be less worthy of his regard, no such homage would be paid to him ; and thus that great Being, whose character is fitted to be the object of exalted and refined contemplation to all his creatures,—whose works and whose ways were designed to awaken in every heart feelings of the most delighted and adoring complacency,—and whose unwearied compassion and grace are fitted to command a gratitude such as it becomes a creature to pay, and such as it would not be unworthy even of the great Creator of all to receive,—is practically treated by multitudes as though there were nothing about him to beget any feeling in their hearts beyond the conviction, that he possessed an infinite power at which they could not but tremble, and an unchanging rectitude, which at times they would be fain to propitiate, because conscious that they had often and grievously provoked it.

I shall not be held as including under this description those whose hearts have been touched with the power of Divine grace, manifested in the Gospel. However they may have found it to be true in their former experience, and may yet find it true, that the tendency of their hearts and natures is to carry them away from God ; and however they may need affliction, as the means of bringing them back to him ; the views which they have been led to entertain of God, and

the feelings with which they now regard him, constitute one very great and striking point of difference between them and such as are yet in their natural ignorance and unconcern about God.

I should as little desire, however, that any of the observations now made should interpose a barrier, as through misapprehension they may perhaps do, in the way of a sinner's return to God; or that any one who is convinced that all his professed regard for God has been merely the result of a gross and hateful selfishness, should, on that account, consider it as impossible to serve God on any other principle, and thus give up the idea of serving God at all, and be left in utter hopelessness of doing any thing that was acceptable to him. Though it is right that we should be made to feel, if this has been the source and substance of all our religion, that there is something in it essentially wrong in principle, and that it can never therefore be well pleasing to God,—that it is dishonourable to the Divine Majesty, and cannot therefore be received as the homage which he has a right to claim, and cannot but claim from us all; yet one design of God in sending those afflictions which lead us to return and inquire after him is, by attacking our fears, to lead us onward to better and juster apprehensions of his character and will. Such dispensations of his providence have been often the means appointed for leading men to the great source of a new and better obedience; and many of those who, for all the forgetfulness of God which adheres to them, and which none will be more ready to confess and deplore than they, do still feel that they are animated and encouraged to serve God from something more than concern for their own safety, and may be able to tell that the circumstances in which this originated were the very same with those which the Psalmist describes,—“God slew them, and then they sought him.” However lost these convictions of sin, and wretchedness, and misery, which every man is made, more or less, to feel, may be upon the mass of the world, there are not a few on whom, by a Divine blessing, the effects

have not ended when the cause which produced them had ceased to operate. The affliction may have left an impression which survived when it passed away ; and such examples remain as encouragements to assure every man who would seek God, whatever may have been the motive by which he was actuated, and however imperfect the feeling that first brought him to God, and however far he should be from resting satisfied with it, as if there were need of nothing purer or better,—that still he is, while following his convictions and turning from his sins, in the way of duty, which is at all times the way of safety ; and that were he to delay inquiring after God, or seeking to his footstool in penitence and in prayer, till such time as he could offer unto God a service that was worthy of him, he would never come to seek after God at all. To use an illustration, which the beautiful parable of the Saviour will readily furnish,—the father did not ask his prodigal son what had led him to bethink himself of the home from which he had wandered, for he knew that it was nothing else than the merest selfishness,—the feeling of his own bitter wretchedness and misery, aggravated as this was by the reflection that he had provoked and deserved it. He did not meet him on his return by reproaches for his ingratitude, nor tell him that since he had forgotten him in the day of revelry and enjoyment, he could not expect to be remembered of him in the day of want and poverty. And, in like manner, God will not ask any of you who, through the mere feeling of your own danger and extremity, are led to think of him and to turn to him, what brought you first to this course, or reject you because it really was that you could not do better, and were forced to own his presence and his power (for it is, I fear, the case with all of us, that a stern necessity, in one shape or other, leads us first to God),—he will not ask this of you, be assured, provided you do only turn and come to him now in sincerity and in truth.

To ensure this, however,—to ensure something so deep, and permanent, and abiding, as that it shall not pass away

with the mere sense of wretchedness and guilt in which it may at first originate, it is necessary for all of us that we should see God in another character than that in which we naturally regard him. It is only in so far as the dispensations of his afflicting providence,—those warnings by which he knocks at the door of our hearts,—lead us to hear the admonitions and invitations of his grace, that any change will be wrought on our hearts; and though you may begin with an earnestness as strong as was your indifference before to seek after God,—though there may be all the appearance and all the reality of seriousness in the prayers which you present to him for assistance and deliverance,—though you may vow, and vow as you think in all sincerity, that you will never forget God as you have done, and that you will evince your gratitude by living to his service,—it needs not the gift of prophecy,—it needs nothing more than an acquaintance with your nature or my own to tell, that, unless his grace touch your hearts, and unless you are encouraged through the knowledge and belief of the Gospel, to regard him, not merely as a sovereign who must be feared, but as a gracious and compassionate father, who is to be loved,—all your impressions of Divine things will be as passing and as perishable, because as selfish, as those of the persons of whom it is said, “When he slew them, then they sought him; and they returned, and inquired early after God.”

It is impossible that the religion of the world can be otherwise than we find it, so long as the world regards God in the light of a hard taskmaster;—so long as there is nothing seen in God which awakens any other feeling than dread and apprehension, men will only think of him when they cannot forbear it, and they will cease to think of him so soon as the danger or extremity which presses upon them is removed. Their life, like that of the Israelites, will be composed of alternate compunctious visitings on account of sin, and returns to a course of forgetfulness of God, when the load is lightened, under the pressure of which they cried to him for deliverance. And if you would have all this done away with,

there is no other resource than an acquaintance with him, as, in Jesus Christ, a God who is waiting and willing to be gracious. The afflictions and the trials of life were all intended to bring those who are yet in their sins to the knowledge and the belief of the Gospel. If they fail of this, they will only bring out more plainly and palpably the corrupt selfishness of our nature ; if they are blessed for leading to this, however a mere concern for our own safety may have begun our inquiries after God, there they will not end ; and when you are brought to see that the God whom you dread, and from whom you turn away, is waiting to meet you with a free forgiveness and a full salvation,—that he is seeking, by the richest mercy, to win his way to your confiding regard,—that his warnings and addresses to you on the danger of sin were all intended to reclaim you from a course not more adverse to his glory than to your well-being,—and that, to secure this, he sent his own Son in our nature to take away sin,—there is a truth presented which will dissolve the enmity of your hearts, and bring you near to him, not with the dread of slaves, but with the spirit of children. You will then be led to feel your happiness identified with a course of willing and affectionate obedience ; and under the impulse of gratitude and affection, you will be led to live, not unto yourselves, but unto him who loved you, and gave himself for you.

DISCOURSE THIRD.*

ISAIAH, xl. 6, 7, 8.—“ The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; because the Spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.

THESE words present two things in striking contrast,—the nature of man and the word of God; the one, which is likened to the most perishable thing around you,—the grass which in the morning groweth up, and in the evening is cut down and withereth; the other, enduring and unchangeable as the everlasting nature of Him from whom it proceedeth.

It would seem as if the former of these truths scarcely needed so very solemn an announcement; and as if much less than the voice of a Prophet had sufficed to assure men that they were but as grass. It is one of those very obvious facts which no experience has contradicted,—which has grown so common as to have become proverbial,—and of which, besides the general impression of its truth that we must have gathered from the observation of the world around us, every one of us has had our own particular and individual lesson.

When the Prophet inquired of God, What shall I cry? we

* Preached in St George's Church, 9th February 1832, being the Presbyterian Fast on account of the prevalence of Cholera in the city, which was also the anniversary of Dr Thomson's death.

may be disposed, in the expectation, perhaps, that he would announce to the world something of which it had never heard before, to wonder that he should have been required to publish so common and so ordinary a sentiment as the perishable nature of all human glory,—that “all flesh was grass, and the glory of them as the flower of the grass.” Were we, however, to assign any reason why it should have been thought necessary to publish such a truth, I apprehend that independently of the contrast which it is intended to exhibit, a reason might be found in the very circumstance on account of which it may to some appear wonderful that it should have been thus published at all; and that reason may be found in its very commonness and familiarity. It was not because it was a truth which men did not know, but because they knew it so well, and were so familiar with it,—it was because it passed current amongst them as one of those things which no man might contest, which it required no learning to unravel, no process of reasoning to reach or to establish,—it was because no man could ordinarily even so much as hear it spoken of by his fellow, without intimating that he needed not him to teach it, and that he could not make it clearer and surer to him than it was before; it was for this reason that the voice might well cry. It was because this truth shared the natural fate of all truths which are familiar,—in being a subject on which men seldom reflected, and which passed through their minds without awakening any of those deep impressions with which we should naturally expect it to be associated,—it was because, being thus common, there was a degree of difficulty in fixing the mind upon this, which we do not experience to the same extent with other truths which are less evident to ordinary observation, though they may be far from so nearly concerning us,—it was because it was so habitually admitted, that no man could hope that there was either curiosity to be gratified, or novelty to be indulged, from all that you could tell him of it,—because he instantly passed from it as from a subject which, though not in itself distasteful perhaps, may become so, even to weariness,

from the frequency with which it has been urged,—it was thus that if there was any important practical lesson to be deduced from it, or any thing in the solemn announcement of the truth by a Divine messenger, which might serve to arrest the attention, and gain for it even a momentary place in the serious regard of those to whom it was addressed, that we may see why it might not be unnecessary or uncalled for, that God should have bidden his Prophet proclaim, though it had been as a single and detached sentiment, and unconnected with any other, that “All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass.”

And I am here led naturally to advert to a distinction between natural and moral truth, which may not indeed hold in every point, but is, nevertheless, sufficiently broad to afford room for a separation between them. In the natural world, and in the investigation of natural things, that truth may not always be the most useful, which is the most obvious. It may frequently require the highest effort of the most gifted mind to reach it,—the discovery may have been the result of long and patient investigation,—and the thing itself have been so remote from common apprehension, and so hidden from ordinary observation, that nothing less than this investigation was sufficient to detect it. You find, accordingly, that many of those truths which have been most successfully applied to the business of the present life, and which have been most useful in promoting the comfort and well-being of man, are truths which have been elicited only by the light of science, and by the well-directed efforts of a patient and persevering sagacity. Whereas, in the moral world, and in the case of moral truth, that truth which is the most obvious, is always the most useful. The truth which may suffice to guide man to the knowledge of what is right in human conduct, or which may furnish man with the most important motives for pursuing it, is as plain, and lies as open, to the view of a peasant, as it does to the view of a philosopher. And it is in those things which are every where apparent, which lie on the very surface, and which no man

can fail to discover, however he may fail to improve them ; it is in these that you are to find the elements of all moral wisdom,—the substantial truths which are to direct you in the path of duty and of happiness. If there be a single truth in the Word of God, or a single moral fact in human history, which is obscure or difficult of detection, you may be sure that this truth, though by no means to be undervalued, has but a slight and indirect bearing on human conduct. Had it been more important for us to know it, it had assuredly been more clearly revealed, or more easily apprehended ; in proportion to its strangeness and its singularity, you may almost predict its comparative inutility. And instead, therefore, of undervaluing any truth which is given forth by God, simply because it is a common truth, and a truth which we already know, and which every man must know, and setting it aside, therefore, as that from which no important lesson was to be deduced,—I say, that simply because it is a common and ordinary truth, you should rather be disposed to regard it as containing the seeds of true wisdom, by receiving and admitting which into your hearts, you may be made wise unto salvation.

The application of this principle to the message which the Prophet was commissioned to proclaim, is so evident, that it can hardly require to be pointed out to you. As I have already remarked, it contains one of those truths which every man knows, and which no man would ever think of disputing, which has been familiar to us from our childhood, and which we have had abundant opportunities of verifying by our own observation. Who does not know that life is uncertain, and must soon pass away ?—that death is in the world, and that it is appointed unto all men once to die ?—that underneath the glory of the whole world, the worm is already at work which is to consume its beauty, and lay its honour in the dust ?—and that, were we to continue amid the wreck of all around us, and no succession of living beings to be kept up, we should soon live alone in a desolate and unpeopled wilderness ? Who has not read, or who has not witness-

ed striking exhibitions of the vanity of all human expectations, and of the sudden and overwhelming disappointment of all human hopes? of parents bereaved of their children, and children bereaved of their parents? of men being brought down in a moment, in the fulness of health and of enjoyment, to the chambers of the grave? and of others, in the very midst of all that this world could give to add to their glory and their triumph, being severed at once and for ever from it all? Who is there living in a world like this, that does not know and is not familiar with these things? And yet, instead of undervaluing it, because it is a common and a well-known fact, and conceiving that you have therefore no moral or spiritual lesson to learn from it, you are bound, from this very circumstance, and because it meets you every where, and because, go where you will, you find it meeting you,—you are bound to consider, from its being thus inscribed on the face of human things, that it is fitted to teach you a truth of which you need ever to be reminded, and which is just as important as its inculcation is frequent throughout every page of God's Word, and every path of his providence.

This view of the subject, derived from the very circumstances which would lead many to undervalue it, is amply borne out by the consideration of the truth which the Prophet was commissioned to proclaim; and, however common it may be, were it only aright fixed in your minds, and wrought into your very nature,—were you only brought to act under its influence, and to have respect to it in all your ways,—there is no truth which could be in itself more effectual for guiding you to the right estimate of the world and its enjoyments, or for assisting and preparing your minds to receive the lessons of a higher and diviner wisdom. I can scarcely conceive the single thought, that we ourselves, and all that constitutes the source of our happiness and endearments, are fast passing away from the face of the earth, like the most quickly fading thing around us, to be realized by any,—that in a few years all that is living and breathing,

and full of animation and enjoyment, shall be silent as the grave and mingled with the clods of the valley,—that every thing which now interests, and engages, and delights us, shall become to us as though it had never been,—I can scarcely conceive this thought to be realized without its leading to something, not merely good as a matter of feeling, but good in what regards our best interests,—without inducing a soberness of mind favourable to the reception and inculcation of spiritual wisdom, and without fitting us in some degree to feel the suitableness and the necessity of some such confidence as the Gospel brings near.

Did we only allow our minds to dwell upon this most common truth, I think it were impossible that men could be so entirely engrossed by the things of a present world as we find them,—that they could be buried in its earthliness, or immersed in its pleasures, or busily engaged in the pursuit of its riches or its honours as they are, or that they could live so habitually forgetful that they have any thing to care for, or any thing to be concerned about, beyond what they must eat, or what they must drink, or where-withal they must be clothed. That truth, simple and easily admitted as it may be, could not be habitually contemplated without breaking in upon the fatality of this world's gratifications; it would dispel the delusion which makes the world in which we live every thing, and the world that lies beyond it nothing; you could not in that case, even though you would, live so devoted to time and to vanity,—you could not count so firmly as you seem to do on the perpetuity of its connexions,—you could not live so forgetful of your spiritual and eternal interests,—you could not so easily and so perseveringly forget God and your dependence upon him,—you could not be content to remain in that ignorance of his character and his providence in which many live, and in which many die,—you could not rest so contented as some of you may be doing, without having any sure ground of hope whether you are the objects of his favour or not,—you would be constrained to think of Him,—your very help-

lessness would make you think of Him,—the feeling that you were withering before the breath of the Almighty would force from you a cry to Him, the very hiding of whose face troubled you,—and just because he had constituted you reasonable and provident beings, who could not be indifferent to the future, unless you could contrive to forget it, would you, by this first principle of your nature, be necessitated to look out for information about that world whither you are travelling, and become indifferent to a world which you saw could never be your resting-place.

These are lessons which the habitual recognition of such a truth as this would teach you ; and if they are of the highest importance for us to learn, as we are men who are to be judged by the deeds done in the body,—if they are the first rudiments of all moral and spiritual wisdom,—they are to be learned, not from the deductions of philosophy, or reached by any application of profound reasoning, or confined to the few who have time and perseverance for abstract inquiry,—the materials of them are strown on the face of the world around you,—they are to be found in the wreck of human hope and human happiness,—in the ravages which death is making in your families and neighbourhoods,—in every funeral procession that moves along your streets,—in every change which seasons and years are bringing round,—in short, in that silent but deep and solemn response which the whole world and every part of it is giving to the Prophet's cry,—“ All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof as the flower of the field.”

It is good on every subject on which we would seek to influence the minds of human beings, that there should be certain truths which are on all hands admitted, and which are in themselves incontrovertible. These form the basis of all reasoning, and let us be driven from other points as we may, or let any resistance be given to the truths which we would seek to build on them, these still remain as a resource to which we betake ourselves, and from which we renew the assault. Precisely such a truth for the work of the Christian

minister, is that which the Prophet proclaimed. It is of that nature which no scepticism has ever sought to impugn,—it is an incontrovertible fact in human history and human experience,—it carries with it all the force of a first principle,—no man ever yet thought that it required demonstration, and the conclusions that we would seek to draw from it are so plain and palpable that no man who admits the first principles of Divine truth, or who is possessed of the smallest measure of a reasonable nature, can mistake or resist them. They may be reduced to a question of the plainest arithmetic,—they may be brought within the compass of numbers,—the balance may be shown to lie as clearly on the side whither we would carry your determinations, as time is exceeded by eternity,—as a finite by an infinite number,—it needs no reasoning to understand the inference any more than it does the truth on which it rests,—the man of the plainest understanding apprehends it as easily and as readily as the man of the most profound intellect,—and he who has realized most distinctly, and has his mind imbued most deeply with the vanity and the short-livedness of all human glory, will be best prepared to appreciate the perpetuity of the Divine,—will be the best prepared by the consideration that all flesh is grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass,—to estimate the value and importance of the word of the Lord which abideth for ever.

Many reasonably apply in this light the contrast which the Apostle Peter presents when, in his first Epistle, he quotes, as it would appear, this very passage from Isaiah, although the particular object of the contrast, as stated by him, seems to have been to ensure the faith of those to whom he wrote in the promises of God concerning the great salvation which was to be revealed, and to silence the distrust which they might have been led to entertain of events so wonderful and so far beyond any thing that they had ever known,—from the very great difference that subsisted between the nature of which they were partakers and that of the Most High,—between a nature which was perishable, and whose

glory was as the grass, and a nature, every attribute and declaration of which partook of its essential unchangeableness. The Apostle has told us that the word of the Lord, which endureth for ever, is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto us. The declaration of our text, as it comes thus explained to us, therefore, is a declaration of the unchangeableness of that foundation on which a Christian is required to build all his hopes; and instead of presenting a contrast between the weakness of our nature and the everlastingness of the Divine, which could only serve to make us fall prostrate in the dust before Him, our text will be found to present a truth the most supporting and strengthening, because the most adapted to all our wants and necessities, and because revealing to us how there may be connected to our frail and perishing nature something of the unchangeableness of the Divine.

If there be one feeling more than another which the view of the passing nature of every thing around us is fitted to make on our minds, it is that feeling of the emptiness and unsatisfying nature of all earthly good, to which no man is entirely a stranger,—the feeling of its utter incapacity to meet the wants of an immortal being. Let it have all the other qualifications which it may to ensure our happiness, we must feel that it wants one essential element so long as it is not lasting,—that the happiness on the security of which you cannot count for a single moment, is no happiness at all,—and however there may be men that can overlook all this, and never enjoy the world the less for all the changes that are going on around them, and which they themselves are so soon to undergo, they cannot do so without surrendering themselves to that callousness of heart which is not more truly the characteristic of utter ungodliness, than of a state devoid of every thing that exalts and dignifies human nature. There is felt the need of a resting-place,—of a foundation more solid and durable than any thing which this world presents,—of something that partakes not of the shifting nature of all human things,—some-

thing, in short, which is possessed of the same qualities with that of which the Prophet here said that it standeth and abideth for ever.

Now the Prophet says that this character belongs to the word of the Lord, which, whilst it mingles with human things, and is let down into the world, remains untouched and unaffected by all its changes. Not unlike Him who, in a higher sense, is God's Eternal Word, and who came in our nature, without impairing in any degree by its assumption the essentially Divine and immutable qualities of His own,—does His word come down to man and dwell with man upon this earth, whilst it retains all the perpetuity and unchangeableness of Heaven. And if that word does present any thing fitted to comfort and to sustain our hearts amidst the changes that are every where around us,—if it tells us of everlasting counsels of peace to sinful man,—if it reveals to us a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God,—if it brings life and immortality to light,—if it lays a sure pathway to their possession and enjoyment across that fearful gulf which sin hath placed between us and God,—do you not feel that it supplies the very thing which human necessities require, and this just because it is the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever ?

I need not say to those of you who are acquainted with the Gospel that these are its discoveries ; and I might, at this point, without diverging very far from the object which the Prophet had in view, endeavour to explain and open up its nature generally, as it is adapted to all the wants of a sinful and afflicted world,—a world which is withering away before the curse of the Almighty. I might explain it as a message of mercy and grace to your souls,—as extending to every variety of human suffering,—as sent to heal the broken-hearted,—to proclaim deliverance to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound,—as addressed to every sinner, in every degree and depth of natural and spiritual wretchedness,—and as meeting him

with that very blessing which his necessities require,—free for him to receive and appropriate without the burden of one qualifying condition. But that which will not fail to commend most of all to you the word which by the Gospel is thus preached unto you,—especially when you think of it in contrast with the passing and perishable nature of every thing in the world beside,—will, I am persuaded, be the immutability of its nature. Let every thing change as it may, it never changeth; when the flood and the tempest descend, it floats on the face of the waters like some ark of refuge to which every man may flee, and he who believes and receives it into his heart as the word which God hath sent him, becomes possessed of a principle which constitutes him, in some degree, a partaker of its own incorruptible nature.

It is when viewed in this light that the declaration of our text is the most interesting. It is no doubt very difficult for us to form any distinct conception of an attribute of the Divine nature, or a quality of the Divine word, so very remote from any thing which attaches to our nature or to our counsels, as that of perpetuity or unchangeableness. It may assist our minds, however, to conceive of it, when we reflect that the very event which proves the mutability of our nature, proclaims the unchangeableness of the Divine; and it is because the word of the Lord abideth, that man is as grass, and the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The truth which every where forces itself upon us, that men are dying and perishing creatures, remains true in consequence of the word of the Lord. Corruptibility and decay are no essential properties of a nature like ours,—for men once existed without being subject to corruption,—“It is *appointed* unto all men once to die;” “death hath come upon all men, because all have sinned.” In the universality with which this sentence is executed, we see a proof how God’s word abideth. But God hath spoken another word, not less sure and not less steadfast, even the word which by the Gospel is preached to you. He hath told dying men how they

may never die,—how this mortal may put on immortality, and this corruptible incorruption,—how a nature that is now moved and changed by every breath of the Almighty, may become, by the inspiration of his spirit, a nature that shall never pass away. The word which he has given us declares, that he who believeth in Jesus Christ shall never die,—that he is born of the incorruptible seed which liveth and abideth for ever; and when we are called to feel how true he is in the one case, let us be persuaded to rest on him as equally faithful in the other. The transitory nature of all human things, instead of serving, as it does I fear with many, merely to call forth a few commonplace observations, or a few sentimental feelings, will then become to us, as it is fitted and designed to be, a preacher of the Gospel; and every time that we are called to feel that all flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof as the flower of the field, we shall be only bound the closer to that word of the Lord which liveth and abideth for ever.

I do not know that there can be much necessity for applying a subject, which needs only to be realized in order to lead you to its right application. If it be indeed true, that, whilst all flesh is grass, the word of God abideth for ever,—that word, by the abiding of which in your hearts you may be in some degree partakers of its own incorruption, there is no inference plainer than that you should, as you value your own peace and happiness, make it the ground of your dependence and confidence. The matter in question is, as I have already said, no abstract consideration;—you cannot so much as open your eyes on the world, without seeing that it is fast passing away from you,—and you cannot think of yourselves without knowing that you must soon pass away from it; and, therefore, as you are dying men,—men who must stand at the judgment-seat of Christ,—men who, whatever you may think now, will then find yourselves, if you are not in Him, of all creatures the most miserable,—delay not, I beseech you, to make his Word your confidence and

dependence,—to have it abiding and dwelling in your hearts,—for “if any man abide not in him, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered, and men gather them and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.”

If these considerations might be expected to influence your minds at one time more than another, it is surely at the present, when that judgment which hath realized more than ever the Prophet's description,—that surely the people is grass,—is still hanging over us,—that judgment before which men have passed away with a rapidity and a suddenness of which we have no like example,—that judgment which hath given to life a stronger uncertainty, and to all that lies beyond life a greater nearness and solemnity. What better improvement, then, can we make of this dispensation, than that we should be led by it to that word which abideth for ever,—to him and to his grace who hath in mercy opened up a way of peace and safety in the midst of all; and who, whilst he is declaring by these judgments the truth of that curse which he hath uttered against sin, is leading you to see thereby that he will be equally faithful in saving them from its final curse and its final misery who come to him through the blood of Jesus?

There is another event which has been this day, I doubt not, brought to the remembrance of many of you, and which is fitted, by the blessing of God, to lead you to the very same improvement. I am sure that not a few of my hearers will anticipate me when I mention, that, on this very day last year, you were, by an awfully sudden dispensation of Divine Providence, deprived of the services of your late faithful Pastor; and we, at least, I am sure, ought to feel especially grateful to the Giver of all good, in being allowed to meet together this day in this house, though it were for nothing else than to have our minds refreshed again, by the lesson which his sudden removal, in the midst of his labours, and in the midst of his usefulness, reads to us all.

There was not one of you who did not feel at that time, even though you had never felt it before, that all flesh was

grass, and the glory of man as the flower of grass,—there was not one of you who was not made to see that you held by a very thread all that was dearest and best beloved by you ; he who addressed to you many a solemn and awakening lesson by his life and by his ministry, read you a more affecting lesson than them all by that event which severed him at once from your fellowship and endearments,—he being dead, yet speaketh ; and when that voice which issued, and still issues, from his tomb, comes re-enforced and strengthened by the voice of other like providences around us,—all of them alike intended to lead you to that word which abideth for ever,—that, by receiving it into your hearts, and keeping it in your hearts, you may live for ever,—let us give instant heed to its declarations,—let us betake ourselves immediately, if we have not yet done so, to that blood which cleanseth from all sin,—to that spirit which is able to sanctify us wholly. And then shall we be provided with a refuge which shall stand us in stead when all others shall fail,—with a hope which hath its foundation in the Divine unchangeableness, and which neither the trials of life nor the approach of death shall ever sweep away.

DISCOURSE FOURTH.

LUKE, ii. 14.—Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

THERE are few names fitted to call up a greater number of pleasing and delightful images than that of peace; and it can hardly be mentioned, without suggesting to every mind many a scene of happiness and endearment.

We find ourselves, perhaps, on the very mention of peace, transported beyond the occupations of the present hour, to some long-past period of our infancy, surrounded by the friends and companions of our early years, and once more interested in those easy and unpretending enjoyments which present,—as we are ready to believe,—such a contrast to the cares and anxieties of our after existence. Or, we find ourselves placed in the bosom of some happy family, where contentment and quiet satisfaction reign,—where parental tenderness and filial reverence vie with each other in promoting the happiness of the whole; in which there is the balance of well-regulated affections, and the play of easy, generous, and kindly feeling, and the circling of all those charities which soften and grace human existence, and such a harmony of will and of object, as seems to bespeak that each one of the party was animated by the same spirit, and that one soul inspired them all.

Or the mind takes in a larger field, perhaps, and then it fancies itself looking abroad on some land, rich in beauty

and fertility, over which is spread a repose as perfect and unbroken as you may conceive to be possible in a living and a peopled world; which presents every where the traces of abundance and comfort in the circumstances of its inhabitants, and with whose dwellings we readily associate the idea of simplicity and contentment,—a land, in short, such as we may conceive that to have been, which was the garden of the Lord, before God turned its fruitful fields into barrenness, for the sins of those that dwelt therein,—over which no devout mind could expatiate without feeling as though the earth rejoiced, because the Lord reigned; and which could hardly fail to suggest to any mind at all familiar with the Bible, that exquisitely simple and tender description, “Every man sitting under his vine, and under his fig-tree, and none to make them afraid.”

Such are the images which the very mention of peace naturally brings before us. Were a Christian, however, to name that which included and excelled all these, he would probably find himself returning to that time in human history, when God saw every thing that he had made, and behold it was very good; when on every part of the world were inscribed the traces of the Divine beneficence, and when every thing bespoke it to be a world in the full enjoyment of the Divine favour and love. On the face of such a world there had been all that may even yet be found to gratify our minds in the scenes of beauty and loveliness around us,—every thing to please the eye and to fill the heart, which may be yet found lingering, as it were, amidst the desolation which sin has wrought. But this had been its high and peculiar charm, that, in the light of God’s countenance, every creature had its very life and enjoyment,—that the visible and the sensible peace which reigned on the earth was only the reflection of that more delightful and profound peace which dwelt in the human souls that were abroad upon it; that, void of suspicion or of fear, they walked in all the tranquillity of innocence, and with all the security imparted by the conviction of an ever-present, an ever-watchful, and

Divine guardianship ; and that, in every thing which constituted the happiness and the enjoyment of their spiritual nature, they lived, and moved, and had their being in God. At such a time as this, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy,—the presence of a scene, which led so directly to the contemplation of that goodness in which all had originated, might well have inspired the praises of those blessed spirits that rejoice in the manifestation of the Divine beneficence, and well might they have been found, with so fair a spectacle of his love before them, exclaiming, “ Glory to God in the highest ; on earth peace, good will toward men.”

It was, however, as you know, with other scenes opening to their view, that the song of the heavenly host in our text originated ; and scenes of a nature fitted to impress us more deeply with the value of that peace which they then proclaimed.

Peace is, properly speaking, rest from war ; and the view of those miseries which war entails upon families and upon nations, communicates a new interest, and almost a kind of sacredness, to the very name of peace. It were impossible to look abroad on any land, blessed with the bounties of Divine Providence, and reposing in tranquillity and abundance, without the feeling that we looked on a scene most refreshing and gladdening to every mind that delighted in the contemplation of human happiness. But could we see it when this peace had been violated,—when the quiet occupations of the land had been interrupted, its dwellings laid in ashes, and its inhabitants armed against one another, or pressed down by the might of some resistless adversary,—if the very scene on which we looked had been once the field of contending armies, and if every where around were strewed the traces of a merciless and unsparing devastation,—if we could not move a step without witnessing the wreck of human hopes, the blight of human industry, and all the unmitigated desolation which war brings along with it,—if we saw, as we passed on, how the sanctity of every human affection

had been profaned, the tenderest of human ties outraged, and all that distrust, suspicion, and hatred awakened, which had armed every man's hand against his neighbour's, and his neighbour's against his,—were such a scene as this presented,—with what new, and, till that moment, perhaps, unfelt power, should we discover the value of peace, in the ruin and misery spread over a territory no longer blessed by its smile,—and how beautiful upon the mountains would then be the feet of him who brought good tidings, and who published peace !

It was in such a scene as all this presented to view, that the language of our text originated ; and however little many of us apprehend the truth, such a scene may be every where witnessed in the world in which we dwell. The language of the Bible and the sentiment of our own hearts bear witness, that there has been a contest between God and his creatures, of which the effects are every where discernible ; and could we only spiritually realize what is hidden,—we fear, from not a few, through its very familiarity,—we should not want proofs that the traces of war are universally to be found ; and of war too, as ruinous for us as might have been anticipated, in a case where the feebleness of the creature stood opposed to the might and the majesty of the Creator.

It is not sought to be denied, that the world, as it now is, presents numberless scenes fitted to convey the image of peace ; and we could hardly imagine any one so insensible to the proofs of beneficence every where spread around him, as never to have carried away from it some impressions of the character of him who called it into existence. But tell us of the loveliest and most blissful scene which this world ever presented,—carry us to the land, if such a land there be, which war has never visited, and where human passions have never been let loose for purposes of mutual destruction,—let it be blessed with all the comforts which human laws and the refinements of civilized life can confer,—and yet, as surely as sin has been there, is it a land suffering under the curse and the misery of sin ! And in the cry of human

wretchedness which every where ascends from it,—in the spectacle of suffering humanity which every where assails us,—in the untold griefs which are pressing down the bosoms of multitudes,—and, above all, in that scourge before which its successive generations are passing away,—as surely as though some pestilence had swept over them, may be discerned the ruin, and the ruthlessness, and the unmitigated severity of war.

Or carry us, if you please, into the bosom of the happiest human family that is to be found in the world,—let there be in it every thing that can impart tenderness and grace to the nearest of earthly connexions,—let there be all that affectionate interest in each other's welfare, and all that interchange of love and endearment which the most refined sentimentalist has ever conceived of ; and yet it is, for all this, a family rent from the great family of the universe ! Let affection and tenderness circulate as they may among its different members, there is naturally no circling of affection between them and a Father in heaven ! Their hearts are naturally alienated and estranged from him whom they ought most of all to revere ; and when you find that, as if by some strange and unnatural compact, they have excluded God from all the happiness which they share, and from all that love which is emanating freely from every bosom upon its fellows,—when He alone, most surely the head of that family, and the author and giver of all its blessings, is the object of none of those affections which they cherish towards one another ; and when the name that ought to lighten every countenance, and to fill every heart with gladness, is heard with indifference or with dread,—perhaps even with aversion,—may you not discern that, underneath the peace and tranquillity of its surface, there is lurking the distrust, and the suspicion, and the enmity of war !

Or carry us, if you will, into the recesses of the finest human soul that inhabits the world ; and yet, if that soul is a stranger to the peace of the Gospel, it, too, has experienced and is still suffering under the miseries of war ! I

shall not suppose it to be the seat of all, or any of those passions which may convert a human bosom into a very hell. I shall allow it to be graced with every human accomplishment, and blessed with every human sensibility. It may be, if you please, a wise and understanding, an amiable and affectionate soul; and yet, if God dwells not there, as its chiefest good, and the supreme object of affection, it is still a soul without an object to meet and to satisfy its wishes, and a soul that is and must be a stranger to all true, and lasting, and satisfying peace. Whatever enjoyment it may possess, it can only possess it in forgetfulness of Him whose presence is necessary to constitute its real happiness. The fancied serenity which it may attain, can only continue so long as the claims of his justice and his holiness are not felt; and even the conscience must be seared and deadened, so as never more to break in upon its accustomed pleasures, or chase, as it may sometimes do, all its peace away. The profound lethargy in which it may be sunk to the consideration of its chiefest good and its highest interest, so far from proving that the miseries of war have never been there, only reminds us of a country which war has so completely desolated, that no living thing survives to tell the story of its sufferings; and of which the unbroken, unpeopled, and deathlike stillness is more dismal even than if we had seen the struggle and the agony of which this has only been the fearful consummation!

I am aware that many of the facts to which this description applies have been otherwise interpreted; and they may, to a certain extent, be susceptible of a different interpretation. Attempts have been made to reconcile, upon natural principles, the misery that exists in the world with the Divine benevolence, and even to prove how it might be consistent with a greater measure of happiness on the whole. But the arguments that have been adduced for this purpose are generally only farther proofs of our ignorance, and not such as are sufficient to convince or satisfy our understandings. They are proposed without much consideration of the

amount of misery that exists in the world ; and, above all, they make little or no account of that secret, but not altogether hidden, distress and dissatisfaction which really constitute the greater part of it. At any rate, let men speculate as they may on these subjects, the Word of God has told us, that it is the result of our enmity to God, and the consequence of our departure from him. In proof of the reality of that contest which we have sought to wage with God, it refers you to the curse which sin has entailed on us all,—it directs you to the suffering and the wretchedness which every man sees, and which every man is made, more or less, to feel, in evidence that there is a scourge desolating the world, yet more fearful than all those ravages of war that ever swept over it. And if, with this experience of Divine wrath, and that, too, but the forerunner of a misery yet more awful, God did publish peace to the world, and reveal a plan by which the calamity might be averted, and sin and wretchedness banished from the world,—if, when there was no eye but his that could pity, and no arm but his that could bring us deliverance, his eye pitied, and his arm wrought salvation,—might there not be in the sound of peace after this long night of desolating warfare, something more cheering and more gladdening, than if it had never been violated,—and might not those blessed spirits that rejoice in every manifestation of God's compassionate grace, have sung as they announced it, with deeper and more affecting melody than when they hailed the birth of a sinless world, “ Glory to God in the highest ; for on earth there is peace and good will toward men.”

Such might have been the sentiment inspired simply by the consideration, that God had given peace to the world, and that a scheme was now to be accomplished for arresting the miseries of war ; and though it is impossible to conceive the existence of such a state of things without reference to our guilt as having provoked it, it may be proper now to consider, for a little, some of those circumstances in the his-

tory of human transgression which give additional energy and impressiveness to the language of our text.

In ordinary cases, and as usually seen in our world, the origin of war is so obscure and doubtful, as to render it a matter of some difficulty to determine on whom its miseries are justly chargeable. On both sides there may have been aggressions which have provoked it, and which share the guilt equally between them ; and each party has, at any rate, some plausible reason to allege why the guilt should not attach to him. In such circumstances, the generosity of the party which bestows peace cannot be supposed very strong, and the ingratitude not very striking in the other,—nor may there be much to confer honour on the character of the individual or the nation that, in these circumstances, makes the first advances to peace.

Besides all this, war cannot long be maintained between any two of our earthly families, without its becoming necessary for both that its progress should be arrested. Whatever brings ruin to the one, in some degree affects the prosperity of the other. There is a waste and an expenditure of means which tell nearly as much upon the conqueror as upon the conquered ; and peace may be really as needful for the country which has acquired the right of proposing it, as it is for the country to which it is proposed. If there are cases of which this cannot be affirmed, peace is generally granted on the solicitation of those who are suffering most deeply from its consequences. Conceiving that they are at the mercy of another, they appeal to the pity and compassion of the conqueror ; and the thing is of rare occurrence amongst individuals, and of far rarer occurrence among nations, when, in the very height of conquest, without the burden of one dishonourable surrender, and without one solicitation on the part of the conquered, peace is offered, not to say pressed on their acceptance.

It will be obvious, at first sight, that none of these circumstances is found to lessen the value of that peace which is given by God to man. It can never be a matter of doubt

with any reader of the Bible, on whom is chargeable the guilt of violating that harmony which subsisted in the beginning between heaven and earth ; and in the feelings of every heart, even without the Bible to interpret them,—in that consciousness of sin and undeservedness which every one feels so often as he thinks of God,—there remains something to tell, that the aggression has been on our part, and that, even in the face of all that might have forbidden it, the guilt is ours of rising up against the majesty and disowning the sovereignty of God. Of the nature and aggravation of this conduct, we have indeed only the faintest and most imperfect conception ; but to the truth that such a contest there is, every human soul gives testimony. With all the softest epithets that may be applied to human guilt, one thing is evident, that the authority of God has been displaced by another authority, and that every man is ready to constitute himself and his own will in the place of God. And though the commencement of this may have been at an age far distant from our own, and though we may be ready to flatter ourselves that it cannot therefore be chargeable on us, the fact of which every one may be assured, that he has given, and does habitually give, consent to this rebellion against God, and does, in opposition to the light of his own conscience, persevere in it, most surely evinces, that if he has not been the first to rise up against God, he has, at any rate, joined with those that resist the might and authority of the Creator ; and there is, besides, in every man's history a standing proof that, so far from seeking that this most unnatural state might be removed, he would rather that it should be perpetuated.

I speak not now the truth of a distant age, when I say, that the first approach to reconciliation was made by God. I speak something which must commend itself to all of you as a present truth ; for, of this you must be aware, that, so far from having naturally, as sinners, the smallest desire to be at peace with him, you had, but for the invitations and the warnings that he addressed to you, remained for ever

at a distance ; and that, so far from feeling any relenting for your abuse of his goodness, you never did feel the strength of your alienation, till you were made, in some degree, to feel that God was soliciting you to hear, in order that your soul might live. You may remember how averse you were to him, even when he besought you to be at peace ; that instead of being alive to the mercy or the grace involved in such tenders of salvation, it was nothing but a hard necessity perhaps, which brought you to seek God in that way in which he had declared that he was to be found ; that this very necessity brought forth your averseness to his character in terms of more decided enmity than before ; that there was exemplified in your history as individuals, what is exemplified in the history of every sinner, and is true of all the world, that, unless God had moved towards you, you had never moved nearer to, but rather estranged yourselves the farther, from him ; and that his grace was manifested towards us in the very depth of our ungodliness, without even the relenting of a single heart to him, whose name had been dishonoured, and whose fatherly grace we had altogether cast away.

You will observe that it was this Divine grace which the angelic host celebrated in the praises which they sung,—that it was good will toward men,—not the movement of a world in penitence to God, but the movement of God to the world, in a compassion and tenderness which they had never besought,—and that the particular event which called forth at this moment their adoration was, not the ascending cry of human beings suffering under the miseries of war, that God would put an end to the conflict, but the descent of the Son of God into a world that had rebelled against his authority, not as the messenger of our condemnation, but the ambassador of peace.

And if the message of reconciliation which he brought had announced peace on any terms, however painful and humiliating, you may easily see what ground there was for celebrating the condescension and the grace that were in-

volved in it. The Word of God, however, does not speak more plainly to the fact, that there is a way of favour and forgiveness opened, than that this way is free and open to every man, be his transgressions what they may; and that, without a single condition to qualify its free and liberal bestowal, every man is invited to return to the Lord, in the confidence that he waiteth to be gracious to him, notwithstanding all his iniquities. The peace which the heavenly host announced was not peace to a peculiar few, it was “peace on earth and good will toward men;” it embraced within its ample proclamation the whole family of man. It was proclaimed in such terms as that every man who heard it, and so soon as he heard it, might know that it was a message from Heaven to him, conveying tidings the most interesting, and such as should have been, of all others, the most welcome; and that, instead of being required, and vainly required, to propitiate that God whom he had offended, or to remain in hopeless misery, for ever exiled from his favour and love, God had himself interposed to put an end to the contest which he was maintaining, and to the misery and suffering which it had so fearfully brought along with it. And, contemplating the mystery of grace now to be unfolded,—the pledge and assurance now to be given, that Heaven and earth were again to be united in the birth of that Saviour by whom, conjoining in his person the nature of both, God was to reconcile men unto himself,—we may well conceive, that beyond the riches of his goodness to themselves, there might have been, in the estimation of the angelic host, a profound sense of the depth of his compassion to a sinful though suffering world; and that peace never sounded so welcome, and was never felt so greatly to magnify the grace of the Creator, as when, instead of being sent forth the messengers of his wrath, they were sent forth the messengers of his compassion, proclaiming, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

The sentiment of the text is yet more strongly impressed

on our minds when we reflect on the way by which this peace is purchased and secured to us. As usually seen in our world, the restoration of peace may be, comparatively speaking, a matter of easy accomplishment. The accommodation of a few contending interests is all that is requisite to settle it; and if there be cases where national honour as well as national interests are concerned, and for which provision may require to be made, such cases are of rare occurrence, and often more nominal than real,—it may require, in general, but a single act of will on the part of the conqueror, and peace is restored,—the whole may be begun and completed without the necessity of a single sacrifice; and if there be only the generosity to bestow it, that generosity may not be fettered by any higher consideration in its free and liberal bestowal. But the question may become altogether a more complicated one, if peace is to be made with those who had risen up against their rightful sovereign,—if they for whom it is destined were rebels against his just authority and law, and if, in opposition to every principle of duty and obligation, they had persevered in this rebellion,—in this case, other interests come to be considered than simply the interests of those who may have provoked the miseries of war,—the dignity of the law must be upheld, even whilst it bends in its severity to admit the restoration of the guilty, and it must still be seen and felt throughout the land, that it can neither be violated nor infringed with impunity.

Such a case may not unfrequently be exemplified when the interest involved is merely that of a human government; and I know nothing which could justify us in supposing that if God governs his creatures by certain fixed principles, these are less determinate in their character than those which obtain amongst men; or that the consequences of suiting them to every case of transgression would be less fatal to the harmony of his administration. If discerning the character of God, even as it may be read in the world, you must see, that let him be as patient and as merciful a^s

he may, his is not that easy tenderness which shrinks from the infliction of suffering,—that there are other traces of him manifest on the face of human things than simply the traces of his beneficence,—that there is a law which has its course, let men be exposed as they may to its direful consequences,—and that there could have been no anticipation in the mind of any serious observer, if God was to give peace to the world at all, that it would be given in any other way than that which left entire the justice and the rectitude of his character, or in any other way than what proved that though he might be reconciled to the sinner, yet he never *was*, and he never *could be*, reconciled to sin.

That all this is true, however, is not left to any judgment or inference of ours. God has himself interfered to decide the question at issue ; and of all the lights in which the proclamation of peace may be regarded as inspiring the language of our text, and as calling upon us to glorify God,—this is the noblest, that God did make righteousness and peace to meet together ; and that, coming forth in the graciousness of his nature, to reveal a way of forgiveness which might embrace the guiltiest of us all, he did yet manifest his justice in a way at which the most hardened might tremble, as discovering a purity and a hatred of sin in the Godhead, of which we could never have conceived by all that God had said or done before.

That this was involved in that peace of which our text contains the announcement, is to us no matter of speculation. It is a truth with which we have long been familiar. But if it had never been communicated till this day or this hour,—were we here met for the first time to listen to the unfolding of that plan by which God did magnify his law, and make it honourable,—or could we only enter, almost in any measure, into its extent and magnitude, with what feelings should we listen to tidings more strange than ever greeted human ears ? The interest of such a moment would painfully contrast with the indifference which too often meets its announcement ; and, O ! how many are there, who, were

that indifference overcome which hides from them the grand principles of Gospel-truth, would be amazed at the listlessness with which they have treated its brightest discoveries, and astonished to find that ere that cloud which hung over our guilty world could be dissipated, or a single tender of that peace be made which they have so often and so thoughtlessly cast away from them,—that cloud, charged with the wrath which our iniquities had provoked, must be discharged on the head of God's own Son!

It was this view of the subject chiefly which drew forth the praises of the angelic host. Sent to announce the birth of the Saviour, such an event excited in their minds an admiration at the riches of Divine grace which they had never experienced before. Beholding the first step taken towards the accomplishment of human salvation, in the humiliation of one who thought it no robbery to be equal with God, they felt as if labouring under a theme, to the expression of which even they were unequal. And as they thought of that mysterious babe who lay cradled in the manger of Bethlehem, like some outcast thing that the world had rejected, and who was yet the Eternal Word, uniting in his person the nature of earth and the nature of heaven, their feelings, as they announced that by means of this mysterious union heaven and earth were to be reconciled, could be no other than those of profoundest adoration at the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God.

Could they at this moment have followed him through the scene of his earthly sojourning; could they have passed with him through life, and looked upon him in death; could they have witnessed him in poverty and in suffering,—in his moments of agony and in his day of darkness; could they have heard the strong cryings of his spirit, or looked through the dark perspective to his last hour, and onwards to the time when, as a conqueror, he was again to ascend to the mansions of light and peace; had there been any thing in all this, think you, to lessen their amazement? And

should there be a sinner now present who doubts whether there had ever been wrath in heaven or war on earth, we would lead him directly to the cross of Christ, as that which is in itself the noblest spectacle of Divine love, and, at the same time, the most apt and expressive image of the fearfulness of the contest in which every sinner who is not in Christ is yet engaged. If there is truth in the representation of the Bible, God did send forth his own Son, not as a conqueror, or simply as the ambassador of peace, but to subject him to the miseries of warfare ;—he treated him as an enemy, and, as if our enmity had been concentrated in his person, he poured out upon him the wrath of his indignation. And contemplating, again, the peace which the angels proclaimed as the fruit of his sufferings, and as issuing from the blood of his cross,—as the reconciliation cemented and ratified through his death, and assured to us by his resurrection,—we cannot wonder that there was in this mystery of holiness and grace, something of which, for all that they had known of God, they could never have conceived before ; and the voice of their praises might well ascend in glory to God in the highest.

I might farther have enlarged upon the song of these blessed spirits, as proclaiming peace upon earth,—peace to the whole family of man,—as connected with blessings still nobler than the removal of the enmity which subsisted between God and them,—even access to all the blessings of the family of God ; and as introductory to a state of peace, to which this world, even to its latest hour, will, we fear, make only a very slender approximation. It may be sufficient, however, at present, to regard it in the single light in which it has now been presented,—as opening up a way for the restoration of the guilty,—conveying an assurance to the very chief of sinners, that the access is free for his return to God, and that God is waiting to be gracious for his Son's sake. And little as we may feel alive to the honour and glory of God as angels did,—little as we can appreciate

the magnitude of this salvation compared with them,—there is still one way in which it is fitted to interest us, which angels of light and purity could but feebly experience. By them it was simply regarded as a manifestation of the Divine character, and as the assurance of pardon for a guilt which they had never contracted; for no sound of war had ever broken in upon the peace of that abode from which they had winged their flight to the confines of our world. But it comes to us, who are by nature enemies and afar off, as the way of our peace and reconciliation with God. And if you have, in any measure, realized the fearfulness of that enmity, you must feel, that, beyond every thing in importance and interest to you, is the truth that God has been propitiated for your rebellion, and now waiteth to be gracious.

Let me ask you, therefore, how far you have regarded it in this light? whether, persuaded of the reality of that peace, you have indeed embraced it as the way of *your* peace? and whether, believing that God is no longer your enemy, you have ceased to be the enemies of God, and have returned in heart and in spirit to him from whom you had revolted?

Till this be the case, the proclamation of peace has been made to you in vain; and I wish it, therefore, to be distinctly considered, that the alternative proposed every time that it comes round to you, is, whether you will return to the Divine favour and to the obedience of his children, or continue in a state of implacable enmity, with your hearts given to those things which are by nature not God's. I wish you would feel this to be the alternative; and if you are indeed led to flee for refuge to the hope that is set before you,—if, persuaded of the Divine compassion, you rest upon its free and gracious invitations,—and if, subdued by a sense of that love wherewith God loved sinners, you feel your enmity dying away before it,—if confidence, and gratitude, and love, have taken the place of suspicion, and dislike, and aversion,—O! then there will be shed abroad upon the little territory of your souls a calm and a sunshine which they

never knew before,—and then, with feelings different in some degree from those of angels, but with which those blessed spirits that rejoice for ever in the light of God's countenance can well sympathize, you will also begin the song of thanksgiving and praise, saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

DISCOURSE FIFTH.

2 CORINTHIANS, iii. 18.—We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

THERE are few circumstances in our moral nature with which we are better acquainted, than the influence which any thing comes to possess, when it has been frequently present to our minds, and been made the object of repeated and familiar contemplation ; and the tendency which it thus acquires to mould our character into a conformity with its own. However far it may once have been from possessing any such power ; however small the congeniality which it may once have had with our minds, or with the objects which formerly engaged us ; and however unfitted it might appear to be for working any change upon our characters and conduct, it cannot find frequent entrance into our minds and interest our affections, without, in some degree, leaving its image behind, and stamping upon us its own likeness. Though it might be impossible for you to say precisely in what way this took place, or how it came to exert the power which it may thus possess over you,—though there might be something in the whole process so insensible as to elude your perception, yet the fact itself would soon become so manifest, as to leave you in no doubt that such an influence actually did exist,—that every time the object was presented anew went to strengthen the effect, and all this with-

out any farther effort on your part than what might merely be necessary to keep it before you, and to make it the subject of thought and of reflection.

I shall not require to adduce many illustrations of a truth which every one must recognise, whenever he apprehends it, as being in accordance with all that he has himself felt and known. In looking back on our past lives, we are conscious of certain changes which have taken place upon our minds, not less striking than those which have taken place upon our bodies. We feel that they have been in a state of continual transition, as we passed from one period of life to another; and without supposing this change to have been so violent or extraordinary as to have excited the attention of others, we may nevertheless be conscious, that it has been so great as that we require at times to forget what we now are, in order to enter into the feelings and employments of our former selves. We are conscious also, that these changes have been very much wrought upon us by objects foreign to the mind itself; that the character we have acquired has been formed by the presence of things which, though we might not be altogether able to exclude them, yet affected us chiefly, according as they were beheld and felt, and wrought into us by our own thought and reflection,—that there are none of all the objects with which we were most familiarly conversant, the society in which we mingled, or the friends with whom we associated, or the examples that were presented to our imitation, which had not a distinct place in constituting us what we now are; and that could we trace every thing to its proper source, none of these would be found to have been destitute of a certain power over us. Without saying that we have possessed no control over the formation of our own character, since, in all these cases, it was our own will and choice that gave them the power which they exerted, we should yet find that our character in its progress to maturity has been very much like a river, which, in tracing it upwards, we find to have been swelled by a thousand tributaries, and to have carried

off from every soil which it has washed, and from every shore amongst which it has swept, something to affect the colour and the properties of its waters.

I have made these remarks, in order to point out to you, that when the Apostle says of believers, that, “ beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image from glory to glory,” he speaks of a thing which is equally well known and familiar as that which we have now described ; and that there is nothing more mysterious in the influence which he assigns to the glory of God,—that is, God’s glorious character, as it is delineated in his Word,—than there is in the influence which is every day exerted over us by a thousand objects foreign to the Divine nature and character. Whatever mystery may attach to the way by which the mind of a Christian is at first opened to perceive a truth, to the presence and existence of which so many in the world are insensible ; and whatever mystery there may be in the way by which that great object obtains also a place in his heart,—though there may be required for this nothing less than the interference of a Divine agency to open the one, and nothing less than the interference of a Divine power to impress and change the other ; yet the mode in which a spiritual knowledge and perception of the Divine character acts upon the moral character and constitution of a man proceeds, and its influence is maintained, on the very same principle as in any other case, where an object, kept constantly before the mind, leaves there an image of itself. The believer ever keeping before him the great object of his faith, his assimilation to it is rendered more perfect by every renewed contemplation ; and, continuing thus to behold the glory of the Lord, he is changed into the same image from glory to glory.

The glory of God,—the object to which the Apostle assigns such an efficacy in transforming the character of the believer is nothing else, as we have said, than the character of God, as it has been revealed in his Word ; the united effulgence of the Divine attributes, as therein manifested. It is

the combination of infinite holiness and justice, mercy and truth, as seen throughout the whole of the Word of God, and more especially as they have been enshrined in the great work of man's redemption, or manifested in the person of Jesus Christ, our Lord. In his person and in his work, mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have embraced each other: in these there is a glory which, though hidden from the eye of sense, is yet revealed to the eye of faith; in them is embraced every thing that is purest and best; every thing that is fitted to win the love and admiration of a moral and spiritual nature; and the declaration of our text, when stript of its figurative dress, simply means, that this great object, presented to one whose mind discerns its reality, and whose heart is disposed to regard it, will exert such a power over him, as that the result will unquestionably be, that by that slow but sure process, through which every object gradually assimilates us to itself, we shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Of all the objects that may be presented to engage the attention and affect the minds of human beings, it may be readily admitted, that there is none to which they are so insensible as the Divine character and glory; and of all the objects which may be every day influencing their minds and transforming their characters, the very lowest place, if any place at all, may be assigned to that, to which, in the hand of the Spirit of God, the Apostle attributes such an efficacy. Of many it may be said, that God is not in all, or in any of, their thoughts,—that the great truths of his existence and perfections are truths seldom or never realized by them,—that however they may admit in words that God is possessed of all the perfections which his Word every where attributes to him, they do not discern these as the real perfections of a Divine nature; and, above all, that they do not behold them in such a light as to win them to love or to imitate them,—that, in their case, the glory of God works no change upon their character and hearts whatsoever,—and that in no de-

gree are they assimilated to his perfections by all that they know and hear of God.

That an object which must derive all its power over us from being believed and admitted, should never leave its image upon our minds in their natural state, is only, indeed, what you might apprehend and expect ; nor does this in the smallest degree detract from the truth which our text declares. It may be, and still is true, that this great object, when believed and discerned, is as much fitted to impress our minds, and mould us after its own image, as are any of those other truths with which our minds are familiar ; and where that truth is discerned as clearly as the Word of God has revealed it,—where it comes forth from the darkness in which it is naturally hidden to all of us,—where those attributes of his nature which are but feebly apprehended and still more feebly realized are discerned as combining together in the work of redemption, and, above all, as uniting together in a work so interesting and important to us as the work of our own salvation,—it cannot pass before the mind that understands and believes it, without affecting and impressing it,—it must necessarily awaken its gratitude, and admiration, and love, and all those feelings by which we are led most easily to the imitation of the object in which these qualities inhere ; and that object cannot be beheld and contemplated without forming in us, insensibly it may be, but surely, its own likeness, and changing us in some degree into its own image. Though the first feelings which the contemplation of that glory awakens in our minds may be personal, and such as respect our own peace and safety ; though it appears at first sight most interesting and attractive as a manifestation of the Divine perfections for our salvation ; and though it cannot be expected that we are at once to find room for any other view of it, the transition is easy from this to the contemplation of that glory as it is in itself, as well as in reference to our salvation. The mind naturally passes from itself to Him whose character and grace have been so conspicuously manifested, and if not

even the least of those objects that are around us can familiarly pass before our view, without a portion of them, as it were, adhering to us, the mind cannot freely and fully gaze upon that object which is above every other fitted to elevate, to purify, and to refine the heart, without bearing away with it something to evince the holiness and the heavenliness of the things with which it has been conversant.

The Apostle has likened the effect of contemplating the glory of God, as it is presented in the Word, to the effect of turning our face upon a mirror, from which any bright and shining object is reflected. It is obvious that so soon as you do this, the brightness of the object will be cast upon you ; that you will partake in some degree of its luminousness ; that you will shine in some degree with its lustre ;—and that, so long as you maintain your position, the effect will continue to be the same. So is it, in fact, in a way equally sure, though it may not be always equally perceptible, that the character of God, as presented in his Word, affects our characters and our hearts. Though it may be utterly powerless, so long as it is undiscerned, or so long as you are not beholding it as reflected from the glass of the Word, you cannot turn your face towards it and look upon it as it shines there, without its image being flung upon you,—the purity, the holiness, and grace of a Divine nature are wrought insensibly into your own heart,—the qualities which belonged to the object which you contemplated gradually become the qualities of your own nature ; and, keeping yourself in the same position, the same result will continue to flow from it. Though, if you should cease to make it the object of contemplation, it would cease to exert for the time any effect upon you, yet the very instant that it again becomes such an object, it will assert its power, and the mind being filled with whatever is holiest and best, there will come a virtue and an energy out of it, to purify and refine your nature, and to exalt you to the love and imitation of those perfections, in the love and imitation of which consist the glory, the dignity, and the felicity of your nature.

It is not promised or affirmed, that the effect thus attributed to the glory of God, as seen in the pages of the Divine Word, will be sudden or instantaneous ; or that it will be always or easily perceptible to those who are the objects of it. In speaking of the influence which any object exerts over us in transforming us into its own nature, and stamping on us its own image, we have been speaking of a thing which, though it may be sure, is yet gradual in its operation, and which is advanced by slow and imperceptible degrees. The language of our text obviously supposes the same thing, when it says that believers are “ changed into the same image from glory to glory ;” and the influence of Divine truth on the heart is likened by the Saviour himself, to that which is of slow growth. “ The kingdom of God,” says he, “ is as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how,—first the blade,—then the ear,—after that the full corn in the ear.” So is it with the formation of the Divine image on the soul of the believer. At first, it may be at best but faint, and obscure, and hardly discernible ; nor may it be always easy to detect its presence or its lineaments. The glory of God, as revealed in his Word, may be faintly seen and faintly reflected ; it may be only, perhaps, after many contentions with other and inferior objects, that it secures for itself a place amongst those which are every day influencing and affecting our character. To use the similitude of the Saviour, the seed may be long cast in the ground before the tender blade appears,—though, from the first moment that it was deposited there, it became the subject of an operation which is to issue in the fruits of harvest,—and even after the blade appears, the process by which it advances to maturity is so gradual, that you could not hope, by the most minute observation, to detect its growth, or to mark it shooting forth into the ear, and assuming the tint and colour of harvest. Thus it is with the influence of Divine truth upon the soul of a believer ; and thus, though at any single or

individual moment, imperceptibly does the contemplation of the Divine character affect and determine his own. The process may be gradual, but the result is sure,—the soul continues to grow, and the blade to shoot forth,—every drop of rain fertilizes the ground that nourishes it,—every beam of sunshine goes to ripen it,—every breath of heaven has its influence in bringing it forward to maturity. A man may not know how, yet still the seed grows and advances onwards, till he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is nigh; and though you may be incapable of assigning to every element its proper influence, and of determining the advance made at every separate instant, and by every distinct contemplation, still does the believing study of the Divine character accomplish the end which we have ascribed to it. Each time it is presented and beheld, it leaves some impression of itself behind, or deepens that which had been made before. Each time it is more correctly beheld, it stamps its image more perfectly upon the soul; nor can it be seen, as a believing mind discerns it, without producing such a result. The holiness, the purity, and grace that are therein combined, mingling with the stream of the believer's thoughts and affections, are insensibly transfused into his own soul,—in proportion to the frequency with which they are realized and dwelt upon, will be the rapidity with which the assimilation is effected. And he, whose mind was once the subject of every influence rather than an influence coming upon him from God, and who, familiar only with objects of sense and sin, was every day maturing and strengthening a character the most opposite to the Divine Being,—brought and kept by the Holy Spirit within the range of this new and hallowed influence, becomes conformed to the image of God, grows in the love and practice of those things which constitute the Divine likeness,—his whole spiritual life comes to consist in daily seeing more of God, and in being constantly carried on in a nearer resemblance to him; and thus is he made a partaker of the Divine nature, and escapes the corruption that is in the world.

I would have this view impressed upon the mind of every Christian, not so much as a matter of interesting speculation, as a truth, the recollection of which is essential to his peace and his progress. If there is a desire, peculiar to a believer, which ought at all times to distinguish him, it surely is, that he may be conformed to the image of the Son of God,—if there is any thing after which his endeavours should be unceasing, it surely is, that the image of God may be matured in his soul,—and if there is any thing that is, or ought to be, matter of serious grief to him, it will be, that he has hitherto made so little progress towards this great attainment, and that there is so little about him by which others may take knowledge, that he has been with Jesus, and learned of him.

But whilst this is true, there is often with many an ignorance or a misconception of the way by which the result that they desire is to be attained. Although the Christian knows that for all his growth in holiness, as well as for all his spiritual understanding, he must be dependent on the Spirit of God, he is not always practically aware, that the Spirit of God operates in a way that is agreeable to the principles of his nature ; and he may be often found, therefore, entertaining hopes of spiritual aid, and expecting to receive sanctifying power in a way which God has not promised. He may be looking for the fruits of holiness in his heart and life, whilst he is not preserving in his mind that great object which alone can sanctify him,—he may be expecting the image of God to be formed in his soul, whilst he is not habitually fixing the eye of his mind upon the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,—and not a few of those distressful fears, so hurtful to his peace and prosperity, may arise from his ignorance of that great law of his being, which is equally in accordance with the testimony of the Bible and of all experience, that the power which is to renew and sanctify him lies in something out of his own mind altogether, by the contemplation of which he is to be changed into the same image from glory to glory.

If the principle which we have now stated be correct, the expectation or the attempt to become conformed to the Divine image independent of it, were as vain as if a man should expect any bright object to be reflected upon him from a glass, whilst his face was not turned in the direction of it. To secure this end, the first and indispensable step is, that we look upon it ; and to secure the reflection of the Divine image from the glass of the Word on the soul, the first and indispensable step is, that we turn the eye of our mind towards this object, and keep it steadily fixed upon it. Let this only become the object of familiar and believing contemplation, and the image cannot fail to be realized. Let us only study to give it the chief place, among others that solicit our regard, and its likeness will stand with a corresponding prominence impressed upon our minds. Let us only exert the power which we possess over our own thoughts, to direct them habitually towards this object, and all the feelings of love, and gratitude, and praise, will come along with it. Our minds will be brought within the operation of a principle which acts with all the certainty and invariableness of a law of nature, although the resemblance may not be formed so rapidly or so correctly as we could desire ; and growing, we know not how, and by steps which we cannot discern, it will, nevertheless, advance steadily onwards to perfection.

Though the Divine character, seen and contemplated by faith, is thus the great source of holiness and purity in the Christian, and must continue to be contemplated and studied, as he would grow in conformity to it, during the whole period of his continuance in the world ; yet the influence which is attributed to it is not confined to the present state of things. It is as applicable to the eternal world as it is to that in which we are now placed ; it constitutes, in fact, the great object by which saints will be advanced in glory, as well as trained up in meetness for it ; and it will still be true, at every point in the progress of an immortal spirit to its high destination, that the glory of God, seen, not through a glass darkly, but face to face, is the source of its glory, and the

great spring of all its moral and spiritual excellence. Though the image of God in the soul is so far perfected at death, as that the believer is at once and for ever delivered from that sin which so often clouds his perception of the Divine character, and turns his mind aside from the contemplation of it; yet that image can never be completely perfected, so long as it is capable of receiving any increase or addition. When an immortal being, with a capacity of knowing, and serving, and imitating God which is susceptible of infinite enlargement, enters upon a world, of which, if we know any thing at all, we know that it is a world that brings him nearer to God; and when he is ushered into a scene, of which, dim and obscure as our conceptions may be, we are assured that it is bright with manifestations of Divine glory,—when he walks abroad in the new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, with a nature refined and purified, but still in all its essential properties the same; and when there meets him on every hand the glory of God that doth lighten it, and the Lamb who is the light thereof,—when the same objects that, seen through a glass darkly, transformed him into their own likeness, are again presented in new and fuller lustre, the effect of contemplating them will still be the same, in changing him into the same image, from one degree of glory to another. It is said, emphatically, of the life to come, that “we know not what we shall be, but this we know, that we shall see God as he is,”—that there will be given to those objects which we have contemplated by faith all the brightness of sense,—that the mystery of God will then be accomplished,—that there will be a new light poured on the character and ways of God,—and that the believer will then stand on an eminence, from which he may contemplate with greater advantage that object, from the contemplation of which, even in this world, he bears an image conformed to the character of the Son of God. And who knows, in that world which no eye hath ever seen, what new and untold glories await us?—what fresh discoveries may be presented to our sight, or even to our faith? And in those new and

untried scenes of being through which we have to pass, what new manifestations of the glory and of the excellency of God may yet burst upon us?—and how much, in the depths of a nature infinite in all its perfections, is there yet to be disclosed to the view of his creatures? Who knows what those blessed and happy beings that have ever dwelt in the light of God's countenance, and have far outstripped us in the knowledge of God, discern of him from their heights of celestial observation?—who knows what we may discern when we come to occupy the place which they now occupy, and which they will then have quitted for one far in advance of ours?—or who knows, or who even can conceive, as this position comes to be exchanged for another, and another, and another, through a series of infinite ages, each one enabling us to see further into the infinite glories of the Godhead, what brighter revelations of holiness, and purity, and grace, may stand disclosed to us? This, at any rate, we are warranted to conceive, that there may be no limits to these, and therefore no limits to our advancement in the image of God,—that the time will never come, even in eternal ages, when the spirits of the just made perfect shall make no nearer approach to the Divine perfections, because the time can never come, even in eternity, when these perfections are incapable of being further disclosed to them; and that the same glory which, opening upon a human soul in this world of sin and suffering, imparts to it a new and heavenly character, and a new and purer blessedness, continuing to open upon it at every successive stage of the path which it is pursuing, may continue to be the source of its advancement in all those qualities which constitute the glory and the felicity of an immortal nature. It is thus, I conceive, that the Divine character may be, not only in this world, but in that world where one being differs from another, even as one star differeth from another in glory, the object, by beholding which the believer is to be changed into the same image, from glory to glory. It will only become so, however, if that glory is here disclosed to us, and we are changed into its image; and there is

no consideration more powerfully fitted than this to impress upon the minds of believers the importance of having that glory revealed, and of turning their minds habitually upon it.

There is another view of the subject, however, which may impress more readily the minds of those who are living careless of God, and careless of having his image stamped upon their souls. The same great object which, when presented to the mind of a glorified saint, will continue to win his heart to the love and imitation of God, presented in a different light to an outcast spirit, may be the source of increasing aversion to God, and of increasing distance and estrangement from his perfections ! That which is to constitute the felicity of the one, may only contribute to the misery of the other ! Whatever may be the difference that death makes upon the condition of any two human souls, the one of which, by the contemplation of the Divine glory, has been growing in the image of God, and the other, by disregarding God, has been left exposed to all those evil influences by which the soul grows in opposition to him,—one thing is common to them, that death brings both nearer to God, and brings them into a condition in which they cannot, even though they would, exclude the thought of his presence and his power. To the one he will appear arrayed in all the riches of his grace and divine compassion, to receive him to the everlasting habitations ; to the other he will appear in all the terrors of his justice, bidding him away to the wailing and the weeping of outer darkness. By the one he will be seen in all that glory which has won his soul to love, and to imitate his perfections, and which will still continue to attract and carry him on in advancing conformity to God ; to the other, his grace now for ever withdrawn, he will appear only in such a light as to awaken his enmity and opposition to his character and will. Like the pillar which guided the Israelites in the wilderness, whilst it was a terror and an amazement to their enemies, the presence of God will give light to the one along the whole path of his eternal progress, whilst it will only cast a more fearful gloom into the terrible prison-

house of the other. And thus, whilst within the blessed and privileged circle of those who have sought to know God and to serve him, his presence will fill every heart with joy, and bring every soul nearer to himself, and nearer to his own blessedness ; beyond that circle, his presence, not less real, and not less felt, will only awaken a profounder misery, and strengthen the character of its ungodliness ! Both of these souls may be acted upon by the same object, and both may be obeying the same great law of their being, though the one may be advancing nearer to God, and the other be only the more estranged from him. But, with all this in common, the effect will be opposite, from the opposite lights in which the character of God is contemplated ; and whilst the one is elevated by the contemplation amidst the choirs and the company of heaven, it will be only giving forth an influence which is to sink the other still deeper down amidst the principalities and the powers of hell !

DISCOURSE SIXTH.

JOHN, iii. 14, 15.—“ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up ; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”

THESE words direct us to an event in the history of the Jewish people, which it is necessary shortly to bring to your remembrance, before employing it to illustrate the way in which we are to become partakers of the eternal life that is in Christ.

During their march through the wilderness, the Israelites, as was often the case, murmured against God and against Moses, and, wearied and worn out by the length of the way, expressed their dissatisfaction in reproaches, most unbecoming their situation, and most unworthy the tender care of which they had been the objects : “ The people spake against God and against Moses, saying, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in this wilderness, for there is no bread, neither any water, and our soul loatheth this light bread ?”

Provoked by these murmurings, and resolved to punish the disobedient, God sent fiery serpents among the people, which bit the people, and much people of Israel died ; and, finding the vanity of contending with God, and professing to feel the iniquity of their conduct, they came to Moses, saying, “ We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee. Pray unto the Lord that he take

away the serpents from us." And Moses prayed for the people. The answer to this prayer, which was graciously accepted, was given, however, in a way that the Israelites could never have anticipated. Instead of at once removing their sufferings, God was pleased to employ means, as unlikely in themselves as they were found, through his blessing, effectual, for their cure; and resolved to make one and all feel that the removal, as well as the infliction of the calamity, was from him, and to leave not the smallest room for boasting that their own might or their own wisdom had done it,—resolved at the same time to make the restoration of every individual dependent on his obedience to the Divine appointment, he required Moses to make a fiery serpent of brass, and set it upon a pole in the view of all the camp, assuring him that whosoever looked upon it should recover. And when, in obedience to this injunction, Moses had made a serpent of brass, and set it in the view of all the camp, "it came to pass," says the historian, "that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass he lived."

Such is the incident in Old Testament history which forms the subject of the Saviour's allusion.

It is not our intention at this time to enter into all the ends which such an appointment might have been designed to serve. It might, we doubt not, from the very first have been intended to direct the minds of men forward to a higher deliverance; and in this view it might have conspired, along with the many other types strewn throughout the Old Testament, to guide the faith and animate the hope of believers, when they walk by the word of prophecy, as by a light shining in a dark place. Of this, however, there can be no doubt, from the language of the Saviour, that the way of safety prescribed to the Israelites may well be employed to illustrate the way of peace and safety provided for us by the Gospel; and it is clearly implied that there is such a parallelism or resemblance between them, when he declares that, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so

must the Son of man be lifted up." It is obvious that such a parallel supposes something in our situation which may not unfitly be represented by that of the Israelites, as they lay exposed to the misery of a Divine infliction. It is not the object of our Lord to bring such a state directly before us,—that object being rather to point out the similarity between the mode of our deliverance and that by which the Israelites were healed; but still this implies the existence of a state equally miserable; and the Saviour has indeed expressed it all, when he declares that the Son of Man was lifted up, that whosoever believeth on him might not *perish*,—obviously implying that, but for this Divine interposition, all of us must have *perished*. And though the full import of such a sentence is not brought visibly and sensibly before us, and though multitudes may be blind to every indication which exists that it is taking effect upon themselves, or upon others; no believer in the Word of God can need to be told, that there is in this single expression something so fearful, that its fearfulness would be very feebly and inadequately expressed by the state of things at the moment when disease and death were spreading their ravages most widely through the camp of Israel.

It is the declaration, not of one part of Scripture, but of every part,—the truth which lies at the foundation of all its discoveries, and without which nothing of all that it reveals could possess the smallest application to our circumstances,—that the guilt which attaches to us as sinners has provoked the utterance of a wo as righteous as it is awful,—that we lie exposed to a curse, the nature and malignity of which all the misery and suffering that exist in the world afford only a very inadequate conception,—and that, unless removed from us by an application like that in which lay the safety of the Israelites, we are yet involved in a condition, of which we cannot say less, and can hardly say more, than that the wrath of God abideth on us.

Such is the sentence declared in every page of the Bible, and implied in the whole of those communications which it

makes to the children of men. In this respect, we meet on common ground with the Israelites, and our condition is equally miserable and perishing as theirs. Moved by a like pity and compassion, however, God has in our case, as in theirs, interfered for our deliverance. “He so loved the world,” we are told, “that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” And it is because of the similarity in the way by which these two Divine appointments became effectual for the healing of those whom the serpent has equally bitten, that we have it stated in the language of the text, that “as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up.”

In following out this subject, we remark, in the *first* place, that in order to our obtaining salvation or eternal life,—a term which includes under it all the blessings of the Gospel,—the first thing necessary is, the conviction that salvation is out of ourselves, and in Christ.

We mean by these expressions to affirm, that the first step in order to the safety of any sinner is, not that he must believe that he is saved, or that he is in possession of any one blessing, the conveyance of which is suspended on his faith,—we mean, that you must know where the blessing is to be found,—not merely that you are altogether destitute of it, but that it is in Christ. The former of these is to be produced by reflecting on your own character, or on the testimony of God regarding it, that you have no life in yourselves; the latter, by reflecting on the character of the Son of God, or on the testimony that God has borne to him in the Word,—that there is life in him. Without being in possession of the former,—I mean the conviction that salvation is not in yourselves,—it is obvious that you could never look to Christ for salvation; and without being in possession of the latter,—I mean the conviction that it is in Christ,—it were as foolish to suppose that you could ever expect to receive it of him. We presume that it needs only to be under

stood in order to commend itself to every one as true ; and it is one of those things most clearly and distinctly testified by the history which our Lord employs, in order to illustrate the way by which we are to become the partakers of his life.

It is hardly conceivable, indeed, situated as the Israelites were, that any such idea could have been entertained by them as that they were able to work their own cure. They found themselves suffering under an infliction as dangerous as it was inevitable ; the sight of the dying and the dead around left them no reason to expect that, when bitten by the serpents, their fate would be different ; and, in the indescribable confusion of such a moment, and with such an exhibition of misery on every side, there would be little disposition to wait for any remedy from human skill. If no Divine interposition had taken place, they had probably at once surrendered themselves to despair ; nor were they, in this condition, very likely to oppose the deliverance presented and provided, through that natural disposition to self-dependence, which at another season would have led them to trust to their own devices, instead of betaking themselves to God.

But you may easily perceive, had this been in any measure their feeling, how much the means which God had appointed for their cure were calculated to withstand it ; that, instead of leaving any thing to be done in order that they might save themselves, it supposed the case desperate, and took it at once out of their hands ; that the first intimation which they had of being healed was by a Divine appointment that led them away from themselves altogether, and which was to be submitted to simply as of God ; and the smallest inclination to trust to themselves for relief from the calamity with which they were visited, had as effectually interposed to prevent their recovery, as if they had at once abandoned themselves to the misery of their condition, and obstinately and perseveringly refused to be made whole.

This was the first step to the healing of the wounded and dying Israelite. The same Divine intimations, however,

which bespoke his own helplessness, told him also where the remedy was to be found ; and you can easily conceive how, as his thoughts were averted from himself, and from any human devices, they would be fixed upon the serpent placed in the view of the camp, convinced that all his hope of a cure, and the only remedy for his sufferings, were deposited and treasured up in it. Though unable, indeed, to tell why God should have appointed this to be the mode of his deliverance, he must have believed and been fully satisfied, that, if he was to be saved by looking to it, God would communicate to it a virtue which it possessed not of itself ; that there was in it the very thing which could give him, and every dying creature around him, instant and immediate relief ; and before ever he made a single move towards it, or turned his eye in the direction where it stood, he must have been firm in the conviction that there was something like a healing balm ready to flow out of it, which could communicate life to his dying frame, and send the vigour of healthful existence through every member that was pining under the misery of disease.

Such must have been the first views and feelings of every Israelite who was healed by the brazen serpent ; and I need hardly say that, by the method which God hath appointed for our salvation, something equally specific and determinate is required at the hand of every one who would receive the blessings of everlasting life. By the expression which our Lord applies to our condition as sinners, denominating it a dying or perishing condition, he obviously supposes that there is in us nothing but death ; that it would be as impossible to extract life out of it as it would be to extract one thing out of another whose qualities are entirely opposite ; and the very first announcement which the Gospel makes to you, or to any sinner, that the Son of God is lifted up, in order that, believing in him, you may have life, obviously denies you the liberty of believing that there is life in yourselves ; it declares that you are dead, and that, if you are

fancying that you can live through any device of your own, or refusing to look beyond yourselves for its attainment, you must of necessity perish.

The same Divine commission, however, as clearly and decidedly tells you where this life is to be found. The uniform testimony of Scripture is, that in Christ there is life,—that, if God hath given unto us eternal life, this life is in his Son,—that it is a blessing deposited and treasured up, as it were, in the Son of God, which he hath purchased by his death, and which he is willing to impart to all who will receive it. And if you must do something equivalent to that which was required of the Israelites, when they were commanded to look to the brazen serpent for their cure, you must know that, as surely as the blessing which you seek is not in yourselves, so surely is it in Christ. We are very desirous that these two things,—that in yourselves is nothing but death, and that in the Son of God is the life of which you are in search,—should be closely and distinctly seen; because, till this be done, nothing is or can be done towards your salvation. They are two distinct things, be it remembered,—as distinct as your life and mine, as distinct as your soul and mine,—and they must be preserved distinct, if you would enter into life; and however easy a matter this was in the case of a wounded and dying Israelite, the smallest reflection on whose condition told him that it was hopeless, and prepared him to acquiesce in any appointment which God might be pleased to institute for his safety, it is a matter of far greater difficulty to bring this home convincingly to your minds, as the truth of your spiritual condition. It was no insult to the pride of a dying man to tell him that he was dying; but it is felt as insulting to the pride of many a dying sinner, to tell him that he is perishing. There is a self-love in the heart of every man which resists the entrance of a truth that removes at once every ground of boasting,—and, independently of those who would not be fond of confessing that their condition is such as the Bible reveals, even amongst such as are ready to own that they can do nothing

to procure for themselves everlasting life, there may be often discovered something which gives ground for apprehension, either that they do not perceive the aggravation of the disease, or that they know not whither they are to betake themselves, simply and unequivocally, for the remedy. There is a perpetual mixing up of themselves with the Saviour,—a disposition, it may be, to travel from themselves to him ; but not from their entire emptiness to his all-sufficiency and fulness,—a disposition to look to him for life with greater confidence, because of something in themselves which gives ground for believing that they are not altogether lost, and to regard his work as making up for those deficiencies by which his honour and their own peace are injured and impaired, if their salvation is not thereby undone. It is therefore necessary, most necessary, to press upon you the declarations of Scripture, that, whilst in yourselves there is nothing but death, there is life, wholly and exclusively, for you in Christ.

Now, observe, we are not asking you to believe that Christ has saved you, or pardoned you, or bestowed on you any blessing at all. That is not the matter in hand,—but simply that salvation is in him, and nowhere else ; and that it is a thing as much distinct from yourselves as the life of Christ is from your own life. And if you connect these two propositions together, and account salvation to be a blessing, and therefore covet its possession,—there will be, in the singleness and simplicity with which you turn away from every other remedy to the Saviour, and in the earnestness with which your mind is fixed on him, the very same disposition with which the mind of an Israelite turned away from his own dying condition to the serpent lifted up in the view of the camp, convinced that in it lay his only safety. Even though there were no hope connected with such a condition (which, however, from the very nature of the Gospel, cannot be), still, if that condition is mine, I feel that I cannot but abide in it. To this Saviour I must be found directing my anxieties, because I know that the blessing which I

need is only to be found in him. To him every travailing of my soul for life must therefore conduct me, even as surely as the weary traveller is prompted to seek the living fountain, at which alone his thirst can be quenched, and his strength invigorated. Though unable to see his readiness to grant me my desire, or even though repelled from his presence (which no sinner ever was, or ever could be),—thus driven again upon the hopelessness of my own spirit, the renewed experience of my own helplessness would only send me back to him, because I feel the more that I am perishing, and that Christ alone can give me life.

The first thing necessary to be known, then, in order to our salvation, is, Where the blessing which we need is to be found? and the *second*, to which we are now to direct your attention, is, How the blessing is to become yours? The answer to the former of these questions, employing the illustration with which our Lord furnishes us, was, that salvation and eternal life were out of yourselves and in Christ; and the inquiry which now remains, and which will be found, we trust, not less satisfactorily illustrated by the case of the Israelite, is, how this blessing, which is in Christ, is to flow out of Christ unto you. The answer to this, as we have it in the text, is, that believing in Christ we shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

In making this a distinct and separate subject of inquiry, we do not suppose that it is always such to every believer. He may be seldom or never guided fully and clearly to the conviction that there is life in Christ, without, at the same time, perceiving how it is to be attained,—the Word of God never presenting the one of these, without at the same time presenting the other. The one, therefore, may have succeeded the other so rapidly, and been acted upon so immediately, that you might scarcely be conscious of the succession, as the dying Israelite needed only to hear of the brazen serpent lifted up for his healing, and, instantly looking, he was healed; and whilst it may cost us some pains to un-

ravel the way by which you have reached your confidence in Christ, the whole may have been transacted in your case in a single moment, and the intimation that there was life in Christ for sinners, for every sinner who did not put it away from him, have been instantly followed up by that act which made that blessing your own. For all this, however, and though we are not wishing to divide what, as the testimony of the Gospel is addressed to sinners, cannot perhaps be separated,—you will easily perceive that these are two different things, as different as, in the case of the wounded Israelite, was the conviction that the serpent of brass was lifted up for the healing of those whom the fiery serpents had bitten, and that act by which he looked and was healed. The one was the result of the other,—and in his case, at any rate, the necessary result ; but they were still distinct, and though we have already ascertained that this eternal life is out of yourselves and in Christ, it may be yet necessary to state how this life is to flow out from Christ to you.

The answer to this question, as found in Scripture, is given in many terms, substantially the same in meaning, and is most frequently conveyed by the language of our text, that we must believe in Christ for salvation, or, as it unquestionably means, if we adapt it to the mode of cure prescribed to the Israelites, that we must look to Christ for salvation. But though, to an answer like this, there could attach, in the view of an Israelite, not the smallest ambiguity ; though he could not hesitate for a moment what was in this case to be done, in order that he might be recovered ; though it was to him the simplest and most intelligible thing in the world, when it was said, “ Look, and be healed,” I can easily conceive, that, were we to tell you, in like manner, that you need only look to the Saviour in order to be saved from perishing, there would be not a little difficulty, even with some who really felt salvation through him to be the most desirable of all blessings,—that you would not know what to do, or where to begin,—that, under a language, the very plainest as applied to natural objects, there would be

found to reside a most incomprehensible mystery, as applied to spiritual objects; and the very figure which had been employed to guide you to the truth, might thus be the very thing to darken and confound you.

It may serve, however, to clear away the difficulty, if we attend a little further to the illustration of our text; and, in doing so, we feel that we have to deal with a point, the knowledge of which is as essential to the sinner's holiness as it is to the sinner's peace.

You will remember, then, in what state we left the Israelite, when the first intimation had been given him of a Divine appointment, in which there was virtue enough, through the blessing of God, to heal the fatal malady under which he laboured. We left him, not only in the full persuasion of the hopelessness of all human remedies, but persuaded that there was a remedy, and only one, by which he could be relieved; and with a mind resting upon one object, and only one, in the virtue of which lay all his confidence of a cure, though as yet without the experience of that cure. The same message, however, which brought him the tidings which lifted him above despair, conveyed the intelligence, not less welcome, that the appointment was designed for him, and for every man in a like miserable and helpless condition,—that, without respect to the character of one above another, and with a feeling which embraced all, however wasted by suffering, or on the point of perishing, its merciful provision waited his acceptance,—that every man, unless he refused to be healed, would participate in its efficacy,—and that, by an application so simple as turning his eye toward the serpent placed aloft above the camp, he should infallibly be healed. You may easily conceive that the effect of this upon the man who comprehended and believed the message, would be to raise his expectation of a cure from hope to certainty,—every hinderance had been removed, except there had remained any, which it is impossible to suppose, in his own unwillingness to be healed,—and now you might have seen the eye that was before sunk and overcast,

begin to brighten up,—and the limbs, that had formerly refused to do their office, slowly dragged along to a situation from which he might catch a look of the desired object ;—and every where you might have seen hundreds of dying wretches bestirring themselves as if for their life, and summoning all their strength to make a last effort, because they felt life to be precious. And you might have seen little children, too, as well as old men, hastening on together (for the un pitying serpent had spared none) ; and many a one that had laid himself down to die, would lift up his head, persuaded that he needed not now to perish,—till, throughout the camp, which had presented the spectacle of a battlefield, rather than that of an army resting peacefully in their tents, the wail that rose from the wounded and dying would be lost in the thanksgivings and the praise that ascended as each dying man looked and felt the inspiration of a new and healthful existence,—felt that virtue had come out of that serpent, and healed him. Surely not one of them all could have perished, without being the cause of his own undoing ! And why, then, brethren, why need you or I perish, if Christ be lifted up to take away sin, and if we need only look to him and be healed !

It was in a way thus simple, that the wounded and dying Israelites were cured. We do not enter into the reasons of such an appointment, though it appears very obvious, that whilst God designed to try their obedience, by requiring them to look to the serpent before they could experience a cure, he intended, at the same time, that there should be nothing to allow the smallest room for the imagination, that they owed their safety to any other than to him. No one could, in this case, boast that his looking to the serpent had healed him,—a thing more likely in itself to have aggravated his disease, than to have removed it,—he must have felt that the power and grace of God had effected it, and nothing else. And it is in a way equally simple, though equally humbling to our pride, that any of us are to be saved. If you have realized the situation of the Israelite

as we went along, you must have discovered, in every step of it, the description of the mode of your spiritual deliverance; and, without almost drawing the parallel, I might now leave with yourselves the determination of the question, how the life that is in Christ may flow freely out to you.

If persuaded of these two things, the importance of which we have endeavoured to press upon you,—that this life is out of yourselves, and in Christ,—that these two things are as distinct as your life and mine,—you know already the condition in which the Israelites were, when convinced that God had laid up, as it were, in the serpent, the only balm which could prove sufficient for his cure; and your mind must be convinced as firmly as was his, with reference to a different object, that in him who has been lifted up on the cross to take away sin, lies your only hope of safety.

This is not, however, to you, any more than to him, the full extent of the good tidings which you are required to embrace. The same Word which informs you that there is a Saviour, or that there is life in this Saviour, tells you with equal clearness, that this blessing God waiteth to bestow on all who will receive it at his hands. The declaration made in the one case is as free and as unqualified as in the other,—the “whosoever looketh on the serpent shall live,” is not one whit larger or more gracious than the “whosoever believeth,” or the “whosoever looketh, shall not perish,” in the other. In either case the language plainly amounts to this, that every hinderance on the part of God has been removed which might have prevented this life flowing out upon you; that God has given you the blessing which, beyond every other, you require, as much as he might be said to have given to the Israelites a remedy for the mortal disease with which they were visited, when the serpent was lifted up above the camp. The act by which, after this was made known, the Israelite looked and was healed, was merely an act expressive of his confidence in the efficacy of the Divine appointment,—and, when you are bidden, in like manner,

look to Christ and be saved, nothing more is meant than that you should give the same confidence to Christ as the way of your peace and reconciliation with the Father, in order to obtain what is in your case an equally necessary deliverance. He looked, and God testified his faithfulness by instantly vouchsafing a cure ; and the same reliance on the efficacy of the great propitiation,—the same devout acquiescence in the cross of Christ as that by which God is reconciling all things to himself,—the same acceptance of God's testimony concerning him,—will not, and cannot fail, in all that concerns your spiritual welfare, to draw down a like experience of the same faithfulness. He is set forth for this very purpose, that you may look to him and be saved. Though he is not, and cannot be sensibly beheld, he may be made by each of you the object of believing contemplation. The eye of your mind may still be directed to Jesus as the author and finisher of your faith,—and it is when you turn to him in the confidence that there is life in him for your souls,—when you fix your regards on him in the confidence that he will give out of his own fulness as your necessities require,—that these necessities shall be met and supplied, and that you shall be as truly put in possession of the healing virtue that flows from his cross, as was the Israelite, when virtue came forth from the serpent of brass and healed him.

I trust that none of these observations will have the effect of distressing any of those anxious and sincere inquirers after truth, who, though seeking rest, may be yet in many respects far from having obtained it. They have been made, I am sure, from a very different motive ; and though we must hold it to be the right state of a Christian mind when it rests on the Saviour, and finds its rest in him, I know nothing in the Bible which warrants us to say, that the man does not look to Christ for salvation, unless he is fully conscious of looking to him, and is persuaded, from actual feeling or experience, that he has life through him. Though the truth, that salvation is not of ourselves, but of Christ,

is one which will approve itself to every mind that knows any thing of the Gospel at all; and equally so the truth, that, in looking to Christ, we are made the partakers of his life, yet the full meaning of this may not be distinctly apprehended, and there may still be often darkness, and distress, and disquietude, instead of light, and peace, and grateful joy. For all this, however, men may not be strangers to the very act of faith of which we speak,—there may be a real substantial intercourse between Christ and their souls, in the exercise of humble looking on the one hand, and in real communications of spiritual life on the other; and we should feel it to be as cruel and unjust to pronounce them to be devoid of all saving faith, as it was to deprive the poor man of his little ewe-lamb, which grew up with him and with his children, and which did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as his daughter. The thing of all others, the most desirable for them is, that those seasons of light, and liberty, and enlargement, which throw a gleam of sunshine across their path, should become more constant through the distinct and vivid apprehension of a Saviour lifted up, having life in himself, and ready to dispense that life to all who will look to him.

If an Israelite, when told to look to the serpent and he should live, had asked, what was meant by looking to it, or what he should do in order to open his eyes? I fear that we should have found difficulty in answering the question, otherwise than by repeating the same injunction, in terms more urgent than before. And when you ask us, in like manner, what is meant by looking to Christ, I fear that I can do little else than reiterate the injunction, whilst I direct you at the same time to him who enlighteneth the eyes of the understanding. Look to him,—receive him,—rest upon him,—and you shall be saved. Than these, I hardly know words more simple, or more intelligible in language, and had we not some preconceived opinions of our own upon the subject,—were we not ready to render mysterious what

the Word of God has conveyed in the plainest terms,—and was there not a natural blindness in our minds to apprehend spiritual things, I can hardly conceive why there should be greater difficulty in understanding the injunction, “Look unto me and be ye saved,” than there was, “Look unto the serpent of brass and ye shall live.” The one conveys the sentiment as clearly as the other; and he who, knowing and believing that over this world of sin and suffering a Saviour has been lifted up, in whom there is power and grace sufficient to relieve all his sufferings, and to pardon all his sins, turns his mind towards him, and fixes his very soul upon him as the only and the satisfying remedy,—who, persuaded that the blessings which are treasured up in him are free as the air we breathe, or the light of heaven in which we rejoice, raises his eye to him with confidence, and rests on the prevalence of his eternal mediatorship for his complete salvation; and who, never perplexing himself about the inquiry, with which, indeed, he has no concern, how, or in what way, he must look to him, looks to him and sees in him his safety and his deliverance,—he is doing all that God requires, in order that he may be put in possession of salvation through his cross,—and, resting and abiding in this faith, he shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

And is it possible, addressing myself, as I now do, to those, each of whom the serpent has bitten, and each of whom the sight of a Saviour lifted up can alone save, is it possible that I shall address this language in vain? Can I place before you, and almost bring sensibly into view, that life which you need, as surely as you have no life in yourselves, without one hand being extended to receive it, or one heart opened to embrace it? Is it possible, that when nothing more is required than to direct the eye to the Saviour, you will close it, lest you should be converted and healed?—and that you will leave this house, through which now soundeth the voice that was heard over the camp of Israel, “Look and you shall live,” without one heart being turned to an unseen Saviour, or any believing intercourse being begun between him and

your souls? O, how different was it in the case of the dying Israelites! for the serpent had no sooner bitten any, than he looked to the serpent of brass that he might be healed,—and the man who was languishing under disease and suffering hastened to look, lest he should perish ere he could behold it,—and not a dying creature throughout the host, but hastened to some spot from which he might see it and live. And is there any thing less real in your danger, or less effectual in the ransom provided for you, that with the curse of sin resting upon you, and the misery of sin following you, you should yet reject the proffered deliverance, or resist the beseeching which is made to you, “Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth?”

While I cannot suppose that any of you have experienced this life, who have never looked to the Saviour that ye might receive it, yet, addressing myself, as I now do, to believers, I am sure that you can, in some degree, testify to its reality. Though some of the blessings embraced under the expressions, everlasting life,—the removal of the curse, and the pardon of sin,—be invisible things, and though the life which the Saviour promises is as yet hid with Christ in God, yet I am persuaded that you can tell, how, with all your deadness and coldness to spiritual things, you have been conscious of something like a new and better existence,—a life as foreign to your own natures as life is to death, and which has been derived from the contemplation of that very object in which there is life. And in the changed current of a soul, now delivered from the slavery of sin, and from the bondage of many a corruption,—and which finds its chief happiness in God, and in obedience to his will, and in all the holier feelings which are exercised about heavenly things, you know, in so far as you can be expected to know, that he who believeth in the Son hath life.

I need not tell you, however, though experiencing the mode of your cure to be in these respects similar to that of the Israelites, that there is one point in which it is materially different. He looked to the serpent of brass, and was instantly

and completely healed. After having once beheld it, it was not necessary for him, as if his cure had been imperfect, to look again—nor did he retain for a single moment any taint of the baneful influence which had poisoned every member of his bodily frame,—whilst you must feel, on the other hand, even after having looked to the Saviour, that your cure is imperfect. You may sometimes, indeed, through the power of sin, the prevalence of temptation, and the insensibility of your mind to spiritual things, be led to doubt whether you have known any thing like a cure at all. At any rate, there is enough every day to remind you that the malady is deeply seated in your natures,—that it is, indeed, the sin that dwelleth in you,—and you may be brought at times, from its power, to be dispirited and desponding, as if there were no remedy provided, and no Saviour brought near. Fear not, however, brethren,—for these, and all your spiritual distresses, there is still the same remedy. The serpent is still lifted up over the camp of Israel,—the Saviour is still lifted up that you may look to him, and, looking, be healed. Continuing to keep yourselves in the attitude of believing suppliants, you shall continue to receive as you ask, and to find as you seek, and as you need it of him.

It is by looking to Jesus that your spiritual cure is begun, and it is by the exercise of the same faith that your spiritual cure is to be perfected. Out of Him every blessing you require is to flow; and if you have found either peace, or joy, or holy desire, conveyed to you from this source, be assured that every blessing included in the gift of life, when you come trusting to him, will be as freely imparted. Fail not, therefore, O fail not to remember, beloved brethren, as when you first heard it and first believed it, that the life which you need is in Christ, and not in yourselves; that whilst there is nothing but death in you, in him there is every thing that can quicken your hearts. Let your souls, as one has it, “be continually travelling between your own emptiness and Christ’s fulness;”—let each experience of weakness, and sin, and suffering, send you to

him with a more earnest and persevering cry for deliverance—and thus continuing to wait upon him, and to look to him for your final cure, you shall know more fully, that, “as the Father hath life in himself, even so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself,”—and that “he that hath the Son hath life,” and shall have it more abundantly.

DISCOURSE SEVENTH.

PSALM lxxvii. 19.—Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known.

PSALM lxxxix. 14.—Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.

WE join these two scriptures together, because we dare say they are frequently united in the minds of Christians,—their experience of the truth of the one frequently serving to exercise their faith in the other. The former, as well as the latter, is usually regarded as a declaration respecting the providence of God; and there can be no difficulty in perceiving the application of its bold and figurative language to many an event which that providence presents to us. In one sense, the words of our text might be considered as strikingly characteristic of the whole scheme of that government, which, whilst conducted by God, is still conducted in a manner imperceptible by our bodily senses; in which, with numberless marks of wisdom and contrivance, we never, as it were, approach nearer to the presence of the Great Designer; and in which all our researches into the causes operating around us only conduct us from one instrument to another, God still hiding himself from us in light that is inaccessible.

It is, however, in a meaning somewhat different from this, that the first of these verses is generally regarded and employed. Even supposing us to go forth to the consideration

of God's works with that complete knowledge of his character, and perfect assurance of his continued working in every human event, which his Word conveys ; persuaded that nothing could ever happen beyond the plan of his government, and that every thing was under the guidance of infinite wisdom and rectitude,—there would yet be much to convince us of our own ignorance and inability to comprehend the mystery of his working, and to make us feel that his way was in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and that his footsteps are not known. It is as an expression of the inconceivableness of the Divine government, and of the difficulty of reconciling many parts of it even with the acknowledged character of God, that we are now, therefore, to consider the language of our text.

In looking upon the world as the creation of infinite holiness and infinite goodness, one of the first things which strikes us as partaking of this character of inscrutableness is,—that mystery which has perplexed alike all ages and all nations, and still remains incapable of solution by any,—the permission of evil. Of its existence none of you can be ignorant ; for where has not sin entered, and death by sin ? Every man is speedily convinced that he is born into a world of sin and of suffering ; every thing that he sees in the world assures him, also, that no more than himself are others exempted from their visitation ; that it is the condition of human nature ; that evil is still preponderating, and sin every where ruling, scarcely checked by any opposition or resistance which it may encounter. That it is overruled for the accomplishment of many wise ends ; that a work is in progress for its complete removal ; that even now suffering works patience, and is the cause of many a noble virtue ; that the permission of evil is interwoven with a state of trial ; and that it is by the varied painfulness of such a scene that sons and daughters are trained up for glory,—are, no doubt, truths agreeable to our experience, as well as in harmony with all that we know or have learned of God. But weigh this against the countless sorrows which sin has introduced, with-

out bringing one consolation to its unhappy victims,—weigh the bliss of the few who shall be redeemed against the misery of the many who shall be left under its power,—and who will say that, on the principles of human wisdom, he can explain the mystery? The existence and the permission of such sin and misery under the government of him whose power was adequate to prevent, or who might never have permitted them, is one of those deep things, of which, I know not how far it can be said, that angels have a desire to look into it. And much more, then, may the very thought bring us in deepest prostration to the Divine footstool, acknowledging that “God’s way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known.”

The difficulty would be in some degree removed, did we find, on turning to the scheme of redemption, that it was intended universally to remedy, or did actually so remedy, this state of things. But though the ways of God have been thereby vindicated in a manner of which we could not have conceived, and a light has been thrown on the character and government of God,—light indeed, compared with the darkness that sat on them before,—there is still much, in whatever way we view this work, to afford new room for the sentiment of our text. Why it was four thousand years after the introduction of sin before the Saviour appeared?—why during this long period evil was permitted to reign, except in a single family, without remedy?—why God left men to walk in the ways of their own hearts, and gave them up, without any interference of his power to prevent their impenitence?—why, since its introduction, the Gospel has been confined to so very small a part of the earth, and almost to a very fraction of its people?—why many a dark place of the earth has never yet been visited by it, though it be fitted for all men?—These are questions to which we can give no answer; and we feel that there is in the causes in which they originate the exercise of a sovereignty of which God has given us no account, and of which we can give none. Again, why, even in those places where the Gospel has been

published, it has in so few instances produced those blessed results which it is intended to accomplish?—why so many placed under its light and privileges have been consigned to almost hopeless ignorance?—why others have rejected all the means employed for their spiritual renovation?—why one has been taken and another left?—and why so little has been done by all its ordinances for rolling back the tide of sin, and misery, and desolation, which has overspread the world?—Here, again, are questions equally beyond our comprehension. The unequal distribution of the Gospel is not, indeed, more mysterious than the unequal distribution of the choicest blessings of Providence. But why was there this mystery in either?—why was not the Gospel equally communicated to all?—why are not men compelled to come in?—why does not the Divine Spirit that is moving on the face of the spiritual world at once arrange its discordant elements, as when he first brooded over chaos?—or why, of those who hear the Gospel, it shall be to so many of them the savour of death unto death, and to so few the savour of life unto life?—These are inquiries which we cannot answer, and which we never may! And the very proposal of them imparts such views of the unsearchableness of him who giveth not an account of any of his matters, as brings us to acknowledge, that “his way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps are not known.”

Such circumstances in the economy under which we live are, no doubt, well fitted to draw forth the sentiment in the text; and yet, after dwelling on these, we may not have reached those things which most frequently give rise to the sentiment in Christian minds. There are multitudes to whom subjects like these have scarcely been matter of consideration at all, but who have yet felt the truth which our text conveys. That which is the character of the dispensation as a whole, is also the character of its several individual parts; and the more ordinary, but not on that account more easily comprehended, events which are taking place around us, in the bosom of human families, and in the field of God’s af-

fictive dealings, afford many examples of a providence, which it is equally difficult for us to reconcile with the benevolence and rectitude of an infinitely good and righteous sovereign. We do not now advert to the fact, that one event happeneth alike to all, to the righteous and to the wicked, because we know that it shall finally be well with the righteous; but how many an event is every day occurring, as adverse to the present happiness as we should deem it to the future interests of those who are concerned in it!—how many dark seasons of trial, how many mysterious visitations of suffering, how many disappointments of our dearest hopes,—hopes which God himself seemed to wish us to cherish,—are every day experienced! The Christian parent is removed from his family at the very time when they most needed his Christian instructions and Christian experience, and at the very time when these might have been expected, through the Divine blessing, to fix their character and principles, so as to fit them for the duties and trials of the world. The private Christian, whose life was a speaking example of the power of Divine truth, and whose benevolence was as active as it was enlarged, may be called from the path of usefulness in the maturity of his years, and in the midst of his benevolent pursuits. The pastor, scarcely entered on the field of ministerial labour,—the missionary only begun the missionary enterprise,—whose various talents, long and painful in the acquisition, seemed to promise so much for the advancement of their master's service, may be successively withdrawn in the freshness of their youth, or in the maturity of their days. Or they may be only removed to other stations of usefulness, for which their previous qualifications, and discipline, and habits, were intended to prepare them; but, for any hope that may be thus held out to us, we cannot help experiencing the painfulness of a conflict with all the better feelings of our nature on their removal; and when we think of the disappointment that has been thus given to our fondest expectations and desires for the best of all interests, we are necessarily thrown back on the incomprehensible na-

ture of him, whose “ way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and whose footsteps are not known.”

Such events as these meet us on every hand, and furnish abundant cause for the sentiment of our text ; and they are of such a nature, and so frequent and general in their occurrence, as to make us feel, that, with all the light which the Word of God throws on it, God’s providence is a great deep. The wisdom, the goodness, the rectitude, and the holiness of the Divine administration, must still be to you, my dear brethren, in a great measure, a matter of faith. We see a part of the scheme, but yet how small a part of it ! Amidst all the troubled scenes of human things, we must still be assured, that God is on the side of rectitude, of holiness, and of truth ;—that sin and misery will go together,—that, with all its pleasures and apparent immunity, there is a worm that never dies in the guilty mind, and a peace and enjoyment to be found in God and in holiness,—a reward for the righteous, which would, of itself, evince that God judgeth and ruleth in the earth. Yet, for all this, there are a thousand events every day occurring, for the accordance of which, with all the righteousness and truth of his character, we must rest simply on what he has told us ;—and so often as discomposed or afflicted, by the solemn mystery of his doings, we must betake ourselves, simply and implicitly, to the declaration, which we have united with the one already so often quoted, that “ righteousness and judgment are the habitations of God’s throne, mercy and truth go before his face.”

The Bible teaches us that all our difficulties are the result of ignorance,—that if we could take in the whole scheme, all would be plain,—that there is no mystery in it to an omniscient mind,—that it bears the stamp of all his holy and gracious attributes. And one of the best ways, perhaps, of evincing how this may be, and of bringing us to feel how it is our ignorance that bewilders us, were to show what would be the consequence, if something of that light, which God has actually communicated, were removed, and how this

would at once obscure what, to us as we now are, may be almost plain.

Take, for example, one of those truths, of which the Word of God assures us, that he hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by Jesus Christ,—and there is not one of you who can be unconscious of the light which this truth diffuses over much that is dark and mysterious in the world around you. Now suppose, for a moment, that you were ignorant of this truth,—that it had remained one of the hidden things of God,—that he had seen fit to conceal it from you, or left you to the obscure intimations of your own mind on the subject; and what would be the appearance which the world would present? The wicked often triumphant, and the good often suffering,—the wicked full of temporal blessing, the good languishing in poverty, or subjected to disease and affliction,—the wicked rich and clothed in purple, and faring sumptuously every day,—and Lazarus, covered with sores, laid at the rich man's gate, and refused even the crumbs which fell from his table. Should we not, in this case, feel, were the realities of an eternal world unknown to us, as did the Psalmist, when he exclaims,—“ I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked; for there are no bands in their death, their strength is firm; they are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men. Behold, these are the ungodly which prosper in the world; they increase in riches; verily, I have already cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.” And would not this be a case to afford abundant reason for the declaration, “ Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known.” But just let in the light which the knowledge of a day of judgment affords, the mystery disappears; and, like the Psalmist, when he went into the sanctuary of God, then we would understand their end. The wicked triumphs, but his triumph is short,—the righteous suffers, but his sorrow is soon turned into joy. The greater the prosperity of the wicked,—abused as it has been to strengthen

him in wickedness,—the heavier his condemnation ;—the greater the sufferings of the righteous for righteousness' sake, the more exceeding his weight of glory. The rich man dies, and is buried, and in hell he lifts up his eyes, being in torment ;—the poor man also dies, and angels carry him to the bosom of Abraham.

This may serve as an illustration of the truth, that all the mystery of the Divine dispensations is merely the result of our ignorance ; and that a single circumstance unknown,—a single link of the chain hidden,—may render it impossible for us to pursue it. In like manner, you may take as another illustration, the life and sufferings of our blessed Saviour. Suppose, for a moment, that the purpose for which he lived and died had been concealed or unknown,—that you had been acquainted with them only as they might have been recorded in profane history,—and that the mighty work which he came to do, and which could only be perfected through suffering, had been one of those things which God had kept in his own power. If this had been the case, could any thing have been a greater mystery, or have furnished more abundant room for the exclamation, that “ God's way was in the sea, and his paths in the great waters, and that his footsteps were not known !” A holy and righteous Being,—for such even his enemies confessed him to be,—subjected to every form of reproach and suffering,—the object of unfeeling and unrelenting persecution to those whom he laboured to benefit,—destitute of every human sympathy, and left apparently in the hands of his enemies,—how could we, on this point, have vindicated the goodness and rectitude of the Divine procedure ? Even the best of human beings may need to be purified through suffering ; but this was not required for him who did no sin. If their iniquities might merit that God should at times hide his face from them, why was that face hidden from him in the hour of his severest agony ? and if they might have provoked and received chastisement of the bitterest nature, how could this be said of him, who had never provoked and never offended ?

These might have been our thoughts, had we been ignorant of the design of the Saviour's appearing ; and our feelings of the mystery of the dispensation might have been the very same with those which are often elicited by difficulties in the scheme of Providence, for the unfolding of which we possess no such information. But here again, admit the light which the Word of God communicates respecting the purpose of Christ's manifestation, and the object of his sufferings and death,—that he came in delighted obedience to the Father's will, to give himself a ransom for many,—that he was thereby opening up a way, consistently with the Divine justice, for the extension of mercy and forgiveness to a world of sinners ;—take the very simplest view of that salvation which he has perfected, and which is now published through his name,—and the difficulty which our ignorance had, but for this, occasioned, is at an end. That which we might have deemed the severest reflection on the Divine justice and the Divine goodness, becomes the brightest manifestation of both ; and you confess Christ, and him crucified, to be the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

Another illustration of the same point,—namely, that the difficulties we find in God's administration are merely the result of our own ignorance,—may be taken from the ordinary dealings of his providence in the world ; and, perhaps, no example could be more striking, than that which is presented to us in the history of Jacob and of Joseph. Suppose that the Word of God had only made us acquainted with the earlier period of Joseph's history, when he was torn from his father, sold into a distant land, or condemned to a hopeless imprisonment ; and that you had been ignorant of any of the mighty objects which were thereby designed to be accomplished,—few situations could have seemed more deserving of commiseration than that of the aged patriarch. Joseph was the best beloved of his children,—the son of a mother whom he had fondly loved, and whose memory he delighted to cherish in her offspring,—his cruel and mysterious fate,—devoured, as he believed, by the beasts of the wil-

derness, and left to perish without remedy ;—every circumstance was calculated to make the deepest impression on his mind, and the effect must have been to convey the idea of a dispensation of the most mysterious nature,—that “ God’s way was in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps were not known.” But, then, on this point again, admit the light which the sacred history has given us,—the steps through which God led this child of a beloved father,—the purposes which he designed thereby to accomplish,—the weaning of that father’s heart from a too fond attachment,—the preservation of a whole nation, and even his father’s house, from famine,—independently of the spiritual objects with which the descent of the Israelites into Egypt stood connected,—and God’s way is no longer in the sea,—we find a light shed over what had otherwise been a dark dispensation, and behold and admire the doing of him, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.

These examples may afford a sufficient illustration of the truth, how easily all the mystery connected with the Divine dispensations,—whether in providence or in grace, in the wide field of the world, or in the narrower scene of family or personal afflictions,—may be, as the Word of God declares it to be, the result of our ignorance ; and that, whatever difficulty we may feel in reconciling many of them with the acknowledged principles of his administration, there is no difficulty to an infinite mind,—to him who knoweth the end from the beginning. The smallest part of what God has communicated, if hidden or concealed from us, would constitute a thousand things mysterious and perplexing, which are now plain ; and why may we not conclude, therefore, without even the positive declaration of our text, that righteousness and judgment are still the habitation of God’s throne,—that mercy and truth go before his face ? Had the day of righteous retribution been hidden from you, and the purpose of Christ’s coming been unknown,—had the issue of Jacob’s sufferings and Joseph’s captivity been concealed,—each one of these had been full of mystery ; and yet the

wisdom, the justice, and the goodness of God, had been equally the same, whether we had been possessed of the knowledge which we now have or not. And what we affirm, in accordance with the general tenor of Scripture, is, that we are looking on much of the system of Divine Providence and grace without this light,—as if we looked on the world without a knowledge of the final retribution,—as if we looked on the Saviour on the cross, without a knowledge of the holy sacrifice which he offered,—as if we looked on the sorrowing patriarch, without any acquaintance with the way by which his sorrows were brightened into joy;—the manifestation of the same holy and gracious character is actually spread over the whole scheme, which has been here and there faintly and partially disclosed,—only you cannot perceive it. It reaches alike to the greatest and the minutest events around you; so that, whilst God's way may be often in the sea, and his path in the dark waters, justice and judgment are still the habitation of his throne.

I can scarcely suppose the train of observations into which we have been led to be new or strange to any of you who have lived any time in the world, and have attended to the dispensations of Divine Providence in your own peculiar lot. There are very few who have not, at least, found the former of the Psalmist's declarations often expressive of God's dealings with themselves, and who, instead of allowing their minds to dwell on the general darkness of the Divine dispensations, have not found that darkness come so near them, as to give it a tenfold power of impressing their minds. When blessed with worldly prosperity, enjoying those things in which the mind is disposed to repose and to seek enjoyment, there might be little or nothing to elicit the sentiment which it contains; and except when forced by some very striking providences around you, the mysteries of the Divine dispensations may seldom have been present to your thoughts. But if visited by the afflicting visitations of his providence,—if deprived of worldly comforts, and disappointed of worldly hopes,—if the hand of God lay heavy on you

through repeated bereavements, and earthly props and supports were removed, till you were forced to say with the Patriarch, "All these things are against me,"—if they were sudden and overwhelming, and as we say, unaccountable,—if they seemed as prejudicial to your spiritual, as they were to your temporal interests,—you might feel on not a few occasions that God's way to you was in the sea, and his path in the great waters, and his footsteps not known.

Such occurrences, however, have been seldom found in the history of Christians, without their discerning, at least, something like a key to the mystery. For a time, they may have seemed to wear the same dark character which they at first assumed; but, as the course of events was unfolded, you may have found them connected with others of the deepest importance to your spiritual well-being,—they may have been the means of bringing you into situations fraught with the most important consequences, or of inducing those habits of reflection, of self-examination, and communing with your own hearts, which were the beginnings of spiritual life within you. Or they may have led you more simply and unreservedly away from seeking happiness in things that cannot profit, to that happiness which is to be found in the promises and supports of Divine grace. Out of that dark dispensation that had well nigh sunk and overwhelmed you, there may have emerged all the brightness of noon-day;—and the many testimonies which have been left, in every age, to the benefit of afflictions, and the many occasions on which the people of God have had cause to discern in them the manifestations of Divine faithfulness, are sufficient to tell, how nearly the two Scriptures on which our observations have been founded, are connected together, that whilst "God's way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters," yet "justice and judgment are the habitation of his throne."

Such is the nature of that economy under which we are placed,—full of mysteries which none of us can unravel, yet, at the same time, in not a few points, disclosed to us, God having graciously revealed so much as to give abun-

dant cause for trusting his wisdom, his holiness, and his goodness, in that which yet lies concealed ; and though this state may be, in not a few things, painful to us, it may be still more profitable and more useful for us, than if we were furnished with clearer discoveries of the ways of God.

It does, in the first place, impress upon us that truth, of all others the most useful to be known and felt, the truth of the Divine sovereignty,—a truth which, though disliked by many, because they would have every thing in the character of God made plain to them, is yet most sanctifying in its nature, and, indeed, the very first lesson which the creature requires to learn. That he giveth not an account of his matters,—that he acteth, and will act as a sovereign, without revealing his purpose,—that his will is our law, without its being necessary for him, at every moment, to give reasons for our obedience,—that we are in the hand of the potter, and that he doth with us whatever seemeth right to his omniscience,—these are truths which we are slow to receive, because they abase us in the very dust before him ; and yet it is just for this very reason that they need to be learned. Such a spirit the believer will feel to be that which alone befits him in the presence of the Divine majesty ; and which commands from his inmost soul, that profound homage which it befits the creature to give, and the Creator to receive. To awaken and cherish such a sentiment in his mind, the scene of things around us is peculiarly fitted. Whilst there is enough disclosed to secure the confidence of the Christian, there is at the same time enough, and more than enough, to humble him :—the depth of Divine Providence, and of Divine grace, presents a gulf into which he cannot look without the most devout and solemn adoration. The overwhelming conviction of his own utter ignorance, ruinous as it may be to his pride, leads him to cleave to God with all the feeling of intense helplessness ; and every conviction which he gathers from an increased acquaintance with the works and ways of God, only excites more profoundly in his soul the sentiment of the Apostle,

“ O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God !”

But whilst this may be one lesson to be learned from the mysteriousness of the Divine government, it is easy to see how it is fitted, in like manner, to exercise the faith of the Christian, and thus to strengthen a principle full of the most important results to his moral and spiritual improvement. Were the whole of the Divine government plain to us, or even the path of providence, in so far as each of us is concerned, it is obvious that trust in God would scarcely be tried or matured at all. If every thing were agreeable to our own views of things, we should not know whether his will or our own were influencing us, and dependence on him would be little more than a mere nominal virtue. There were, at any rate, in this, no room for that cleaving to him in Christ as our all,—that humble submitting of ourselves to his appointments,—that affectionate preference of his will to our own, in which, as things are now constituted, consists so much, not merely of the duty, but of the happiness and real enjoyment of the Christian. And there were no place for that devout waiting upon him for light and guidance,—the earnest beseeching, and the patient hope, which are blessed for working out in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness. As things are now constituted, however, trust in God,—that disposition so essential to the happiness of all his creatures, and above all essential to the recovery of a fallen and guilty creature,—is required to be in constant employment. Every mystery in the Divine government,—every experience of affliction,—every season of despondency and perplexity which the dark and troubled tide of human things brings upon our naturally fearful hearts,—brings us also to God, as the only being in whom our help is to be found. If we are in any measure acquainted with his power and grace, we find that we cannot walk without him, else we walk in darkness ; his presence and his strength are felt to be essential to any thing like peace and enjoyment ; and hence originates the believing in hope against hope,—the

triumph of grace over all the feelings and sympathies of nature ; and the believer, in fighting the fight of faith, that he may inherit everlasting life, gains already, in some degree, the reward of his faith and obedience, in an increase of that very confidence which is so essential at all times to his spiritual well-being. It is not for me, perhaps, to say that God might not have accomplished the same end by a system of things different from that under which we are now placed. He might have invested the sons and daughters of glory at once with the bloom of perfect moral beauty ; and, without training them through all the painfulness of many a dark dispensation for the habitation of his presence, they might have been in a moment blessed with entire conformity to his character and will. Though this might have been the case, however, we can still see the peculiar fitness of things as they now are for the attainment of his object. We can still reverence the wisdom and grace of him who leads us in a way we knew not ; and though, by another appointment, there might have been much painfulness saved us, the present system may yet be finally more productive of real blessedness.

Even in the present world, the opening up of the Divine providence, as he advances in his journey, constitutes one of the most delightful employments in which a Christian can engage ; and when our connexion with present things has been dissolved, and the mystery of the Divine appointments, which, in so far as we are concerned individually, is not always designed to remain mysterious, shall have been unfolded, will it not present a source of inexhaustible wonder to look back on all the way by which God has led us ? The history of a human soul, conceived in sin, and cradled in misery ; redeemed by grace, and brought into the condition of an heir of glory ; doomed during the period of nonage to live in trouble and in poverty, and trained through suffering for the blessedness of the Divine presence, will present a history, with the intense interest of which nothing that we know or can tell of can compare. And the blessedness of such a

soul, at every given moment of its never-ending progress, must be enhanced by the remembrance of the struggle and the fight through which it has passed to its eternal dwelling-place,—from amidst the sin and the suffering, the darkness and the misery of its former habitation, to that place where sorrow and sighing have for ever passed away.

DISCOURSE EIGHTH.

JOHN, iv. 42.—Now we believe, not because of thy saying ; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

IN the commencement of this chapter, we read that our Lord, desirous to escape from the malicious designs of the Pharisees, who had heard of the popularity and success of his ministry, left Judea, and departed again into Galilee. In repairing from the one to the other, it was necessary for him to pass through Samaria, the country that lay between ;—and he came, we are told, to a city of Samaria, called Sychar,—and, being wearied with his journey, sat down by a well, whilst the disciples went into the city to buy meat. At this time, and while they were absent, there came a woman of the city to draw water ; and to her, not more from the wish to have his thirst quenched, we may readily suppose, than from a design of introducing the subject in which he was at all times most deeply interested, he preferred the very natural request, “ Give me to drink.” The answer which she returned showed full well the strength of her prejudices, and her astonishment that such a request should have been made by one belonging to a nation who were the enemies of her people,—“ How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria ?” Our Lord, however, did not, for all this, give up the attempt, and having taken advantage of the circumstances

of their meeting to declare, that he could give her that living water, of which whosoever tasted should thirst no more, succeeded, at any rate, in awakening her curiosity, and in fixing her mind on himself, not more from the supposed value, than from the very extraordinary nature, of the promises which he made.

Having thus gained her attention, and in some degree overcome those scruples which had nearly proved fatal to all intercourse, he next revealed a circumstance in her past life, which made her feel that she was in the presence of one, before whom all its iniquity was manifest; and which, coming from a stranger, who, till that day and that hour, had been as ignorant of her as she was unacquainted with him, instantly led to the conclusion, which neither the meanness of his appearance, nor the strength of her Samaritan prejudices, could withstand,—that the person whom she had thus casually encountered, must be no less than a prophet, favoured with some extraordinary means of knowing her character, such as this high office might be supposed to confer. To this impression she did not fail to give utterance: “Sir,” said she, “I perceive that thou art a prophet!”

But, as if aware that in admitting this, she had made a concession almost fatal to the credit of her own worship, and in which the superiority of Jerusalem and its temple was obviously involved; and desirous, perhaps, to escape from any farther scrutiny, she suggested that her fathers had worshipped in the mountain that was near, whilst, as a Jew, he must believe that Jerusalem was the place where men ought to worship. One less aware than our Lord of the power of early association, or less disposed to condescend to human weakness, might, at this moment, have been tempted to enter into all those differences which had alienated the Samaritans from their Jewish neighbours; and the discussion of which had only tended to excite feelings not at all friendly to the conviction which he sought. But with a true knowledge of the human heart, and without compromising the truth, that salvation was of the Jews, our Lord returned

an answer, which, whilst it did not humour, did not, at the same time, unnecessarily offend, her prejudices; and which showed the comparatively insignificant claims of any outward forms of worship, as contrasted with the claims of that worship in spirit and in truth, which was now to be, more prominently than it had yet been, the distinction of every one who should be accepted of the Father. Whether satisfied or not by this answer, she was, at any rate, led to express her hope,—the hope which the Samaritans entertained equally with the Jewish people,—of a Messiah, by whose coming every such question as that which she proposed should be finally resolved. And when assured that he who now stood before her, and of whose prophetic character she had received so striking a proof, was no other than this great deliverer, she appears at once to have admitted his claim on the simple yet sufficient proof which she had already received, of his Divine commission, and to have owned him as the Saviour, in the confidence that he who had poured such a light upon every darker passage of her history, could also enlighten that darkness in which, as to the right nature of all acceptable worship, she found herself involved.

Thus convinced that Jesus was the Christ,—with the very natural desire to communicate the truth to others, which will always distinguish those who have found the Saviour,—and without regarding, or even recollecting the errand on which she had come thither,—she left her water-pots, and returned to the city, to tell the tidings of the mysterious stranger, who, by a few moments' conversation, had wrought a change upon her, of which she could not yet estimate the magnitude; and, with true simplicity and real earnestness, addressed herself to those with whom her report was most likely to be credited,—“Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did.”

Struck, we may suppose, not more by the report which she brought, than by the interest manifested on such a subject, by one whose previous life could have shown no ap-

pearance of concern for Divine things ; and, with minds in some degree prepared for the reception of the truth, as hers had been, by the hope of a Saviour to come, her declaration met with a ready attention amongst the Samaritans. And having no reason to suspect her testimony, especially when she besought them to inquire for themselves into its truth ; and satisfied that he who had discovered the secrets of her heart and life, must be all that he claimed to be,—many believed for the saying of the woman, which testified,—“ He told me all that ever I did.”

Under this conviction many repaired to Jesus ; and with the very natural desire of obtaining every means of information in their power, and of neglecting no opportunity of being established in a truth so important as the appearance of the Messiah, proceeded to verify, by their own observation, the testimony which they had received. And fully satisfied from all that they saw and heard, during the two days in which the Saviour tarried with them, that the report was not exaggerated, and that our Lord was indeed all that he assumed to be, they gave implicit confidence to the character and work which he came to perform, and rendered that honour and submission to his declarations which they were well entitled to receive.

We have not the means of ascertaining what was the additional evidence which they obtained, and by which they were established so firmly in the faith of the Saviour. We are not informed that he wrought any miracles for their conviction, or even that he did to every one what he did to her who first guided them in the way to him,—tell them all things that ever they did. There can be no doubt, however, that in the course of two days, they might have seen many things about our Lord calculated to impress them with high and exalted views of his character ; and that in the truths which he revealed, and the light which he threw upon their own Scriptures, they might have had the opportunity of discovering many things which argued him to be, indeed, sent of God,—many things even more striking than that

which had at first aroused their attention ; and that, independently of the truth of the report on which they had come to him, they would now have the conviction of their own experience ;—their faith would become more enlarged in its nature, and be settled on a new and surer basis than that on which it had before rested. Such their own declaration assures us was the case. Instead of depending on the testimony of another, it now rested on what they themselves had seen and heard. So confident were they of the truth, that, setting aside the authority on which they had been at first induced to come to the Saviour, they could now afford to part with it altogether, and yet their confidence be, in no degree, impaired. And without disparaging, in any measure, the witness to whom they owed their first knowledge of the truth, that Jesus had come amongst them, they could still say,—“ Now, we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.”

I can hardly suppose an attentive reader of the Scriptures not to have been often struck by the interesting narrative which we have now briefly related, and by the memorable testimony with which it concludes. And the way in which these Samaritans were brought to the knowledge of the Saviour, is so like that in which he is introduced to us,—the change which they underwent resembles, in so many points, that which takes place when we are brought to experience the power of Divine truth on our hearts,—the language is so like that which a believer would employ when speaking of his faith, compared with a time, when that faith, if such it could be called, rested simply on the authority and influence of others,—that we may be permitted in this view for a little to pursue it, not doubting that the application is one familiar to the minds of many, and that the declaration of the Samaritans may be as true in their case, as in that of those who first employed it.

You will at once perceive, in order to bring out the pa-

rallel to which we have adverted, that any one to whom the Gospel is addressed is placed in precisely the same situation with these Samaritans, when they were first assured of the fact that the Messiah had appeared. The report which is brought to all who have ever heard the glad tidings of everlasting life is, that the Saviour has come ; and the whole of those means which are put in operation for the furtherance of the kingdom of God amongst men, are intended and fitted to promote the great object of awakening their attention to a truth, which it is of the first importance for every human being to know and believe. Amidst lesser differences that may distinguish the situation of different individuals, this is common to them all with that referred to in our text, that the truth is brought near to us through the medium of human testimony,—that it is something not addressed immediately to our senses, but handed down by those who have seen and heard. And when we trace upwards the authority on which it rests, we come to those who saw, and therefore believed, those mighty works by which Jesus Christ was attested to be the Son of God with power. Whether it seeks access to our minds by the witness of prophets and apostles, or is assured to us by living men, themselves believers in the hopes and promises of the Gospel, it comes in the very same manner, and addresses us with the same urgency, that the tidings of the Saviour's appearing did these Samaritans, when they were called upon by the woman, to come and see a man who told her all things that ever she did.

In the circumstances in which most of us have been placed, too,—reared in the midst of a Christian land, and in the bosom of families professedly Christian,—it cannot be supposed that any of us are ignorant of as much of the Gospel as was made known to them ; and with the access which they who taught us what be the first principles of the oracles of God possessed, to every avenue of approach to our hearts, as well as to our understandings,—with the very natural wish which they felt, that we should attach the same value to the Christian faith that they themselves did,—and with the unhesitat-

ing confidence which we were prepared, for the best of all reasons, to repose in their testimony,—it cannot be supposed, that many have felt inclined to dispute the truth that might have been instilled into them in their early years, or have been disposed to treat the Gospel as a cunningly-devised fable. So far back as we can trace our recollection of Divine things, no subject may have commanded a deeper reverence, and we may have felt an awe on our minds whenever it was adverted to, which evinced that the seriousness with which those around us spoke of it had reached ourselves. And having all these impressions strengthened in our connexion with the ministry of the Word, and taught, by the respect which was given in the world around us to the Gospel, to respect it ourselves ; preserved from the taint of irreligious principles or irreligious example, or so fortified against them by our early feelings and prepossessions in favour of religion, that they may have lighted harmless upon us, or tempted us in vain, there may have been nothing to insinuate even a doubt of the truth of the report brought to our ears,—and few things from which we would revolt more strongly, than from the idea of slighting or undervaluing the faith as it is in Jesus. It may come to us with so many tender associations and touching recollections,—it may be that on which we have been taught to set such a value, and the importance of which has been so often dwelt upon, that nothing, as we think, could induce us to part with it ; and we may have been led so uniformly to connect every thing that is fearful with hostility to the Gospel, that we could not contemplate the renouncement of its claims without horror,—so that it may be said of most, if not of all of us, that we have believed, if on no better foundation, at least on some foundation like that of the Samaritans, who believed for the saying of the woman which said, “ Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did.” This is very much the system, it will be readily admitted, under which we have all been made acquainted with the truth, that Jesus is the Christ, the Saviour of the world. And let it not be supposed, even for a

moment, that in leading you to something more distinct and specific as the faith of the Gospel, we have the smallest disposition to reflect on the method in which an early reverence for Divine truth is inculcated. However there may be men that can smile at all this, as a system unfriendly to the promotion of truth, and calculated to entail superstition and delusion on the world ; there is, in the way by which Divine things are impressed upon us, nothing more unreasonable than that which obtains on a thousand other subjects, to which this is never objected. And, in seeking to enlist on the side of the Gospel all those tender feelings which have been implanted in our nature, for the wisest of purposes, there is nothing more than what a proper concern for that which is believed to be the truth ought to dictate, and nothing more than the infirmity of our nature, and, above all, regard to the will of God, require. They on whom the charge of others, and especially the young, is devolved, have need to be on their guard against ideas which are not more absurd than irreligious ; for, so long as the circumstances of human nature require it, and so long as God enjoins it, and accompanies it with his blessing, it were worse than idle to speculate about the propriety of commending the Gospel of Christ to them, with all the credit and influence which we possess, even though they may yet be incapable of looking beyond our own testimony, for the truth of the report which we bring to them of the Saviour.

In this view, then, it may be said of all of us, that we are placed in the same circumstances with these Samaritans, when, without having yet seen or possessed any acquaintance with the Saviour, they received the report which was brought concerning him. It may also be said of us, however, equally with them, that the report which is brought requires and demands that we should inquire and see for ourselves. The object of all the commendation which the Gospel has received to our understandings and our hearts is, that we may be thereby induced personally to seek after an acquaintance with the Saviour. The Samaritans could not have complied

with the invitation they received, unless they had themselves gone forth to find the Messiah ; and we cannot, in like manner, comply with the message which is brought us in the Gospel, whatever outward reverence we may give it, unless we seek to know the Saviour in his Word, as he reveals himself to all who humbly seek him. They were rewarded for their simple, teachable, and inquiring spirit, in being led to a faith in his character and work, as far superior to any thing that they had known before, as the faith which rests on the evidence of our senses is superior to that which rests on a single and unsupported authority. And whenever, in like manner, any have been led personally and for themselves to seek after the way of peace, they will find a reward hardly less desirable than theirs, and which will enable them equally to say of all the authority on which their faith might have previously rested, “ Now we believe, not because of thy saying, for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.”

We are concerned to impress this point upon you, because it is to be feared that there are many in every Christian land, placed in the circumstances to which we have already adverted ; who, beyond the influence which their education, or the society in which they mingle, or their connexion with those who profess the Gospel, has over them, possess no ground of attachment to the Gospel itself,—who believe it, simply because they have been taught to do so, but who see nothing in it which they value or regard,—and who, for all the claims which it has on their attention, have never made its truths the subject of distinct consideration, or felt any anxiety to share the blessings which it comes to bestow. Though they may have had their feelings at times excited, and their hearts warmed, by the exhibition of Gospel truth, or their minds moved and affected by the mighty revelations which the Gospel discloses,—though they may be able to speak of its truths with some interest, and be as far as possible from having any inclination to disbelieve the greatest or the least of them, they may never, with all this, have felt

any interest in it, as the way of peace and salvation for their own souls. The interest which they have experienced has rather been something caught from the warmth of others, than because they saw it in such a light as to affect themselves. Were all the credit which it derives from the authority of others withdrawn,—were they removed from the society which may serve to make them in some degree observant of it,—and were they brought into situations as unfriendly, as their present circumstances may be favourable, to the respect and reverence which they render it, they might become as regardless of the Gospel as they are now attached to it; and it is therefore most necessary to have it ever impressed upon our minds that this is not the faith of the Gospel,—that there must be in it something personal, or it does not exist at all,—that I can no more rest on the mere authority of another in this matter, than his faith can be received instead of mine,—and that if, in the great day of account which is approaching, and when I must stand at the judgment-seat of Christ, to give my account of every deed done in the body, whether good or evil, and, above all, to render an account of the manner in which I have improved the Gospel, his soul cannot occupy the place of mine, or his improvement of the Gospel be reckoned as mine,—so I must now possess a ground of attachment to the Gospel, and a bond of union to the Saviour, such as shall enable me to say, of all the authority and the influence by which both may have been commended to me, “I believe not because of you; for I have heard him myself, and know that this is indeed the Christ.”

It was obviously in this way that the Samaritans acted, when, instead of resting upon the testimony of one of their number, they went forth themselves to seek after the Saviour; and when, without discrediting her testimony, they yet sought to have it confirmed, by knowing the Saviour themselves. And the distinct and unequivocal confession which they made of their faith in him, as the Christ, the Saviour of the world, shows how correctly they had appreciated his character,—and that the truth of which they were

now so well assured, was not the mere general truth that he was a prophet, or even the Messiah, but a great Spiritual Deliverer, whose work and office accorded with all their wants and necessities as sinful men.

We have said, however, that such will be, in a great measure, the experience of those who employ, in like manner, the testimony by which the Gospel comes recommended, as the means of becoming acquainted with the Saviour himself. I am persuaded that this language has been often employed by Christians in every age, to express what they had themselves felt and experienced. And here I shall not be supposed to speak of such a confirmation of the truth as may be derived from an examination of the evidences of the Gospel, or such as may arise from the consideration of its high moral purity and excellence,—important and interesting as both of them may be,—but of something more accessible to ordinary feeling,—of the confirmation which the experience of its power, and of the efficacy of its consolations, is fitted to produce,—of such a testimony as may be derived from its unfolding to us all the corruptions of our heart, and, at the same time, providing a remedy sufficient to heal them all ;—of such a testimony, in short, as can only arise from personal application to him as the Saviour, and a steady reliance on his power and grace. To this we may have been led from mere authority. The influence of others on us,—the force of their example, or the earnestness of their entreaties,—may have won us to believe ; to receive, and come to Christ our Saviour. But if led in any way to rest upon him as all our salvation, and enlightened to perceive the value of his grace, the result will be the same ; and whatever may have been the ground of our former attachment to the Gospel, or whatever the helps that assisted us onwards in coming to a saving acquaintance with it, they will almost disappear, and be unfelt, as was the testimony of the woman by the Samaritans, when it was displaced by the evidence of her own experience.

To evince the nature of the testimony to which we advert,

let us only suppose, for a moment, that the evidence by which the character of Christ was assured to the minds of the Samaritans, had been, that he had made every one of them feel his Divine power, as truly as he did her on whose evidence they had at first come to him,—that he had recorded to them, as clearly as he did to her, the actions of their past lives,—and made them know as distinctly, that they were in the presence of one before whom the whole lay naked and open. If this had been the case,—and we know not but it was,—we can easily perceive how well they might then have set aside her testimony ; and after having received the same proof of his Messiahship which had ensured her faith, and which led them also to believe, might have thought no more of it, or felt no need of it ; and that, possessing the same advantages which she had herself possessed, it might be no longer of any consequence to them whether she had believed or not. Or let us suppose farther, that the fact which had arrested their attention, and brought them to the Saviour, had been, not merely that he had read the heart and life of one of their number, but that she had thereby become the subject of new affections and desires, been altogether changed in the whole tenor of her life, and that the change, which was so manifest and so wonderful in her case, had passed upon each of them successively in their intercourse with the Saviour. It is to something of this nature that we advert, when we speak of the resemblance which there is in the experience of these Samaritans to that of all true Christians. The Saviour, by his Word and Spirit, opens up to them the inmost workings of their hearts, whilst, at the same time, he presents in the Gospel that provision of mercy and grace which is fitted to meet and to rectify them all. The peace and the confidence which it presents, is not more fitted to banish the fear of guilt, than it is to quicken the desire after holiness ; and ignorant as believers may be of many things, one thing they may know, that, whereas they were blind, now they see. They will find themselves awakened to the presence of objects to which they were insensible be-

fore, but of which they cannot now doubt the reality ; they will find themselves the subjects of affections and desires to which they were formerly strangers, and to which the Gospel alone could have begotten them,—of desires which, while they make them feel their own nothingness, are, at the same time, sanctifying in their nature, and heavenly in their object. And the whole of the new tastes, habits, and enjoyments, which the Gospel is fitted both to beget and to satisfy, will convince them how truly he in whom they have believed is the Christ, the Saviour.

Of the difference that obtains between their acquaintance with the Saviour, and that which Christians might possess before, it is not too much to say, that it is as great as the difference between the situation of the Samaritans, when their faith rested on the report of another, and when they found the truth of the report substantiated by personal intercourse with Jesus. And the correspondence is not less exact, because the latter being possessed, they may lay aside their former ground of attachment to the Gospel, without, at least, finding their confidence sensibly diminished ; just as the scaffolding may be removed without doing injury to the building which it had assisted to rear. With an independence of thought and sentiment, not less decided than the language which our text conveys, they may be able to say, that whatever it might once have been to them, yet now they do not, and cannot, need its support. They will not, on this account, deem less valuable any thing which might have assisted them onwards to the knowledge of the truth, nor be disposed to disregard any of those means which were employed to beget in their minds an interest in the Gospel. They will find it to be a cause of gratitude and thankfulness to God, that they were placed in circumstances favourable to any impressions of Divine things ; that they were never so far left to the influence of their own evil heart, as to be tempted to reject or disbelieve the Bible ; and that, until a new and better ground of confidence in its truth was imparted, there was still some attachment or other which kept

them within the range of its sanctifying impressions. But these will be no longer, as they were before, the chief, and far less, the only grounds of their faith in the Saviour; they will find themselves knit to him as the life of their souls, and the stay of their hearts,—as the source of their happiness, and the spring of their best consolations. And in the enlargement of mind which his Gospel communicates, in the hopes which it imparts, and in the new and better dispositions which these have made to spring up within them, they will know for themselves that he is the Christ, the Saviour of the world.

Till something like this is known, there can be no real faith in the message of the Gospel; and any other sort of faith which men may have in it, is ever ready to be disturbed and disquieted, occasions every day occurring to evince its unfitness to contend with the real circumstances in which they are placed. Every new inlet of knowledge is apt to unsettle it; having its foundation very much in the authority of others, instead of resting on any foundation of its own, it is ready to be moved by all those circumstances which may occur to shake our confidence in the character and conduct of those to whom we naturally look for counsel and guidance. But when we can say, in the language of our text, “We have heard him ourselves, and know that he is the Christ,” none of these things will move us. Though the testimony of those through whom we first received it should fail, as the testimony of the Samaritan woman had done, if she had confessed her report of the Saviour to have been fabricated, we should still have a ground of attachment that would survive in the experience of our own hearts; and the man that has known this can look round upon the difficulties and discouragements that perplex others, and which lead them to make shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience,—on all those offences at the truth, at which many stumble, and cast away their confidence,—and find all only binding more firmly to him his own. And with the mind of the Apostle, when in trying and troublous times,

and when many had been seduced from the truth, and others had been shaken, he can fall back upon his stronghold in the time of trial, and say, “ Nevertheless, the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his.”

DISCOURSE NINTH.*

1 CORINTHIANS, v. 7.—Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.

THE mention of the Passover, or of Christ as our passover, will naturally bring to our recollection that occasion in the history of God's ancient people with which the name originated, and from which it has been transferred by the Apostle to an event yet more important; and compared with which, the other was only the shadow of good things to come. Designing shortly and expressively to convey to us the virtue and efficacy of Christ's sacrifice, he tells us, that "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us."

We are thus almost necessarily referred, for the illustration of his meaning, to those transactions which were obviously in his view at the moment when he thus associated that event, which stands pre-eminent in Old Testament history, with the great event which crowns the glory of the New Testament dispensation. You will know that we refer you to the time when God brought his people out of Egypt. After a series of miracles, wrought in the sight of their enemies, intended to prove that he was the God of Israel, and to achieve their deliverance from the house of bondage, but which were successively resisted by the obstinacy and pride of Pharaoh, we are informed, that God resolved on giving a demonstration of his power,

* Preached before the Communion.

so terrible, that not even the haughty monarch should be able to resist it, and one which should be so widely spread, and so widely felt, that not a dwelling in Egypt should remain unaffected or unreached by it. He declared his purpose to go out at midnight into the midst of the land, and slay the first-born of every family, from the first-born of Pharaoh to the first-born of the meanest of his subjects; and by thus inflicting on every family the bitterest of all suffering, to make them feel the vanity of resisting God, and the necessity, unless they would provoke a heavier judgment, of giving instant compliance with his demand, to let the people go.

In the prospect of such a visitation, God was not unmindful of the Israelites, scattered up and down, as they were, in the midst of the Egyptians. Intending to manifest his power against their enemies, the shield of his protection was to be flung over them. The same hand which was to be extended in judgment upon their oppressors, was to be stretched out to shelter and to save them; and their families were to be preserved from the visitation that impended over the families of the Egyptians, in such a way as to leave no doubt on any mind that He had wrought their deliverance.

They were commanded, every household apart, to slay or sacrifice a lamb, hence denominated the lamb of the Passover, or simply the Passover, and to sprinkle its blood upon the posts of their doors, that it might be to them for a token upon the houses where they were; and wherever the Divine command was thus obeyed, the destroying angel was to *pass over* them, that the plague should not come upon them to destroy them, when he smote the land of Egypt. “And it came to pass, that at midnight the Lord smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sat on his throne, unto the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of cattle; whilst against any of the children of Israel not a dog moved his tongue against man or beast, that they might know how the Lord put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.”

It can hardly be doubted, I think, that the whole of this transaction was intended to direct the minds of the Israelites forward to that event with which it is connected in the text ; and, however many might never have been thereby guided beyond the event itself, I can hardly suppose that its typical meaning was unknown to those who looked for redemption in Israel. God had placed them under a dispensation which they were given to understand, generally, was only introductory to another and more perfect discovery of his will. He had taught them to expect an interference of his mighty power in their behalf, more glorious than any thing which they had yet beheld ; and that they were reserved as the witnesses of his grace, and the depositories of his counsel, for the accomplishment of a purpose, in which, not only they, but all the families of the earth, were to be blessed. He had strewn the whole pathway of their history with incidents which were clearly typical of something to be fulfilled in his future kingdom, and had kept the feeling alive by the whole system of their religious observances ; and in these circumstances, and placed under such a dispensation, I can scarcely persuade myself, but that holy men of old, whose minds were waiting in the faith of a spiritual redemption, did, in all ages, regard the Passover as the earnest of better things to come, and hailed its commemoration, not merely with feelings of gratitude for the deliverance which God had then wrought out for his people, but with feelings of joy and expectation, inspired by the hope of a yet higher deliverance. At any rate, there can be no doubt with us, that such was its ultimate design and intention. The many applications which we have of it to the person and work of the Saviour, as “ the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world,” and “ the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,” assure us, that it was intended to lead to him, and to centre in him. And it was something more than an allusion, therefore, or a mere accommodation,—it was an appropriation of the deliverance which God had wrought out for his people, to an object which it was all along designed

to typify and illustrate, when the Apostle declared that "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us."

According to the declarations of Scripture, the danger to which the families of Israel were exposed, on that night when God was to pass through the land of Egypt in judgment, is only a feeble representation of the danger to which all men are exposed as transgressors of the Divine law. The purpose which God then intimated, of visiting the sinners who had slighted and despised the manifestations of his presence with his righteous indignation, is that which God has declared in every page of his Word, he will one day execute, in a yet more awful manner, upon every impenitent worker of iniquity. And the doom under which the first-born, whether Israelites or Egyptians, must be considered as lying, is really that under which, not the first-born only, but all men, in a yet more awful sense, lie,—the sentence of death. And not even the situation of Egypt as it lay that night, exposed to a misery from which there was no refuge, and to be crushed before a power which it was hopeless to resist, and to be sunk in an overwhelming overthrow before it could tell the hand that dealt the blow,—not even this situation could express the terribleness of that in which all men are placed, exposed to the wrath of God, which may come suddenly, and which, when it comes, comes without remedy, and leaves no room for hope. The Word of God assures us, that by nature we are the children of wrath,—that judgment has come upon all men to condemnation,—that the wages of sin is death,—and that cursed is every one that continueth not in all things written in the book of the law to do them.

With these declarations of our guilt and danger as sinners, however, God has equally declared his desire to pass over the families of the children of men, as he did the families of Israel, on that night of fearful visitation to the Egyptians. Actuated by the same tender pity for human necessities, which then showed itself in the consideration which he gave to the situation of his people, he has declared him-

self not willing that any should perish, but that all should be saved from the avenger of blood ; and not satisfied with any general expression, he has appointed a way by which we may escape the danger, and repose in safety from the threatened evil. Along the whole line of his denunciations against sin, and his declarations of the hatred and abhorrence with which he regards it, you find running, side by side, intimations of a gracious will and purpose towards the sinner. Wherever you read of the hand of the destroyer lifted up to smite, there is, as it were, the stretching forth of another hand, to stay, to shelter, and to save ; and the discoveries of coming judgment are as nearly connected with discoveries of a promised refuge, as when God, in announcing to Moses, for the first time, the judgments impending over Egypt, declared also the way by which his people would be in safety from the coming indignation. The combination of these two things constitutes, in fact, the substance of the Divine communications on the subject of man's spiritual condition. They are written, not merely in words, but graven on the incidents of the Bible history ; it is because our deliverance is to come to us through the same way, and is to become ours by very much the same application as that by which the safety of the Jewish people was ensured, that the Apostle declares, that " Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." In the Christian Passover, God has provided in the blood of Christ a sacrifice sufficient for the deliverance of all from everlasting destruction.

You will remember, that, when God declared to Moses his purpose to save the Israelites from the calamity which was in one night to plunge the land of Egypt into mourning, and lamentation, and bitter wo, it was not intimated, as his purpose, to preserve them independently of any means appointed by him, and to be employed by them, for the accomplishment of this end. In this, as in many like deliverances vouchsafed to his people, he was pleased to make their safety to depend on their faith and obedience. He was pleased to require that every family should provide a lamb

whose blood was to be shed, and offered to him in sacrifice. The blood of this lamb was to be poured forth and sprinkled on the door-posts, and it was only through their obedience to this injunction, that the Divine purpose, in so far as they were concerned, was to be accomplished. There can be little doubt with any one, I think, what was the design of God in making such an appointment. Independently of the trial which it afforded of their dependence on his faithfulness, it was doubtless intended to keep alive on their minds the truth, that without shedding of blood there was no remission,—that even they, though his own peculiar people, were in a state of sin, and lay exposed to his judgments equally with those on whom they were to be inflicted,—that the lives of their first-born were his, and only to be preserved by the substitution of another life in the room of theirs, and as the price of their ransom; and the solemnity with which they were required, in commemoration of this event, and throughout all ages, to redeem their first-born, was obviously intended to preserve the same impression on their minds. There can be no doubt, at any rate, that, as their deliverance was to come to them, it was represented as coming by blood; that intending to save them, God made their safety to be ensured through the substitution of a victim; and that it was in consideration of a sacrifice offered by them, and accepted of God, that they were to be preserved. The appointment of this sacrifice was the declaration of God's gracious mind towards them; and when, in obedience to the Divine command, the required sacrifice was offered, and the blood which God himself had declared adequate to their ransom was shed, every hinderance to their attainment of the promised deliverance was removed; and they required only to present to God the token of their obedience in order that this deliverance might be their own.

You are not to suppose, when, in allusion to this mode of deliverance, the Apostle says, "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us," that the comparison which he intends to institute, will hold, or was designed to hold, in every point.

For any thing we know, there was nothing,—I mean no necessity in his moral nature,—to have prevented God from saving the Israelites by the blood of any other animal than that of a lamb, or even without the shedding of blood at all. And for any thing that we can see, he might have provided for their safety in a thousand other ways, equally available,—excepting in so far as it was designed to keep alive on their minds the truth of their own guilty condition, and that their lives, and the lives of their families, were at God's sovereign disposal. The appointment of a sacrifice was merely an arbitrary one,—that is to say, a thing for which we can give no other reason than that God appointed it. But you are not to suppose for a moment, that there was no more necessity than this, which was really no necessity at all, for the intervention of a greater sacrifice, before guilt could be atoned, or the sentence pronounced against iniquity passed from and repealed. On the contrary, we know, and are assured, that, in order to the exemption of any of our race from a yet more awful destruction, there was a necessity in the very nature of the Godhead, that an atonement should be provided, that a vindication of the Divine holiness and the Divine rectitude should be rendered, before one sinner could be admitted into the Divine presence, or one sin be forgiven.

And on the night when God made to meet on the Saviour the iniquity of us all,—when he poured on his blessed head the vials of his wrath, and when he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, there was a manifestation of his hatred against iniquity, yet more fearful than on that night, when, in punishment of their contempt, he laid low the pride of Egypt by one desolating overthrow, and made every family through her territory the scene of bitter anguish and wo. For all this, however, it still remains true, that designing to manifest his grace, in passing from execution of that sentence under which all men lie as transgressors, the deliverance opened up to them was to be by the blood of a sacrifice,—that it was by the substitution of a life for their life that his

hand was to be stayed against the workers of iniquity, and that a price was to be paid, in order that the redemption, even of one, might be secured.

Instead of leaving it to us, however, either to provide or to offer the victim, necessary as the ransom,—God himself has provided and offered that victim in the person of his only-begotten and well-beloved Son. The precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without spot and without blemish, has been shed once for all, that all might apply to it, and, applying, be in safety. And if there was a virtue in the blood of a lamb, so that by the Divine appointment, when that blood was shed, God was pacified towards the children of his people, how much more virtue and efficiency, may we rest assured, are there in the blood of Christ, who, through the Eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, to turn aside the fierceness of the Divine wrath ; and, if we only make application to it, to stay the hand of the destroyer !

It was for this reason that the lamb in the Jewish festival was called the lamb of the Passover, or simply the Passover ; and it is because the offering of the Lamb of God, to take away the sins of the world, has done for all men what the offering of the lamb did for every single family in Israel in which its blood was shed,—because that hinderance which existed in the holiness of the Godhead and in the purity of the Divine law to the passing over the sentence denounced against transgressors has been removed,—and because it needs now no more than a simple act of faith on our part, in order that we may be in safety through its provision of mercy, that the Apostle, borrowing the terms which had been of old applied to the mode of deliverance which God provided for his people, declares that “ Christ our passover was sacrificed for us.”

It is to this point, we beg you to observe, that our illustration is to be confined,—that in both cases a ransom was required, and that blood was to be shed, in order to their safety. Between the nature and preciousness of the blood shed, and the dignity and quality of the victim, there was a

difference as great as between the nature and value of the deliverance to be effected by the offering of the paschal lamb and by the offering of the Lamb of God ; and redemption from all the fearfulness of the second death did not so far exceed redemption from the mere visitation of the natural death as did the preciousness of the blood of Christ, that spotless Lamb of God, exceed the preciousness of that blood shed for Israel's deliverance. In this, however, both agree, that they were the appointed and effectual ways through which deliverance was to come to the Israelites and to us ; and would you see how important is the declaration which the Apostle makes, and how necessary it is for our peace and for our safety, you have only to realize and to bring near to yourselves the condition in which the Israelites were placed when they first heard of the judgments which were impending, and listened at the same time to the way of peace and safety which the tender mercy of God had opened up to them.

Could I tell you with the certainty of a Divine commission, that God was this night to pass through the midst of your families, to overwhelm you with such a visitation as he sent on Egypt,—that at the dead of night his power was to be felt in every dwelling, laying your first-born in the dust, and saddening every household into the solemnity of a funeral,—could I tell you that, with a secrecy which defied all precautions, in a way to which you could offer no resistance, and with a power before which you would be forced to feel your own nothingness, he was to rob you of your dearest treasure, heedless of all the tender ties and dear domestic sympathies which were then to be torn asunder,—could I tell you this with a Divine authority, and were you to receive it as Divine, I should have a communication to make, to which, I am persuaded, not one member of a family now present could be indifferent, whether he himself were marked out as the destined victim or not, and one which would awaken a sense of instant and pressing danger too importunate to be resisted ! And could I tell you at the same time, that by an appointment, assured on the same authority, the life of your

children would be spared to you,—that there was a way opened for their deliverance,—that, whilst you could give nothing sufficiently precious to effect it, God himself had provided a lamb for the ransom,—that its blood had been actually shed, and needed only to be applied for their safety, —I am persuaded that I should have a communication to make which would interest every better feeling of your nature, and awaken a desire to participate in its blessings, proportioned to the danger from which it gave you the hope of a sure deliverance ! And yet this were fitted to convey a very imperfect idea of the truth which our text declares. The danger under which it supposes you to lie is one far more widely spread, and more fearful in its nature ; the deliverance which it announces is one far more precious than even the redemption of your first-born. The reality of the coming wo, and the value of the provided refuge, may be seen in the preciousness of the blood required, in order to avert the one and to ensure the other ; and we may read at once the reality of our misery, and the reality of our safety, in the declaration, that “ Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.”

Christ is called our passover, inasmuch as it is by an application of the blood of Christ, equivalent to that which the Israelites were required to make of the blood of the paschal lamb, that the iniquities of any sinner are to be passed over and forgiven. You will remember, on again recurring to the history so often adverted to, that it was not simply by the blood of the lamb that the first-born Israelites were to be saved from the calamity which was to light with unsparing and unpitied vengeance on the first-born of Egypt ; they were required, after killing it, to take of the blood, and to strike it on the two side-posts, and on the upper door-posts of the house ; and it was only after this was done that they were promised, or could obtain, the safety in which God designed to place them and their families from the misery which was that night to come on the families around them. “ And the blood,” said God, “ shall be to you for a token

upon the houses where ye are, and when I see the blood, I will *pass over* you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.”

You will thus perceive that the lamb might have been provided and the blood shed, which was adequate to the ransom of their first-born, and yet they would for all this have perished, had they neglected that part of the Divine ordinance which required them to sprinkle the blood upon their houses,—that their safety lay, not in the mere fact of the lamb being provided or offered as a substitute for their first-born, but in the blood of the lamb being recognised by God upon their habitations. It was this thing, equally indispensable as that there should have been blood shed at all, by which their safety was ultimately secured ; and until this was done, in the very way that God required it, they were really, for all the grace which God designed them, as helpless and unprotected as those for whom no such deliverance had been appointed.

We beg that this may be remarked, because it affords a very simple and intelligible illustration of a point in the Christian economy, about which many are ready to entertain confused and erroneous opinions. There are not a few who, regarding merely the wide and comprehensive terms in which the Word of God declares the extent, and fulness, and efficiency of the death of Christ, are indulging in the idea of safety, when they have no right ground for entertaining it,—who are ever employing the freeness and sufficiency of his salvation as a means of searing their consciences, and hardening their hearts in a course of forgetfulness of God,—and by whom the truth, that the blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin, is ever applied as the palliative, when they are pressed by the fears of guilt, or as the means of building them up in the indulgence of a false hope. Against such ideas the language of the text is well fitted to guard us, and there may be few illustrations better fitted to show the exact situation in which men are placed by the death of Christ, than that derived from the nature of the Passover. In saying that

“ Christ our passover is sacrificed for us,” the Apostle meant, that the death of Christ has placed us, and every man, in the same situation as were the families of Israel when the blood of the lamb was shed. God is propitiated for iniquity, and every thing is done that can ever be done, or that will ever be required, in the way of satisfaction or atonement. But are we on this account to conceive that, by this act on the part of God, we are forgiven, or placed beyond the reach of the destroyer?—or are we to conceive, because a ransom has been offered, adequate to the blotting out of all transgressions, that our safety is secured? The case of the Israelites will easily furnish you with the answer. All this was done in their case; and yet they might notwithstanding, and unless the blood of that lamb had been sprinkled on their door-posts, have been involved in the same calamity which overtook the Egyptians. Without this, the blood shed had never availed for the deliverance of their first-born from the stroke of the destroying angel; and as little will it avail us to hear of the value of Christ’s sacrifice, the efficiency of Christ’s redeeming blood, and the fulness and sufficiency of his substitution, unless we follow this up by an act equivalent to that by which a believing Israelite, on the simple word and bidding of God, sprinkled the blood of the lamb on his dwelling, and rest in the security of the Divine faithfulness that he was then in safety from that unutterable wo, which in one night, and in one hour, was to send consternation and anguish into every dwelling in Egypt.

But it is not merely for exposing false or mistaken views of the nature of Christ’s salvation that the illustration of our text may be employed. It was intended and fitted to teach us how the blood of Christ may be made effectual for our deliverance. And there is something so exceedingly simple in the way by which the families of Israel were preserved, by sprinkling of the blood on the door-posts of their houses, that it can hardly fail, I think, to be felt as placing within the reach of every one who has been led to feel his own necessities as a sinner the blessings of salvation; if it be true,

that in his case it is by an application equally simple that this blessing is to become his own.

I fear, however, were I merely to tell you that the blood of Christ must be sprinkled on your hearts, as the blood of the lamb was required to be on the dwellings of the Israelites,—that you need only to do this, and you are in safety,—and that God will at last pass over all to whom the Saviour's blood has been thus applied,—that I should not convey any clear idea on the subject to those of you who possessed it not before ; and it is necessary, therefore, to know precisely what meaning that act conveyed by which an Israelite did these things, and what is the act analogous, or like to it, by which the blood of the Passover becomes effectual for shielding a sinner from that misery which will one day be the portion of all who are not in Christ.

Now you will easily perceive, that this act on the part of the Israelite was one declarative of his confidence in the efficacy of the blood that had been shed for his first-born. He did thereby declare, that he had given, as God required, a life for the ransom of his child,—he carried that blood forth to meet God, and to present it, in order to stay the hand of the destroyer,—and he did simply and expressively plead with God this blood in arrest of the destruction to which both he and his family had, but for its gracious appointment, been exposed. Such was the real meaning of the sprinkling of blood ; and there was something in it not less significant or less eloquent, because the whole passed in dumb show, without any thing to break in upon the solemn stillness of that fearful night. And mark well what was the consequence. Whilst there was not a dwelling in Egypt which was not on that night visited with the destruction of their first-born, and not a family remained in which there was not one dead,—wherever the symbol of a believer's habitation was discovered, the angel of God passed over it,—the arm that was lifted up to smite was instantly extended to shelter and to save,—the same Almighty power that had otherwise been arrayed against it, stood forth for its defence and protection,

—and the families of Israel were each of them embraced in a security, as if there had been no pestilence walking in darkness throughout the land.

In declaring that “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us,” the Apostle, as I have already said, tells us that blood has been shed adequate to the deliverance of all, and free to be applied to by all. And he substantially tells us, also, that wherever there is the same confidence in the efficacy of a Saviour’s blood, and in the fulness of a Saviour’s ransom,—wherever these are pleaded with the same simplicity as was intended to be exhibited in the act by which an Israelite was saved,—God will, in like manner, pass from the sentence which he has denounced against the sinner, and manifest the same reverence for that faithfulness, on which, equally with the believing Israelite, the sinner then takes his firm stand.

In going to God, carrying with you the blood of the one sacrifice, and in the faith of its efficacy,—in laying it down, as it were, at the Divine footstool, in arrest of the awful sentence under which you lie as transgressors,—and in presenting it to meet and avert the punishment to which you are righteously subjected, you do the very same thing as was done by the Israelites, when they sprinkled the blood upon the door-posts of their houses. You go forth to meet God, presenting and pleading the sufficiency of the Saviour’s ransom,—you fill your mouth with the very arguments which he has emboldened you to employ, and which he never once denied or refused,—and the safety of a sinner, whilst waiting in the attitude of confidence in God through the death of his Son, and having his heart and his conscience sprinkled with the blood of his spotless sacrifice, is not even exceeded by the security in which the dwellings of Israel were placed, when sprinkled with the blood of the lamb, every one of which was fenced by the Divine faithfulness from the coming judgments, and became the scene of reposing confidence and peaceful gratitude; whilst nothing but the cry of lamentation and anguish was to be heard in the dwellings around them. God then becomes the sinner’s confidence, as he was

the confidence of Israel,—his trust is then equally with theirs in that faithful Word, in which he hath privileged him to hope,—and though no outward mark is set upon him, and no visible separation distinguishes him, he is as much, in the eye of God, separated from others, as if God had visibly fenced him by the direct exercise of his omniscience, and placed him beyond the reach of those threatenings which he has denounced against transgressors.

It was to engage your minds to the consideration of this truth,—not merely to tell you that the blood of a Lamb has been offered, adequate to the blotting out of all transgressions,—but to tell you how, by thus simply coming forth to meet God, with no confidence in yourselves, but carrying this blood with you as your confidence, you should be in safety, that the Apostle declared “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.” And I know not any argument more effectual for urging you to make it your refuge, than that which may be found by returning once more to that eventful night, from the scenes of which we have necessarily been led to draw so many of our illustrations.

I have already pointed out to you the solemn interest that would be awakened in the breast of every Israelite, as he heard of the redemption by the blood of the lamb for his first-born, and how every parental feeling would be awakened that this blood might be made effectual for his child's deliverance; and you can easily conceive how, as he listened to the discovery of the way by which his dearest treasure might be spared to him, the resolution would be instantly taken, and almost instantly executed, to kill and sprinkle the blood of that lamb, whose life was to be accepted for the life of his child. And never would his anxious fears rest for a single moment,—never would he cease to feel that the destroying angel might be upon him, and tear from him his first-born, until that blood was sprinkled on his door-posts, and he could rest in the security of the Divine faithfulness, that he and his family were then in safety from the threatened destruction.

Now when I can assure you, on the same Divine testimony, that you yourselves are exposed to perils more fearful than those which threatened the families of Israel,—that if you hasten not to sprinkle your guilty souls with the blood of God's spotless Lamb, the avenger of blood may be upon you, to cut you off without remedy, and to leave you without hope,—and that by an application, which may be made in less time than that in which an Israelite could strike the blood of the lamb on his door-posts,—an application so simple as that of instantly placing your confidence in God through Christ, and presenting to him the blood of the sacrifice,—can I find any thing more effectual for shutting you up, as it were, unto Christ, than this simple statement of your danger on the one hand, and of the freeness and fulness of the remedy provided on the other? Or can I present a security more ample than that which may at this moment be yours, even the faithfulness of him who has magnified his Word above all his other name, and who never can, and never will, disown the confidence on which he has encouraged you and every sinner to repose?

There was not much apparent difference between the situation of the Egyptians and that of the Israelites on the approach of that night when God was to pass through the land in judgment. The dwellings of the one looked as well guarded and as well fenced from the entry of calamity as the dwellings of the other; and, sunk in the profound repose and in the deep forgetfulness of a midnight hour, the families of Egypt might have seemed even more peaceful, and their condition more enviable, than the families of Israel, with that look of painful expectation, and at times, I doubt not, of watchful and unbelieving anxiety, which, even with all their trust in God, they might have betrayed. The confidence of the one, however, was the confidence of a blind security, which the approach of danger soon dissipated,—the confidence of the other was a well-founded confidence in God, the strength of which was only known when the hour of trial came. The peace of the one was that restless and troubled

peace which precedes and announces the fury of the tempest that is to sweep it away,—the peace of the other was the peace of those who saw the gathering storm, and had found in the Divine faithfulness a shelter from its coming desolation. The tranquillity of the one was the tranquillity of nature, from which they could not awake without also awaking to the bitterest sense of misery and wretchedness,—the tranquillity of the other was that of faith keeping its watchful eye upon the sanctuary, and contemplating at once the danger and the deliverance.

Whilst, therefore, there was that night a cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there was none like it, nor shall be, and nothing was to be heard save the wailing of parental affection for the first-born whom the angel of death had smitten, and nothing was to be seen but the consternation of men who knew not but the next hour would bring with it a heavier doom,—there was peace, and holy joy, and devout gratitude in every dwelling of Israel. And when the night of a yet more terrible judgment comes, as come it will, whether men regard it or not,—when sinners shall be made to feel the baselessness of every false confidence, and every refuge of lies shall be swept away, and they shall call upon the rocks and upon the mountains to fall on them, and to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb,—Christ shall in like manner distinguish those who are sealed with the seal of his own faithfulness, and shutting them up for a little, until the indignation be overpast, as he did the Israelites that night in their dwellings, until he had avenged him in the blood of his enemies, shall he bring them forth, to walk abroad in the new heavens and the new earth, which his blood has purchased, and to inherit the kingdom which he has prepared for all who love him.

THE FENCING OF THE COMMUNION-TABLE.

We read in the Old Testament history, brethren, that in commemoration of the great event to which we have had occasion to direct your attention,—the passing over the first-born of Israel, when God smote the first-born of Egypt, he appointed a solemn festival to be observed by the children of Israel in all ages, in order to preserve alive the memory of the Divine interposition on their behalf. “This day,” said God, “shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord throughout your generations. Ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.”

In like manner, and in commemoration of a yet more glorious Passover,—in commemoration of that blood shed for the redemption of his people from their spiritual enemies,—God has appointed a festival to be observed by them in all ages; and, before proceeding to celebrate this feast, in obedience to the Divine command, you will read with us the warrant which we have for dispensing it, as you will find it written, 1 Corinthians, xi. 23—30.

Such are the nature and design of the Christian Passover. On recurring to that festival, with which, following the language of the Apostle, it may be compared,—I mean the Jewish Passover,—you will recollect that the stranger and the uncircumcised were forbidden to partake thereof, and that it was not till they had acknowledged their desire to belong to the body of the Israelites, and received the outward seal of the Divine covenant, that they were permitted to unite in celebrating a festival, which, from its very nature, was appropriated to the chosen people of Israel. And we are thus reminded, on the very face of the Jewish institution, of that separation,—not less truly intended, and not less solemnly to be observed, though partaking of the spiritual character of the economy to which it belongs,—which God requires in

the celebration of the Christian Passover, "lest coming unworthily, we eat and drink judgment to ourselves."

In directing your attention for a few moments, therefore, to this point, permit me to do so by reference to the profession which every Israelite really made in observing the memorial of the preservation of his people, and to lead you to ascertain how far you are really prepared to make the same profession, with reference to a higher object, in the commemoration of the Christian Passover. In eating of the paschal lamb, the most solemn of the ordinances of his nation, I need not say, that every Israelite professed his belief in the great events which it was intended to commemorate, and which occupied so prominent a place in the history of his nation. The degraded state in which his people were in Egypt,—the danger which threatened them on that night when the Egyptians were smitten and they delivered,—the reality of the Divine interference in their behalf in crushing their enemies, and the subsequent redemption which was virtually accomplished, when the destroying angel passed over them, and smote the power that oppressed them ;—all these things must have been believed, and must have been present to his mind, at the time when an Israelite partook of the Passover ; and he did therefore, by this one act, avow his faith in the great outline of God's dealings with the children of his people, in every thing that related to their redemption from the land of bondage.

In doing this, however,—in thus solemnly commemorating so distant events,—every Israelite did at the same time profess to feel that they were events in which he was interested, not merely as occasions in which God manifested his power and his goodness, or in connexion with which the history of his own nation might be affecting to him ; but as events in which he had a real personal interest, and which were still fitted to awaken his gratitude and thankfulness, notwithstanding the distance of time and difference of place in their original accomplishment. He professed to regard them as the events to which he really owed his redemption and deli-

verance from a like bondage,—to them he virtually traced all the blessings of which he was then in possession in the land of Canaan,—he acknowledged that it was of God that he held, or could hold, them, from this circumstance alone, that God had wrought out his redemption. And the act, therefore, by which he partook of the paschal offering was an acknowledgment of his dependence on the Divine goodness for the comforts he enjoyed, and an act expressive of his obligation to God for all the peculiar mercies which his grace had bestowed on him.

It is no less obvious, however, and is, indeed, almost an inference from what has been now stated, that in celebrating the Passover, every Israelite did virtually transact and covenant with God over the blood of the lamb then offered, taking God to be his God, and owning the obligation under which he was laid to obey all his commandments. I can scarcely suppose an Israelite to have entertained gratitude to God for the peculiar mercies of redemption, without this sentiment following in its train. Of all the blessings which God had bestowed at the time when he wrought deliverance for his people,—the greatest, and that, indeed, which enhanced every other, was, that he then announced himself to be their God,—that he claimed them to be his own, because he had redeemed them, and challenged for himself all those peculiar and gracious feelings, which such a condescension on his part entitled him to claim. In professing, therefore, as every Israelite did, by participating in this ordinance, his gratitude for his peculiar privileges, he unquestionably professed his gratitude for this, the chiefest mark of the Divine regard. He expressed his peculiar thankfulness to God, for having assumed so gracious an appellation as the God of his people; and he virtually admitted, as distinctly as it was made, the claim which God had on his grateful obedience, as the God who had redeemed him. Such, in the very simplest view of it, was the profession which every Israelite made, so often as he celebrated the Passover. I do not say that every Israelite really felt this

to be implied in it, or received it with these truths distinctly before him. Nevertheless, all this was involved, whether he considered it or not; and the question to which I would now, in a few words, direct your attention is, how far you are prepared to make the same acknowledgment with reference to those great objects presented to your faith, and well fitted to excite your gratitude, and challenge your obedience, in the Christian Passover.

I shall not suppose, that amongst those who seek admittance to the table of the Lord, there are any who either disbelieve or deny the great facts which are there commemorated, the sufferings and death of the Son of God, as an atonement for sin. I should be unwilling to conceive it possible, that almost any consideration could induce such a mockery of holy things, as would be implied in thus participating of the communion of the body and blood of Christ. I would remind you on this point, however, that these truths can never be received or held by you, as the Bible requires, unless you have been convinced of your own condition as sinners,—that it is vain for you to speak of believing in Christ for salvation, if you never felt that you were lost, or if you never knew what it was to feel that you were in bondage to sin. Till this is done, you have, and must have, something in yourselves, which will prevent the full conception,—and far more, the cordial acceptance of gospel truths; and I beseech those, if such there be, who are destitute of any serious consideration of their own guilt and misery as sinners, and who yet propose to commemorate, and that with no small appearance of fervour, the great fact that God gave his own son to the death, that guilt might be taken away and sin removed,—to consider that such a service must be as hateful to God, as it is unmeaning on their part,—a thing, to say the very least of it, which God never will accept at their hands, because it possesses, and can possess, nothing that entitles it to be called a reasonable service.

I would, however, in fencing our communion-table, more especially inquire, how far the great truth, which it brings

so affectingly before us, has impressed your minds, and warmed your hearts?—how far it has come home to you as an event in which you are as much interested as if it had passed but yesterday?—and how far you can approach its commemoration with the feeling of those, who, under the impression of a lively gratitude, look to the great Passover as an occasion, the blessings of which were as much intended for them, and have as much application to them, as if it had been the special provision made for their family, instead of a provision in which all are free to share.

You will remember, that this was a peculiar feature in the profession which an Israelite made by eating the Passover; without which, indeed, it could never have claimed, or received, the reverence which it obtained throughout every generation of God's ancient people. And believe me, brethren, there can be no real commemoration of Christ's death, unless we have this bond of connexion with the great purposes of his death. It is not by hearing of the shed blood, and the open way, and the free and full salvation, or giving to them a bare and formal acquiescence, that you are ever to be profited; unless there be also a special application of that blood to your own consciences to make you clean; and our inquiry at you is, not how far these things may be known and received by you, but how far, under a sense of sin, and danger, and helplessness, you are betaking yourselves to the Saviour, and, if I may use the expression, shutting yourselves up in him, as all your salvation?—how far you are now thinking of him, and hearing of him, even as an Israelite would hear of the lamb provided for the ransom of his first-born? Has there been any thing of that going out of anxiety and desire after him which there would be in the mind of the Jewish parent, till the lamb was slain, and the blood sprinkled on the door-posts? Have you felt any thing of the gratitude which he would feel, as he saw with joy the deliverance which God had specially provided for him, from the coming desolations? And, is it with this mind, and in this spirit, that you are come to commemorate that

Divine grace, to which you look for blessings more precious far than life, even deliverance from that eternal death, under the power and condemnation of which sin has brought you ?

I have only to ask you further, whether, in this view, and with these feelings, you are prepared to take God as your God, and whether you have it as your great desire, to do his will ? You will remember, that this was a point, not less prominent than any of those now stated, in the commemoration of the Passover by a believing Israelite. The Passover, with him, was the first step taken by God towards the redemption of his people, in order that they might be his people, and he might be their God. That deliverance was wrought for this end amongst others, that God might institute a new claim on their homage and obedience. And the Christian Passover,—itself only a step towards the entire redemption of his spiritual people from the bondage of sin,—was sacrificed for this great object, that God might institute a new claim on the hearts of all who believe in it. Are you now prepared, therefore, to acknowledge the claim which God thus makes, in consideration of the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, once shed for you, by an affectionate reception of him as your God, and a simple and unreserved dedication of yourselves to his authority and will ? And without making any exception of your dearest sins, or your tenderest affections, do you now desire that God may have the predominance over all ? and trusting to his grace to perfect the resolution, do you now resolve to give yourselves up, not only to be washed and justified, but sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the spirit of your God ?

It is in this way, and with this mind, that you are invited to come to the Lord's Table ; and wherever this is the mind of intending communicants, we now cheerfully invite them to come, with the assurance, that to such his flesh shall be meat indeed, and his blood drink indeed.

THE ADDRESS AFTER THE COMMUNION.

Before closing the peculiar services of a Communion Sabbath, you will permit me to address to you a few words on the obligations under which you are now laid to God; and the peculiar influence which you should carry with you from the services of this day to the business and employments of the world. It is well for our direction on this point, that God himself, by an ordinance, to be observed throughout all ages in Israel, with reference to the time when he passed over the first-born, has left on record what is the peculiar feeling which he requires us to cherish in consideration of his grace.

When the Lord brought the children of Israel into the land of Canaan, all the first-born, whether of man or of beast, were to be the Lord's. The firstlings of their flocks or herds they were to offer in sacrifice, the first-born of their children they were to redeem, and they were given distinctly to know the ground of this, in the answer which they were required to make to the inquiries of their children,—“When thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this?—then shalt thou say unto him, By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; and it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the Lord slew all the first-born of Egypt, both the first-born of man, and the first-born of beasts; therefore, I sacrifice to the Lord all that openeth the womb being males, but all the first-born of my children I redeem.”

In thus challenging to himself in all ages this peculiar right to the first-born of Israel, in requiring that they should be either offered to him or redeemed by the substitution of another victim, and in giving, as the reason of this appointment, that he had saved the first-born of their fathers from the destruction which came upon Egypt, there can be no doubt, that God did claim them as peculiarly his; that in

addition to the title which he had in common to the life of all, he had a stronger title to their life, because he had redeemed them ; and in continuing this as an ordinance for ever, he did obviously desire to keep alive on the minds of every successive generation, that he never had forgotten, or would forget, the obligations under which his grace had laid them, by working out for them so great a deliverance. Every head of an Israelitish family, in offering to God a ransom for his first-born, distinctly confessed that his child was not his, but God's ; that he could only have that right to it which God permitted him to have with regard to his other children, by the substitution which had been made of another life in its room, and that it was a holy and dedicated thing, with which he had no right to intermeddle. And to refuse thus sanctifying it to the Lord, was a distinct denial, either that God had wrought redemption for the families of his people at all, or a refusal to own the obligations under which that redemption had laid him, and the children of his people, for ever.

It must be very obvious to you, that the design of God in this ordinance was to teach every successive generation how greatly they ought to value the riches of his grace to them and to their families ; and the application of this to the situation of those of you who have now participated in the memorials of a yet greater redemption is almost too obvious to require a distinct illustration. If, in consideration of having saved the first-born of his people from the stroke of the destroyer, God thought fit to appoint an ordinance to commemorate it to all ages ; and if, not restricting his right to one generation, he sees fit to stretch it over every succeeding generation, and to claim all the first-born as his ; then what must be the claim which he has upon those whom he has yet more signally delivered ? And what must be the feeling of obligation to the riches of his grace, which he requires them to keep alive on their hearts ? If these were not their own but God's, how much more must they be his,

whom he has rescued from the punishment, and promises to deliver from the power of sin? and how much more deeply may they be expected to feel, and to cherish a sense of the obligations which they owe to him, for whom God himself has provided and offered so precious a ransom, in the person of his only-begotten and well-beloved Son? It is thus that the ordinance instituted of God in Israel may be employed to show us, how, and in what way, God wishes us to account of the obligation under which the riches of his redeeming grace has laid those who believe.

And, brethren, this is an acknowledgment which God does expect and require, and will, I am persuaded, receive at the hand of every one who has been made alive to the riches of his grace. If you do feel that you are not your own, but God's,—that he has acquired in you, by purchase, a right of property, even stronger, if possible, than that derived from having created you, and that you have not been redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot,—you will feel it, at the same time, to be the most reasonable of all claims, when he requires you to glorify him in your bodies and spirits, which are his.

To know it as a truth, that in the day of a calamity impending over us, more fearful than that which impended over the families of Egypt, and when neither the blood of lambs nor of bulls could take away sin, he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up to the death for us all; to know that to the blessings of his salvation we are all welcome, and have had these blessings actually made over to us, and sealed in the solemn services of this day, may well be expected to awaken a sense of gratitude and obligation which could not be repressed, and which would surely manifest itself in every way that could do him honour. And when the path which God opens up for the expression of a grateful heart, is one not more tending to his glory than to your own peace and well-being; when, in the keeping of the least of his command-

ments, there is great reward ; I know nothing which could be added to induce you to live, not unto yourselves, but unto him who loved you, and gave himself for you.

It was not only, however, by such an ordinance as that to which I have now adverted, that God kept alive the peculiar feeling which his grace was intended to excite in the mind of an Israelite. Whilst the mere act by which God passed over their families had an especial reference to the first-born, it was only, as I have had occasion to say, the first step toward the redemption of the whole nation. The power of their enemies was then broken, and their freedom was virtually accomplished ; and all, therefore, in after ages, were required to cherish those peculiar feelings which his redeeming grace was fitted to awaken in every heart. Accordingly you find that this point is always brought prominently forward by God in the various commands which he issued, and the various requirements which he gave them to observe,—that it was not merely by the authority and right which he possessed over them, as over all his creatures, but by a new and superadded authority, originating in the new relationship in which he stood to them, that he peculiarly claimed their obedience. And an Israelite, in reading the word which God had given him, was never, therefore, allowed to forget the peculiar obligations under which he was bound to live to the honour of the Divine name.

I am persuaded that on this point I do not need to give you examples ; but you will easily recollect without them, that it is this consideration,—the consideration of having redeemed them,—which prefaced the solemn deliverance of the law from Mount Sinai,—which constitutes the great bond in inculcating even the minutest relative duty,—which is ever applied to excite the people of Israel to thankfulness, or to make them patient under tribulations,—which is employed to bring them to a sense of guilt, or to lead them back to him from whom they had revolted. And if you were to take these motives from the Old Testament, you would strip it of

the great and inspiring considerations which it every where contains to diligence and faithfulness in the Divine service. God did obviously design by all this, that the redemption which he had accomplished for his people, and the peculiar privileges which he had bestowed, were to mingle with the whole strain of their existence,—that it was not only on the commemoration of the Passover that they were to be felt and acknowledged, but amidst all the diversified employments in which they would be engaged, and the various situations in which they would be placed. And if this was his design and object,—if he deemed this obligation to be so strong and so sacred as thus habitually to present it, and to desire that they would thus habitually feel it,—can we suppose that our obligations are less, to cherish the remembrance of his grace to our souls, or that we should not feel it at all times thus exciting us to live to the Divine service and glory in Christ Jesus?

I have only to add a single word to those who have been merely the spectators of this day's solemnity,—to those who by reason of tender years have not yet participated in this ordinance, or who from some other motive have never yet sat down at a communion-table. And I do so at this time, because there was on this very point a special command given by God to his ancient people. When their children should ask in after ages, on the return of the Passover, What meaneth this? the Israelites were commanded to say, "It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses." The command was obviously intended to awaken their minds to the importance of Divine things; and it is a command which every Christian parent who has been this day at the Lord's Table will not fail, I trust, to remember this night in his family-circle. And when you ask, as some of you may do, with reference to the services in which your parents, and friends, and neighbours have been engaged, What meaneth this? we feel con-

strained to answer you in like manner,—It is the sacrifice, or the memorial of the sacrifice, of the Lord's Passover, who smote our spiritual enemies, and delivered us by the blood of his Son from that death to which we were subjected on account of our transgressions.

DISCOURSE TENTH.

1 JOHN, ii. 1.—These things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

IT is not difficult to perceive, from the structure of this sentence, what was the design of the Apostle in addressing it to his converts. He had obviously been setting before them certain topics, intended and fitted to guard them against sin; the natural impression of which, if duly considered, was to advance them in that holy character which it was his great aim to further and to perfect, and to excite them to a greater abhorrence of every thing that would injure or impair it. Whilst aware, seemingly, that believers would, through forgetfulness or neglect of this, and by the power of temptation, be led into sin, and that they needed something more than simply to be guarded against its commission, he opens up the way for their restoration to peace and purity, in the advocacy and intercession of Christ. Such we conceive to be the design of the Apostle, from the language he employs; and we may become satisfied of this, from a little attention to the subjects presented in the context.

In the fifth verse of the previous chapter, beyond which the points adverted to in the text do not extend, you find him declaring the perfect holiness and purity of the Divine nature, expressing this under the very striking and significant emblem, that “God is light, and in him is no darkness

at all;" and declaring, at the same time, that so much did this constitute his essential character, that it was impossible for any who were living in sin, or "walking in darkness," as he terms it, to maintain communion or fellowship with God. Along with this, you find him declaring the blessedness of those who walked in the light,—that is, the habitual bent of whose lives was to holiness,—that whilst others were lying, and not acting sincerely,—not "doing the truth," if they made any pretences to its possession,—they had truly their fellowship with one another, that is obviously, with the Father through the Son; that they were admitted to the full and free participation of all the blessings of the Gospel, and that the blood of Christ cleansed them from all sin. The mention of salvation through the blood of Christ leads the Apostle, in the eighth and ninth verses, and in a way not unusual in the simple and sententious style of writing which he adopted, to state the necessity of this atonement, and at the same time its freeness to all who come to God acknowledging their iniquities. "If we say we have no sins, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And when, at the close of an address of this nature, and bringing before their minds these truths, he turns to his converts,—to those whom he believed, as is evident from every part of the epistle, were walking in the light, and says, "These things write I unto you, that ye sin not," there can be little doubt that his design was to move them, by the view of the privileges which they enjoyed, to beware of the very appearance of evil; and that the consideration of these furnished peculiar reasons why they should not in any way offend God. Aware, at the same time, that in spite of all the motives that might be brought to bear upon them, or rather through the neglect of these, sin would assail, and often overcome,—that through the power of temptation, and the principles of a corrupt heart, they might be at times led far away from the purity that became them,—and that transgressions of a deeper dye than those defects in

daily observance, which attend the humblest and the closest walk with God, might stain their conduct, and destroy their peace, he declares that there was a remedy provided in the Gospel for meeting this influence to which they were daily exposed ; and that if any man,—obviously meaning thereby any believer,—any of those whom he denominates his little children,—sinned, “ there was an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

We are anxious to impress this view of the subject, because on reading the verse it might appear, at first sight, that the Apostle was laying a restriction on sin with the one hand, whilst he was removing it with the other,—that in one part of the sentence he was warning his converts against sin, and in the other part nullifying the effect of his warning by supposing that they might sin. And, judging from the proneness to iniquity which is naturally in us all, the truth which our text brings prominently forward might be construed into something like an indulgence given to its commission : at any rate, it is felt as if there was a mixture of severity and indulgence in the Apostle’s address, and as if, from the persuasion that he had required something too strict before, he was in the latter clause of the sentence relaxing from his severity. Such is almost necessarily the idea formed, so long as it is supposed that the Apostle was merely deterring his converts from sin, through the view of the dangers involved in its commission. If it was the case, however, that the considerations which he presented to guard them against sin partook not at all of this character,—if he was stirring them up, by the view of the privileges which they enjoyed, to be holy in all manner of conversation,—and if whether he had said, “ If we walk in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin,” or “ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,” he was still presenting the grace which they had received, as the most powerful inducement to guard against iniquity, there is no such opposition involved as we have referred to. He did believe, and, none

of us will presume to say without reason, that the grace bestowed upon believers afforded the most powerful motives for purifying the heart, as well as the only means of pacifying the conscience. He reminded them of this grace, therefore, in order that they might not offend ; and when he presented to their minds an extended view of the same grace, as providing, not merely for the blotting out of their first transgressions, but providing for the forgiveness of their daily sins, an advocate with the Father, who was the propitiation for their sins, and through whose blood they might at all times have access, it was not likely that this would operate as a permission to live in the practice of iniquity. The evidence which his language affords that they had experienced the influence of the one, is an assurance that they would feel this declaration of the other equally effectual'; and that it would only the more constrain them to be holy in all manner of conversation, and to be blameless and without offence unto the day of Christ.

The design of the Apostle, then, in addressing the language of our text to believers, was to present, and affectionately to press upon them, the mercy and grace which they had already received, as the motive likely to be with them, of all others, the most effectual for the cultivation of habitual holiness ; and yet, should they sin, to make known a grace which was adequate to their recovery,—to uphold and strengthen in that course of purity on which they had entered all who were steadfast, and at the same time to bring within the range of some holy influence those who had turned aside from it,—to confirm all who were walking in the way of holiness, and to raise up and to restore all who had fallen by their iniquity. And though the means which he employed for the purpose, by presenting the grace of God on the one hand, and the advocacy of Christ on the other, may not appear to some the most effectual for the accomplishment of his ends, yet I am persuaded that there is no believer who will not feel that in most cases he adopted that very way

which is suited to his necessities, and comes home the most readily to his heart.

I am aware that there are many who conceive that the tendency of the doctrine of salvation through grace is to lead men to continue in sin, because grace abounds; and that the proclamation of a free forgiveness, and full salvation to all who receive and rest upon the offered Saviour, must make men careless of the interests of practical godliness. Of all the topics to which they would resort for encouraging men to holy obedience, perhaps the very last would be the assurance of God's readiness to blot out their iniquities, and to receive them to his favour and regard; and they might conceive it a hopeless thing to affect the minds of those who had been thus accepted and received into the Divine favour, by any such considerations, or even by any considerations at all. And yet, so far was the Apostle from participating in these sentiments, that he presented this very grace, in all its freeness, to guard his converts against the commission of iniquity. Writing to them that they might not sin, he sought no other motives, and, we are entitled to say, knew none more powerful, than those to be derived from the privileges to which they had been introduced, in order that they might be encouraged to abound in all the fruits of holiness. The very truths which many, in their imagined wisdom, might conceive detrimental to the interests of godliness, he felt to be its very safeguards, and the only source from which all real purity was to flow. If these could be impressed upon their hearts, and made to live and dwell in their remembrance, he knew that they would not, and could not, wilfully sin. And he has thus left on record his testimony,—and a testimony it is which it were daring and presumptuous in any of us for a moment to question,—that the doctrine of salvation through the blood of Christ is in every point a doctrine according to godliness. I am persuaded that the language of the Apostle will in this respect be found true to the sentiments and feelings of every believer,—that as it was the

grace of God, through his own Son, which first brought him to yield any thing like a willing obedience, so it is this alone which can continue to preserve it ; and that however necessary it may be at times to stimulate his conscience or awaken his fears, in order that he may be led to cleave closer to the treasure of the Gospel, he never feels so powerfully the evil of sin on the one hand, or the excellence and desirableness of holiness on the other, as when realizing the grace on which he rests all his hopes, and feels alive to the blessed privileges into which this grace has introduced him.

That God should have published a declaration so truly gracious as that he would, for his Son's sake, be faithful and just to forgive the sins of every one who truly confesses and forsakes them ; that, committing himself to this grace, the sinner should have been permitted to taste the blessed hope of forgiveness ; that, to open up the way for its bestowal upon him, and upon every sinner, God should have given his own Son for the sacrifice ; and that, in virtue of this sacrifice for sin, he should be reinstated in the Divine favour, emboldened to look up to God with humble and childlike confidence, and even admitted to the nearest and most endearing communion with him, so as truly to have his fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ,—this is a view of his situation, and privileges, and hopes, which, I am persuaded, no believer ever can take, without feeling, at the same time, how sanctifying it is in its nature ; how truly its effect is to work by love, and to purify the heart ; and how far beyond all the terrors and threatenings of the law is its influence, in delivering him from the power of sin, and in strengthening him that he may abound in all holy obedience. If you have known these things, you cannot need to be told, that, let other considerations deter you as they may from sin, it is the consideration of this grace which can alone take away the desire of it,—that with these truths present to your remembrance, you would feel that the thought of sin were doing violence to all the dispositions which they awakened in your hearts,—that the ef-

fect of all the peace, and joy, and good hope, which they communicated, was as purifying as it was elevating and ennobling in its nature,—and that, admitted to the fellowship of the Father through the Son, you were brought within the range of a new society, under the power of a new and heavenly influence, after having known and experienced which, you could not contentedly live any longer in darkness. Such is the experience of every believer; and you have thus, in your own feelings, a proof which I need not enforce, of the truth and propriety with which the Apostle, after having adverted to the freeness and richness of Divine grace in the Gospel, might say to his converts, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”

Whilst every believer, however, will thus readily bear witness to the power of those motives for the cultivation of holiness, he will bear witness as readily, I am persuaded, to the necessity of the provision that is made for his recovery from sin. When the Apostle said, “If any man sin,” or, should any man sin, “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous,” he is not to be understood as expressing any doubt respecting the liability of the believer to commit iniquity,—he was merely pointing out the remedy whenever the evil did occur. He knew well, that, in spite of all the motives which every view of his condition and privileges furnished, or rather through forgetfulness of these, sin would assail, and too often overcome; and what Christian is there, who has not to confess that this has been too often the case with him?—Who does not feel, that, though he cannot live contentedly in sin as he did before, yet he has sinned,—and sinned, perhaps, in a way of which he could hardly have believed himself capable,—and that he requires, every day, as much as if he had never before applied to it, the efficacy of that blood which has been shed to take away sin?—For, I shall just suppose, that no such provision as an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the right-

eous, were found in the dispensation of the Gospel ;—that, after having been once washed in that fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness, the believer were required to stand or fall by his own obedience,—that, restored to the Divine favour and to fellowship with God, the continuance of these privileges was made to depend upon his walking in the light,—and that he was left to the inspiration of the motives to which we have already adverted, without having any hope or assurance administered, that, should these fail to uphold him, any remedy was prepared. Is there one of you that could contemplate such a state of things without dismay ? Who would not feel that this were, to you, an utter exclusion from all hope?—that it left you in a state as wretched and helpless, by any efforts of your own, as if no Saviour had been provided, and no Son born,—as void of any ability or willingness to serve him, as if he had never purged your consciences from dead works,—and that, were all the burden of the sin which you have contracted since the time in which you first believed the Gospel, and to which you are daily adding, left on your consciences, without any blood anew to purify, or any advocate by whom you might draw near to God, you were really as void of any confidence towards him, or of one thing which could give you boldness in drawing near to the Divine presence, as if God had been maintaining all the distance at which you once felt him to be,—had never sent forth his Son to take away sin, nor his Spirit into your hearts, whereby you might say, Abba, Father ?

A still more distinct consideration of the circumstances of believers, however, may serve to bring forth more clearly the importance and suitableness of this provision. And these circumstances are such, I am persuaded, as will lead every one who has felt the influence of Divine grace most powerfully operating to guard him against sin, to feel it to be equally necessary, and for the very same ends, that he should know of that advocate with the Father, who is the daily propitiation for our sins.

When any one is introduced for the first time to the

knowledge of salvation through the blood of Christ, and to all those gracious privileges which are therewith connected, and to which we have already adverted, from the language of the Apostle, it is easy to conceive that he should not immediately, or at once, come to know the power of sin, and readily or easily yield, even in matters of comparatively inferior moment, to its seductions. Brought from a state of darkness into God's marvellous light,—led to know the peace and the joy that arise from believing,—permitted to look up to God with the blessed hope of his favour,—walking in the light of his countenance, and prompted by every gracious motive to devote himself to the Divine service, you will readily perceive that there may be enough in the scene to which he has been introduced,—in the new objects that surround him, and in the blessedness of which he feels conscious, fully to occupy and engage his heart; that there would be no desire and no room for any other, and, least of all, for a disposition to admit any thing by which the honour of God might be violated, or by which he might prove himself unworthy of his grace. In this situation, the very thought of sin would be felt to be in contradiction to all the better feelings of his new nature,—the very idea of indulging in that thing which had all but undone him, would be as terrible in itself, as it would appear ungrateful to God,—and there would be a tenderness and even scrupulosity of conscience, and a sense of weakness and ignorance, of themselves no small safeguard against surrounding iniquity. Such is the situation in which many have been, and in which they might be supposed powerfully to feel such language as that of the Apostle, when he stirs up his converts by the view of that grace which they had received, to abstain from all appearance of evil. It is, I fear, however, too consistent with the experience of Christians, when we say, that this scene, bright as it is, may have been overcast,—that this joy, though it may not have been altogether lost, may have been damped and impaired,—that the tenderness of conscience may have been, in many things, worn away,—and that sin may have

again shown itself, though with diminished power, in the hearts, and perhaps in the life, of one that might have seemed at once, and for ever, delivered from its seductions.

It would not be easy to enumerate the various ways in which this may have taken place ; and they may be as various as are the circumstances of individual Christians. But this we may say, as being common to all, that it has arisen from dependence on their own strength, and forgetfulness of their dependence on the power of God,—from neglecting, or failing to improve, the grace which he had imparted, and from ignorance or unbelief respecting the power and strength of remaining corruption. From any or all of these causes it may have arisen ; and though the return of a believer to iniquity is not likely to be sudden,—though his tenderness of conscience would be alarmed at any thing like the approach of presumptuous sin,—and though, in most cases, his degeneracy may have taken place by slow and insensible degrees, yet it has not been on this account less dangerous or less fatal. After persuading himself for a while, that the change was no other than might be anticipated, he has soon been made to feel, that he had declined from the purity and from the holiness that became him ; and that, by ceasing to watch against sin, or to look to that strength which is perfected in weakness, he had been left to experience the strength and power of temptation. In describing such a case, I am making no merely imaginary representation ; it is one which has been realized in the melancholy history of thousands, and of which few believers are altogether without some experience. And the effect of such a declension from all the warmth and steadiness of their first affections, may have been not less hurtful to their peace than injurious to the whole spirit and character of their obedience. It is obvious that the effect of sin indulged, would be to harden the conscience and to remove the confidence wherewith the believer drew near to God ;—that, when his own heart condemned him, he could not, in the very nature of things, or even from the very nature of the Gospel, ex-

perience the comfort which he once did from the view of the atonement ; and he would thus be in danger of relapsing into his former dread and apprehension of God. But it is equally true, and almost equally obvious, that he could not be in this situation, without finding himself cut off from the springs of his new and better obedience ; that, ceasing to feel the grace of God to be his hope, he would cease to feel all the inspiration and activity in duty which that hope communicated ; and that, even though sincerely desiring to return to the path of obedience, he would find himself labouring under a weight of the very same nature,—the weight of the guilt and burden of sin,—with that which besets the awakened inquirer when he first meditates a return to God.

In this situation, the only remedy would be that which, by purifying the conscience and giving peace to the heart, would restore to him the confidence of which he then felt destitute ; which, by leading him near to God, would communicate anew the blessed hope of forgiveness and acceptance ; which would bring him again within the range of that sanctifying influence which he experienced on the first reception of the Gospel, when he felt the mercy and the grace of God enlarging his heart, to run in the way of all God's commandments. And such is, in fact, the very remedy to which the Apostle directs us, in assuring his converts, that should any man sin, there was an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous. He assured them of that truth,—comfortable in every situation of the Christian life, but most of all comfortable to those who have fallen by iniquity,—that, in a state in which we are made powerfully to feel our own helplessness, there was one able and willing to undertake our cause ; that he who had died for sin, still lived to apply his blood for the blotting out of all transgression ; that, amidst all the aggravation that might attend our ingratitude for his best blessings, there was no iniquity so aggravated, but that this blood would wash it away ; and that coming to God anew, with the same entire self-abasement, and the same entire confidence in the riches of his grace through Christ, he would receive us graciously, and

love us freely. This was the remedy to which the Apostle directs us; and it was not more designed, therefore, for giving peace to the believer's heart, than for promoting the believer's sanctification,—and while he presented to his converts the riches of Divine grace in the Gospel, that they might not sin, he assured them, at the same time, that should any man sin, there was an advocate with the Father.

In the remarks now made, we have, as you will observe, attempted no formal explanation of the office which the Apostle attributes to the Saviour, that of an advocate with the Father; our aim having simply been to present, in the single view in which he presents it, the truth declared in the text, as opening up to believers, under their daily sins or more aggravated transgressions, the way to renewed confidence and renewed purity.

A constitution of things so very gracious as that to which we have adverted, however, and which has required us to bring before you, in a short space, the whole of that merciful provision for your deliverance from the guilt and power of sin, can hardly have been touched upon, even briefly as we have done it, without awakening in the heart of every believer a deeper sense of his obligations to the Divine mercy; and without, I am persuaded, in so far as you have felt and realized it, promoting the end of the Apostle, “These things write I to you, that ye sin not.” However it may be with others who know not this grace, and with whom its every discovery seems only to operate as an encouragement to continue in sin, it is the happiness of every believer to know that its effect is the very opposite. Though the very truth which we have had occasion to state most prominently,—the continued advocacy of Christ for his people,—may be, and I am sure is often employed by those who have never honestly besought his intercession, to keep them easy in sin, instead of bringing them to him, that they might be delivered from it, it is, at the same time, I am convinced, that truth which, when apprehended by the believer, instead of leading him presumptuously to offend

God, would check the very thought of such a thing, and prompt him never again to grieve that Saviour, in the refuge of whose grace there is a provision made so ample, and so adequate to all his various wants.

If the observations already suggested by the language of the Apostle should impress one sentiment more than another upon your minds, it is this, that the use to be made of the Saviour's work, and the application to the blood of atonement, are not confined to the first entrance on the Christian life, but must be continued along the whole line of the believer's progress,—that it is not the knowledge that there is such an advocate with the Father, but the daily employing of him as such, by coming to the Divine footstool through him for mercy to pardon, and for grace to help, which constitutes the right improvement of this gracious economy. And though it may be the case, that the great cause of sin in believers arises from their failing to improve those gracious privileges in which all may share, and which the Apostle presents, that you may not sin, we cannot help feeling that this sin is, in many respects, aggravated, and the darkness and misery which sin will always bring along with it, often fearfully prolonged, by ignorance or error about a truth, which it is of the first importance for us, compassed about as we are with manifold sinful infirmities, to know, and at all times to realize. Did you only employ and improve this truth as it becomes you,—did you feel the importance of preserving your consciences at all times purified by the blood of the atonement,—and did you, by a fair and honest confession of sin whenever it appeared, make instant application to that blood which can alone cleanse it,—how many sins were there in the heart and lives of believers which would never obtain any permanent ascendancy over them ; but which, when the remedy is not sought, become at last so powerful, that they are unwilling to confess them, because unwilling to forego and to forsake them?—How would the feeling that we needed to go into so holy a presence, and by a way so holy,—even through the blood of Christ, for the forgiveness of

every, even of the least, sin,—communicate a solemn sense of our nearness to God, which would powerfully guard us against temptation?—And how might we come away, every time we entered it, more fitted, through a sense of our own weakness, as well as of God's great mercy, to offend him no more? Instead of this, I am persuaded, that sin, even when it is discovered, does not always bring believers to the fountain opened for sin; that there is a disposition often to strive against it in their own strength, without renewed application to the blood of atonement; and that the wish is, to make up matters, if I may use the expression, with their own consciences, ere they will come to God, that sin may be forgiven. It is very true, indeed,—and this is often the source of the unwillingness,—that none of you can come into the Divine presence, in the hope of experiencing mercy, without, at the same time, having the desire to be delivered from the sin which requires the exercise of mercy,—that you could not fully and frankly confess all the aggravations attending your iniquities, and cast yourselves upon the riches of Divine grace for forgiveness, unless you did, at the same time, sincerely pray, that you might be cleansed from all unrighteousness. And, at any rate, it is of the nature of the Gospel, that no sinner has access to its mercy at first, or access to its mercy at any time, without being made willing to receive the full salvation which it brings near. But even when there may be no such obstruction, there is often a wish to have the conscience purified, and the heart purified, in some other way than that which the Apostle enjoins,—a wish that when you do again enter the Divine presence, it may not be in the spirit of one who must be every day a debtor to the riches of Divine grace. The believer is thus led to seek peace away from the only means which can at first procure, or at any time restore it; and the burden of guilt is thus accumulated on the conscience, which no efforts of your own will ever dissipate; and which, even until removed, will only widen the separation between God and your own souls.

Moved by such considerations, you can easily see that he would be desirous to communicate with his father on the various steps which he required to take ; that whilst employing his own wisdom, and exercising his own prudence, there would still be room left for parental counsel and determination ; that the conviction of his own inexperience would be ever bringing him to one whose experience was larger, and whose interest in his happiness was unquestionable ; and that, even long after he had left the paternal roof, and ceased to be immediately dependent upon the providence and care of his father, the reverence which he had for his will would be manifested in a thousand marks of respectful and dutiful attention, whenever that will was signified or expressed.

Though possessed of such feelings, it is easy, however, to suppose that he might be every day placed in situations, and required to decide upon matters, as to which there would be no necessity for betaking himself immediately to his parent, in order to know what he required. He could scarcely be long conversant with him, in the relation in which he stood, without becoming familiar with his general sentiments on many subjects of common interest to both ; there might be many points on which his will had been already specially declared, and on which there could be no doubt what he would have him to do ; he might have furnished him with certain directions to regulate his conduct, so plain, that there was no need of directly referring to him in every individual case ; and the best acknowledgment which he would therefore make to his father's good pleasure, would be by simply and implicitly following it.

But it is easy to suppose, at the same time, that cases would often occur which had not thus been embraced ; that some would present themselves which, though in many points similar, were yet so different, as almost to constitute them cases for which no provision had been made ; that he might often find himself bereft of his usual guidance, and in circumstances where his own experience could not direct him. Cases would be every day occurring in the varied and com-

plicated business of life, which would afford ample room for the manifestation of that spirit, in which the acknowledgment due to a father's authority and will more properly lies. If possessed, as we have supposed, of right filial dispositions, he would naturally come on these occasions to ask his father's advice and counsel. Distrusting his own wisdom, doubting his own judgment, and persuaded above all of the deference which was due to his parent, he would naturally betake himself to the aid of his experience,—he would be solicitous to know what course he would have him to pursue, and seek to be guided by the expression of his father's counsel and wisdom, from the conviction that this was alike the path of duty and of safety.

I. The illustration now given may perhaps convey, better than any more formal statement, the nature and extent of the *duty* adverted to in the text.

When Solomon requires us to “acknowledge God in *all* our ways, and he shall direct our paths,”—meaning by this such an acknowledgment of God (though, I need not say, far more devout and reverential than any thing in human life to which we can liken it), as a child would pay to the authority and will of his parent, by referring to his counsel and guidance,—you will readily perceive that there are many of our ways, many of the situations in which we may be placed, and many of the questions that we may be called upon to decide, about which there can be no necessity for a direct expression of our desire to know what is the will of God concerning us, because, as in the case formerly supposed, he has furnished us with certain plain and intelligible directions on the great subjects of our duty to him and to one another. In addition to the light of our own conscience, he has given us the light of his Word,—he has strewed this, not merely with innumerable declarations of his will, but with many examples of the character and conduct which he approves ; and to suppose that in every individual case we should require to carry the matter to him,

as if he had given no deliverance on the subject, or as if he had, or could have, another will than that which he has expressed, were certainly the very reverse of a disposition to pay him the honour due to the God with whom we have to do. In these circumstances, the acknowledgment which he requires, and the path for us to pursue, is simply to follow that which he had prescribed, without allowing our minds to conceive that there could be any other. The very idea of taking any opposite course would imply that we were regarding iniquity in our hearts, in which case the Lord would not hear us ; and it augurs, I fear, not merely an error in judgment, but a wrong state of heart, when, under pretence of waiting for the Divine determination, men will ask it in cases which God has already clearly decided in his Word, and in which there ought to be no room for doubt or hesitancy in any mind which is alive to the great principles of moral obligation, and supreme regard to the Divine will.

From these considerations, therefore, we judge that, in so far as the acknowledgment of God includes in it the expression of our desire for Divine guidance and direction, the expression “ all our ways ” must be limited to those about which the mind of God has not been clearly signified or expressed to us,—those cases which involve no direct moral duty ; or in which, if there is duty concerned, it is yet so doubtful, as to leave us in some perplexity as to the precise path which we should choose,—in which one duty may have to interfere with another,—in which the results of our conduct may be so complicated, and so much beyond the bounds of any human sagacity, that we know not, and cannot foresee, what may be connected with the determination which we form, and on which we are to act,—those cases, in short, which are every day occurring in the course of Divine providence, and which are as various as the circumstances of every individual, in which no one can sufficiently direct us, and the issue of which can be certainly predicted by none. The acknowledgment which in these circumstances is required of us, and with which the promise of Divine guidance

and direction stands intimately and essentially connected, is, that carrying the matter to God, under a deep sense of the ignorance and blindness that attach to us, and making known to him our perplexity, we should, with simple and honest hearts, commit it to him ; and, in the confidence of his wisdom and goodness, solicit that light which is necessary for our guidance, and that ordering of events and circumstances which may serve to promote his glory, in connexion with our own happiness and well-being.

You will easily perceive that the spirit to which we have now adverted is that enjoined in the text, from the connexion of the words with the context. It is said in the verse immediately preceding, “ Trust in the Lord with all thine heart ; and lean not unto thine own understanding ;” and when it is added, “ Acknowledge him in all thy ways, and he shall direct thy paths,” there can be little doubt that the acknowledgment required was only the expression of that trust in God which was previously required ; that it was the opposite of that leaning to our own understanding, which is so expressly condemned ; and that it might be well likened, therefore, to that spirit of deference to a father’s authority and experience, which may be found to mark the conduct of a dutiful son, when, under a sense of his own ignorance, and actuated by the wish to secure a better guidance and direction, he comes soliciting to know what course he should pursue that would be agreeable to the will of his parent.

It will not need to be pointed out to you how proper such a spirit is, in our circumstances, and in the relation in which we stand to God ; and, above all, how becoming it is in those who feel the privilege of looking up to God in Christ Jesus as a Father. And if every well-constituted mind will readily acknowledge that, in ascribing the submission which a son would pay to the wishes and to the counsel of an earthly father, we have described nothing beyond what the relationship might justify us in expecting, I can hardly think it doubtful that every such mind, alive to the truth of its own dependence upon God, will even more readily approve

it in any matter that bears reference to him. To suppose it otherwise for a single moment, would involve a denial of the Divine supremacy, and a contempt for the Divine counsels. It would argue a state of moral feeling so depraved, that whilst we could see the duty and feel the obligation in the human connexion, we could see no place for it in the Divine. And little as the spirit of our text may be the spirit of the world,—practically as many may disavow and disregard it,—and unrevered as it may be, in its observance, even by those who profess to set the fear of God before them, I should hope that the number may be very limited of those who would be held to affirm that, in requiring such an acknowledgment of him in all our ways, God required any thing beyond what he had the fullest right to ask, or which did not flow from the very simplest consideration of his character, on the one hand,—or of our continued dependence upon him, on the other.

The injunction of our text cannot be regarded by many in this view, without their being brought to feel in what light it places their conduct with reference to God's authority and will. There are multitudes, I fear, who may be said to be utterly without the appearance of acknowledging God in all their ways,—who cannot, perhaps, point to a single event in their life, in which they did deliberately ask his blessing or guidance; and who, though they may have found, as every one will find, many occasions in which they felt their need of direction, have, in these cases, betaken themselves to any other counsellor rather than to God. Beyond, perhaps, the customary and formal acts of private or public devotion, it would be difficult to find any thing in their history which implied a belief of the reality of the Divine existence; and still more difficult to find any thing that implied a belief of the continued presence and agency of God. And thus a creature that lives by the Divine bounty, and is continually dependent on the Divine care,—who, were God only to hide his face, would be troubled; and should he take away his breath, would die and return

to the dust,—who is brought by his providence into many a situation which would necessitate him, one should think, to feel his own helplessness and need of God,—and met, too, it may be, by many an example of Divine interference in his behalf, that might recall him to a sense of his own guilty and alienated condition,—may be found regardless of any thing that God can do for him, and living in a condition which implies an unwarrantable confidence in the wisdom of his own counsels, and a presumptuous contempt for the counsel that cometh from God.

The true spirit of our text, however, may be nearly as distant from that manifested by those whose recognition of God is more decided than in the case now described, and even as very different at times from the spirit of Christians themselves. They will acknowledge this, when they view it as essentially involving a distrust of our own understanding, and a simple and childlike committal of ourselves to God; as nothing else than the entire relinquishment of our own wisdom and our own strength for his,—an act expressive of our desire to have no will but God's, and to yield ourselves to his guidance and counsel. And this will further appear, when we consider, at the same time, how ready our hearts are to deceive us; how, even whilst we believe ourselves to have the desire of giving up every thing to God, we are still retaining, it may be unknown even to ourselves, something which he has not authorized,—how ready we are to be swayed by our own feelings and inclinations, so that, instead of coming to ask counsel of God, we are merely coming to ask for something which may confirm us in a resolution which we have already formed, independently of his guidance at all,—and how ready we are in these and in many other ways, under the name, and with the appearance, of honouring God, by professed submission to his will, to give our own will the preference to his. I cannot believe that any one acquainted with these things (and who that knows his own heart can be altogether ignorant of them?) will be at a loss to conceive how very different may be much

of that acknowledgment which is professedly paid, from that which God requires ;—and how needful it is, in order to ensure the blessing which he promises, that we should exercise an habitual watchfulness over our own hearts and our own inclinations, and seek to maintain in them an habitual submission to his righteous will. The truth is, God must be acknowledged in all our ways, or he is not, and will not hold himself acknowledged at all. So long as there is one thing which we will not give up to him, or one thing which we cannot commit to him, we are indulging a spirit of rebellion against his righteous authority,—we are virtually saying, that, be it as it may with other things, this is a point on which we place our wisdom or our own will above his ; and it is not without reason, therefore, that it is required of us, to acknowledge him in *all* our ways, if we would obtain the promise that he will direct our paths.

II. It will not be necessary to explain at any length the promise contained in the text, and of which every one has, at the very first sight perhaps, a sufficiently intelligible conception. The words, literally interpreted, express that God will make straight our paths ; and this at once conveys to every one the idea, either that God will make our way clear to us, and guide us in the path of duty and safety, or that, whether clear or not to us, his guidance shall be so extended and imparted to us, as to preserve and keep us in the right way. At any rate, there is such a promise of the controlling and governing power of God, whilst maintaining this spirit, as may serve to give rest and peace to our minds under the burden of all our natural and spiritual anxieties,—satisfied that, if left with him, all will be found at last, not merely as he has appointed, but as we ourselves, could we know the whole, would have wished and desired it.

But it may be necessary for us to specify somewhat more distinctly the nature of that direction which is promised, and which we are authorized to expect. It is natural, I fear, for many minds to indulge on this point extravagant

opinions, flattering to their own pride, or their own self-indulgence. The idea is not uncommon, that we are to look for such a direction, as may convey the impression that we are acting under the influence of inspiration, and by the authority of God ; or such as may discharge us from the use of those means which are proper and necessary for our guidance and safety,—such a direction as may make us dispense with the exercising our own judgment and discernment, or with taking heed to our own ways ; and the belief of which may lead the man who is under its influence to put away from him every admonition that a salutary caution would dictate, under the persuasion that he is not amenable to the laws of any human jurisprudence.

We know nothing, however, in the language of the Bible, or in the ordinary tenor of God's working, which authorizes us to expect any such direction. The guidance which he promises is such a guidance as is necessary for a reasonable and understanding, yet, in many respects, blind and ignorant being, in his way through the perplexities, and dangers, and temptations of a present world. It is such a guidance as may suffice, in the use of natural means, and with the exercise of his reasonable nature, to lead and keep him in the way of righteousness and peace ; and such a guidance as God can easily exert, not merely by the direct enlightening of the understanding, or by directly working upon the heart, but which he can bring about through the various openings of his providence, and the various admonitions of his grace. After having acknowledged God in any thing, given it up to his disposal, and besought his blessing, the understanding is still to be exerted, and the judgment informed ; we are still to look around us and before us, not as if our discernment was every thing, but in the faith that he will assist and enlighten it. We are still to wait upon him in the reading of his Word, and in attendance on his ordinances for counsel ; in short, we are to be on the watch, so that every inlet of light and knowledge to the mind may be open, through which the direction may come. And believe us, it is not honouring God to suppose that he has only one way

of working, which requires extraordinary means to be adopted in every specific case, in order that the guidance of any individual may be effected, and the way of any sinner who commits himself to his guidance be brought to pass. The perfection of his government consists in this, that whilst every one of us is viewed with reference to the whole, the case of every one of us is as distinctly regarded, and the promises of God to every one who has made them his own, as distinctly made good to him, as if he constituted in himself the single object of the Divine care ; and without breaking in upon the harmony of his working, which is often appealed to in evidence of his faithfulness, he can and does apportion to every one his measure of guidance and direction, as he apportions to every one his measure of food and raiment. Surely this direction, though it comes through the intervention of a hundred second causes down from God, and by the interference of a hundred agents, is not the less to be acknowledged as of God, by him who owns that God is all in all ! How ready are we to lose sight of the resources of infinite wisdom and infinite power,—to measure God by our own littleness,—and derogate from the perfection of his works ! How apt to forget, that he can make a bird of the air to carry, or a whisper breathed at midnight to convey, what may be necessary for the guidance or the safety of those who put their trust in him ; and that it is in surprising us by the depth and the variety of his operation, that we are to acquire our most exalted conceptions of him who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working !

There is nothing, therefore, in the nature of the direction promised which authorizes any expectation that we are to be dispensed from the use of those means which are ordinarily indispensable for our safety, but only that we are to be guided in the use and employment of them ; and the mode in which the Divine power is to be communicated to us, and our path made plain, may be safely left with God, so long as we are assured,—which is all that is necessary for our peace and confidence,—that, committing our way to God, he will bring it to pass. It is enough for us to know that there

is a real power to be exercised, and a real guidance to be vouchsafed,—it is enough for us to know, that, maintaining the attitude of simple-hearted reliance, God will maintain the attitude of his faithfulness. The thousand questions which may perplex an unstable and changeable mind, need not perplex him who is assured that God will provide, and he may safely cast his burden on the Lord, when he knows that in doing so the Lord will sustain him.

It will not require much, I think, to impress on any of your minds the value of a promise, of which every one must in some degree have felt the need, whether he has or has not made it his own by acknowledging God in all his ways. There is something in it so adapted to the circumstances in which we are placed, and to the whole character of the scene around us, that it may require little else than a simple allusion to that which every one endowed with any powers of reflection must have felt and experienced, in order to commend it to your hearts. If you have at all attended to your past lives, you must have found many cases, I am sure, in which the events that most of all affected your well-being have been brought about by means of the smallest and apparently most trifling kind,—that your own wills and your own plans have been perpetually crossed by a power often hardly discernible,—and that if one of the least of the means had been wanting, the whole character of your life might have been changed. You must have known how little your own wisdom or your own foresight have directed you,—how little your circumstances or your character have been determined after a model of your own devising,—and how it has been literally the case, that you have been led by a way that you knew not. Let any of you only look narrowly into your past lives, and you will find that this has been the case; nor have you any reason to think that it will be different in the time to come. The thousand little things which we usually call chance, but which may be, and are, links in the chain of an unerring providence, will again be affecting us,—we shall probably be again placed in circumstances over

which we shall have as little control as heretofore,—and the events that are to befall us will probably be as different from all our anticipations as those which have already befallen us. In such a situation, which is more or less the situation of human life, how utterly dreary and comfortless were the prospect to a reflecting mind, if all this were brought about by a blind and uncontrollable fate ! And almost as dreary and comfortless were the prospect to one who looked beyond the enjoyments of the present hour, though he was assured that all was under the direction of an infinite, and all-seeing, and all-directing mind, provided there was nothing about God on which he could fasten a single hope, and nothing in his revealed character and will which could invite a blind, and sinful, and tempted human being, to look up for his guidance, or to repose with confidence in his grace. In this case it might not be less true than ever, that the mighty movements which he saw taking place around him, and before the power that directed which he felt himself sink into insignificance, were as much directed against him as they were for him,—it would yield him but little comfort, nay, it would only add strength to his fears, to know that there was an infinitely great being who ruled over all, if he knew not, also, that, among the objects which his wisdom contemplated, one of these was his salvation,—and he would be compelled to own, that if he was not living altogether without God, he was still living without hope in the world.

But how different is the scene, if we have made the promise our own, that he is directing our paths ! The various events that are affecting us are then no more under the government of chance, but the ministers of a wisdom, one of whose ends is our guidance and safety. The apparently aimless incidents of life are all controlled by a goodness on which we are privileged to repose ; and even those things which often wear the darkest and most forbidding aspect, have each their appointed work to accomplish for our spiritual improvement. Let there be as much or as little of this apparent as may be, this, the believer is assured, will be

finally discernible ; as he advances in his path, one dispensation will throw light upon another, and one step be found leading to another, which shall interpret and explain it. And, although there may be no sensible comfort, and no clear light beaming upon the path of God's providence, he has still that faithfulness for a security which never faileth, one of whose declarations it is, that, acknowledging him in all his ways, God shall direct and guide his paths.

These observations may suffice to point out the nature of the duty required in the text, and the value of the promise with which it stands connected. Amidst many other qualifications that commend to us the declaration which it contains, one is, its breadth and comprehensiveness of application. It is a declaration which may be brought to bear upon the most advanced believer ; for, which of you all does not need to be put in remembrance of the duty of acknowledging God ? and who may not be profited by the inquiry, how far you are in simplicity acknowledging him in *all* your ways ? It is a declaration, likewise, that may be brought to bear upon the mind of a sinner, who is yet living at a distance from God ; for, who is there that owns a God, that may not be made sensible of the duty and obligation of acknowledging him ? It enforces a duty, the thorough performance of which may be among the hardest lessons which a Christian has to learn ; and it no less enforces a duty which may be begun in some degree this day and this hour, by every one who feels the value of salvation, and the need of a Divine guidance and direction. In short, it takes up the man as he is, and possesses an application to every conscience in the sight of God. No one can say, that here is something which I do not need, or something to which I can, even with all my willingness, make no approximation. Though in the very lowest state of spiritual advancement, I might almost say, if only awakened in the smallest degree from the sleep of spiritual death,—though, as yet, unacquainted with the nature of salvation through the blood of the cross,—though unable to discover the fulness of a freely-proclaimed Saviour,—between whom and your souls, remember, we are

placing no barrier, no, not for a moment, when we bid you acknowledge God,—you can yet see, and yet do something, toward the duty of committing your way to God. You can do something toward the spreading a regard to God's will over a life in which, hitherto, there may have been little recognition of his existence,—you can begin this night to pray to Him, if you hitherto neglected it, or only formally performed it,—you need not let another morning pass, if this has passed, without expressing your need of his guidance and direction for the day,—you can begin by resolving, in dependence on his aid, that you will go to nothing without asking his blessing, and to nothing on which you cannot ask it,—you may begin, in short, by seeking to do God's will, and seeking to do that will is intimately connected with coming to the understanding of the doctrine which is of God. There are some things which you can do, if you are only willing to do them; and none of them are of a nature that exceed the conviction of duty and obligation which you at present possess. Though they may be very humbly and very imperfectly performed, yet, in so far as their performance bears any evidence to the existence of a disposition to honour God, and to confess the obligations which you owe to him, they will ensure you the promise of a guidance that shall send you onward to the way of peace and enlargement. The first step in the history of many a sinner who has come to taste the constraining efficacy of the love of Christ, and to manifest the graces of a new obedience, is to be traced to that day and that hour, when he first took the resolution to stand by the dictates of a conscience, which, though in many points unenlightened, was yet given by God for his direction, and began to reverence the voice which it had so often and unavailingly lifted up within him. Only let something be done, and let a beginning be made,—defer not till to-morrow, for to-morrow will bring more than the temptations which assail you to-day. Remember that now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation. To-day, whilst it is called to-day, harden not your hearts, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

DISCOURSE TWELFTH.

LUKE, iv. 18, 19.—The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

THESE words are a quotation from the Old Testament Scriptures; and on reading them, as they are found in the prophecy of Isaiah, it can hardly be questioned that they were spoken of the Messiah. Our Lord himself has removed all doubt respecting their application, in the verses succeeding our text,—for, “when he closed the book, and gave it to the minister, and sat down, the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him.” And the Evangelist adds, that “he began to say unto them, This day is *this* Scripture fulfilled in your ears.”

It was clearly of him, then, that the Prophet had spoken. The high designation, or solemn inauguration to the prophetic office, which he announces, was something which the Saviour claimed at this moment to possess; and the intimation given us in this and the preceding chapter on the subject, can hardly leave us doubtful what was the dignity, in virtue of which he now came forth, declaring, that the “Spirit of the Lord was upon him,” and that he had been “anointed to preach the Gospel to the poor.”

In the twenty-first and twenty-second verses of the third

chapter, the Evangelist tells us, that “ Jesus being baptized and praying, the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape, like a dove, upon him, and a voice came from Heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased.” With the obvious design of informing us, that this descent of the Spirit was something more than a striking attestation to the truth of the Saviour’s mission,—that it was no less than a manifest proof of the indwelling of the Spirit in him, to whom “ God gave not the Spirit by measure,” he tells us further, in the first verse of this chapter, that “ Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led of the Spirit into the wilderness.” To convey the same truth, he acquaints us, in the fourteenth verse, that, on his temptation being ended, “ Jesus returned in the *power of the Spirit* into Galilee.” And when he rose up, therefore, in the synagogue of Nazareth, declaring of himself, in the language of prophecy, “ The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me,” there can be no room for doubt, that the reference was to the solemn and imposing scene which had taken place at his baptism, and that this was the time when he had been anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power.

In this anointing, or solemnly instating, Christ into his prophetic office, by the descent of the Holy Spirit, immediately before the commencement of his public ministry, the design of God clearly was, to teach us that such a communication of Divine influence was then made to the holy human nature of Jesus, as served to endow him with all that wisdom, and knowledge, and power, necessary for the right discharge of his high calling,—that this influence was conveyed to him with a fulness and richness, to which there had been no parallel in the case of any other prophet; and in thus separating and setting him apart in the presence of those amongst whom his ministry was to be exercised, by something so imposing and overawing, as a manifestation of the Divine presence, and a voice from the Most Excellent Glory, there is as little room for doubt, that the design

was to convey an idea of the dignity of his person and mission, far beyond that of any one whom God had ever before commissioned to reveal his will. And we can well see, therefore, why, in opening his message, almost for the first time, in the synagogue of Nazareth, our Lord should have done so in language which recognised his authority, and was calculated to give weight to his address, as one whom the Father had thus solemnly sanctified and sent into the world.

It was with obvious propriety, then, and for the purpose of awakening the minds of those whom he addressed to the dignity of his character, that our Lord said of himself, in the language of prophecy, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor." The object of that prophecy clearly was, to acquaint us with the purpose for which he had been thus anointed; and it would be difficult to conceive, crowded into so small a compass, a greater number of pleasurable images, than those which meet us in the verses which announce his manifestation.

To preach the Gospel as good tidings to the poor,—to heal the broken-hearted,—to proclaim deliverance to the captive, and the recovery of sight to the blind,—to set at liberty them that are bruised,—and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, that is, the year of Jubilee, when the bondsman was to go free, and the poor and the destitute again to return to the inheritance of their fathers;—these are images the most delightful,—they seem clearly intended to teach us, that the Messiah came for the bestowal of blessings, dear to us all as the air which we breathe, or the light of heaven in which we rejoice. Whatever may be the precise meaning attached to them, we cannot doubt that he came in furtherance of a purpose, well adapted to the necessities of a world so full of misery as is the world in which we dwell, and reaching to every variety of that misery. And we know not the man who had ever estimated human wants aright, and far less who had ever made a single effort to re-

lieve them, that might not well exult in the assurance, that one had come forth from God with these high claims upon our regard, invested with power to communicate blessings obviously the most precious in their own nature, and intimately connected with every thing that is dear or precious to human beings.

In looking to the history and preaching of our Lord for the explanation of the language which he employs, you will have no difficulty in perceiving, that many of those works which he was anointed to perform, were, in the strictest and most literal sense, wrought by him. He did, in this view, preach the Gospel to those who were actually poor in worldly circumstances. The sympathy which he manifested for human suffering, and the effectual relief which his power administered, evinced how truly he came to bind up the broken-hearted ; and he did, on many occasions, give sight to the blind, opening the dim and benighted eye to the glories of the material world. On surveying the life which he led in this world, we could not characterize it more justly than by saying, that it was a life of uniform devotedness to the interests of suffering humanity ; and in whatever sense the expressions of our text are to be understood, whether of temporal or of spiritual evils, there was, in the power and in the grace of Christ, that which was fitted to be the remedy for them all. There is reason to believe, however, that the language was intended to apply only to our spiritual condition. Though he did, truly and literally, preach good tidings to the poor, heal the broken-hearted, and open the eyes of the blind, we do not find that he ever did, at any time, claim or exercise the power of rescuing those who were in captivity,—that is, really confined in prison,—or that he did ever really proclaim the year of Jubilee, by restoring this last and almost forgotten institution of the Jewish law. Such language as this could only be applied to him in a figurative or spiritual acceptation ; and as it is the uniform rule in interpreting the prophetic style, or indeed any style possessed of the same bold and striking character, that, if one member of the

sentence be literal, all must be explained literally ; or if one be figurative, all must be understood figuratively,—that these cannot be mixed and confounded, without tending to weaken and confound human speech,—we are necessarily led to infer, on this very simple and intelligible ground, that the prophecy which the Saviour applied to himself was designed to be understood in a spiritual acceptation, and with reference to the spiritual purpose and end of his appearing. If he had ever rescued the captive from bondage, in the same sense as he gave sight to the blind, or if he had ever proclaimed the year of Jubilee in the same way as he preached good tidings to the poor and the destitute, there might have been room for doubt how far we were entitled to go in search of any other meaning ; but when we find that he never did any thing at all to which these terms could be literally applied, and that they could only be true of him spiritually, the necessary inference is, that every thing attributed to the Messiah throughout the prophecy bears the same spiritual meaning ; that the errand on which he is represented as sent, was a spiritual errand ; and that the terms, “ the poor,” and “ the broken-hearted,” and “ the blind,” were as much expressive of spiritual characters and spiritual conditions, as those which are expressive of captivity, or bondage, or release.

By comparing the Saviour’s language with his life, then, and the work which he declares himself anointed to perform with what he actually did perform during the days of his flesh, you may perceive in what way we are led to the conclusion, that the language of our text respects his spiritual character. By the poor, we are to understand the *meek*, as the word is indeed translated in the Old Testament,—those who are elsewhere named, “ the poor in spirit.” The “ broken-hearted” are those who are broken and contrite because of iniquity, of whom he has himself pronounced, “ Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.” The “ captives” are those subject to the bondage of sin. The “ blind” are those, the eyes of whose understanding

must be enlightened. And the "bruised" are those who are subjected to that spiritual oppression from which he comes to set them free. To each of these, the purpose of the Messiah's coming is declared to be fraught with every thing that is most suited to their spiritual wants, and which, if only alive to their real condition, every one of them would chiefly desire. And though, perhaps, by this view of the subject, much of its charm may to many have passed away,—though the Saviour is not in this case announced, at least directly, as a deliverer from the merely temporal evils under which men are every where suffering,—and though the liberty for which we pant most earnestly, be not the liberty which he promises, or of which he comes to put us in possession,—yet, if it be true that every varying form of wretchedness which meets us, is in reality the bitter fruit of iniquity; and if sin be, after all, the heaviest of evils, and the most oppressive of bondages, I know not why, beyond all the blessings of wealth,—or all the comforts of healthful existence,—or all the sweets of earthly freedom,—or all the joyousness of emancipation from the most miserable and degrading earthly bondage,—I know not why, beyond all these in interest and importance, may not be the assurance, that one, anointed of God, and to whom God gave not the Spirit by measure, has come, endowed with power to remove every vestige of spiritual suffering,—“to preach deliverance to the captive, and to set at liberty them that are bruised.”

Having thus endeavoured to vindicate the spiritual meaning of the prophecy, we are naturally led to two points,—First, What is the message? Second, To whom is it addressed?

I. The message. In the explanation already given, we have shown it to be a spiritual message, because it is addressed to certain of those spiritual states or conditions in which men are placed; and we are entitled to infer, that there must be in it a peculiar fitness to the particular conditions for which it is designed. Whatever it may be, it is obviously some-

thing of which you may say, that it is good tidings to the poor in spirit,—that it speaks comfort to those who are mourning on account of sin,—that it is to the captive as deliverance, and as sight to the blind,—and that whatever may be the condition of any man spiritually,—whatever form his spiritual disease may assume, or in whatever terms you might describe it,—there must be something in the message which has to these conditions a direct application, and for which it conveys the great remedy.

It will hardly need to be proved, that the only message which the Messiah ever communicated, or which was, indeed, ever communicated to the world, at all answerable to this varied qualification, is the message of the Gospel,—a message, as you all know, spiritual in its object, and designed to remedy the disorders of our spiritual nature,—suited by him who knew what was in man to meet all the spiritual wants to which sinful beings are subjected,—and possessing (with all its simplicity) that power of adapting itself to the various forms of spiritual suffering that obtain in this world which involves not the *least* proof of its Divine original. You will easily recollect, without the necessity of a more direct reference, numberless passages in the ministry of the Saviour, in which the announcement of this message is declared to have been the great end of our Lord's prophetic office ; and in which the full discovery of that salvation, which had been promised ages before his appearing, is represented as constituting the great distinction of his prophetic character. And there is hardly an expression employed in the prophecy of our text to designate the work given the anointed of the Father to do, to which you may not find something similar in his after preaching. When he came to explain and open up more fully the object of his mission to the world, “ Come unto me,” said he, “ all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,”—“ I am come a light into the world,”—“ If the Son make you free, you shall be free indeed.” In others, and in many like Scriptures, you will recognise the very same images which are presented in the

verses now before us ; and it could hardly be doubted, from the frequency with which our Lord employs them, and the force which he appears to attach to them, that they were peculiarly expressive of that salvation which he was anointed of the Father to proclaim.

That this was no unreal description of the Gospel,—that it is as much entitled to this character as any thing can possibly be,—that if you admit the representation given of men's spiritual condition, that they are blind, or captive, or oppressed, or broken-hearted, the Gospel may be truly termed eyes to the blind, and liberty to the captive, and comfort to the mourner,—it might be easy to show, from a full investigation of our spiritual diseases, and of the nature of the Gospel, as the divinely-provided remedy. But without attempting now to make any such investigation, this I will say, that describe the necessities of a sinner by any terms that you please, and give me them in all their extent and variety,—give me them in any form they may assume, and conceal nothing of the malignity, and depth, and inveteracy of the disease under which he is perishing in utter thoughtlessness, or sinking in the bitterness of his heart,—yet I will venture to say of the Gospel message,—and it may be told in so very few words, that an infant memory need not be burdened by it, and conveyed in terms so simple, that an infant mind may be made to comprehend it,—that it is that very thing which the man to whom it is addressed, if believing it and receiving it, would be the first to characterize as a light to enlighten his darkness, or as the sound of deliverance breaking in upon the hopelessness of a solitary captivity. Discovering the way by which God is just, and yet the justifier of the ungodly, it communicates the very truth which they who are oppressed with guilt, and mourning because of iniquity, feel to be indispensable to their peace and happiness. Coming to achieve a great spiritual deliverance, in the rescue of human beings from the guilt and power of sin, and their restoration to the favour and image of God, its proclamation may be truly termed the proclaiming of liberty

to the captive, and the opening of the prison-doors to them that are bound. It reaches to every variety of spiritual misery,—it meets the full extent of it all,—it embraces the man, however low, and lost, and fallen, within a provision of mercy so ample, as may well suffice him, and so free, that if he will only heartily receive it, and yield himself up to it, he need never fear to be a castaway. And it cannot be doubted, therefore, with what propriety the Saviour, in announcing such a salvation to the sinners around him, might say, in terms which were alone in any measure befitting the misery of their condition, and the blessings which he had to bestow, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised; to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

There is one view of this salvation, however, so clearly presented in the language of the text,—I mean its freeness to all those whose spiritual condition is here presented,—that it may be necessary to press it upon you as the truth peculiarly taught, especially as it presents a view of the Gospel which the sinner is in much danger of overlooking or neglecting. We shall soon have occasion to explain who are the persons to whom salvation,—that is, deliverance from the guilt and power of sin,—is addressed, and that, under the different expressions of our text, all men are included. But what we beg you to remark is, that, as set forth in these expressive images, the deliverance is declared to be not more suitable in its nature to *every variety* of spiritual destitution, than it is to the destitute, considered simply as destitute,—that it is addressed to them, and comes to them with a direct application, at the very moment when it is addressed, whatever their spiritual state may be,—that, without waiting till they have wrought any change upon themselves, by which they may be entitled to its grace, or become the proper objects of its salvation, it announces to every one of them, *as*

he is, an effectual remedy for all his spiritual wants. In short, it is of such a nature as that it may be compared to a ladder let down from heaven, the lowest step of which reaches so very near the earth, that any sinner, even the very lowest and most helpless of all, may plant his foot upon the first step of it, and thereby ascend to heaven.

You may easily understand our meaning, by observing the mode of the Saviour's address. He did not say that he came to preach something which was fitted to be good tidings to the poor, and which had a certain suitableness to his poverty of spirit, but that he came to preach good tidings. This was the character of his message ; so that any humble soul believing it, could not fail to say, " These are the best tidings that I ever heard." Nor did it merely speak to the captive of deliverance,—it proclaimed deliverance from his miserable bondage,—a deliverance to which there was obviously no hinderance except in his unwillingness to be rescued. Nor did it merely speak of liberty to the oppressed or the bruised,—a liberty which it might be, after all, beyond their power to regain,—it was to set them free ; or, as we have it in the language of the Old Testament, " to proclaim the opening of the prison to them that were bound." It was to tell all, in a word, whom it addressed, whatever their spiritual state might be, that the remedy was provided,—that all things were ready,—that there was no barrier to their participation of its blessings instantly and immediately, saving in their own unwillingness to return in heart to that God whose grace it disclosed to them,—that whenever the message reached them, and was welcomed by them, they might wipe away their tears, and be comforted, and rejoice in it, as the captive when he hears for the first time, through the narrow grating of his prison-house, the sound of deliverance and of freedom.

Such, we say, is very obviously the view of the Gospel here presented, and such a character the Gospel possesses, because it presents to every sinner who will give himself up to be justified and sanctified in Christ, a ground of confidence

in that Saviour's righteousness, whereby he may draw near with humble boldness, and by which all his spiritual misery will be finally and for ever done away. The poor might put away the good tidings, and say, They are not for me!—the mourner might reject consolation!—the blind might obstinately persist in closing his eyes!—the captive might obstinately refuse to go forth! and in such a case no change would take place upon their condition; they would remain as miserable, and only more guilty than before. Nevertheless, the assurance conveyed to all remained the same, whether they chose or whether they refused to believe and obey. And whenever, therefore, the message of salvation reaches a sinner, it is to him like the sounding of the trumpet of jubilee, when liberty was proclaimed throughout the land of Israel; and he is invited with the same freeness, and with the same assurance of safety, to return to his original portion in the friendship and favour of God, as when the voice of the trumpet was heard echoing from mountain to mountain, and repeating from valley to valley, the assurance that the year of release had come, and that every man might now return in peace to the inheritance of his fathers.

This was the message which the great Prophet of his Church was anointed to proclaim. It was the Gospel,—the grand remedy for the spiritual diseases of our nature, and the remedy so free and full, that every one whose condition it described and embraced might immediately apply to it and be healed. Before we can bring such a view of the subject to bear upon your minds, however, it is necessary to advert particularly to those to whom it is addressed, and to whose situation it comes in its special application. We inquire then,

II. To whom is the message of salvation addressed?

As described in the text, they are the poor, the broken-hearted, the captive, the blind, the bruised, or those in bonds, as it is in the original prophecy of Isaiah. And we have had occasion to remark, in the general explanation given of the text, that these are descriptive of certain spiritual conditions.

The poor are the poor in spirit,—the broken-hearted, those who are mourning on account of iniquity,—the captive are those who are subject to the bondage of sin,—the blind, those, the eyes of whose understanding need to be enlightened,—and the bruised are they who are subjected to spiritual oppression.

Such is the description given of the persons to whom salvation is addressed, and to whom it presents that very thing which, most of all, is essential to their peace and well-being. And a little consideration may show that, with all their variety, they are divisible into two classes, in many respects different, but whose case is equally embraced in the commission given to the Messiah. Whilst all are alike involved in a state of spiritual destitution, you may observe that to more than one class such language is applied as argues them alive to their miserably sinful condition, whilst of the rest no such thing is affirmed. Under the former class are included the poor in spirit and the broken-hearted, who are obviously conscious of some want, which the Gospel is fitted to relieve. Under the latter class are included the blind, the captive, the bruised, or those in bonds, of whom nothing more is affirmed than simply their miserable condition. Every one may perceive the difference between these two classes. The one is expressive, not of sin and misery only, but of misery united with a certain moral character, certain views of sin, and a certain state of heart ; the other is expressive of guilt and misery simply, without any alleviating feature in their spiritual condition, and without any thing necessarily implying that they are truly alive to its misery, or truly desirous of deliverance. They may, or they may not ; for though, in the literal sense, it were impossible to suppose a man blind, or in prison, without being desirous of sight or of enlargement, it needs not to be told that spiritually a man may be destitute of both these comforts, without any wish to have them restored, and that the depth of his wretchedness consists often in being void of one aspiration after any thing purer or better. Such are the two classes under which may

be included all to whom the message of free, unfettered, and unqualified deliverance, from the guilt and the power of sin is addressed; and these two classes clearly embrace all men, whether the peculiar feature of their spiritual condition has been depicted in the language of prophecy or not. For, though you should scrutinize the case of every sinner,—of any one suffering under sin,—of any one who has ever been, or who will ever be so suffering,—it is clear that, in this respect, you could find no greater variety than these two, and that every one would belong, either to those who were not only under sin, but alive to its evil,—or to those who were simply under sin, without any thing to show that they were sensible of its guiltiness, or conscious of any desires after deliverance from its punishment or its power.

There is no necessity for pressing upon you the truth, that the former class, such as the poor in spirit, or the broken-hearted, the lowly and the contrite, are the peculiar objects of the Gospel salvation,—those for whom it is designed, and who are warranted, upon its declaration, to appropriate the tenders of Divine grace, as freely offered as they are fitted to cheer and gladden their hearts. There is a very general feeling of the value of such dispositions, and something like an idea that these constitute a kind of claim to salvation. But it is often, also, supposed, that to these, or such as these, the invitations of Divine grace are restricted,—that, until sinners have left their original condition, and become truly penitent; or, at any rate, till they are conscious to themselves, of a certain amount of desire after its blessings, they are not at liberty to consider the salvation of the Gospel as addressed to them.

And as this is introducing a qualification of the grace of the Gospel which God has never sanctioned,—which is dishonourable to its nature, and hurtful to the comfort and establishment of souls, we beg you to remark, that whilst the great Prophet of his people declares that he was anointed to preach good tidings to the meek, and to heal the broken-hearted, it was equally stated as the purpose of his

designation, that he should preach deliverance to the captives, and the recovering of sight to the blind,—and the opening of the prison-doors to them that were bound,—to those, in short, of whom nothing is said that necessarily implies that they were alive to the guilt, or even to the misery of their condition, and far less that it had ever been to them the cause of honest and sincere contrition.

The error to which we have now adverted, and which we judge the language of the text, figurative as it is, well fitted to expose, that of imagining that you are not authorized to come to God in Christ, in dependence on the peace-speaking blood of Christ,—to ask, that you may receive, mercy to pardon, and grace to help,—till such time as you are conscious to yourselves of penitence and contrition, or of some strong and earnest desires after the blessings of the Gospel, has arisen in some, I doubt not, from the dread of its freeness,—a dread as dishonouring to the Gospel, as it is mistaken and erroneous. A very frequent cause of this error, however (strange as it may seem), has been the mode in which the Gospel is generally presented in the Word of God. And, because it is there found most frequently directed to those who are possessed of certain desires which it is obviously fitted to gratify,—presented under the image of bread to the hungry, or water to the thirsty,—other passages are overlooked which announce it without any such qualification, and as a message addressed with equal sincerity and unreservedness to all ; and so wide in its invitation, “that whosoever will, may take of the water of life freely.”

In this mode of address, however, there is nothing more than might be expected ; and nothing but what we should ourselves employ, in communicating a message similar in its nature to that of the Gospel. Were this required of us, we should naturally address ourselves first,—and address ourselves most frequently, to those who were conscious of some want which we could supply. We should naturally hope, that, by them, it would be most generally appreciated and most cordially welcomed, though we could hardly expect it to

meet with any cordial reception from others. And, in like manner, when announcing to sinful men a free and full salvation through the death of Christ, God has generally addressed himself to those who are athirst, or hungry, or weary, or poor in spirit, or broken-hearted,—to those possessed of some want which the Gospel was most clearly fitted to satisfy ; though it is as freely and fully tendered to all,—to the captive, and the blind, and the bond-slave, who may never have been made truly sensible of their spiritual necessities, and who may be surrendered to the blindness of their own hearts, and the perverseness of their own ways.

It may seem, perhaps, that there is no necessity for insisting upon a point so very obvious, and which may be deemed, at first sight, of no practical importance ; for it is most evident that, let the salvation of the Gospel be as free and as sufficient as it may, men will never value its provision of mercy till such time as they are brought to feel their need of it ; or ever welcome deliverance from sin, till they have been made alive to the misery of abiding under it. For all this, however, it is no speculative point to uphold it in all its freeness. It is in every case of the utmost practical importance to make a sinner feel, that whatever be his condition, the Gospel comes down to him, and that it leaves him none of those excuses with which he is very ready to satisfy himself for delaying to return to God, the very instant it addresses him. And it is of still greater importance for the comfort and establishment of those who are seeking salvation, to know that there can be nothing more free and unfettered than that salvation which they are most of all disposed, in some way or other, to qualify or restrict.

It is from some error on this very point, that there are, in every Christian congregation, so many disconsolate souls, who are seeking rest and finding none ; and who, though possessing that sense of their own necessities which fits the Gospel to be a message of peace and joy to their hearts, are yet strangers to the consolations which it so richly promises for every human condition, and, above all, for those who are

weary and heavy laden, because of iniquity. Anxious and fearful about their eternal interests, though possessing, perhaps, the very qualification, were any qualification necessary, for resting upon the provision of mercy, they are, through this very anxiety, prevented from seeing this to be their condition; and are tormented by the dread that they want the indispensable qualification for peace and safety through the Gospel,—and that, until this is obtained, they cannot venture to appropriate, or to rest upon one gracious tender, which the Word of God makes to sinners. These fears are as unbecoming their spiritual privileges, as they are hurtful to their spiritual progress. Though acknowledging the Gospel to be fully adequate to the supply of a sinner's wants, and discovering in it the very thing which is fitted to supply their own, they are, through mistaken views of its freeness, separated from the comfort which it is fitted to impart; and the sound of peace, and liberty, and deliverance, may be echoing around them, whilst they never taste its influence, or are blessed with peace and the consciousness of freedom. If such persons, however, are not poor in spirit, or broken-hearted, they cannot deny that they are captives. They may, through fear of Divine indignation, be experiencing not a little of the misery of a captive condition, and all the depression of mind with which it is accompanied. And is not the Gospel a message of deliverance to the captive as well as of good tidings to the poor, or of comfort to the mourner? Is it not an intimation, that the prison-doors are opened, and unless you prefer breathing the air of a dungeon, to breathing the air of liberty, that you may go forth? And why then should you hesitate, as to whether you are embraced within its provision of mercy; and, though not on the ground of being truly sorrowful on account of sin, or truly penitent, yet, as a captive simply conscious of your own miserable condition, why not believe that its deliverance is intended for you?—and, that you may hail its intimations with the unmingled exultation and gratitude, with which the wretch who has pined in solitude, and been left to the loneliness of

his own spirit, an outcast from all that gladdens and refreshes human hearts, hails the intimation that he need be no longer a captive, and welcomes the messenger, who assures him, that the way is open to liberty and enlargement.

This message which the great Prophet of his Church and people was anointed to proclaim,—the announcement of blessings which he lived to publish and died to procure,—his ministers, in every age, are commissioned to make known. And, from the observations we have made on its nature, and the objects which it embraces,—we feel that we are in possession of something which has an application to the state and character of each one of you. Whatever may be the temptations or sorrows with which you are visited, of one thing we are sure, that you have all experienced, in some degree, the misery of sin,—that, whether conscious of the peculiar nature of your malady or not, you are suffering under its power, and that you are by nature and practice, as sinners, in a condition so very miserable, and exposed to such danger, as not even the situation of the prisoner in daily dread of death can adequately express. Whatever be the aspect of your spiritual condition; whether you be the poor, or the broken-hearted, or simply the captive, or the blind, or the bond-slave, sure I am, that you are either amongst those who are alive to their spiritual destitution, or amongst those who are not. And, finding both alike included in the commission which Christ has given us, I now look round upon you all, whatever may be your rank, or character, or acquirements, and say to each one, “I have a message from God unto you.”—“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,” saith the Saviour, “because he hath anointed me to preach good tidings,”—and wherever there is one to whose spiritual condition the message applies (and to what condition does it not apply?) I do now tender him, in the free remission of sin, through the Saviour’s blood, and the full sanctification of his nature, through the efficacy of the Saviour’s Spirit, a remedy for all his misery, and deliverance from all his sins.

Ye poor in spirit ! why will ye not listen to the good tidings which the Saviour addresses to you ? Ye broken-hearted for sin ! why will you not allow him who sympathizes with all your griefs, tenderly to bind up your wounds ? Blinded, O, miserably blinded sinner ! why will you close your eyes against the light of this heavenly truth ? Captive of sin ! deluded, and deceived, and in bondage to Satan, why will you not hear the voice of the Son of God, and come forth ? The sound that is now breaking over you is the note of jubilee ;—already the inhabitants of the rocks are singing, and they are shouting from the tops of the mountains,—and every one who takes up that note of triumph as it passes by, is heard repeating that the “ Day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace ;”—and that “ the Lord hath comforted his people, and redeemed Jerusalem.”

DISCOURSE THIRTEENTH.

LUKE, xxii. 19, 20.—And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body, which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.

IN the preceding verses we find our Lord engaged in the observance of the Jewish Passover; yet indicating, by the expressions to which he gave utterance, that his mind was looking beyond it to that more glorious Passover, the time for offering which was now so near. As he sat down to celebrate the feast, in language prompted not more by the feeling that this was to be his last Passover on earth, than that it was to be the last time in which this feast should be celebrated before it was lost in the coming of those mighty events which it typified, he declared the desire which he had felt for its approach; prepared his disciples to expect its speedy fulfilment in the kingdom of God; and led their minds to rest on those solemn transactions which had at this moment obviously engrossed and swallowed up his own. And, after having thus prepared them for what was to follow,—occupying, as it were, at this moment, the point of transition from the shadows of a former dispensation to the glories of a more perfect and brighter era, before which these shadows were to flee away,—the blessed Saviour, taking of the bread and the wine used in the paschal solemnity, conse-

crated them to become the memorials of a more glorious Passover, to be observed by his Church and people in all ages, in remembrance of his grace, and as the pledge and seal of his faithfulness.

I need not say to any of you, that in these very striking and memorable words, we have recorded the institution of what is commonly called the Lord's Supper, from its being appointed whilst he was eating the paschal supper with his disciples,—and of what is perhaps as frequently termed the Communion, from the bond of union which it was designed to form among all Christians, and the fellowship which it represents them to possess in the Saviour, and in the blessings of his redemption. Its nature and its objects are here set forth with the greatest simplicity and clearness ; and no Christian can consider the verses we have read, heightened as the interest of the whole is by the circumstances in which our Lord was at this moment placed,—on the very eve of his crucifixion, and just before going forth to the scene of his agony,—without feeling that no ordinance, whether from its own intrinsic importance, or from the circumstances in which it was instituted, ever had, or could have, a more commanding claim on his devout reverence and regard.

To have seen the Redeemer engaged in this transaction with his disciples, without having at the same time heard the words by which he explained it, there might have been little to indicate its deep and impressive interest, saving, perhaps, in the solemn stillness of an hour, when every heart responded to the discoveries of his grace. As “ he took the bread, and blessed it, and gave it to his disciples,” there was nothing more than what, we may be assured, was the uniform custom of him who delighted at all times to acknowledge the bounty of his Father in heaven. And as the bread and wine, thus sanctified by prayer, passed from hand to hand among the assembled guests, there might have been little to distinguish it from an ordinary entertainment, or, at any rate, from any ordinary celebration of the Passover. In this simple institution, however, every thing was full of

meaning, beyond what it had been possible for any of us, without the aid of the Saviour's language, to have conceived. In these elements of bread and wine we are taught to discover the symbols of a presence, at all times pregnant with the deepest and most commanding interest. Every part of the transaction has its counterpart in the invisible things which faith substantiates. The elements are only helps to aid and to elevate our minds in apprehending spiritual and invisible mysteries ; and, after having rested on these so long as to discern what it is which they bring, or seek to bring, sensibly before us, we instantly pass onwards from them to lose ourselves in the contemplation of objects, fitted at all times to command the deepest reverence and admiration from the soul of every believer.

In directing your attention, as we are now shortly to do, to a view here presented of the Lord's Supper, there are two errors, almost equally to be guarded against, if we would understand its true nature and design. The former is that of those who have been led to give to the language which Christ employed on this occasion a meaning entirely literal, and such as was never intended ; and the latter the error of those who, viewing the language as altogether figurative, regard this ordinance simply as a bare memorial of the fact of Christ's death, without attaching any thing at all mysterious to the expressions which he employed. In explaining the words, " Take, eat ; this is my body, which is broken for you ;"—" this do in remembrance of me ;" you may be aware that there are a very great number of professing Christians, and some of them belonging even to the Protestant churches, who conceive that our Lord strictly meant, —what his language might, at first sight, seem to declare, —that the bread which he broke became, by his blessing, actually his real body, and the wine, in like manner, became his real blood,—that, in giving these to his disciples, he did really and literally make them partakers of his body and blood, —or, at any rate, that his body and blood were so hid under these elements, and in some mysterious way so mingled with

them, that they were actually eaten. An inlet has thus been given to a thousand superstitious practices, as contrary to the evidence of our senses, as they are to the language of the Bible ; and the true nature and design of the Lord's Supper have been thereby really as much lost sight of and disregarded, as if no respect had been shown to the institution at all. From the wish to avoid these errors, if possible to strip the ordinance of all mystery, and to make it so simple, that there should be no room for misapprehension, it has been as frequently supposed, on the other hand, that the Lord's Supper was nothing more than a commemoration of the death of Christ,—a feast in honour of the Saviour,—intended simply to keep alive on the minds of believers their obligations to his grace, and fitted to do so by the very significant symbols then to be employed,—that it had in it nothing of the nature of a covenant transaction, by which certain blessings are made over to us by God, and certain engagements entered into on our part,—and that the whole of the benefits to be expected or derived from it rested in the opportunity thus afforded of meditating on the death of Christ, and on his grace to sinners, aided, as we might expect our meditations then to be, by the symbols presented to our senses. And thus the view of the ordinance, which is the most interesting and valuable to the Christian, by which it brings before him most expressively the gracious discoveries of salvation through the blood of the cross, and by which he is taught to regard it as the seal of a better covenant, founded on better promises, and which gives to it all its power to comfort and to strengthen his heart, is altogether lost or obscured.

It will be sufficient to guard you against the former of these errors,—which, however, is not the one from which we are most in danger,—to remark, that when our Saviour said, “ Take, eat, this is my body,” or when he said, “ This cup is the new testament in my blood,” or, “ This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many,” he merely employed that form of expression which would convey to the minds of his hearers the idea, that the bread and wine were

only the symbols of his body and blood. It has often been pointed out on this subject, that the language which Christ spoke,—the language then current in Judea,—had no word exactly to express what we mean by the term *represent*, or *signify*,—that this want was usually supplied by the simple affirmation *was* or *is*,—and that, in making use of it at this time, our Lord only followed the mode of speech with which his disciples were familiar. Such expressions as the following will be recognised as very frequent in Scripture :—“ The seven kine are seven years,”—that is, represent seven years ; “ The field is the world,”—that is, represents the world ; “ They drank of that rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ,”—or, represented Christ ; “ The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches,”—or, represent the seven churches. In like manner, when Christ, addressing himself to the disciples as he divided the bread, and passed the cup amongst them, said, “ Take, eat ; this is my body,—this is my blood of the new testament, drink ye all of it,” his language did not necessarily convey any other meaning than that the bread and the wine *represented*, or *signified*, or were the symbols, of his body and blood.

Again, when this language is considered as implying nothing more than that Christ gave them the bread and wine to be the memorials of his body and blood, and that, by receiving them, they were to be reminded of their obligations to his grace,—when every thing that is mysterious or spiritual in the ordinance is removed, and nothing more held to be involved in it than a bare commemoration of that event, which is at all times the most interesting to the mind of a believer, we cannot but feel that there is an attempt made to bring down the nature of this great Christian ordinance far below the standard of the Divine Word ; and that, in the desire to render it simple, and intelligible, and void of all mystery, we are in danger of losing, or letting out of view altogether, those peculiar characters which belong to it, and which are fitted to convey the most solemn and affecting representations of the grace therein not only exhibited, but

also sealed to the mind of a believer. When the Apostle says, “ The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ ? the cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ ? ” it is surely implied that this ordinance is not only a commemoration, but also a communion of the death of Christ.

If language has a meaning, our Lord did declare that they who worthily partook of it were thereby made partakers of him and all his blessings. And, in like manner, when he said, “ Take, eat ; this is my body, this is my blood of the new covenant, drink ye all of it ; ” though every one to whom he addressed himself might easily understand that the elements of bread and wine remained unchanged, it was, at the same time, the design of the Saviour, by the strong language which he employed, to teach them, that, under these significant emblems, was represented the conveyance of himself and of his redemption to their souls ; and that, in receiving them in faith, they were made, in a manner far beyond that which any actual participation of his real body and blood could have made them, partakers of the body and blood of the Son of God.

Whilst no countenance is given, therefore, by the language of our text, to the opinion which, indeed, needs no other contradiction, than what it receives from the common sense and feeling of every man, that Christ spoke of his real body and blood in the elements of bread and wine,—it would be as wide a departure from the spirit of the Saviour’s declaration, to rest satisfied with the notion, that nothing more was meant by the transaction, than the participation of a feast in honour of Christ. When he said, “ Take, eat ; this is my body, this is my blood, drink ye all of it, ” he did not declare that the bread and wine were his real body and blood, if for no other reason, yet for this, that his body had not then been broken, nor his blood shed for them. But there was a meaning in these expressions, not even explained by the fact that they were the symbols of his body. There was a reason for employing them, which rendered them, even

apart from the poverty of language, the fittest which he could have employed, for conveying the precise truth to their minds. So close was the connexion between the elements and the spiritual things which they represented, that, in receiving the one, they were by faith made partakers of the other,—and this was the great end and design of the ordinance which he now instituted.

In considering still farther the meaning of the words of our text, they will be found to receive very considerable illustration from a conversation of our blessed Lord related in the Gospel of John,—a conversation which, though originating in a very different subject from that of the sacramental institution, we can hardly suppose to have been spoken, without his having this ordinance in view, so clearly does it seem to point to it. The doctrine which that scripture declares in words, the sacrament of the Supper may be supposed to represent figuratively, or by symbols ; and the former may therefore be held as furnishing us with the commentary of an infallible teacher on the latter. You will at once perceive that I refer to the very remarkable passage in which Christ speaks of himself as the “ living bread that came down from heaven, to give life to the world.” He there declares that “ Except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man,”—that is, receive him by faith, as he explains it,—“ ye have no life in you,”—that to those who did so receive him, “ his flesh was meat indeed, and his blood drink indeed,”—that is, the doctrine of Christ would prove the life and support of their souls. He declares further, that he “ who eateth his flesh and drinketh his blood dwelleth in Christ, and Christ in him ;” declaring the wonderful and mysterious union which subsisted between him and his believing people. In these expressions, Christ is set forth under the very same image, by which he is symbolically represented in the sacrament of the Supper, as bread to be received and to be eaten, the participation of which is essential to the existence or the continuance of spiritual life ; and by partaking of which, we become one with him, and he

dwelleth in us. And when he addressed himself, in the words of our text, to those in whose hearing the expressions now quoted had been employed, and which might very readily have recurred at this moment to their remembrance,—when taking the bread and the wine, he said, “ This is my body broken for you,—this is my blood of the New Testament, shed for the remission of the sins of many,”—when he required them, not merely to receive these elements at his hands, but also to eat and to drink of them,—they might have understood, we think, without any further explanation, that our Lord was only employing a different way of elucidating and enforcing the same truths which he had before taught. They might understand him as setting forth, under expressive symbols, the freeness with which he was given on the one hand, and the freeness with which they were to receive him on the other,—the necessity of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of man,—that is, of believing on him if they would live by him ; and as assuring them, in so far as this could be done by sensible things, that all who thus received him became the partakers of his body and blood, or were united to him, and derived life and nourishment from him, as the branch does from the root. It is not too much to say, that all this might have been understood by the disciples, from the previous discourses of Christ ; and thus an act, so very simple as that of giving and receiving bread and wine, was qualified to bring before them, at a single glance, the most impressive and affecting truths of the Word of God, which represented the riches and freeness of Divine grace on the one hand, and expressed the faith by which they were to become the partakers of these blessings on the other.

It has been often said of the Lord's Supper, considered merely in this light, and without regarding others yet more impressive, that it constitutes the clearest and most effective preaching of the Gospel,—setting forth, by very significant symbols, and by very expressive signs, the great mysteries of the kingdom of God ; and embracing, in a single point of

view, the substance of those truths concerning the Gospel-salvation, which are spread over the discourses of the Saviour. In this light, it may be compared, at least in so far as the general design is concerned, with the many ordinances found throughout the Old Testament,—such as the institution of sacrifices, for example ; by which God did both enforce and illustrate the declarations of his Word,—by which he taught his people through signs, what he had previously taught them through the medium of written language,—and sought to convey the truth clearly to their understandings, and to render it impressive and affecting to their hearts.

To the power and efficacy of this mode of address, the history of almost every nation testifies ; and no other proof can be needed of its accommodation to the actual state and condition of human nature, than the frequent use which God has made of it throughout his Word ; and in his communications with the Church in all ages. The sacraments thus stand forth as illustrations of the Saviour's doctrine, whilst that doctrine is in its turn illustrated and explained by them. The one serves to throw light on the other ; and thus, whilst Christ declared himself to be the “ living bread that came down from heaven, that we might eat thereof and never die,” because he that ate the flesh and drank the blood of the Saviour, “ had that Saviour dwelling in him,”—he both illustrated and enforced this truth by a transaction, in which, by giving, and receiving, and partaking of, bread and wine, he represented his body and blood as broken and shed for the life of the world, and made effectual for imparting this life to all who in faith receive them.

In this view, the Lord's Supper obviously partakes of the nature of those transactions by which God was graciously pleased, under a former dispensation, to covenant with his people ; by which he confirmed,—solemnly confirmed and ratified, the promises which he had graciously made them ; and sealed them as promises that should be made sure to all who observed his covenant. Accordingly it serves, in some

degree, the same object as the bow in the clouds, given to Noah as the surety of the covenant which God had made with him,—as the blood, by the sprinkling of which God sealed his covenant with the Israelites,—as the ordinance of circumcision, appointed to be observed in the families of Israel, the pledge that God would be a God to them, and to their children after them. Like them, it is the seal of a covenant, though of a better covenant, founded on better promises; is intended to comfort and support every believing mind, by the assurance of a grace adequate to all his necessities; stands forth with as much freshness as though it had been given but yesterday; and is fitted to apply as much to the circumstances of every individual believer, as though it had been intended for his single benefit and improvement.

We are peculiarly directed to this view of the subject, from the language which our Lord employs—when he says, “This cup is the New Testament, in my blood,” or, as we have it in another Gospel, “This is my blood of the New Testament,” or new covenant, “shed for many, for the remission of sins.” This language obviously possesses the same meaning with that already quoted, as employed by Moses, when sprinkling the Israelites with the blood of the sacrifice. He said, “This is the blood of the covenant which God hath made with you,”—meaning, the blood by which the covenant was ratified,—and Christ Jesus being now to introduce another covenant, denominated new, in contradistinction to every former dispensation of Divine grace;—a covenant, in which the will of God to sinful man was to be fully and completely disclosed, and which he was to bring in and establish, by his approaching sufferings and death as a sacrifice for sin,—did now give, in this blessed ordinance, a standing attestation of its truth and faithfulness to all ages,—in the return of which, believers might continue to read that God was not unmindful of his promises; and laying hold on which, they might find themselves enabled to trust more implicitly in the freeness and riches of his grace.

Regarded in this light, you will easily perceive how well fitted the simple rite which Christ instituted was, for the purpose for which he designed it, and how expressive as a seal of the blessings of the new covenant. In employing bread and wine, Christ did employ those symbols which might best express his body and blood, through the efficacy of which the covenant was to be established. These symbols were not merely exhibited, they were given to his disciples in a way expressive of the freeness with which he made over to them all the blessings of his salvation. They were to be eaten by them, to represent the intimate union that subsists between Christ and his people,—and to intimate that they were to be the members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. No ordinance could better, or more significantly, convey those spiritual things which it was its design to unveil. And when these were embraced by their faith, or when they are in this ordinance embraced by your faith,—when alive to the meaning of every point in this solemn transaction, you do feel that God is therein making over to you Christ and all his fulness, and do actually embrace him for your peace and sanctification, when you discern at the same time the nearness and intimacy of the union therein signified,—when you regard those things as the pledge and earnest of the unseen spiritual blessings which they signify, it is impossible but you must feel how unspeakably gracious is the assurance which they convey; how well fitted this sacrament is, by the full exhibition which it makes of redeeming grace, to comfort the mind under the burden of sin, to bind you to walk before God in newness of life; and that in testifying by the acceptance of the seal your acceptance of the blessings sealed, you virtually surrender yourselves to be the Lord's.

If such was the nature and object of the institution, we cannot wonder why our Lord should, even at such an hour, and with the scene of his coming agony before him, find a place for its observance. And every one that has any feeling of his grace, or of his own unworthiness, must feel, I

think, the depth of that tenderness which was implied in his appointing such an ordinance, at the very time when he was about to enter on the scene of his deepest trial, and when the dark forecastings of that terrible hour must have been, we should have thought, already upon him.

In improving such a subject as this, one of the most natural feelings present to our minds, will be the little improvement that any of us have made of such an ordinance, and how little our minds have truly realized and entered into the mind of the Saviour when he appointed it to continue in his Church throughout all ages. Regarding it as bringing before us the most astonishing discoveries of his grace,—as fraught with so many things fitted to interest and engage our hearts,—as intended to be nothing less than a partaking of the body and blood of the Lord ;—as an ordinance by which the Saviour and his blessings are virtually and expressively made over to all who, in faith, receive him ; and in which we do transact with God through Christ, receiving the seals of his covenant, and sealing ourselves to be his,—we cannot but feel, I am persuaded, how feeble have been all our apprehensions of this great mystery, and how little it has awakened dispositions in our minds corresponding to the wonderful and gracious characters in which it is set forth to us. I fear that among the multitudes who do regularly sit down to celebrate such a solemnity, there may be not a few who have never entered into these views of the ordinance at all,—who have been satisfied with regarding it as an expression of their attachment to the Gospel, or a mark of their respect for the faith in which they have been educated, if not as a kind of purification from the sins which they have contracted ;—who have never discovered in it a mystery of deeper sacredness than any mere commemoration of the death of Christ, or inquired how far their faith did embrace it as a sign and seal of the benefits of redemption to themselves,—or how far they are prepared to lay hold of it as sealing those blessings to their souls. With them, the whole benefit which they have expected to receive from the solem-

nity, has consisted in the admission of a few pious thoughts on such an occasion, not very frequent or familiar to their minds,—in some vows and resolutions there formed against sin, soon lost and forgotten in the midst of the world,—in the strengthening of a certain false peace derived from the regularity with which they observed a Divine ordinance,—and, perhaps, in things yet more adverse to the design of the institution. The feeding upon an unseen Saviour by faith in their hearts,—the willing dedication of themselves to his service, commended by the manifestation of his grace,—the grateful reposing of a soul upon the word of his faithfulness,—and the holy admiration excited in a believing mind by so gracious a view of redeeming mercy as is there given, have been things of which, though participating in this ordinance, they have been utterly ignorant,—and, though brought into near and immediate contact with every thing that is most sacred, and fitted to be most sanctifying in its influence, they may have been as devoid of such an influence as though the ordinance of God had never been designed to convey it. O, how far have these been from realizing the mind of the Saviour, as he said, “This is my body which is broken for you—This is my blood of the New Testament, shed for many for the remission of sin!” How awful the guilt contracted by those who thus profane the body and the blood of the Son of God! and how much do they require, should another opportunity be granted them of observing this ordinance, to “keep the feast, not with the old leaven, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth!”

Amidst all the contempt that may be thus shown to the Redeemer, however, by these profane intruders into holy things, and all the dishonour that may be done to his cause, by those who will participate in such an ordinance, whilst their conduct may testify that they are none of his, let believers be only the more stirred up to value and improve the privilege,—let them, whenever the opportunity is afforded of “showing forth the Lord’s death till he come;”—

come to it in the exercise of a living faith, and a true repentance,—let them stir themselves up to lay hold of his covenant of peace, that it may be thus ratified and sealed to their souls. And thus, “this holy mystery,” as one has it, “shall be as nails to fasten us to his very cross, that, by them we may draw out the efficacy of his blood. We shall then be dipt in the wounds of our Redeemer,—our hunger be satisfied, and our thirst for ever quenched,—and this bread, which hath in it more than the substance which our eyes behold,—and this cup, hallowed with solemn benediction, shall avail to the endless life and welfare, both of soul and body, in that it serveth as well for a medicine to heal our infirmities, and purge our sins, as for a sacrifice of thanksgiving ; with touching, it sanctifieth,—it enlighteneth with belief,—it truly conformeth us unto the image of Jesus Christ. What these elements are in themselves, it skilleth not ; it is enough, that, to me which take them, they are the body and blood of Christ : his promise in witness hereof sufficeth ; his word he knoweth which way to accomplish ; why should any cogitation possess the mind of a faithful communicant but this ? O, my God, thou art true ; O, my soul, thou art happy !”*

* Hooker, chap. v. sect. 67.

DISCOURSE FOURTEENTH.*

LUKE, xxiv. 50, 51, 52, 53.—And he led them out as far as to Bethany ; and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshipped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy ; and were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen.

THESE words describe the closing scene of our Lord's intercourse with his disciples ; and they close, at the same time, the Gospel history, as given us by one Evangelist, with the illustration of whose narrative of the Saviour's life we have for a considerable time been employed.

In the preceding part of the chapter we find him relating the various appearances of our Lord to his disciples subsequently to his resurrection,—the various methods which he took for convincing them that he was in very deed that Jesus whom they had seen openly and publicly crucified,—the condescension which he manifested on this subject to satisfy their weakness, and to meet their unbelief,—and the full evidence which he gave, in every way fitted to affect the minds of reasonable beings, of the truth, that he had indeed risen again.

We find the Evangelist likewise relating the endeavours which our Lord made to convince them that the events which had so lately befallen him, and which had for a time

* Concluding Lecture at Stockbridge Chapel.

almost destroyed their faith and confidence, had taken place agreeably to his own declarations, and in fulfilment of all that had been predicted in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning him,—that they were part of a Divine ordinance, by which it behoved him to suffer, and to rise the third day, before repentance and remission of sins could be preached in his name among all nations,—and that, though in themselves, at first sight, apparently in contradiction to the testimony which had been of old given to the Messiah, they were, when rightly understood, the most convincing evidence that he was indeed the Christ. We find him relating, farther, that, in addition to the means which the Saviour employed, in order to make this truth plain and evident, he did, at the same time, and in a way peculiar to himself as a Divine Being, open their understandings to understand, and their hearts, we may be assured, to embrace the Scriptures,—that having set forth in order the whole of that Word which bore testimony to him, he did then, by an act of his Divine power, remove the cloud which had so long hindered the truth from finding access to their minds, and made them to discern between the Divine declarations and the most obscure passages of his history, such a harmony, as left them no occasion to doubt that the one had taken place in fulfilment of the other ; and no room for any other feeling than that of amazement at their own blindness and ignorance, and admiration of the ways of Him who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in working.

Having accomplished this work,—and that it was accomplished, the feelings with which the disciples returned from Bethany afford ample proof,—the purpose for which he had for a season lingered in the world might be considered as at an end. He had finished the work which his Father had given him to do ; he had wrought out by his death an eternal redemption ; and by his resurrection from the dead, had evinced that this redemption had been accepted of the Father. He had left, in his apostles and disciples, men who were fitted to be witnesses to the truth of his character, and

the reality of the mighty works on which that truth rested ; and he had so far instructed them in the nature of his doctrine and kingdom, that they were prepared to wait for, and to receive, the further developement of those things which were to be given, when the spirit should be poured out from on high. Nothing now remained, therefore, but that he should take leave of those for whom, and for whose welfare, he had so unweariedly laboured ; and who now remained to be, under God, the seed of that Church which was one day to extend over the whole earth.

The manner in which he did so, however, as strikingly indicates the spirit by which he was actuated as any single event of his history. It adds another to the many proofs which he gave of his condescension to their weakness, and the tender love which he bore towards his disciples ; and there may be few scenes around which a believing mind will feel more disposed to linger, or which it will seek more frequently to realize, than that presented, when a beloved master, with claims upon the affections of his disciples, infinitely greater than those which any human being can ever have upon the affections of another, commended them for the last time on earth to his Father and to their Father, to his God and to their God. You can easily conceive for what reason the Saviour, about to leave in this world those in whose happiness and well-being he was so deeply interested, would be disposed to render the event impressive and affecting to their minds,—how he would wish that there should be something about it to which they might recur, not merely for the purpose of recalling the image of one so dear to them, but for strengthening their faith, and confirming their hearts in the truth of his character and work ; and that the last impression made upon their minds, equally with that which all the rest of his history was fitted and intended to leave, might be this, that he came from God and went to God. Persuaded as they might be of the truth of his character, it was still possible that this persuasion might be strengthened ; though he had come from the invisible world upon them at

this moment, they would still be the more assured of it, if they should see him ascend thither again ; and though they had received evidence enough to satisfy every mind, and which had satisfied theirs, of his power and glory ; though the strongest proof of his exaltation to the right hand of the Father was yet to be given, when he sent down gifts upon men,—it might serve, in the mean time, to banish any doubts that remained, furnish them with a new fact to attest to others the truth of his exaltation, and lift them above the painfulness of this separation, were they permitted to see the reality of his ascension, and with the bodily eye, at least, to follow him to the borders of that invisible world which now opened to receive him, and the highest honours of which now awaited him.

It appears to have been for this purpose, as well as for the sake of furnishing an image of the glory in which he shall come again, that our Lord, instead of merely bidding farewell to his disciples, and blessing them, and then vanishing, as he had done before, out of their sight, gave to the event of his ascension full publicity,—that he went about it in that way which indicated his wish that the remembrance of it might never fade from their minds,—and that the last scene of his life presented so striking a contrast with the humble circumstances in which he was ushered into the world,—and the mean and lowly form which he had continued to wear whilst he was in it.

For this purpose, we are told, he led them out as far as Bethany, restricting their number on this occasion to the eleven disciples, and those who were with him,—having no wish that any should be spectators beyond those who were the proper witnesses of his truth to the world ; and confining this, as he did, indeed, all his appearances subsequently to his resurrection, to those who had already received and admitted the miracles which he had formerly wrought. It was on this spot, and near the Mount of Olives, where he had so often withdrawn for privacy and retirement,—where he had passed, in the night of his agony, through one of the scenes

of his deepest humiliation, and which was well fitted, therefore, to be the scene of his coming exaltation,—in a territory, every footstep of which would be associated in the minds of the disciples with some affecting incident or other of his history, and which was now to be consecrated for ever, as the scene where they were to have their last look of their Master,—it was here that the wonderful and mysterious visitant, who had come into this world from the world which no eye has ever seen, and whose glory men had beheld, even through the veil of lowliness which hid it, as the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace,—it was here that he was again to ascend to the Father, that he might lead captivity captive, and give gifts unto men.

The other Evangelists, in describing the event which then took place, and which one of them, Matthew, must have witnessed, relate various topics on which our Lord then discoursed with his disciples, such as you might suppose to have been inspired by the circumstances in which they were placed, as most likely to engage the mind of the Saviour, and best adapted to the situation of the disciples. It was here, we are told, that he gave them a commission to go and teach all nations,—it was here he renewed his promise of those miraculous signs which were to attend their ministry, and which were to be the seal of their apostleship to the world,—and it was here that he gave them that assurance of his continued presence with them, even to the end of the world, which to the Church, in all ages and circumstances, continues the ground of their encouragement and hope. And, having compressed into this last charge every thing most needful for their direction and consolation, nothing more remained than that he should give his farewell benediction to those who had been on his part the objects of an unchanging solicitude, and for whom he had poured out so many and fervent prayers at the Divine footstool during the days of his flesh.

Of the mind of the Saviour at this moment, and of the fulness of that blessing which he supplicated to rest upon

them, we may have some conception, from one recorded example of his intercession in their behalf,—an intercession presented in the view of being separated from them, and which may be supposed, therefore, to embody the feelings and desires which such an event was fitted to inspire. I need not say that I advert to the prayer recorded in the Gospel of John, which closes what are commonly called our Lord's consolatory discourses to his disciples. And, if that may be allowed to present in a more extended form what was here compressed into the brief space that was allowed for it, we may be able in some degree to conceive from it of the meaning and import of the blessing which he now sought to abide with them. He had there prayed for them as those who were in the world,—that the Father would keep, through his own name, those whom he had given him,—that they might be one,—that they might not be taken out of the world, but kept from the evil,—that they might be sanctified through the truth, even through that Word which is truth,—and that they might be with him where he was, to behold the glory which the Father had given him. In short, he prayed for those whom he had kept in the Father's name, and from whom he was now to be separated, that the guardianship which he had exercised over them might be more than compensated by the care and grace of that Father, whose they were, and who had given them to be redeemed. And, now that the hour was passing on, which had then been comparatively distant, we may be assured that it was with desires not less large or fervent,—with a mind not less solicitous for their best interests, nor less alive to the dangers and trials that awaited them,—with an intercession not less powerful, and which, now that all power was given to him in heaven and on earth, would not be less availing,—that he commended them, for the last time on earth, to the keeping of their heavenly Father, and poured forth that fulness of blessing, which none but a nature like his could either conceive or impart.

We may be assured that it was no faint or measured bless-

ing which he pronounced, as he lifted up his hand and blessed them,—that it extended to all that their necessities would require, and to all which Divine fulness could impart to meet and to supply them,—that it reached all, and more than all, that they themselves might have considered indispensable for their well-being in time and through eternity. And coming, as it did, from him, who has power to command that blessing, which we can only supplicate and wait on God to receive, either for ourselves or for others, it was to them the assurance that it should abundantly rest upon them, and that it should be with them fully and unchangeably, according to his word.

The Evangelist tells us, that it was while thus employed, —meet employment, you will say, for him who had come into this world, bringing with him the richest blessings, and who did not quit it without leaving a blessing behind !—it was while thus employed, and while almost unwilling, as it were, to separate from those for whom his heart was at this moment so full, that he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. The same Evangelist, however, elsewhere informs us,—what we might perhaps be warranted to infer, from the language of our text, though it is not expressly declared by it,—that this ascent was visible,—that they were permitted to watch his gradual elevation, until a cloud received him out of their sight,—that so impressive and imposing was the spectacle, that they continued gazing up to heaven, even after the bright vision had passed away, and were only recalled to their real situation by two men,—two angels,—who stood by them in white apparel,—who inquired why they gazed thus intently up into heaven. As much as this is, indeed, implied in the fact stated in the text, that they worshipped him, or paid him Divine honours ; such an act of worship being the peculiar and appropriate expression of their feelings on such a manifestation of his Divine power and majesty. And it was thus, in circumstances calculated to give weight to all the declarations

which he had made of the glory which he had with the Father before the world was, and of that glory which now awaited him at the right hand of the Father,—in circumstances that brought almost sensibly before them the truth of his exaltation, and which were well fitted to inspire the faith, and animate the hope of his disciples, that he quitted that world of which he had been for a season the inhabitant,—to which he had been introduced by ministering angels, proclaiming peace on earth and good-will to men,—to whose interests his life had been one scene of continued devotedness, and which he had not in presence forsaken, till he had accomplished for it a work by which it would be redeemed from the bondage of corruption ; and its children, once afar off from God, and strangers to the covenant of promise, would be brought near and reconciled.

It would be impossible for us, even in imagination, to follow the Saviour to those realms of light whither he now ascended as a Conqueror, or to conceive the honour, with which he would be met, who, during the scene of his deep humiliation, had been the object of so intense an interest to the heavenly host, and who had travailed for the perfecting a scheme of grace so amazing to the inhabitants of heaven, that even they desired to look into it,—to conceive with what profound submission he would be received, who was now to sit for ever, far above all principality and power, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but in the world to come,—and with what harmonious feelings he would be greeted to the honours of his kingdom, in whom, and in whose work, the Father had ever felt so intense and delighted a complacency.

It will better become us, instead of attempting to pursue a subject so far exceeding all our apprehensions,—to attend for a little to the condition of the disciples now bereaved of the presence and instructions of a beloved master, and to the feelings which they experienced and manifested, as they returned from witnessing a scene, calculated, for a time at

least, to make them lose every consideration of themselves in the view of that glory to which they had all but seen the Saviour exalted.

We have already had occasion to advert to the state of their minds at the moment when the ascension of their Master took place ; and it was no other, indeed, than we should have ourselves experienced, had we been the spectators of such a scene. To have beheld one with whom we were discoursing, and whilst in the very act of blessing us, gradually elevated into heaven,—one with whom we had been so long familiar as the disciples had been with Jesus, and who had so often told them that he should leave them and go to the Father,—to have witnessed an exertion of Divine power so incontestible, and so glorious, and so far exceeding any anticipations which we might have formed,—had constrained any of us all into the posture which they assumed, and had made us feel and own the power of one who was no less than Divine. And to have seen all this take place in the case of one who had manifested the love and condescension in our well-being which the Redeemer had done in theirs, and with whom we were in any like way connected, had unquestionably absorbed every feeling that might have regarded ourselves, and concentrated our whole souls on him who was thus entering in triumph the invisible world ; and it might have been with some difficulty, therefore, that we had been recalled to the reality of our situation, and brought back to earth again from those spiritual regions which, for a moment, we might have conceived that we were entering along with him.

When we are told, accordingly, that, on seeing the ascent of Jesus into heaven, the disciples worshipped him ;—when we read in the Acts of the Apostles, that they continued to gaze up into heaven, even after he had passed into a region which it was beyond their vision to penetrate,—that, when a cloud received him out of their sight, they still stood, if, by possibility, they might catch another glimpse of his person, or receive another token of his love ; and that they were so insensible to every other object, that it was only the ad-

dress of the angels,—“Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?—This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come, in like manner, as ye have seen him go into heaven,”—which recalled them to the feeling of their situation,—we see only the impression which we might have expected to be wrought by such a scene, even on minds differently affected in many respects to the Saviour from those of the disciples. And, even when we read of the feelings with which they returned to Jerusalem, and of their entire superiority to the circumstances of bereavement in which they were placed, as if they had no more to do with this world, and were as far elevated above it as their divinely-exalted Master,—we only see an effect which has been exhibited by some in the most trying and painful situations, when sorrow has been brightened by a prospect in some degree resembling this, and when God has consecrated the most painful of all separations from earthly friends and relatives into an occasion of gratitude and praise for his mercy to their souls.

It was not to be expected that the impressions of such an event would, or could be easily lost;—that the disciples could again return to this world as unaffected as if they had never witnessed it, or that they could avoid dwelling upon a scene, every circumstance of which was so full of the deepest and most solemn interest. We do not wonder, therefore, to find them for some little time, rapt in spirit, like men who discerned an object to which others were insensible. The impression made on their minds, however, and the feelings which they manifested, were obviously far deeper than those which may, in some degree, be evinced by such as are ignorant of their peculiar character. It is said, not merely that they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, but that they were continually in the Temple, blessing and praising God; that this was, at least, their regular and familiar occupation. And it affords a striking example of the power of faith in supporting the mind, even in the most painful circumstances, that they who had sustained at this moment

a loss beyond what we can easily reckon, should have been so lifted above it, as to find no room for the indulgence or expression of any other feelings than those of gratitude and praise.

The connexion which had subsisted between the disciples and our Lord was of a nature to which there never was a parallel in this world. He had been to them what no earthly friend can ever be to any of us, and their intercourse had been so wonderful, so gracious, and so long continued, as to have served to draw out their hearts in numberless ways towards him. Whilst all his tenderness must have been heightened in their view by the rank and character which he bore,—whilst they must have felt all his actions awakening in them a reverence which they could never cease to entertain,—he had at the same time manifested such an interest in their welfare, such a condescension to their infirmities, and such a patience in dealing with their perversity, as must have drawn out their affections toward him, even though he had not been the Son of God. They had seen so Divine a wisdom in all the admonitions and instructions which he had given them, as must have led them to hang on him for counsel and guidance. During the years in which he had been with them, he had admitted them at all times to his presence and to his teaching; he had not merely received them, but treated them as friends; he had opened their minds and their understandings, as they were able to bear it, to his character and will; he had revealed truths so important as to have changed to them the whole aspect of the Divine dispensations; and in all that concerns the character, and excites the hope, and satisfies the hearts, of human beings, they found themselves as different, through the intercourse which they had maintained with Christ, as if he had communicated to them a new existence. It is impossible, therefore, that they could have been conscious of these things without feeling their hearts knit to one to whom they were indebted for all; or that they could, in ordinary circumstances, have contemplated a separation from Jesus, without feelings of the most

painful nature. In fact, so often as our Lord had adverted to this subject, and so often as they allowed their minds fully to embrace the truth which he stated, they were well nigh overwhelmed by it. When he told them for the first time of his sufferings and death, they were, we are informed, exceeding sorry, as much for their own sakes, I doubt not, as for his. When he told them more plainly, that he was to go to the Father, sorrow filled their hearts ; even the assurance that it was expedient for them that he should go away,—for if he went not away, the Comforter could not come to them,—does not appear to have satisfied them, and they still felt a longing desire to detain him. And yet, when the hour of trial and separation came,—when they saw their Master mount up into heaven,—when they were assured by the angels who stood by, that he would not return till his second and glorious re-appearance,—and when all this took place at the very time at which the separation must have been judged most painful,—after his resurrection, and when they had seen him only at occasional intervals,—so far were they from grieving for his departure, or yielding themselves up to an unavailing sorrow, that they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the temple blessing and praising God,—just as if they had been already called to share his triumph, and for ever exempted from the sorrows, the trials, and the difficulties, of the coming of which he had so often and so solemnly warned them.

There is no one, I think, who must not have been struck with the expressions, at such a time, of such feelings by the disciples, especially when he contrasts them with the very different feelings which the mere anticipation of the event that had befallen them had so often called forth. And there is no one, at the same time, who may not see how this difference must have arisen from the enlarged views which they had now received of the character and work of the Saviour, and from the firmer faith and confidence with which they rested in the truth of all that he had revealed to them. Fully persuaded now of his Divinity,—assured that he was the Son

of God with power, by his resurrection from the dead,—convinced, by evidence almost sensible, that he had come from God and went to God, and that he was exalted to be the head over all things to his people,—satisfied of his power, and grace, and faithfulness, and that, go where he might, and reign where he might, he could never cease to feel interested in the work which he had committed to them, and that he would, according to his own promise, be with them always, even to the end of the world,—there was something in these truths calculated to remove the painfulness of their separation from him, and to make them feel, what was indeed most true, that, though removed in bodily presence, he had neither left nor forsaken them. And persuaded as they were, at the same time, that he had only gone away to receive a kingdom, and to return,—that he had withdrawn for a little, because regard to their interests required him to go,—but that he would come again, and take them to himself, to be with him where he was, to behold his glory,—and that, meanwhile, he would send the Holy Spirit to be their guide and comforter,—there was something in these prospects so ennobling and exalting as to lift them above the depression which they had otherwise felt. The remembrance of the scenes through which they had passed with him, instead of seeming merely to remind them of pleasures which were for ever removed, when seen in the new light which he had cast over all their connexion, tended only to exalt their gratitude and their praise. And, like men to whom not a single desire had been left unsatisfied, and whose fondest wishes had been more than exceeded in the grace of which they had been the objects, they could only find utterance to their feelings in those ascriptions of praise and blessing, which they failed not to present continually in the house devoted to his name.

I might at this point enlarge on the example which is here given us of the nature and power of faith, in circumstances calculated to awaken the most desponding feelings ; and I might point out to you that, with all the peculiarity of the situation in which the Apostles were placed, the same truths,

in all that is essential, are brought near to you, to be received and rested on for your peace and consolation ; and that they are equally fitted to be to you, and will be found by you, should you make them your confidence, all that they were to the disciples ; communicating support amidst the trials of life ; fortifying you against the temptations that may assail you ; animating you, as they did them, for its duties ; and, in the midst of weakness, making you strong. And that the feelings which possessed them at this moment were not the effect of any strong yet passing impression, I might show you from their after history ; and how, as their situation has been described by one who, though not of their number at the time, was afterwards numbered with them, “ They were troubled on every side, but not distressed ; persecuted, but not forsaken ; cast down, but not destroyed ; alway bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in their mortal body.”

There is an application, however, of which this part of the history is equally susceptible, bearing more nearly upon our circumstances at this time, and to which I shall confine your attention. I consider the feelings of the disciples at this moment as the result, under God, not of the scene which they had immediately witnessed,—the ascension of their Master,—or of the converse which he had immediately held with them, so much as the result of their attendance on the whole course of the Saviour’s ministry ; as the result of all those varied instructions and admonitions which they had received from him in the course of a long and intimate connexion ; and as evincing that they had now reached, in some degree, that point to which all his previous teaching had been designed to lead them, and which every part had had its own share in producing. And though the situation and privileges of the disciples have been in many respects superior to ours, I may yet consider the opportunities which we have enjoyed of hearing the words of Christ, as holy men have recorded them, and of having had the various scenes of his ministry brought in this way, and almost uninterruptedly, to

our remembrance, as in some degree approximating our situation to theirs. And, now that our illustrations of this Evangelist are drawing to a close, it is right and proper that we should ask ourselves how far, by the Divine blessing, the result has been the same as in the case of the disciples, and how far we are in possession of that faith in the Saviour, which fits us to rejoice and bless God along with them ?

In this attendance on the ministry of Christ,—for such it may be called, in so far as it has brought before us the words of Christ,—and in which I trust that I have ever sought to feel myself a disciple as much as any of you,—privileged, no doubt, by my situation to wait continually on this very thing, but still needing, as much as any of you, to learn of Christ,—we have been permitted to follow him together through the most impressive scenes of his history. We have heard him speak as never man spake,—we have all but seen those miracles which declared him to be the Son of God,—we have listened to the testimonies which he gave to his character, and power, and grace,—we have been addressed and urged from his own mouth to repent and believe the Gospel,—we have passed with him through the scene of his agony and humiliation, and, without any great interruption, from his entrance on the work of the ministry up to the time of his ascension,—we have followed him through his various wanderings, and been privileged, almost as much as the disciples, to enter the scene of his deepest privacy and devotion.

What we should all be disposed to ask ourselves, therefore, is, Whether, in our waiting upon him, which may be considered in this way as drawing to a close, as the disciples closed their personal intercourse with Christ on his ascension,—we have any thing that survives, as they had, when their Master was removed from them ? Whether that Saviour, who ever liveth in his Word, has been transplanted from that Word to live in our hearts ? And whether, as the result of all that we have read and heard of his person and grace, we find him indeed to be the joy and the strength

of our hearts, to whom we have committed, in the confidence that he will keep it, the most precious of all deposits, against the great day.

If this has not been in any measure the case,—if our hearts have remained cold and unaffected,—if we have followed our blessed Lord through his life, and witnessed him in death, without any thing beyond a passing impression,—O ! how different are our minds from those of the disciples, as they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, blessing and praising God ! How grievous and sinful must be that indifference which has never once been broken by those very scenes that so truly changed their characters and touched their hearts ! And how fearful the condemnation, if that very Saviour, who has come near to us, and permitted us thus to wait upon him, for the purpose of communicating to our souls the richest and most precious of all consolations, has ascended from us, and been suffered to leave us, without having once arrested us in the search of earthly good, fixed our affections, or turned our footsteps to the mansions of his heavenly kingdom !

If, on the other hand, we have found him to be to us what he was to the disciples ; if, in surveying the scenes of his life together, we have found our hearts burn within us ; if we have received through him the pearl of unspeakable price,—that treasure, the which when a man findeth, he goeth and selleth all that he hath, that he may buy it ; then I need not say, that your feelings will be, in some degree, similar to those of the disciples ; that you are in possession of something which can reconcile us to all earthly privations and separations, assured that he abideth faithful ; and which, if retained and cherished in our hearts, will preserve us steadfast and immovable,—always abounding in the work of the Lord, and looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

DISCOURSE FIFTEENTH.*

HEBREWS, vii. 24.—But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.

OF the institutions of the Jewish law, that of the priesthood was one of the most prominent; and one of those which most readily occurs to us, as visibly distinguishing it from the clearer and more perfect dispensations that followed.

To minister in the work and service of the sanctuary, God was pleased to select one tribe out of the twelve into which the nation was divided. From amongst that tribe again he chose a single family, in which the office of the priesthood was to be hereditary,—the family of Aaron; and to this family, peculiarly and exclusively, throughout their generations, belonged the high honour of approaching God, in the service of the Tabernacle; of presenting the offerings of his people, that they might receive the Divine acceptance; and of acting as the medium of communication between a holy God and his creatures,—ever offending, and ever requiring therefore to be purified from sin.

You will readily perceive the glory and the dignity of an institution which derived its authority and its rights immediately from God himself; which was fenced by him from all profane intrusion, by the most solemn and awful sanc-

* Concluding Sermon at Stockbridge Chapel.

tions; with which was combined the exclusive possession and exercise of those privileges that may be supposed the peculiar marks of the Divine favour and regard; and which gave to a single family in Israel a name as much exalted above their brethren in outward sanctity, as they again were exalted above the nations around them. The priesthood was chosen out of a people who, compared with those on whom God had bestowed no such tokens of his loving-kindness and tender mercy, are called a holy nation, and a nation of priests; whose land was secured to them as a Divine inheritance; who were under the peculiar care and protection of Divine power; permitted a nearness of access into the Divine presence which was denied to ordinary worshippers; honoured to bear the offerings and the supplications of God's people to the mercy-seat, and to transact, in their name, with God, in all those solemn matters on which sinful creatures need ever to approach the Divine footstool.

The Jewish priesthood must have seemed stamped by God with something of the mystery of his own nature; and singled out to see and behold such things of the power and glory of God as others were only to hear reported from those who were privileged to enter within the veil, there would be a peculiar sanctity attached to them, qualified to secure the reverence of every Israelite. To them were alone unveiled those glories which were hidden, under the penalty of death, from every profaner eye; they could alone look on that cloud, the symbol of the Divine presence, shadowing the mercy-seat; they could alone hear those words which God uttered from between the cherubims; and, though never for a moment permitted to forget how unworthy they were to enter so holy a presence, their hands alone might shed and sprinkle that blood which, when offered in the faith of a nobler sacrifice, was to make an atonement for sin.

Such was the glory of the priesthood under the law, and when the way into the holiest of all had not yet been made manifest.

Independently, however, of all other circumstances which betokened the innate weakness of that priesthood, and its insufficiency to meet the wants of sinners, and all those marks of imperfection that adhered to it in common with every other part of the economy to which it belonged,—for “the law made nothing perfect,” we are told, “but the bringing in of a better hope, whereby we draw near to God,”—it wanted one thing essential to our highest conceptions of dignity and greatness, and that was permanence. Contemplating it in all that glory which it unquestionably possessed, it was still a glory that was soon to pass away ; it was soon to give place to another priesthood, before which it was no more to be remembered, and from which, indeed, it borrowed the highest dignity which it possessed ; and, in common with the other institutions of a dispensation which was only the shadow of good things to come, whilst the body was of Christ, it had served its original design and purpose, when the contemplation of the believing Israelite was fixed, not upon itself, but, through it, upon that nobler priesthood to which it was introductory. The light by which it shone was, after all, only reflected ; it was like the feeble light of dawn, which owes its existence to that luminary in whose fuller blaze it is soon to be lost ; it served, at best, to guide the foot of an inquirer after God, like a light shining in a dark place, till the day had dawned, and the day-star had arisen. And then, when the fulness of time had come, and blood was shed adequate to the blotting out of all sin, and the way into the holiest was made manifest by the death of Jesus, He was revealed as the one advocate and mediator with the Father ; the sacrifice ceased to be offered, the fire was extinguished, and the altar crumbled into dust ; and, before his eternal and unchangeable priesthood, the priesthood of Aaron passed away like a useless and forgotten thing, having now no glory, by reason of the glory that excelleth.

It is this circumstance, that the one was permanent and the other temporary,—the one the end, whilst the other was only the means introductory to the end,—which constitutes

one striking point of difference between the priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of Aaron ; and which you are prepared to expect, so soon as you know, that the one presented those offerings which could never of themselves take away sin, whilst the other, by one offering, perfected for ever them that are sanctified ; that the one ministered on earth, whilst the other ministered in heaven.

Independently, however, of the inherent weakness of the Jewish priesthood, considered as a priesthood which was soon to pass away, it is obvious that, so long as human beings ministered at the altar, it must have partaken of that changeable nature, from which no human institution, and no institution even with which men are connected, can ever be exempted. Though called upon to discharge an office which brought them every day most intimately into the presence of him who is ever the same, they still retained the frailties and infirmities of our fallen nature. They were not exempted from sin, of their liability to which they were, indeed, ever reminded, in being required to make an atonement for their own sins, before they made atonement for the sins of the people ; they were as little exempted from the sentence pronounced against sin ; they met, as others, that wo in which the first transgression hath involved the successive generations of the children of men ; and, separated as they might be from others in the honours of a high priestly station, they were, nevertheless, one with them in being the heirs of mortality and corruption. Death, that levels and confounds all human distinctions, spared as little the priest as the people. The power that had fenced his office from all profane intrusion, had not fenced his person from the intrusion of this terrible visitant. Whilst one generation of worshippers after another presented themselves at the Tabernacle or the Temple, one generation after another saw other men standing to minister in the sanctuary, and other hands than those which had at first lighted it, fanning the holy fire on the altar. Whilst the same appearances were maintained, the same sacrifices offered, and the same solemnities observed

in drawing near to the Divine presence, and men possessed of the same priestly character trod the sacred courts, and every thing gave token of permanence and stability, the men who used aforesaid to minister before the Lord had given way to others, in their turn to be succeeded by men equally subject to the lot of mortality. Priest succeeding priest served his generation, and by the will of God fell on sleep, and saw corruption; and, as if God had been to give in their persons the most affecting demonstration of the vanity, even of the best and most honourable of all human greatness, the very men who were permitted more intimate access to God than others, who acted as the medium between the sensible world which we inhabit, and the spiritual and eternal world which no eye hath ever seen, and who were invested with a high and unapproachable sanctity, faded away like others before the breath of the Almighty, and left their name and their glory to be inherited by their children.

Such was, and such, according to the ordinance of God, behoved to be the condition of the Jewish priesthood, so long as men ministered in the sanctuary. They were many priests, as the Apostle says, because they were not suffered to continue, by reason of death. We therefore find that in denominating, in opposition to theirs, the priesthood of Christ unchangeable, or which passes not from one to another,—which remains ever vested in the same hands,—the Apostle founds this fact upon Christ's possessing a perpetuity of existence, denied to the men under the law; and this change upon the constitution of our great high-priest under the Gospel we are prepared to expect, so soon as we know how he was named and appointed to the office which he now discharges for his church and people.

He came, descended of no priestly family, and making no claim to respect from his connexion with the house of Aaron. Like that mysterious person, whose priesthood was typical of his own, and who, because he derived his office from none, and left it to none, as did the priests under the

law, is said to have been “without father, without mother, and without descent, having neither beginning of days nor end of years,” the Son of man was ushered into the world a priest of a new character,—the first and the last of his priestly line,—“made not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life,”—exempted from the sinfulness, he was also exempted from the sentence which hath gone forth against all men, because all have sinned,—death, that claimed a right over every descendant of Adam, had no authority over him, who, though of the race of Adam, was yet in his humanity the Son of God. And, though he submitted for a season to its dominion, it was not able to hold him ; he had power to lay down his life, and he had power to take it up again ; and there was no reason in his case, as the Apostle in this chapter has not failed to state, why, having been once constituted to appear in the presence of God for us, his priesthood should ever cease, or ever be demitted into other hands. Having, therefore, offered himself on earth a sacrifice to God, the efficiency of which ever abideth, he passed into the holy place,—even into heaven itself, having wrought out eternal redemption,—there to present that one offering whereby he hath for ever perfected them that are sanctified ; and infinitely removed from the casualty of human things, there to exercise the functions of a priesthood, eternal and unchangeable as the nature of Him of whom it is said that he ever liveth.

You will easily perceive that it is to this point that the language of the Apostle in the text peculiarly restricts our attention. There are many other points in which the glory of the Saviour’s priesthood might be exhibited by contrast with the glory of the priesthood under the law ; in his solemn inauguration into the office by the oath of God himself ; in the virtue and efficiency of that sacrifice which he offered, compared with the blood which could never take away sin ; and in the glory and dignity of that sanctuary at which he ministers,—not in the holy place, made with hands, which is the figure of the true, but in heaven itself, where he hath

appeared in the presence of God for us. In those and other points which might be named, the superior dignity of the Saviour's priesthood is apparent. But not less worthy of our grateful consideration, as that which unites all together, and gives stability to all, is the truth that this priesthood is unchangeable,—that, whilst the men who ministered in the sanctuary on earth served their brief day, and then passed away, and were gathered to their fathers, his ministrations possessed the permanence of his own eternity ; and that so long as a priest shall be needed to meet the daily sins and shortcomings of his people, he remains in every attribute that can render the ministrations of such a high-priest in our behalf either precious or desirable,—Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

In considering the declaration which the Apostle has made, it is obvious that its importance is to be estimated by the relation which it bears to other parts of the Christian system, which are intimately connected with the peace and the hopes of sinful beings ; and that it serves, not so much to bring before us any new quality of the Saviour's priesthood, as to commend a truth concerning it, which exalts and enlarges our views of all that we have known before. When I say of any thing, that it is unchangeable, the amount of the information which I communicate about it, simply is, that it will continue to be what it now is. When the Apostle says, that Christ's priesthood is unchangeable, he merely declares, that in his priestly office he will continue to be what he has been and now is,—he merely gives to all his functions the stamp of permanence. To know its value, therefore, we require to know what the nature and importance of these functions are ; and every one who has felt his own necessities as a sinner, and the need of a mediator, by whom he may draw near to God, may be able to see why such a priesthood as this should be required to meet his wants, and may be able to discern abundant reason for gratitude in the truth, that this man, even Christ, because he continueth ever, should possess a priesthood which shall never pass away from him.

The priesthood of Christ, indeed, is a doctrine in itself so momentous, that on it may be said to rest the whole structure of the Gospel. It was in virtue of this office that the Son of God offered that sacrifice,—the offering of which constitutes the only ground on which any sinner can have confidence toward God, or can expect forgiveness at the hand of God. It was as a priest before God, and by presenting himself to God as an offering of a sweet-smelling savour, that he manifested the harmony of the Divine attributes in the scheme of redemption,—that perfect consistency of infinite holiness and purity in the exercise of the freest mercy, which can alone communicate peace to a conscience enlightened as to the evil and demerit of all sin; and it is the truth that we have such a mediator and advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous, that can alone embolden any,—the holiest of us all, ever needing forgiveness, and ever unworthy to approach unto God,—to do so in the faith, that notwithstanding all our sins he waiteth to be gracious.

In presenting the requests which we may require to prefer one to another, we may find many topics by which to urge and support our plea. We may have something like a claim upon the person with whom it rests to grant it; we have, at any rate, the feeling that, little as we may have benefited, we have not injured him; and the identity of his situation with ours forms of itself some encouragement in urging it. But, when passing from men like ourselves to him who is in himself so far above us, and whom we have, by our iniquities, removed to such an infinite distance from us,—from those on whom we have a claim, to him on whom we can never have any,—and from those whom we may never have offended, or who may have, at any rate, sinful infirmities of their own, to make them tender in dealing with another's sins, to that God, in whose sight even the very heavens are not clean, and whose justice we have provoked in numberless ways by our iniquities,—O, it is not these,—it is not these things, if we know God aright, or know

ourselves aright, it is not the decencies of our own character, or the place that we may hold among our fellows, or the esteem that the world may have of us, or the esteem which at another time we may be ready to have of ourselves, that can communicate any confidence in approaching God,—but the truth, that God has opened a way consistently with his own perfections through the blood of a spotless sacrifice. Every thing, therefore, that touches or affects the stability of that way of access to God, touches a point as virtually important as the stability and the permanence of that hope, without which I must either be truly miserable, or fearfully blinded to the danger that threatens me. It is to this truth that the Apostle bears witness, so often as he speaks of the priesthood of Christ. He tells us that Jesus Christ has been constituted of God the very mediator whom we require,—that whilst possessing all that identity of nature and feeling with ourselves which fits him to have compassion on the ignorant, and on those that are out of the way, he possessed, at the same time, what no priest on earth ever possessed, a power of interceding with God, which will never be refused, because resting on the basis of his divinely-accepted and all-sufficient sacrifice ; and that, uniting in himself a Divine and human nature, he stands forth, not less fitted from the constitution of his person, than from the work which he has accomplished, to mediate between God and man. And nothing more could be required to render him the very person whom our spiritual necessities require, than to be assured that this office which he now discharges he will continue to discharge for us,—that he, who has proved himself, of all others, most deeply interested in our welfare, should carry on to the end the work which he has begun,—and that, amidst the changes which are continually affecting all human things, but which reach not the sanctuary at which he ministers, his office and character as priest over the household of God shall never pass away.

In this view, the unchangeableness of Christ's priesthood, though communicating, as I have already said, no new

truth concerning its nature or its functions, contains the assurance of the stability and permanence of that gracious economy over which he presides. It is virtually an assurance that, by constituting him unchangeable, the way to God by his death cannot and will not be changed,—that the efficacy of that sacrifice which he offered, and still presents to God, continues, and will for ever continue the same,—that his intercession in behalf of all who come to God by him, remains, and will for ever remain, equally prevalent,—and that, in every quality which fits him to discharge for us the most needful and gracious of all offices, he is, and will ever be, the same merciful and faithful high-priest.

On the glory and dignity of an office, not the least honourable of those which the Saviour discharges for sinful men, and which bears particular reference to their condition as sinners, I shall not at this time enlarge. Of this, however, you must be sensible, that it exceeds, in this very view, all the glory that we see around us,—that the mere fact of its being unchangeable, marks it with a character which belongs to no earthly priesthood, and to no earthly dignity,—and that, if it be that very character of heaven which would perhaps strike our minds most forcibly were we carried thither, that every thing there is unchangeable, and all moving on as God has placed it, without the disorder and the confusion incident to human things,—so the very character of him who has there appeared in the presence of God for us, which would also strike us most forcibly, would be this, that he ever liveth to make intercession, and that his ministrations possess the stability and perpetuity of his own Divine nature. Nor is this more glorious to himself than needful and indispensable to us. It places, and it is the only truth that can place, the hope of a sinner on a foundation that will never be moved. It connects the dearest of all interests with something that is in itself unchangeable; and it gives, for the security of him who has cast anchor within the veil, those two immutable things in

which it is impossible for God to lie. Never, then, can you come too humbly confident into the Divine presence; never can you feel too secure of the freeness of the access; and never can you rest too implicitly in the value and the efficacy of the provided ransom, if it be true, as our text declares, that he who is himself the way by whom we are to approach, never changeth; and if, in virtue of the sacrifice which he offered, and of the life which he has received, he possesses and exercises the functions of an unchangeable priesthood.

We have already seen, in the observations to which the language of the Apostle in the context has led us, how such a priesthood contrasts with that under the law. It contrasts no less strikingly, however, with the visible administration of things under the Gospel; and there may be few subjects to the contemplation of which we need to raise our minds more frequently, or which is fitted to be more edifying, than to the consideration, that, amidst all the changes which may be every day occurring, all that is most precious and indispensable for our spiritual interests, is placed beyond the reach of those casualties from which no human thing is exempted. It is difficult for us, living in a world such as that we dwell in, to form a distinct conception of the title which the Apostle applies to the Saviour's priesthood; and there may be few ideas with which our minds are less familiar by experience than that of unchangeableness. The aspect of the world in which we dwell bears indications that it is subject to corruption and decay,—the human beings around us, like the priests of old, are not suffered to continue, by reason of death,—the scenes on which we look,—the society in which we move,—and the connexions which we form, are ever changing and ever requiring to be renewed; and if there be a single object which we have in imagination invested with permanence, it is more than probable that this is the very object of which we shall be made first to feel the instability. In this situation I know not any thing about the Saviour which should endear him more to us, or lead us

to cleave more closely to him, than that he is unchangeable ; or any thing that should excite a deeper thankfulness in our minds than this, that let every other thing pass as it may, he can never, for a single moment, be affected by the vanity of earthly things ; and that every interest that is committed to him, and every hope that is built upon him, possesses the permanence and the stability of his own unchangeable priesthood.

I would be understood, however, as pressing the value and importance of these truths, especially in the view of those changes which may affect the administration of the Gospel, though they cannot affect the Gospel itself ; and as calculated to relieve our minds from that feeling of uncertainty and instability which such changes are ready to occasion. Though it is not now the case that any order of men are constituted priests before God,—though the truth that Christ's priesthood is unchangeable removes the necessity for any such appointment,—and though our office, as ministers of the Gospel, is in many respects different from theirs who presented the offerings of God's people, and acted as intercessors with God in their behalf ; yet, for extending the knowledge of his salvation amongst men,—for bearing testimony to his truth in the world,—and for the edifying of the Church, which is his body, there has been, in every age of the Church, men peculiarly constituted,—men who are called to address you in the name and by the authority of God, and to whose ministrations he has promised and has given his peculiar sanction and blessing. Placed in such a situation, and appointed to address men on subjects that respect their eternal interests,—having every day to bring before the minds of their hearers the most impressive truths, and to support them by the most affecting of all considerations,—leading, on so many occasions, their devotions at the Divine footstool,—and applying the various points of the Gospel to the ever-varying necessities of those amongst whom they minister,—it would say little, either for the faithfulness with which they have discharged their duty, or

for the impression which you have had of its true nature and bearing upon yourselves, were there to be no feeling of a strong and very interesting connexion. And when any of those occasions occur in providence, therefore, which remove a minister from the scene of his labours altogether, or from one scene of labour to another, there may be few that have appreciated the interest and importance of such a connexion, who may not be ready to feel, as if something had been removed which they felt of no small importance to their spiritual well-being. If such changes as these did or could make any change upon the way of access into the Divine presence,—if it was only through the ministrations of men of like passions with yourselves that you could approach God, or be accepted of him,—or if the changes that take place in the sanctuary below, were accompanied by any change in the sanctuary above, such occasions as these would render utterly unstable and uncertain all our hopes; and we should feel as if there were nothing permanent or abiding in that very point where it concerned us most of all to be placed beyond the reach of such casualties. But it is no undervaluing of our office; it manifests no indifference for those intentions which it is designed to serve, and is only forming a right estimate of its place, to say, that there are things beyond its power to influence or to change. And what, after all, is the extent or the operation of those fluctuations that may take place in the administration of the Gospel, if he who presides over all, and who governs in them all, himself possesses and exercises the functions of an unchangeable priesthood?

Whatever effect they may have on our relationship with one another, or with the visible Church of God, they can have no effect on his character, or on that relation in which he stands to his people. They are like those changes that took place upon the Jewish priesthood, and which merely served by contrast to heighten the glory of Christ. The change is confined to the outer court of the sanctuary, and never reaches that most holy place, at which our great high-

priest standeth daily to minister in behalf of all who put their trust in him ; and, though neither uninterested in the greatest or the least of them,—though of far deeper concern to him than they can be to any of us all,—though, as bearing upon the well-being of the humblest of his people, they cannot be disregarded by him, they do not even for a moment disturb that economy, every movement of which is regulated by him, or lay an arrest for a moment upon that grace which he stands ready to dispense and impart to all who come to God by him.

You will readily anticipate the application which these observations have to the situation in which we are now placed ; and you will do me the justice, I am persuaded, to believe, that in so far as they are intended to support and strengthen our minds at this moment, they are as much suggested by the consideration of my own feelings as of yours. It is hardly possible to conceive, connected as we have been for years together, and experiencing, as I have uniformly done, so much Christian kindness from all of you, and having been admitted on so many occasions to share your sorrows and your joys, that I could find myself addressing you for the last time as your minister, without something more than merely natural feelings on the occasion,—without having some anxieties which could only find rest in some such great spiritual truth as our text reveals. When I speak, therefore, of the consolation involved in the truth, that amidst all the shifting and change which there may be in those to whom the dispensation of the Gospel is committed, he who presides over this wonderful economy is still the same, yesterday, to-day, and for ever ; and of the comparative insignificance that attaches to the one, whilst the other remains without any variableness or shadow of turning,—I speak of something which supports me, whilst it humbles me, by making me feel how little loss, after all, can be sustained by those with whom I shall now cease to be connected, when he who has promised to be with his Church and people always, even to the end, possesses an unchangeable priesthood.

I may, however, I trust, without attaching any undue importance to my own labours amongst you, be permitted to think, that these considerations are as suitable to the feelings of some now present as they are to my own. I should be doing many of you as much injustice as I would do myself, after the candid construction which you have put upon my motives in thus withdrawing from you, were I to suppose you destitute of all regret at the separation ; and, whilst none of you can feel, as I do at this moment, the sinful infirmity that has attended all the ministrations of which you have been the objects, I shall hope that there are not a few, who having found through them conveyed that blessing which God has promised to his own Word, in so far as it is delivered, might have wished that our connexion had been more permanent.

Could I only hope that there were more who had so felt, and were, therefore, capable of regarding at this moment the view of the glory of the Saviour which the Apostle opens,—who had, by means of our preaching, been directed to him as the great high-priest of our profession ; who had found pardon and peace in the belief of his all-sufficiency and grace ; and who had thus been brought to look beyond all human instruments to him who is the fountain of every Divine influence, and with whom is the residue of the Spirit,—I should find that there was something in the truth peculiarly qualified to meet the feelings of this hour. As it is, I can only commend those of you who have been thus directed, to him who abideth the same, and whose power and grace can never suffer any withdrawment, through all the fluctuations that may come round upon us. As observed by us, and narrowing our view to this scene of things, such a separation as the present must have in it many things of an afflictive nature. It may be expected to excite a few natural feelings and sympathies,—it dissolves a bond which united, in some degree, a neighbourhood together,—it severs a tie exclusively spiritual, and bearing upon the most important of all interests—and breaks a connexion which may have been found pro-

fitable on both sides for eternity. But though these are things, none of which I would be supposed to undervalue,—though more important far than all human things put together, O, how little are they, when we reflect that the truth still remains which we preached, though we may preach it no more to you,—that, amid all the changes that may be in the sanctuary below, there is, and can be, none in the sanctuary above,—and that he, who is the one mediator of his people, and the head over all things to his Church, possesses the unchangeableness of a Divine nature !

If, amidst the regret which may be felt at this separation, our hearts should be directed with greater simplicity to Christ's all-sufficiency and grace,—if we could only be brought, in the contemplation of his fulness, to lose sight of the instrumentality, the great aim of which consisted in never allowing your minds to rest on itself, but in guiding you to him from whose spirit it can alone derive its efficacy,—and if the experience which we have of the short-livedness of our most intimate connexions, would only bind us more closely to him who abideth ever, I am persuaded we should have no cause to regret, on either hand, the painfulness of such a separation,—and the closing scene of our ministry would teach more effectually than all the rest, that which it has, I trust, been the object of all to inculcate,—that which the Apostle denominates the end of all ministerial conversation,—Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. If these truths could be supposed to derive any commendation, besides that to which their own importance entitles them, from the connexion which has subsisted between us,—I know not the man who, occupying the place which I now do, would not be disposed to give it them. And if there has been any thing about us or our preaching, or ministrations amongst you, that has opened for us any access to your hearts more than others may have, never did we feel more disposed to improve it into an exhortation to be followers of us in so far as in our life, or in our ministry, we have followed Christ.

In the course of a few years,—too short to have allowed us the opportunity of being acquainted with many of you, we have had, at least, the opportunity of addressing not a few, specially and individually, on the things that concerned their peace. We have come into contact with many young minds on that most interesting occasion, when they first devoted themselves publicly to the Saviour at his table; we have accompanied others of you through seasons of deep, and painful, and it may be, long-continued affliction; and if you admit our connexion in this way to give me any claim to address you, as one who has manifested some concern for your best interests, independently of the claim which we have always had on your attention, as speaking in the name, and by the authority of Christ, I know not how I could better improve it than by beseeching you, if you are yet living indifferent to the grace and the glory of a risen Saviour,—this day to receive him as your Lord and your God; or if you have already received and embraced him as all your salvation, to walk in him, rooted and built up in him, that you may connect your weakness with his strength, and may find a refuge in every hour of need, and in every season of change, in the assurance of his Divine unchangeableness.

It had been more gratifying to me than I can tell, if, in the prospect of demitting the pastoral oversight of this congregation, I could have had the satisfaction of knowing that you were immediately to be provided with a pastor according to God's own heart,—one qualified to feed you with knowledge and understanding; and I cannot help feeling that I am leaving those in whom I can never cease to be interested, as sheep not having a shepherd. I am persuaded, however, that by your prayers, and through the grace of Christ, such a pastor will speedily be provided you. For him, and for you, I shall never cease to bow my knees unto the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and in earth is named. And, in the new sphere of duty and of labour, to which we are speedily to repair, and which is not so distant as to forbid the pros-

pect of maintaining our intercourse with you, no tidings shall be more grateful, than the assurance that ye stand fast, being of one mind and one spirit, striving together for the faith of the Gospel. Now "may the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

DISCOURSE SIXTEENTH.

2 CORINTHIANS, v. 1.—For we know, that, if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

ONE of the most popular and striking objections to the doctrine of a life to come has been derived, in all ages, from the effects which death produces on the bodily frame, and the dissolution which follows it. In spite of all that reason can suggest to allay our fears or inspire our hopes, it is impossible for any man, unaided by the light of revelation, to see the gradual decay both of body and of mind which often precedes death,—to perceive one faculty after another giving way as it approaches,—to mark the struggle of expiring nature, and the awful and unbroken silence that follows, without feeling, that, had it been designed of God to put an end to all those expectations of another existence, which are more or less natural to all men, no event could be more fitted to do so than that which consigns a human being to the house appointed for all living; and that it were almost vain to oppose to these sensible proofs that attended the dissolution of the body any of those abstract reasonings which might lead us to hope, that though the body had returned to the dust out of which it was made, yet the spirit had returned unto God who gave it.

It may be for this reason among others, and to suit with a

feeling natural to every mind, that the Word of God, in speaking of the life to come, so much more frequently insists upon the resurrection of the body, than simply on the immortality of the soul ; and that its object is not so much to furnish us with proofs that there shall be a life hereafter, as to assure us, that in this life both body and soul shall participate. On neither of these subjects, indeed, has it left us without sufficient information. We are not permitted to continue in doubt that the soul can exist apart from the body,—that it still survives the effects of dissolution, and remains unscathed, though the tabernacle in which it dwelt may be taken down. But the subject on which the Bible delights to dwell, and to which its proofs are most frequently directed, is the truth of the resurrection ; it takes up the question of our immortality on the very point where nature leaves us altogether in darkness ; it bids us regard the very event which seems ready to extinguish all our hopes as but a step in the purpose of God towards their accomplishment, and the dissolution of the earthly tabernacle as only the forerunner to “ a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

I need not say that we have a striking example of this in our text, and the *first* truth which it may be considered as declaring is, that there shall be a blessed resurrection to life. When the Apostle says, “ We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,” it is obvious, from the remarks already made, that his knowledge must have been derived, not from reason, but from a Divine testimony. The dissolution of the earthly tabernacle is one of those truths, indeed, which are presented to our senses, and of which we may have every day sensible proof ; we see it taking effect upon our fellow-men around us, and we feel it in the gradual decay and disease to which our own frame is subjected ; but beyond this our knowledge extends not. That the body, after its dissolution into its primitive

elements, shall ever rise again ; that it shall rise a far more glorious body than it was ; that when the earthly house is taken down, there shall be provided for the spirit a heavenly and eternal dwelling-place ; that what is sown in dishonour shall be raised in glory ; and that the dissolution of the frail and perishable tenement in which the spirit is confined, is only the forerunner to its being provided with a habitation meet for the immortal spirit to inhabit,—these are truths of which our reason or experience gives no indication ; and when the Apostle spoke of knowing this glorious truth, not doubtfully, but as a truth of which he was fully assured, we cannot question that he referred to a source that was alone competent to furnish satisfactory information on a subject, not merely so far above nature, but, I had almost said, so plainly opposed to it. He knew it, and those in whose name he speaks knew it, as they knew any of those truths which were the objects of faith, not of sense,—they were persuaded of it through the medium of a Divine revelation. It came to them accredited by the very same testimony, and authenticated by the very same miracles, which had ensured their confidence in the Christian system,—it was a part of that truth which the Son of God had published, and had instructed them to publish,—and, far removed as it might be from the apprehensions of men, opposed as it would seem to sense, and destitute of any confirmation from experience, it still rested on an authority which they could not dispute, and which led them to speak of it, not as a bare possibility, or as a thing which they had reason to expect, but as a truth for which they had the most undoubted evidence. “ *We know,*” says the Apostle, “ that we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

If the Apostle had been to refer to one evidence of the truth of the Gospel more than another, in proof of the doctrine in question, we cannot doubt, from the relation in which it stands to it, and the use which he elsewhere makes of it, that he had instanced the resurrection of our blessed

Lord ; and they who have attended to the importance of that fact, and to its connexion with the general truth of the resurrection, will be able at once to perceive in what way it adds to all our convictions of its certainty. Jesus Christ had died, and revived, and risen again, that he might be the Lord of the dead and of the living,—he had manifested in his own person that the empire of death was not perpetual or irreversible,—he had given ocular proof that a resurrection was not impossible,—he had overcome death, and him that had the power of death,—and in the fact of his own triumph over it, he had given the most incontestible evidence to all his followers of his power to redeem them from its dominion, and to make their bodies like to his own glorious body. And, standing on this high ground, he could say, with that confidence which admits of no doubt, “ We know that if our earthly house were dissolved, we have a building of God, eternal in the heavens.”

It is substantially on the very same evidence that our assurance of a life of blessedness hereafter must be built ; and it is worthy of our attention to remark the terms in which the Apostle speaks of it. He speaks of the body which we now possess as the earthly house of the tabernacle,—as a mere tent, never intended as a permanent lodging-place for the immortal spirit,—as a mere temporary residence, soon to be taken down and dissolved, and incapable of affording any longer the shelter which it may for a season furnish. But he speaks of it in this way, only that he may, by contrast, give us more exalted conceptions of the dwelling-place that shall one day be reared for it,—only that he may lift our minds, by contemplating the frailty of the one, to conceive of the excellency and permanency of the other. He speaks of it as a building of God ; for, though the body which we now possess, is, no less than this will be, the framing of the Divine architect, yet the entrance of sin, since it first came forth from his hands, has marred its beauty, and made it liable to corruption,—he speaks of it as not made with hands, to denote its heavenly origin, and its freedom

from all earthly pollution. And above all, he speaks of it as eternal,—not a mere temporary dwelling-place as that which it succeeds,—not a body subject to suffering, and disease, and death,—not a body that is fast hastening to dissolution, and which must soon return to its primitive elements, but as partaking of the permanency of those heavenly mansions which it is destined to inhabit, and worthy of the immortal spirit which it is reared to enclose,—a body unlike that frail tenement which we now carry about with us, but destined to bear for ever the bloom and the freshness of immortality. Hear what the same blessed Apostle, speaking of it by like contrast, elsewhere says,—“ It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption ; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory ; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power ; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.”

You will easily perceive, that though the truth on which the Apostle thus insists is properly the resurrection of the body, yet it does necessarily involve in it the union of soul and body in blessedness ; and great as the truth might be, that there is a life after the present, and that the soul shall never die ; and, though we might hail it as a mighty discovery, if assured of this on a Divine testimony, it is yet, for every practical purpose, far more important for us to know, that the life which we shall then live, will be a life so nearly approaching to the present, as that we shall still possess the same nature, and be capable of tasting the same sources of happiness which we here possess and enjoy. As a matter of abstract speculation, the one may appear to some minds as interesting as the other, and some have, indeed, imagined that deliverance from the body would be deliverance from an union that clogged and fettered all the exertions of the spiritual principles within us. But, in its accommodation to the constitution of a human nature, who does not perceive the difference between a blessedness of which we can conceive so little as that of a separate spirit, and a blessedness

which, refined as it may be, is still the blessedness in which we may now share? Who does not perceive and feel, that though the one may interest and engage us, it is only the other which can ever truly become to us the object of desire, or that will most easily draw out our affections towards it,—as were those of the Apostle, when he wished that mortality might be swallowed up of life.

Secondly,—I remark, that the declaration of our text expresses the assurance of the Apostle Paul, and of those in whose name he wrote, that they should participate in this blessed resurrection to life.

You will readily observe, that this contains the essence, if I may so speak, of our text,—that it is no mere assertion of the general truth that the body shall rise again a more glorious body, and so continue for ever united to the soul in bliss, but a declaration of his own personal interest in this great restoration. It is adduced, you may see, as a reason why he accounted the various afflictions with which he was visited as of small moment, why he fainted not amidst all the evils that surrounded him, why he could say of the greatest of them that they were light afflictions,—that, though they might hasten the dissolution of the earthly tabernacle, he yet knew that he had a building of God, eternal in the heavens. The same thing is no less evident from surveying the feelings which he expresses throughout the chapter. If he, and they in whose name he speaks, had no assurance of their personal interest in this great truth, the whole train of feelings which he here expresses would be utterly without foundation,—they would be feelings which there was nothing either to call forth or to sustain. For, how could he earnestly desire to be clothed upon with the house which is from heaven,—how could he be willing to be absent from the body and present with the Lord, and give utterance to those expressions of hope and confidence which meet you every where in this chapter, unless he knew and was persuaded

(in what way we shall yet inquire) that the dissolution of his earthly tabernacle was only a step towards the rearing of a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens ?

I shall not require to prove that this is a thing essentially different from the simple belief that the body shall rise again, and that there shall be a resurrection to life ; for, amongst all those who may have no doubt of the truth of the doctrine, considered as a part of the Word of God, how few are there who can join in the language which the Apostle employs, or who can look upon death, and the life that is to succeed it, with the same feelings of confidence and desire ! Though the Scriptures have abundantly assured us, both of a life of blessedness hereafter, and in what way that life may become our own, it by no means follows that the admission of the one carries along with it the other. If there is a resurrection to life, it is no less certain that there is a resurrection to shame and everlasting contempt,—that there is as much to excite our fears in the truth of our immortality as to animate our hopes,—and that the feeling with which many may regard, and have good reason to regard, the life to come, may be more nearly allied to dread and apprehension than confidence and desire. In the mind of the Apostle, however, and as he regarded it, these two things were united,—he felt, or seemed to feel, almost with the same security as that there should be a life of blessedness at all, that he should be the partaker of it. The truth came home to his mind, with all the feeling of his own personal and indestructible interest in it ; and whenever he looked with this faith at the things that were unseen and eternal, he felt the evils and the trials of life passing away in the view of the coming glory. Considered in this light, all the sentiments to which he gives utterance, appear at once natural,—the very sentiments which all of us, in his circumstances, would utter. His eager desire for the time when mortality should be swallowed up of life,—his wish to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord,—his labouring to be accepted of Christ at his judgment-seat,—all these, very far

removed as they may be from ordinary feelings and apprehensions, were the natural, I had almost said, the necessary fruits of his faith. It became then as natural for him to have his affections and desires set on heavenly and eternal things, as it is for those who have not his hope, to cling to the objects of a present world ; and it ceased to be an impossibility,—it ceased almost to require any act of heroic virtue, to think little of the trials of life, when he knew the sure and lasting blessedness that was in reserve for him.

I can scarcely suppose it necessary to commend to any one, a state of mind which every human being who has reflected on his condition in this world must have felt to be desirable. Death is one of those events which no man can hope to escape by all his prudence and sagacity ; and one of those events to the approach of which we can hardly be insensible. It is so often pressed upon our consideration, that it may at times require an effort to put the thought of it away from us ; and he must manifest an indifference and a regardlessness to his own interests, to which nothing in human life besides affords any parallel, who has never weighed the consequences which death may bring along with it, or who has never thought of providing for himself a refuge, when those things in which he now seeks his happiness and enjoyment have failed. Let him be habitually insensible to the concerns of a spiritual world, there will be moments when these will force themselves upon him, —and moments even, when he could hardly account any sacrifice too great for the possession of a hope like that which inspired the breast of the Apostle. At any rate, there is a time approaching when he shall find such a hope as this to be the only thing that can sustain him ; when it shall remain the only thing that can minister strength or consolation ; and when he shall account all things but loss in comparison with it. And how necessary is it, against this time, that he should be provided with the confidence which may stand him instead, when every thing besides has failed ! The man who is fortified by such a confident persuasion of

future blessedness as that of the Apostle, may meet death, and look forward to death, not only without apprehension, but with joyful desire ; he may see the earthly tabernacle taken down without a single wish that it should be longer preserved ; he may hail with pleasure the loosening of every joint, and the failure of every part of the frame, as another step towards his enlargement ; he may watch every new symptom of decaying nature with the feeling of one who is persuaded that it is only hastening on the time when he shall emerge into eternal day ; and painful as it may be in itself, and at variance with all nature's feelings and nature's desires, may he, through the strength of faith, so prevail over nature, as to regard the process of dissolution merely as a step through which mortality is to be swallowed up of life.

It will naturally be asked, however, in what way the Apostle, and those in whose name he writes, came to attain such a persuasion of their interest in those blessings ? How did he know, or they know (for he appears to have spoken in the name of believers generally), that when the earthly tabernacle was dissolved, such a building of God was prepared for them ? Was it a singular privilege in which they, and they only, were destined to share, and which now remains to us an object which we can hardly hope to reach ; or does it rest on a foundation on which we may also build the same confident hope ? I need hardly say to any one acquainted with the Word of God, or with the tenor of the epistles of Paul, that this hope rested on the merits and incarnation of the Saviour ; and whatever pretension may have been at times made to the possession of such a spirit, apart from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is only amongst those who have made him the object of their trust and homage, that it has ever been realized. Apart, indeed, from the truth of the Redeemer's resurrection, what solid ground have we to expect that there is such a state of blessedness at all ? And what is there, amidst all the darkness of nature and the fears of guilt, to lighten up the gloomy mansions of the

grave, if it be not in the truth of one who overcame death, and who has opened the way to glory and immortality by his peace-speaking blood. It was faith in the efficacy of his death and in the power of his intercession ; it was by believing that he had purchased eternal life for all that would receive it as the free gift of God through him, and that, surrendering themselves to his guidance, and depending on his promises, were assured that they should never find his faithfulness to fail ; it was this that raised the Apostle and his fellow-believers from the uncertainty and the fears of nature, and put them in possession of so bright and blessed a hope ; and never would they have thought of referring you to any other ground of confidence, saving what the Lord, their Redeemer, had done for them, and what they trusted in his power and grace yet to fulfil.

But though all their hope was finally to be traced to this, —and the same ground of hope, be it ever remembered, is presented to every sinner in the Word of God ; it was not this alone that enabled the Apostle to adopt the language of our text. There was a new assurance that had sprung up from the former, and which came in to strengthen it. There had been given them something like an earnest that the purchased possession would be theirs ; they could refer to certain things which they had themselves known, and felt, and experienced ; and it served no doubt to increase their confidence, and assure their hearts, when they found this faith and this experience going hand in hand together. The Apostle adverts to this Divine influence, when he says, verse fifth, that “ He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.” And what the earnest of the Spirit was, may be sufficiently understood from the nature and work of the Holy Spirit. It was, unquestionably, his purifying and sanctifying influences,—that light, and purity, and holiness, by which his presence and his working in their hearts were made known to them,—that Divine power, in virtue of which they were sealed to the day of redemption,—set apart,

as it were, and marked out as the heirs of future glory, because receiving an earnest of the blessedness that they were hereafter to attain. And it was this that preserved the mind of the Apostle in that state of equanimity, which enabled him to say, "We are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." He found in himself, not merely that God had enabled him to trust in his promised mercy unto eternal life, but that he was, through the influence of the Spirit, preparing him for its enjoyment. He found in the desires, and feelings, and habits of a regenerated nature, that old things were done away, and all things become new. He was able to trace in the change that was wrought upon his soul, the proof that it was already training up for another and a nobler dwelling-place; and he could therefore say, with all the confidence which faith and experience could inspire, that he knew that, "though the earthly house of this our tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

To those who are destitute of such a hope as that of the Apostle, and who are careless as to its attainment, the observations now made may, by the Divine blessing, be useful in directing you to a subject to which, if your minds are indifferent, it can only be because they are never directed to it as a subject of affecting contemplation; and, disposed as you may be at times to undervalue the hopes and consolations of the Gospel, I venture to say that there is no one who can honestly despise such a sentiment as that of the Apostle, and who must not, at the same time, find himself greatly inferior to the man who can, with equal truth and consistency, give utterance to it. Let a man look around him for interesting subjects of consideration, such as are fitted to engage his better nature, and fill his mind with the most profitable reflection, and are the most necessary to his peace and happiness, and where will he find one so worthy of a reasonable and immortal being, as the truth of his own eternal existence? And how can you justify your neglect of a truth so

clearly revealed, and so abundantly confirmed?—how can you consent to remain indifferent to a truth so nearly concerning you, so imperatively demanding your consideration, except on principles which prove you insensible to all that exalts and distinguishes your nature, and which show that you would rather remain in brutish ignorance of futurity, than awaken to the glorious prospects and hopes of an immortal being?

The observations now made have also an application to those who, though they cannot, perhaps, be called either indifferent or unbelieving about eternal things, are yet content to rest in certain very dim and indefinite views of them, without ever attaining, or almost seeking to attain, the confidence expressed in our text. I am willing to believe that there may be many, and those, too, humble and sincere Christians, who are anxiously seeking the attainment of such a confidence, but who have not found it; and who, either from imperfect views of the Gospel, or too jealous and suspicious a spirit in themselves, are making little or no progress in reaching it. But what shall we say of those who are living contentedly in this condition,—who are seeing death and judgment approach, without having any desire to be made meet for the one or for the other, and who are risking on a mere peradventure all that is important in eternal life? We have seen that God has not left us destitute of the means of reaching such a confidence, any more than he did the first believers,—that he gives us the same promises, and will give us, if we ask him, the same earnest of the Spirit. And surely, were eternal blessings prized as they should be,—were our minds but exercised about them as they ought to be exercised,—were there more prayer, and more earnest and humble desire to walk with God, there would be more assurance,—men would not, and could not, remain in such ignorance of their title to so blessed an inheritance; and it is only because they are so immersed in worldliness, and so indifferent about spiritual blessings, that there are so few who can be said to make their calling and election sure.

In conclusion, let me remind those, of whom I trust there are not a few now present, who have attained to the hope, and can join in the language of the Apostle, of their obligations to the riches of Divine grace. I need not tell you how such a hope is to be prized, and how carefully it is to be cherished,—that it is, indeed, as an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast; and a hope, the value of which is every day increasing, as the period approaches when it is to be realized. But surely I may say, that if there are any of whom we may entertain high expectations, it is of those whom God has so signally favoured; and if there be any truth, the faith of which is fitted to refine and exalt our nature, it is surely that which elevates us above the trials of the present life, and which is so full of promise for the life that lies beyond it. What superiority to the sins and vanities of the world!—what purity of mind and elevation of principle!—what patience in the midst of affliction!—what submission to the various events of Divine providence!—what disinterested benevolence and active usefulness ought to characterize those, who have this confidence of a treasure laid up in the heavens, beyond the reach of this world's change to affect it! And could there be any deeper stain cast on our faith, or any fouler contempt done to the Spirit of all grace, than if, by your forgetfulness of this hope, or your neglect in improving it, you should convey to others the impression, or lead them from your conduct to infer, that you are as worldly, or as selfish, or as sensual, as they who make no pretensions to such a profession. “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent, that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.”

DISCOURSE SEVENTEENTH.

2 CORINTHIANS, v. 4.—We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened.

THERE are two things that are perpetually serving to quicken the mind of the Christian, in his desires after the life to come. In the first place, there is the intrinsic excellency and desirableness of eternal life itself, as exhibited in the Word of God; and there is, in the second place, that continual experience of trial and suffering in this world, which is, in some degree or other, essential to its very nature. Even though the life which we lived in the body were far more enviable than it actually is, there is, in the representations of blessedness hereafter, as proposed to our faith in the Scripture, something so surpassingly grand and elevated,—something so much calculated to awaken every principle of our intellectual and moral being,—something so well fitted to meet the desires of our new and better nature,—as it would be impossible for any Christian distinctly to realize, and, at the same time, be assured that this blessedness was in store for him, without desiring it, and without feeling his soul at times so kindled and ravished by the prospects which it holds out to him, of admittance to a glory that it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive, that he could hardly but wish to anticipate the time, when the earthly tabernacle shall be dissolved.

It is, at the same time, obvious, that this view must be much quickened and incited by the daily experience of human life, considered as a scene in which sin and suffering are so deeply mingled. Whenever disposed to cease from contemplating the high things of faith, there will always be something occurring in the world, or something recurring to himself, to make a man feel that this is not his rest,—some event will be always taking place, to show him the emptiness and insufficiency of this world's happiness; and something, therefore, to throw him with entire simplicity upon those hopes of blessedness which the Scripture has given him in the world that is to come,—something calculated to endear and render them more precious to him, and therefore fitted to make them more than ever the objects of desire.

You will be able to trace both these sentiments in the mind of the Apostle. He had, in the opening of this chapter, expressed his firm belief in the truth of a resurrection to life, and his firm persuasion of an interest in its blessed promises and hopes. He had expressed, in short but emphatic words, his views of its glory and excellency as a building of God,—“an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” And realizing this, you may naturally find him expressing those desires after it, which the hope of such an inheritance was fitted to call forth; and anticipating its coming, with the joy of one who felt the solidity and permanence of the happiness which it promised. But mingled with this, and giving strength to this, you find him also alluding to the sorrows which he felt and experienced in this world,—to the burden under which he laboured whilst dwelling in this earthly tabernacle, which made him long more earnestly for the promised deliverance, and which, though there had been no hope beyond the world, he had continued to endure as a thing from which to escape was vain,—yet which, with the prospects on which he confidently rested, could not but quicken his desires for the coming of the time, when mortality should be swallowed up of life.

I have already, in a previous discourse, had occasion to

advert to some of those distinguishing features of the blessedness to be revealed, as brought before us by the Apostle, which are fitted to make it the object of desire to a Christian, and shall not again return to the subject. But it may be necessary for the full explanation of his meaning, to show in what way these desires were stimulated by what he experienced, and what every Christian is called to experience in the world; and what was the nature of that painfulness which led him to say, “ We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened.”

I. In order to illustrate this, I shall not require to present any other views of human life than such as are familiar to those who may be destitute of the peculiar hopes of the Apostle,—such as are common to all men, and are, more or less, confirmed by the experience of every hour; for who does not know, or who has not felt, that this world is a world of suffering?—who does not know, or who has not felt, that, with all the blessings which are to be found in it, sorrow and pain are mingled?—and that the complicated cares and trials which are found, more or less, in the lot of every human being, constitute a burden, of which he would gladly be rid,—and which he feels not to be the more tolerable, because he must submit to it, and continue to bear it, as part of the inheritance to which he is born as the possessor of a sinful nature, and the inhabitant of a world that is suffering under the curse of sin.

Of these views of human life, no man perhaps is altogether destitute, even in circumstances where the world may think he has least cause to entertain them. There is often felt a sense of the vanity and insufficiency of its enjoyments, even at the time when these are most fully tasted; and he must be destitute, not merely of all just reflection on his own condition, but of all true sympathy for the condition of others, who has never felt that oppression and sickness of heart, which nothing in the compass of the world can fully mitigate or relieve.

It is not to be supposed, that there is any thing in the condition of Christians in this world to shelter them from the experience of this bitterness,—or any thing in their peculiar character to render them insensible to it. They are exposed to the same afflictions as other men; nor will those views which they entertain of the presence and providence of God, however they may reconcile them to these, change their nature, or make them indifferent to deliverance; and there is, in the very character of a Christian, something, which, if it does not allow him to dwell so much as others on his own sufferings, renders him more alive to the sorrows and sufferings of those around him.

The influence which the Gospel produces on his character, disposes him, more than others, to weep with those that weep, as well as to rejoice with those who rejoice; he cannot, with his Christian feelings in exercise, wrap himself up in a cold and inaccessible selfishness; he cannot put away the claims which his fellow-men have upon his sympathy or his aid, with the indifference that too often meets them in the world; he cannot look upon them as involved in the same calamities with himself, the fruit of the same sinful nature, without finding his Christian sympathies awakened in their behalf. Others may, through a certain happy, or shall I call it unhappy, lightness of nature?—a certain fickleness and levity of mind, which enables them to pass easily from any painful object,—divert all thought of the suffering around them, and surrender themselves to every vain amusement of the passing hour. But there is something too serious and thoughtful in the character of a Christian to stoop to such frivolity. His mind is too well disciplined to seriousness,—too much accustomed to solemn views of life, to enable him to hide from himself the suffering that abounds in the world. And no wonder, therefore, if, in a world where scenes so painful are ever occurring,—where men are every day made to feel the disappointments of their dearest hopes,—where they are left the prey of disease and suffering,—and where death is ever coming in to break up every

scene of tenderness and endearment ; and, above all, in a world where sin reigns so fearfully, and is so pregnant with the bitterest of all misery,—no wonder if the sorrows of others, in addition to those which may be inseparable from his own condition, should prompt many a wish in the mind of a Christian, after another and better state of existence.

I do not know, indeed, any thing which could reconcile a mind of ordinary Christian sensibility to this world at all, were it not for the hope that the suffering which abounds in it is fitted and intended to be the means of conveying some greater good ; and, that men are here placed in a state of discipline and improvement, by which sin and sorrow are designed to work out their own cure. But for this, the view of human life which is every where presented is so manifest, that almost every thing would appear desirable that would shut it out from our minds ; nor could any man well bear the thought of being condemned for ever to remain in it. Yet, though the knowledge of this truth, to which there are so many interesting testimonies, may reconcile the Christian to the world, it cannot render him insensible to its sufferings, or take away the desire of deliverance,—nor can it hinder him from going out in earnest expectation after the time, when he shall be placed for ever beyond the reach of its painfulness.

The Apostle has, by a strong figure, represented this as the common desire of the inanimate, as well as the living and intelligent creation. “ For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves, groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body.” And, if such be the effect of the sorrows, and disappointments, and unsatisfying nature of the world, that they who are destitute of Christian hopes, are often sick at heart of its very pleasures, and wearied even to very loathing, what must be the effect of it upon those who have the prospects of the Gospel in reserve for them? Must not the natural

experience of human life endear every view of a world, in which all those painful and trying scenes shall have no place? and must not its peace and its blessedness, the perpetuity of its connexions, and the unchangeableness of all its pleasures,—and above all, the absence of sin, be felt to be dearer and more desirable, when he looks forth upon them from a world in which sin, and sorrow, and death, are so fearfully and terribly mingled?

II. I remark, that that which, in the text, is presented, as quickening the desires of a Christian after eternal life, is the burden of a sinful nature.

It is obvious that, in this burden, the Christian shares equally with those around him; and there is no man perhaps, however careless or indifferent as to the consequences of sin, who has not, in some degree, felt it to be a burden. There is no man who has not found himself led away, by the power of sin, into a course of conduct which his better judgment abhorred; who has not, under the influence of sinful passion and desire, been led into much misery, and much guilt; and who has not, at times, breathed out some wishes,—sincere enough, I doubt not, at the moment, though neither very importunate nor very lasting,—after deliverance from that power which carried it so often over the better feelings of his nature. This may be an experience very common amongst those even, who are yet habitually the willing servants of sin. In this case, however, though there may be some feeling of its iniquity, and, at times, a faint opposition to it, it can hardly be said that it is felt as a burden; that there is a conflict maintained with it; or, that there is any of that peculiar experience, which gives to the life of a Christian in this world its sorest bitterness. Such men are destitute of that love of holiness, that unceasing desire after its attainment, and that feeling of its necessity to their happiness, which are more or less experienced by every Christian,—and they cannot know the painfulness, therefore, that results from having their desires incessantly crossed and op-

posed, by the presence of a sinful nature, ever ready to tempt them, and requiring all their watchfulness and prayer that they may not be led astray.

It is to this peculiarity that we advert, when we speak of the burden of a sinful nature, as that under which the Christian groans. He is conscious to himself of certain desires after conformity to the Divine will, which are urging him to the love and the practice of all holiness,—of aspirations after a purity of character which he has not yet realized, but with which he sees that his real happiness is identified ; and he is led, therefore, to seek after purifying himself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord. To this he is constrained by all the obligations which can, or ought to be, with him the most sacred ; and for the attainment of this, he has the promise of all Divine assistance in every time of need. But then he is, at the same time, conscious of a law in his members that warreth against the law of his mind,—of an enemy to his peace, so near him, as to be the sin that dwelleth in him. So entwined is this with his very existence and being, that he can never hope to be perfectly delivered from it in this world. “The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh ; and these are contrary, the one to the other, so that he cannot do the things which he would ;” and there thus results a painful, protracted, and unceasing struggle between the power of sin and the power of that new and better nature which is destined finally to prevail.

This constitutes what has been commonly and strikingly called the Christian conflict,—a name often employed,—and, it is to be feared, by those who are ignorant of the thing which it is intended to signify,—in mockery and derision of a sacred subject. But, for all this, it is no less truly and expressively applied to designate a state of things familiar to Christian experience ; involving in it many a painful endeavour, and presenting all the variety of success and discomfiture that are to be found in any conflict, where two principles, so opposite in their nature as light and darkness,

meet together; and which cannot be maintained without many a painful struggle, and many a mortifying experience of the strength and power of corruption. The Apostle Paul has shown us that he was not ignorant of this, and has depicted it in language, the accuracy and faithfulness of which have been subscribed to by Christians in every age. "The good that I would, I do not, but the evil that I would not, that do I."—"I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me."—"For I delight in the law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members." And he has himself expressed the bitterness of such a warfare, in terms which showed how truly he longed after deliverance from it—"O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

Such, in fact, is, and must be, the feeling of every Christian in regard to a state of things so contrary to the rest and peace which every man courts; and, above all, so contrary to the desires which are dearest to him. To such a state he can never be reconciled, any more than he could be reconciled to a cruel and unwilling bondage,—any more than he could be reconciled to a fellowship with which he had no sympathy, and from which every better feeling continually revolted. It is not in grace even to prevent him from looking forward to the termination of this warfare, with the same feeling with which a captive anticipates the termination of his captivity, and with which the bondman anticipates the hour that is to set him free. And when he is apprized, therefore, that this conflict shall end, when mortality is swallowed up of life,—that the body which he will then wear shall be like to the Saviour's own glorious body, over which sin shall have no longer any power, it is impossible but that the state of blessedness thus held out to him should be more cordially relished, from its very opposition to the state in which he now lives; and that the daily consideration of repressed desires and mortified wishes should quicken his longings

after the time when every wish shall be satisfied, and every desire after holiness fulfilled.

Let it not be thought, however, when we speak of the burden of a sinful nature as prompting the Christian to desire the blessedness to be revealed, that we speak of a desire merely selfish, or such as concern for his own happiness simply prompts. It is connected, I am persuaded, with a much more elevated feeling, however this may mingle with it. Of all the dark and painful experience which a Christian has in his contest with sin in this world, the most painful will be that of so often grieving God by his iniquities, and that his endeavours to honour and to serve him should fall so very far short of his obligations. And of all the trials which he is required to meet in the warfare, the bitterest will be the consciousness of so often suffering himself to be led from that purity that becomes him, into forgetfulness of his highest obligations.

Of these sins, were they reckoned up in order, it may be that others might make small account, or perhaps they would not be disposed to regard them as sins at all ; but, connected as he is with God, as his Father in heaven,—alive to the claim which he has instituted upon him, as purchased by the blood of his only begotten Son,—and aware of the breadth and purity of his law, not even the least of them, whenever he discerns it, can pass unnoticed. Nor will it mitigate his painfulness, but only increase it, when he knows, that it will always be thus with him, so long as he is connected with a body of sin and death ; and that he will ever have to feel and acknowledge that iniquities are ready to prevail against him.

Accordingly, you will find in the history of holy men, as set forth in the Word of God, that this constitutes a prominent source of lamentation,—that it is one of those things, on account of which they desire continually to be humbled ; and, if there be a single thing which can reconcile a renewed soul to death, and make even the grave welcome, it is surely the hope that he shall then cease from sin as well as from

suffering, and no more grieve or do despite to the Spirit of all grace. The desire of rest, and peace, and happiness,—the longing that the warfare were ended, and the triumph begun, may be selfish, but this is not selfish. It is prompted by the very highest and most disinterested feeling of our nature,—the desire to be conformed to a will in all things holy, just, and good; and the soul only does that homage which is due to Him to whom all praise belongeth, when, with this expression of its insufficiency aright to serve him, it waiteth and desireth the coming of that time when we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

It was, I conceive, the experience of these things which gave to the earnest desires of the Apostle in the text not a little of their peculiar fervour. Considered in itself, the blessedness to be revealed might well have drawn forth his longings after its attainment, and the enduring and elevated character of its happiness,—the full and perfect glory of an immortal nature,—might have led him to anticipate the time when these should be fully realized. But, beset as he was by the daily and more than ordinary trials of life,—having to combat with fightings from without, and yet more sorely to combat with corruption from within,—exposed to the painfulness of struggling with a sinful nature, and grieved oftentimes by the power with which it assailed him,—it was impossible that such an experience should not give a keener edge to his desires, and impart a stronger relish to every hope which the Gospel communicated.

So will it be, in fact, with every Christian. And though such desires will often be checked by regard to those whose interests may be dearer to him than his own, and must always be entertained and expressed with submission to the Divine will,—though he may often find himself, even when his Christian feelings are in their purest exercise, like the Apostle, “in a strait betwixt two,”—yet the experience of human life which he is called to meet, and the power of sin which he will every day feel, must tend, under God, to ripen in every Christian the same spirit; and, with a feeling higher

and better than can be prompted by weariness of life, or a merely selfish concern for his own happiness,—with a feeling allied to every thing that is best and purest in his nature, may he be willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord.

The first feeling which the review of this subject is fitted to awaken in the minds of my Christian brethren will, I am sure, be that of gratitude to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for having opened up to us, amidst the trials and difficulties of a present world, such a prospect as the Gospel presents. Were it otherwise indeed,—were human life the scene of trial which we now find it to be, and had we no light from the sanctuary above to lighten the gloom of the path in which we may be oftentimes called to tread,—were there nothing more inviting to which we could turn, in the midst of its adversities and sorrows, than the stillness of the grave, or the faint and feeble hope that nature may give beyond it, how miserable must our condition be ! Or were it possible to conceive in this situation that the Christian could be, constituted as he now is, panting after a happiness which he was never to reach, and with desires that were never to be gratified,—with no more cheering prospect before him than rest from his labours,—without any assurance of a reward for his faithfulness, or of a perfect welcome into the joy of his Lord,—how insupportable would be the load which he is now called to bear, and how unavailing his wishes after deliverance from this body of death ! Blessed be God, however, it is not so with any of us who have believed on Christ Jesus the Lord, and need not be so with any man, so long as the Gospel is revealed. Blessed be his name, that of his abundant mercy he hath begotten us again to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,—that he has enabled us to expect and wait for a happy issue out of all our adversities, and a sure conquest over all our enemies, even over the greatest and the last of them ; and that, continuing in the way of faith and holiness, an entrance shall be at last administered unto us into his everlasting kingdom,—

to the possession of a blessedness, for which all the trials and afflictions of life are only ripening us, and which they are only preparing us more keenly to relish and enjoy. “ Be patient, therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient ; stablish your hearts ; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.”

Our second application of the subject would be to those who, though professing to entertain the same hopes as the Apostle, are, nevertheless, ignorant of those peculiar desires which gave such an elevation to his character in the prospect of realizing them. I fear that there are many of this class, —many who profess to entertain the hope of eternal life through the Saviour, and yet on whose mind this hope has made so feeble an impression, as scarcely ever to have arrested them in their career of worldliness, and far less enabled them to maintain this world in that state of subordination to another, which the Gospel requires,—whose minds, except, perhaps, in moments of deep affliction, see so little in heaven to be desirable, that the thought of it seldom finds entrance into them at all,—and who regard the prospect of heaven rather as a kind of convenient resource, when every other shall have failed them, than as that which should be to them at this moment, and even when all things in the world are going well with them, the object of their most delightful contemplation.

To say the least of it, these are guilty of a very great inconsistency ; and it would be found, I fear, of very many of them, that they were really destitute of the hope which they professed to have, and that there was nothing in it of the specific character which belongs to the hope of a Christian. But one thing is certain, that if heaven has ceased to be to you, or has never been to you, the object of continued desire, it is only because you have ceased to maintain, or never possessed, the character of those who are travelling on the road to it,—and that if it exerts no influence over your affec-

tions and views, it is only because holiness has ceased to be desirable, or because you have become indifferent to its attainment. There is, we have seen, a close and intimate connexion between the right and healthful state of a Christian mind, and the blessedness that is opened up to us in the Word of God,—a suitableness of the latter to the wants and wishes of the former, which must infallibly excite our desires after its attainment ; and if that desire is not found at all in you, one reason will be found to be, that you are not maintaining the attitude or the warfare of a Christian,—that you are not feeling the burden of sin, and are not, therefore, contending against it, else you would have been led to long and to wait for that time, when we shall be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven ; and when absent from the body, we shall be present with the Lord.

DISCOURSE EIGHTEENTH.

2 CORINTHIANS, v. 7.—We walk by faith, not by sight.

THESE words appear to many to involve some very profound and unintelligible mystery ; as to which they, therefore, think themselves excused from having any very clear and definite ideas. The term faith, whenever it is employed in the New Testament, appears to them to refer to some operation of the mind, as indistinct and impalpable, as do any of those unseen things about which faith is conversant. It is conceived to be so very peculiar, that they can find nothing in the ordinary sphere of human life with which to compare it ; and having no very great desire to be acquainted with its real nature, they become very readily satisfied that, if they who employ it most frequently themselves, know what meaning they attach to it, it is a meaning which is not susceptible of being conveyed to the mind of another.

Yet for all the prejudice that exists on the subject, we venture to affirm, that there is nothing more simple in itself, and nothing with which your minds are more familiar, than the nature and operation of faith. It is a thing which you are every day exercising in carrying on the business of the present life ; and without which, the world, as it now is, could not be maintained. So that, when we say of Christians, that they walk by faith, not by sight, we are only claiming that the things about which their faith is concerned, exert the same influence over them, which the things about

which the faith of the men of the world is concerned, exert over their minds.

In illustration of this, I may refer you to that faith in the constancy and order of Divine Providence, which every one exercises, and has exercised from the first dawn of understanding. In observing the world around us, we see an order and a regularity in its processes, and are prepared to expect that such an order and regularity will continue to be in the time to come. We see that, according to the appointment of Divine Providence, certain events are the signs or intimations of certain others,—that certain operations of the natural world lead to certain fixed results,—that certain processes begun, lead to a certain termination; and that there is such a connexion between these, that the one, in the ordinary course of things, leads to and prepares the way for the other. We thus infer, that such things will continue to be. Whenever we see the sign, we are prepared to expect the thing of which it is the forerunner; we doubt not that the first step of the series will prepare the way for all the rest; and we surrender ourselves to the belief, with a confidence from which nothing is capable of moving us. This constitutes what has been generally called our belief in the constancy of nature, or, more properly speaking, our belief in the constancy of Divine Providence; and which, whether it be originally implanted in us, or be the result of experience, is one of the most beneficent parts of our constitution, without which we could never profit by experience, and we should be incapable of regulating ourselves in the most important concerns of life. It is from this principle that we have the undoubted belief that the great phenomena of heaven and earth will continue to be as they have been,—that the same sun will continue to rise and set on us,—that the seasons will continue to revolve with their accustomed regularity,—that seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, shall not pass away,—that there will be the same diffusion of light, and heat, and life, around us;—in short, that all those arrangements which are so rich in goodness to

us, without the permanence of which we could not be secure for a single hour, and by which all our plans and purposes in life are ordered, will continue to be as God at first ordained them.

I cannot suppose any of you ignorant of truths, the very familiarity of which can alone have hindered them from being made the subject of reflection ; but it may never have occurred to some now present, that this persuasion of the constancy and order of natural events around us, in whatever it originates, is faith ; and that, in regulating ourselves according to it, we are walking by faith, not by sight ; and yet nothing is more certain than this, on the slightest consideration. For the persuasion that what has been will continue to be, what ground have we beyond our dependence on the constancy of nature, or rather of the Great Author of nature ? The events on which we rest so confidently have not yet existed, and cannot therefore have become the objects of sight ; they have yet to emerge out of the womb of futurity, and are, therefore, in their very nature, unseen things, which no man can see. That which gives them to my mind, or to yours, the same power and influence as though they already existed, so that we act as though they already were, and conform ourselves to them with the certainty that they are yet to be, is nothing else than the same principle which, with reference to other and higher objects, an Apostle has termed, “ the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” And when we act by them, as though they were present and sensible, and are regulated by them as though they were the objects of sense, we walk by faith, not by sight.

When, for instance, we arrange for to-morrow, with the entire confidence that the sun which has set will rise again, and that we shall, if life is spared, enjoy his light, and his warm and invigorating influences to carry us through the business or the employments of a new day,—it is obvious that the principle by which we are guided, and which is regulating our conduct, is faith in the certainty of a thing yet

unseen. When we enter upon any plans of life, or any scheme of business, which it may require weeks, or months, or years, to perfect ; and for the accomplishment of which we may require, not merely the service of many living beings like ourselves, but the continuance of all those laws by which the world and the inhabitants of the world are governed, and enter upon them with the full assurance that all these shall continue to be as they have been,—it is equally obvious, that things unseen, and which our faith alone can assure to us, are really the things which are governing our conduct and regulating our life. When the husbandman prepares the ground for the reception of the precious seed, deposits it in the bosom of the earth, and watches over its growth and progress, in the confidence of the appointed weeks of harvest ; there is here, if possible, a yet more striking example of the power of faith. None of these operations terminate in themselves, but have all of them respect to a final and ulterior object,—an object of which faith can only assure him. It is the faith that the same laws will continue to regulate the vegetable world,—that the same sun will continue to warm the ground, and the same showers to fertilize it,—that there will be the same adaptation of these to the nature of the soil, and the nature of the crop,—which begins and carries on all his labours. Without this faith there would be no seedtime, and therefore no harvest ; and such an one is an example, more striking, perhaps, but not more real, than any other, of a man walking by faith, not by sight.

In these and a thousand other examples that might be given, we have so many attestations to the power of faith. It is of no consequence to our argument, that this is not usually termed faith, and that the vast majority of those over whose minds it is exerting its full influence have never reflected on the principle which is governing them ; it is enough that things unseen, which are the proper objects of faith, are every day and every hour exerting their influence over us ; that we are not merely persuaded of their certainty, but act-

ing as though they were, or, as the Apostle would term it, walking by faith of them ; and that without this faith the business and the employments of life could not go on for a single hour. Were all confidence of man in man to be broken up, we can easily conceive how fatal this would be to the comfort and happiness of the human family,—how it would rend asunder every tie which binds men to one another, and make every man stand apart from his fellow, with the feeling of a solitary and individual interest. But this were only a part of the evil, were our faith or our confidence in the laws by which the world is upheld to be dissolved,—or rather (if men were not so ready to substitute the law for the Lawgiver), I should say, were our faith in the constancy of him who upholds the world to be dissolved,—not only would every man stand apart from his fellow, but every man would be under such continual apprehensions for his safety, as would repress his exertions ; and, if the race did not perish from the face of the earth, they would remain the miserable slaves of their own gloomy forebodings, unable to institute any hope on the future, or to count on the continuance of any blessing beyond the moment of present enjoyment. So necessary is it for our comfort, and even for our very existence, that we should be provided with faith. And therefore it is that God has so constituted us, as to be capable of being affected by unseen things, and of regulating ourselves according to them ; and that the world, in all its various employments and concerns, affords so many striking examples of its influence,—of men walking by faith, not by sight.

These observations may suffice to show, for all the apprehended mystery of the subject, how familiar we are with the nature and operations of faith. And it appears of no small consequence that a principle, to the possession and exercise of which so much importance is uniformly attached in the pages of the New Testament, should be one with which we are every day, in one form or other, conversant, and which we have had occasion to exert from the earliest dawn of childhood.

If the observations now made are correct, faith, at least in general, and considered as that principle which substantiates unseen things, is no mystery, nothing which is peculiar to the Scripture, and of which we can find no examples apart from those which it furnishes. It is that principle which pervades every part of human life, and enters into and regulates all its concerns, and you may every where in the world find the proofs of its power. When the Apostle, therefore, says of himself, and of Christians generally, “we walk by faith, not by sight,” he is not introducing us to any new and strange principle of our nature, but to the same principle, only applied to different objects, and objects equally fitted to influence and regulate our conduct. The same God who has given us so many intimations of his will in the works of creation and providence around us, and who has hung out in the heavens, and over the earth, so many signs of things as yet unseen, that we may regulate our conduct accordingly for the life that now is, has also given us in his Word assurance as unquestionable, of certain other events, beyond the limits of this world altogether, but which are nevertheless certainly to be, and by which we may, in like manner, regulate our conduct for the life to come. Of the certainty of the one class of events,—those which are yet to be in this world,—he has given us a proof in the constancy of his natural providence, and of the laws by which the world is governed; of the certainty of the other, he has given us proof in the constancy of his Word, which abideth for ever. In both cases, our faith is required to rest on the same foundation,—the unchangeableness of him who is without any variableness. And whether we believe that the first openings of spring shall one day terminate in the harvest, and so prepare the ground and sow the seed in the confidence of its coming, or, looking forward to a yet more glorious harvest, which he has promised at the end of all things, look forward to it, and give ourselves to the work of preparation for it,—in either case, we are reposing on the same faithfulness, and acting in obedience to the same law of our nature, by which things that are not,

but which are certainly to be, become to us as though they were.

To illustrate this point yet farther, let it be supposed that the harvest which year after year crowns the labours of the husbandman, and to his confidence in the coming of which is to be traced all his diligence in preparing the soil and sowing the seed in the bosom of the earth, were to meet and reward his toil, not as we now find it, with each returning season, but were only to be reached after a certain lapse of years, or at the close of life. I am aware of the improbability of the supposition ; but let it be granted, for the sake of illustration, that it were so, and that he were thus to receive his recompense, not in certain yearly returns, but in one great harvest, when the period of his trial had ended, and that he was then, and only then, to enter upon the fruit of his labours. Whatever change this might produce, it is obvious, that if only persuaded of its certainty, and of the constancy of those laws by which the natural world is governed, the mere distance of the object need not enfeeble his exertions, or lessen his diligence that it might be ensured ; and that he might be found as much influenced by it, and walking as surely by the faith of it, as now when no such lengthened exercise of faith and patience is required of him. The truth is, that multitudes in the world are governed by objects as distant, and which they can only hope to reach toward the close of life. The whole work and business of a lifetime may be made subservient to their attainment ; and there is nothing, therefore, impossible or improbable in such an object, however distant, if only sure, calling forth the same diligence and the same energy that it now does, when he is assured of more speedily reaching it. Let it be supposed further, that this object, instead of being one which he was certain of attaining toward the close of life, were removed to a point immediately beyond its termination,—that it could only be his when his connexion with the present world was dissolved, and that it would meet and reward him on his entrance on another state of existence,—a state of which he had

the fullest evidence,—would this make any real change upon the power of the object to affect his mind or influence his conduct? It might, in this case, require to be an object in itself worthy of his ambition, and fitted to stimulate his energies, before it were capable of attracting him, and bringing him within the sphere of its influence, from the distance to which you had removed it; and he would require to be well persuaded of its certainty, before he could be expected to live and labour in the faith of it. But if these conditions were fulfilled, the mere change of its position, from a point at the close of life to the point immediately beyond it, would not make any real change upon its nature, or render it impossible for him any more than ever to walk by the faith of it. Let it only rise up before him with that clearness and power which faith can give to things unseen, and it might, for all its distance, be influencing his mind in some degree, as though it were present, exciting those affections of desire, and hope, and love, which are suitable to its nature, and kindling that ambition which might make him submit to every sacrifice, and undergo every labour necessary to its attainment.

If the propriety of this illustration is admitted, it may give us some idea of the situation of the Christian, and show us that there is nothing contrary to the nature of our minds in supposing that he may walk by faith of those unseen things which the Bible reveals, as well as the men of this world walk by the faith of things in which they are interested. The only difference is, that whilst the objects which move these lie all within the compass of this present life, the objects which govern him lie altogether beyond it. The faith that annihilates all distance of time and space, and makes the things that are not become as though they were, may still be as effectual in his case as in theirs. Only let them appear in the clear light which faith can give to things unseen,—let them be distinctly realized and fully admitted,—and not one of them will be without its efficacy. And when he finds himself walking by the faith of things which are unseen, and

which no man hath seen, or can see, he will find himself only carried on and sustained by the same principle of his nature which directs and governs him in the most ordinary affairs of the present life ; and that the same faith which leads him to live and labour for the attainment of its comforts, is prompting to the same diligence for the life that lies beyond it.

I shall not be supposed by these remarks, and by pointing out the similarity, or rather the sameness, of the principle by which we are to be governed, both for this world and the world to come, to infer, that the one of these exercises of faith is as natural to us as the other ; or, that all who exert the one will exert the other. The one of them is exerted, in fact, by every human being who is endowed with ordinary intelligence ; the other is peculiar to those whose minds have been enlightened by the discoveries of the New Testament. The one of these is either impressed on every man by God, or is the necessary result of the constitution which he has given us ; the other is the gift of God through Jesus Christ, and is not of natural, but of Divine operation. The truth is, that however simple and familiar a thing it may be for a man to walk by faith in the constancy of the laws by which the world is governed, it is not so easy to walk by faith of those unseen and eternal things that lie beyond it. With respect to these, great and important as they may be, the men of this world are asleep, and treat them as though they were not ; nor have they, in the case of very many, made good that lodgement in their understandings and convictions, as real and not imaginary objects, without which they can have no influence. They are not to them the objects of faith, and therefore they cannot walk by faith in them ; they are at best but shadowy and impalpable things, flitting at times before their minds, but never entering there, or taking up their abode in them ; they are, therefore, all but ineffectual, and the things that are present and sensible always carry it over those that are unseen, and which it requires a distinct effort of the mind to realize and to contemplate. But let that veil which is upon their un-

derstandings and their hearts, and which shrouds in deepest obscurity the eternal world and all its interests, be withdrawn,—let these rise up before them as things which are certainly to be, and things to the reality and permanence of which God has given, in his Word, attestation more solemn and impressive than he has given to any of those laws of the natural world, on the constancy of which they act so confidently,—and they will begin from that very moment to walk by faith of them. They who before were only moved by sensible things, or, at most by things which lay within the compass of a present world, will find themselves equally moved by things unseen and spiritual; and, as any great and important object, though distant, may affect our minds, to the exclusion of other and inferior objects, though present and sensible, that eternal world which was then, for the first time, opened upon them, will become the object of presiding interest, to the exclusion of those things which, however engrossing before, will now appear unworthy for a moment to be compared with it.

The observations now made may serve to show the nature and importance of faith as the mainspring of the Christian life; and a very few observations will suffice to point out their application to the circumstances of the Apostle, and how he came to characterize the life which he lived, as a walking by faith and not by sight. The words of the text occur, you will perceive, in the middle of an expression of his confidence in the reality and certainty of his own happy condition, when he should be delivered from the body, and ushered into the eternal world; and that, in his case, and in the case of those who were like-minded, absence from the body would only be the means of bringing about their introduction to the presence of the Lord. Now, what could inform him or assure him of so blessed and desirable a result? It was not any thing that he saw which could impart it to him. His senses and his powers of observation might carry him to the borders of the spiritual world, but they could not guide him one step beyond, nor penetrate, for an instant,

that unknown region which then opened to receive him. Had he been to consult or to listen to the evidence of his senses, their testimony had appeared at variance with his hope, and utterly destructive of it. They could only present to him the spectacle of the body hastening to dissolution,—the agonies of expiring nature,—the stillness, the unbroken stillness of death,—and the rapid progress of corruption seizing upon all that was once full of life, and turning its loveliness into loathing. Had he walked by sight, or been influenced merely by the things which he saw, how was he to extract from a scene such as this, any thing like the hope of blessedness, and not rather to account that all hope was extinguished with the extinction of life, and that, with the dissolution of the body, his connexion, not merely with this world, but with every other, was dissolved? It was here, however, when sense and sight could avail him nothing, that faith came to his aid, giving him assurance of a world which had been revealed to it, and bidding him contemplate, in the dissolution of the earthly tabernacle, but a step to the rearing of a more glorious body, as a seed of corn is not quickened unless it die. It was here that faith told of another life, which Christ had purchased for him, and of mansions which he had gone before to prepare for him, and of which he had already received the earnest and the foretaste in the fruits of the Spirit. It was here that it spoke of deliverance from sin and suffering, and of that Saviour whom, not having seen, he had loved, and of an entrance into his immediate presence, and to all the blessedness of an enduring communion with him. And, letting go sense and sight altogether, he cleaved to faith, and faith assumed the mastery; and walking by faith, not by sight, he was willing rather to be absent from the body and present with the Lord, and laboured, that whether present or absent he might be accepted of Him.

And here I may remark, that this apparent opposition between the things of sense and of faith, is not peculiar to the example which the Apostle gives in his own case, but

runs throughout ; and, it is for this reason, that in our text, and in other parts of Scripture, they are presented in contrast to one another. So remote is the one class of objects from the other, and so different the judgments which the one would lead us to form from those which we are led to form by the other, that if we would walk by the one, we cannot walk by the other ; if we would hold by the one, we must forego the other ; if we would walk by sight, I mean be governed by things seen and temporal, we cannot walk by faith of things unseen and eternal ; or, if we would preserve the high path of faith, we must keep the world, and the things of the world, in abeyance. If we walk by sight, the present and the visible good will be preferred to the unseen and the distant good ; if we walk by faith, the blessedness that is to be revealed will make us account but little of present things in comparison with it. If we walk by sight, one event will appear to happen alike to all,—to the righteous and the wicked ; if we walk by faith, all the inequalities of good and evil in the present world will disappear before the impartial retributions that await us. If we walk by sight, the present world will necessarily engross all our anxieties and our cares ; if we walk by faith, our anxiety and our care will be, so to live and so to labour, as that we may be accepted at Christ's judgment-seat. If we walk by sight, the afflictions and trials of life will appear only as real and unmitigated evils ; if we walk by faith, they will appear blessings in disguise, intended to quicken our advancement in conformity to God and to his holiness.

No endeavours of ours can make these two harmonize, for the one of them is set over against the other, and the influence of the one is to destroy that of the other. It is not without reason, therefore, that it is so often required of Christians to walk by faith, not by sight, and to dwell often among the unseen things which faith substantiates,—that it is so often given as their great distinction from those who know not God, that they were the men who lived and died in faith,—or that, when required to imitate the conduct of holy

men of old, we are called to be followers of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

In concluding these remarks, I would remind those who, in opposition to the Apostle, are walking by sight, not by faith, that, though the things of faith are, in their very nature, unseen, they are not on this account less certain, or less worthy of their confidence, than those which are seen; and that they shall one day be certainly disclosed, whether they believe them or not. You may at present perhaps contrive to bid the thought of them away from you; you may refuse your attention to the evidences on which their truth is built; you may give little heed to those occasions on which they are pressed on your consideration; you may refuse the prayer to which the hidden things of faith are revealed; you may even congratulate yourselves on the possession of a certain prudential wisdom in rejecting all concern about them, as though they were airy nothings, unfit to engage men who have to deal with the sober and substantial realities of a present world. Nevertheless, all this levity and indifference will not prevent or delay the approach of that time when they shall stand open and manifest. The things that are now unseen, shall one day become seen,—the world that is now shrouded in deepest mystery, shall one day be disclosed; and you shall not be able to hide it from yourselves,—that the Word of God only warned you of solemn verities, when it spoke of a coming resurrection and a coming judgment. And what will be your situation, think you, when ushered into a world, to the concerns of which you have been professedly indifferent, and the very thought of which you have sought to shut out from your minds,—when brought into the immediate presence of that Saviour whose voice, issuing from the depths of that awful sanctuary, you have refused to hear,—and when called to reap the harvest of a life in which you have sowed to the flesh, and shall of the flesh only reap corruption; whilst, had you sowed to the spirit, you had of the spirit reaped life everlasting.

Finally, let the observations now made confirm believers

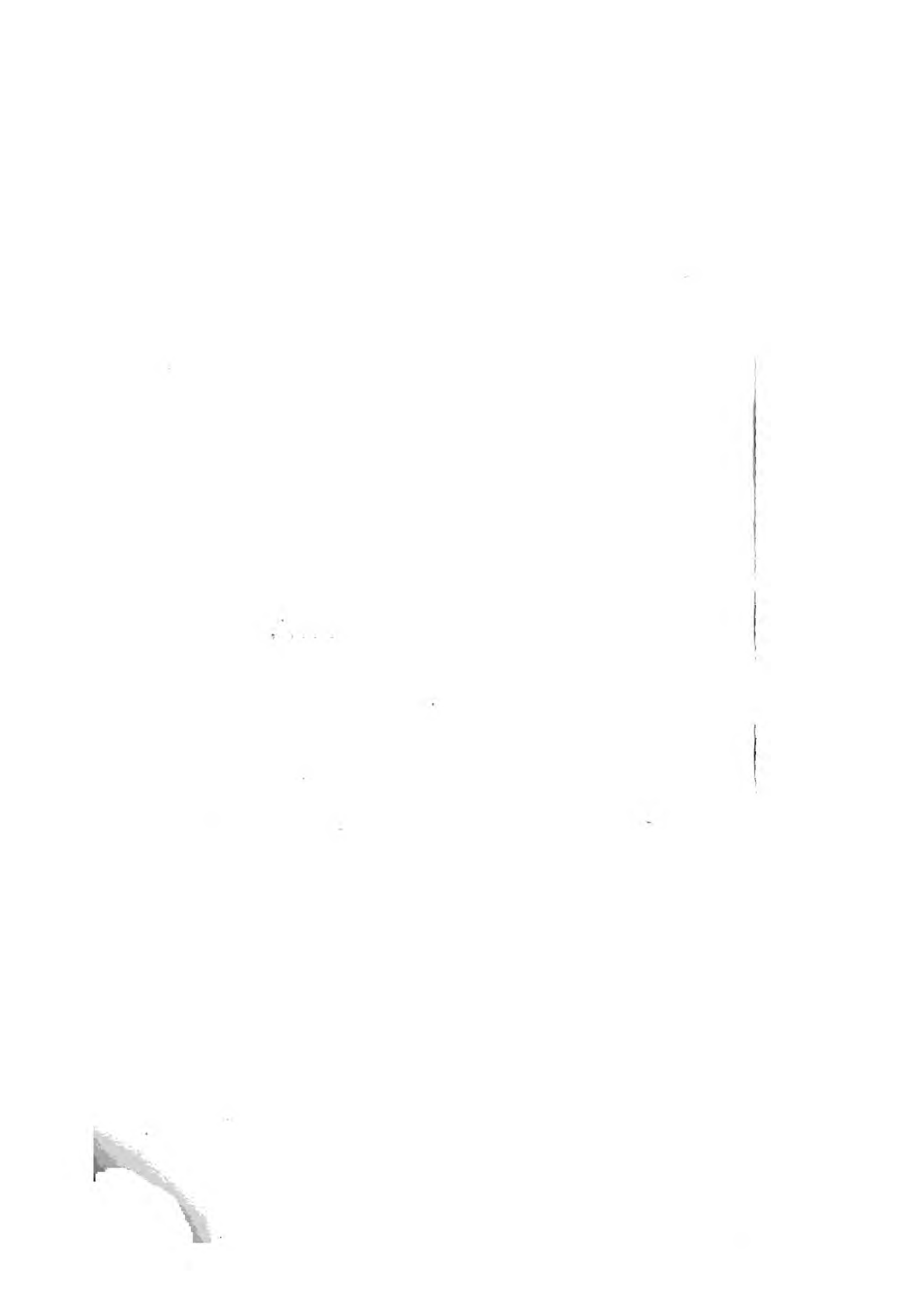
in the stability of those hopes which they are cherishing for a life to come. I know well that these hopes rest on their own evidence, and that this evidence does not require any confirmation. Yet it may bring the thing more convincingly before your minds, when you are made to see that every thing around you is bearing testimony to it,—and that God has given you, in the constancy of those natural laws by which the world is governed, and in which he is continually requiring your faith, an example of the constancy and unchangeableness of his counsel in all that he has declared for the life to come, and in which he is no less requiring your faith.

He who presides over the natural economy presides also over the spiritual; and the faithfulness which he evinces in the one, is an assurance that the same faithfulness will be evinced in the other. He who is never found soliciting your confidence in any thing here, without amply repaying it, will be equally regardful of all in which he has encouraged you to confide for hereafter. One may thus find every where abundant confirmations of their hope. Nature may thus truly become the handmaid of faith; and in her every-day operations with which you are all familiar,—in the certainty with which life and vegetation succeed death in the vegetable world,—may you discover the certainty of what is elsewhere declared, that what is sown in corruption shall be raised in incorruption, and what is sown in weakness shall be raised in power. In the contemplation of these things, we are led to exclaim, with the Psalmist,—“For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven; thy faithfulness is unto all generations: Thou hast established the earth, and it abideth: They continue this day according to thine ordinances; for all are thy servants.”

If these things be so, Christians may well comfort themselves under all the difficulties and trials to which their faith may expose them. You can submit to be regarded by those who walk by sight, as destitute of all true wisdom, and all proper regard for your present interests. You can submit

to all the sacrifices that may be required of you, for the sake of a good conscience, without repining. You can see men enjoying all the comforts and pleasures of a present life, whilst you may be deprived of them, without one feeling of envy ; and seeking daily to lay up for yourselves a treasure in the heavens which shall last when the world and the things of the world have passed away, you can wait for it ; though seeing now through a glass darkly, yet assured, that you shall one day see face to face ; and that though you now know only in part, you shall then know even as you are known.

LETTERS ON PRAYER.



LETTERS ON PRAYER.

LETTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

Nice.

—WHEN I had last the pleasure of meeting you, you seemed to think that I might usefully employ myself during my winter residence at Nice, in putting together a few thoughts on the subject of Prayer; and as I felt too happy in the prospect of any occupation which might be profitable to my own congregation, whilst I was denied the opportunity of ministering amongst them, I promised to give the subject my serious consideration; the fruits of which I now take the liberty of laying before you.

If I remember right, you did not express any doubts on the efficacy of prayer, nor did you consider that this was the point in which the deficiency of many professing Christians principally lay. You seemed to think that a directory for prayer was more necessary, and might be more profitable, than any discussion on its nature, or any attempt to reconcile the answer promised to it, with the ordinary course of *Divine* Providence. And I do the more readily concur in your opinion, as the line thus marked out will not require

me to enter upon any of those depths connected with the subject of prayer, on which I could not hope to throw any additional light ; and which have, in so far as we can penetrate them, been ably and successfully elucidated. I consider, therefore, that the principal object which I am to keep in view, is to give some directions to those who may feel the duty and obligation of prayer, as to the way in which it may be best performed,—the way in which most honourably to God, and most profitably for themselves, they may set about the performance of a duty, the obligations of which they already feel. The inquiry which I am supposed to meet is abundantly natural, and the very inquiry which the disciples made at our blessed Lord himself, when they said, “ Lord ! teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.” But, notwithstanding the answer which he returned to their question, and the additional light which he afterwards communicated, in those clear discoveries which he gave them of himself, as the great medium of prayer, there may be many who feel difficulties that they would wish resolved, and which they do not find the ordinary ministry of the Gospel sufficiently minute and preceptive to remove. If there are any, then, who entertain doubts regarding the efficacy of prayer, the following observations are not intended for them. If there are any, whose minds being satisfied on this subject, still feel perplexed as to the manner of its performance, the remarks I am to make are submitted to their consideration, in the hope that, through the Divine blessing, they may be profitable for guiding them in the discharge of a duty so intimately connected with their spiritual well-being.

Permit me, however, before entering on the subject, to remove one error concerning its true nature, into which some may be ready to fall. When I would give some directions as to the way in which prayer may be best performed, or seek to remove some of the difficulties which are apt to perplex Christians in its performance, I do not presume to suppose, even though I could suggest something far more pre-

cise and applicable to the wants of Christians than I can hope to do, that I could thereby form a man, or even a serious man, to the spirit and the habit of prayer. That requires a higher than any human agency. Prayer, taken in its simplest meaning, presupposes a sense of our need, which I cannot give you, or any man. It supposes some knowledge of the Divine character, which it is the privilege of God himself to reveal. It presupposes faith in the readiness of God to hear us, which it is the gift of God to bestow. No method of prayer, however exact or scriptural, could, for a single moment, be admitted to supply this. However beautiful or perfect in its kind, it were still a dead letter, except the spirit of God gave it life; and he who would pray acceptably, or even pray at all, has need of a higher than any human teaching,—the teaching of Him who is not merely the hearer of prayer, but who himself inspires the feeling of which prayer is only the expression. But, though the state of mind in which prayer originates cannot be formed by any method of human invention, there may yet be ways and means accessible to us, of confirming it; there may be something which habit will strengthen and improve; there may be a right direction given to the mind in its exercise; there may be difficulties removed which prevent our advancement; and there may be encouragements presented, which are fitted to assist this advancement. This may be considered as the legitimate province of human teaching, as it is the province to which I am now to apply myself; and I shall not account my labour to be in vain, if this end be promoted in the hearts of any of God's children, assured as I am, that, being led to take pleasure in its performance, they will draw down upon themselves more largely the spirit of prayer.—I am, &c.

LETTER II.

SIMPLICITY IN PRAYER.

—I HAVE often thought, that one thing which obstructs many Christians in the duty of prayer, is the want of right views as to its simplicity. I am afraid that there are not a few who seem to think it a work which requires certain talents and acquirements, which they do not feel that they possess ; that it needs a certain kind of learning which every person cannot command ; that it is a gift which they do not possess the means of attaining ; and, in consequence of this, they surrender themselves to what may be the easiest mode of prayer, without seeking how they may best perform it. If this has not presented itself to your observation, it has frequently done so to mine ; and whenever this has been the case, I have uniformly ascribed it to imperfect views of the simplicity of prayer. In one sense it cannot be doubted, that prayer is the greatest and loftiest exercise of the human mind ; it presents the contrast of the finite with the infinite ; it is the outgoing of the heart to him whose presence filleth all things, the mystery of whose nature, and the depth of whose ways no human intellect can fully apprehend. But it is still no less true, that prayer, whilst it is the loftiest, is one of the simplest things with which our minds can be familiar. It is the expression of our wants to Him who is able and willing to relieve them ; it is the cry of our helplessness to Him who is able to help us ; it is a son asking

bread of his father ; a little child in perplexity betaking itself to a parent's wisdom and guidance. No ideas can be simpler than those which these expressions suggest, and he who best apprehends them, and carries them about with him in this duty, will best enter into the real nature of prayer.

I have often thought how well fitted the parables of our Lord are for impressing this point upon our minds, and how much they bring it out of the region of shadowy conjecture, and present it as a thing so simple and definite, that it is impossible for any one to misapprehend it. It was said of a certain ancient philosopher, that by the simplicity of his system, and its application to human life, he brought philosophy from heaven to earth ; and, if I might venture to apply such an expression to the present subject, it is far more true of our Lord's teaching on the subject of prayer. As he has set it forth to us, no one will suppose for a moment that it has lost any of its greatness and majesty, as it might have done if so treated by an inferior hand ; but then, without losing its proper dignity, it wears the aspect of prayer, such as infant minds can apprehend. It is spread over subjects with which we are every day familiar ; it is represented as a thing which men are every day exercising ; it is a thing in which we are sure of speeding, as we are in those in which we count most securely on success ; and, separating from the thing itself all that is extraneous, or that our minds can but inadequately conceive of, it is set before us in that most simple and lucid of all sentences, " Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

If you know, then, what it is to ask, that you may receive, —what it is to persevere in asking, or to seek that you may find,—or what it is to ask importunately, to knock, that it may be opened to you, you know what it is to pray. And, knowing this, what is there, if you are conscious of your own necessities, or believe in the answer which the Saviour has promised, to hinder you from this instant setting about the duty of prayer ?

Instead of this, however, I fear that there are not a few well-meaning Christians who have still the idea of something far more formal, and, therefore, more formidable,—of a certain structure of words and sentences which must be attained, and without which they cannot be said to pray,—and of a regularity and order of composition, in which, even though they could attain it, the spirit of prayer is ready to evaporate and be lost. I must confess that, regarded in this light, I have never been able to reconcile myself to an expression, not unfrequently applied to prayer. You may have heard it said of such a prayer, that it is a *beautiful* prayer. The expression strikes me as faulty, perhaps, because it seems to indicate, that the person who utters it has been rather attending to the words than joining in the prayer; but it is also faulty, I think, as it serves to cherish those wrong views of the subject to which I have adverted, as if prayer were good in proportion to the beauty of the expressions in which it is set forth, or as if that prayer must be a good one which is a beautiful one. It is very true that there is a majesty, as well as simplicity, inherent in all spiritual prayer; and wherever the great object of worship is steadily contemplated, there will of itself be generated a language in the expression of our wants, or in our adoration of God, suitable to such an occasion. Who has not admired the grandeur as well as simplicity, for example, of the Old Testament prayers, and above all of the Lord's Prayer? But then this quality, so far from being essential to all right devotion, was in these cases of such a nature, that had it been made the chief end, or even contemplated at all, it had ceased to exist. And he who is familiar with the prayers of simple and untaught men, having no other helps to prayer than a devout frame of spirit, and what an acquaintance with the language of the Bible conveys, will know, that with them there is often a felicity and power of expression, in which the richest and most polished devotional compositions are often defective. I would have this, therefore, steadily kept before the mind of every one who would engage or advance in the duty of

prayer,—that it is not necessary for us, in order to pray, to engage long, or formally, or learnedly, or methodically, in the duty,—that it is neither more nor less than to ask, that you may receive. How simple an injunction is this, when spoken by a fellow-creature whom we know to be able, and who assures us of his willingness to help us! And what should render it more complex or difficult of apprehension or practice when applied to God? There may be other things which are accessories to prayer, and which it is highly desirable that we should possess, especially if we are placed in situations which require us to exercise this gift before others. But this is all that is essential to prayer,—he that asks, and asks in faith, prays,—he may hardly employ language at all in giving vent to his desires, but still he prays,—he may not have arranged his thoughts, he may speak but what he feels and desires, and yet he prays; and I venture to say, that the prayers of such a man will not only be acceptable to God, whilst the most beautiful, exact, and even scriptural prayers without this, would not, but that they will generally be found to possess, even though he regards it not, and simply because he regards it not, a noble simplicity, such as he could not with all his efforts have attained.

I have said so much upon this subject, because I am persuaded that some such mistaken views of prayer as I have now pointed out keep hold of the minds of many, and prevent the free exercise of prayer; and, what is more, because there is danger in this way of overlooking what the essence of prayer really is. There is such a disposition in our minds to substitute other things for spiritual worship, that it is not possible to strip prayer too much of all its accessories, and present it steadily before the mind in its true character, as asking of God, that we may receive, and that it requires to be nothing more than this, in order to be the prayer which God will answer. Who has not felt how ready he is to deviate from this simple exercise of prayer, even although he may not have any false or imperfect views of its nature? And how much more ready would he be to depart from it,

were he to have the apprehension that there was something more than this necessary to constitute prayer ?

I do not intend, however, by these remarks, to forbid the use of forms of prayer on certain occasions, or the taking advantage of the assistance which they may afford to any man for the practice of devotion. But on this subject I shall afterwards enter. In conclusion, I cannot help remarking how ready men are, in every thing that relates to the worship of God, to lose sight of the simplicity of the Divine Word, and, with the idea of improving upon the scriptural pattern, almost to do away the very idea of drawing near to God. Let any one who is familiar with the Roman Catholic churches only recollect the pomp and ceremony in which the worship of God is enveloped, and he will find abundant cause for this reflection. Alas ! how different is the faith there exhibited from the simple character of the lowly Saviour !—I am, &c.

LETTER III.

THE STRUCTURE OF PRAYER.

—THE remarks which I made on the simplicity of prayer will not be supposed to imply, that there is no such thing as method in prayer. Though prayer be, strictly speaking, *supplication*, and nothing more, yet it has come, by scriptural and common use, to signify the expression of all those sentiments with which the mind of a dependent and sinful creature may rightly and properly be filled, in drawing near to God. Hence it assumes different names, according to the nature of those feelings,—all of which, however, are included under the general name of prayer. For example, when the nature, perfections, and glory of God, are the objects to which the mind is directed in prayer, it is *adoration*. When the manifestation of Divine mercy and goodness towards us as creatures, and above all, as guilty creatures, is peculiarly regarded and celebrated in prayer, it is termed *thanksgiving*. When our own sinfulness and unworthiness become the subjects about which our thoughts are conversant in prayer, it is *confession*. And, when we simply ask what we need, or what we desire, this is termed *supplication*; and this last again has been divided into supplication and intercession, according as we ourselves, or as others, are the objects of our petitions.

It were altogether needless to dwell on these several parts

of prayer, with which every man is sufficiently acquainted, and which are familiarly employed by every man who approaches God, whether he has ever thought of affixing distinct names to them or not. They arise, in fact, out of the simplest relations in which we stand, and are amongst the first and simplest feelings with which our minds are conversant, when brought seriously to think of God. The solemn awe which naturally invests a serious mind in this situation, prompts the expression of adoration, as it contemplates his glory and grace; the heart that feels the blessings which God has bestowed, naturally responds in the language of thanksgiving; the pressure of guilt, and the consciousness of unworthiness, as naturally again prompt the language of confession; whilst supplication is called forth by circumstances as powerful and various as are our own necessities, or the necessities of others. In what order, or how far these several parts of prayer should enter into our devotions, is one of those points on which no answer can be given; and it would utterly detract from the simplicity of prayer, were we to attempt to give an answer to the inquiry. And, if even in compositions more exact in their nature than prayer can be said to be,—as in an oration for example, we should be in danger of allowing the spirit to evaporate, were we to compose it according to the rules of an exact method,—how much more must there be danger of this, in a thing so tender and ready to be so evanescent as the spirit of prayer! It is not necessary that all of these should enter into every prayer; although without any design or forethought on our part, they will be found, more or less I doubt not, in almost every one, except on very special occasions. And the best rule that can be given is, that wherever we feel our minds at the time disposed to carry us, whether to the expression of adoration, or thanksgiving, or confession, or supplication, these we should follow, in the confidence that our prayer will then be the best transcript of our own mind, and therefore partake most of the spirit of prayer.

There can be but one feeling on this subject, in so far as

regards private prayer ; and even when our prayers may be intended to guide the devotions of others, as in the family-circle for example, it is seldom that the state of our own minds, unless too minutely depicted, is so isolated as not to lead us to express the prayer which may be most suited to the feelings and desires of those around us. At any rate, the devotional feelings expressed by us will be best fitted to awaken corresponding affections in the minds of others, till all come to participate in the feelings of which we are ourselves conscious. As to the manner, or language proper for supplication, our blessed Lord has given us a short but expressive model, in the prayer which usually goes by his name ; a prayer which, independently of the authority on which it comes recommended to us, must be regarded by every devout mind, as a pattern of simplicity and comprehensiveness ; and the whole language of Scripture is also so suitable to devotion, that it has been adopted and consecrated as that in which we are to approach God. In adoration, indeed, as our knowledge of the Divine character and perfections can only be gathered from his own revelation, it is hardly possible for us to deviate from the expressions of the Sacred Scriptures ; but even in the other parts of prayer, there is such a breadth and comprehensiveness in the Scriptures,—they speak a language always so true to the actual state of human feeling,—they set before us our fellow-men in situations so various, and represent the desires and workings of a spiritual mind with such variety and minuteness, that it is hardly possible to conceive a situation to which you will not find one in the Bible analogous, or a feeling of which they do not furnish the correct and proper expression. It is not to be expected, that those who are requiring direction in prayer should possess that intimate acquaintance with the Word of God, which qualifies them to employ it with this familiarity in their devotional exercises ; but even they may from the very first endeavour to cultivate a habit, which, whilst it gives new interest to the Scriptures, enables them to discover the right use of many a precious promise

contained in them, by employing it as the language of prayer. In reading the Scriptures, for example, let the portion which is read be considered as furnishing the matter of prayer,—let the lessons which it teaches be turned into supplications that we may be enabled to learn and obey them,—let us supplicate that its warnings may be impressed on our hearts,—let even some of the principal topics be written down, if we have time and opportunity for this purpose. This is surely an exercise not above the capacity of ordinary Christians; and, whilst the Word of God will thus be treasured up in our hearts, we shall daily treasure up also the materials for prayer. I may add, that they who have not time or opportunity for transcribing passages from the Word of God, will find the thing done to their hand in some one of the methods of prayer which have been printed; although it were well that they should endeavour to shape their devotions by the Scripture which they themselves read, and note those passages of the Divine Word which are peculiarly suited for prayer, as one of the best means of acquiring familiarity and variety in the language of devotion. In this way, in proportion as we grow in the knowledge of Scripture, we shall grow in meetness for the duty of prayer; and, by turning its promises into supplications, we shall employ the very way by which God has taught us to make these promises our own. Our prayers, which may require some care and attention when others are to unite with us, will possess the native majesty and simplicity of the Divine Word; and we shall feel ourselves elevated by the thought, that we are not only presenting the same petitions, but presenting them almost in the very words, which holy men have employed since the beginning of time. The prayers of a man of God, whose mind is thus imbued with Scripture, are felt to have an unction and a richness which no other prayers, however excellent, can possess. Instead of merely stringing together and repeating a number of scriptural passages, which may be done without much feeling or much connexion, such a man, without formally or fully quoting any, will yet show that he has

imbibed their spirit, made them his own, and has extracted from them those Divine secrets, which are an acceptable offering on the Divine altar.

If it is thought that some of these observations are unnecessarily minute, I would remind you, that they are written for the benefit of those who are "rude in prayer," and intended also to direct others, who may be desirous of improving in the habit of prayer, as to how that habit may be best attained. Surely this is a point of some importance, if we may thereby be assisted to engage in prayer with greater ease, and with greater comfort. At the same time, I would be far from encouraging the idea, that prayer is tied down to these, or any forms of expression. The truth is, that in proportion as we conceive of prayer as a thing which must be possessed of certain qualifications of order or style to render it acceptable, we are in danger of allowing the spirit of prayer to escape; our attention is withdrawn from the great and essential character of prayer, "ask, and it shall be given you;" and, in our anxiety about the dress or mode of our supplications, we lose sight of that thing, without which they will be only as a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. "Our beautiful liturgy,"—"our incomparable liturgy," are expressions which we often hear from our brethren of the sister Church; but it may be questioned whether they are not often pronounced by those who never entered spiritually into the service, and with whom the admiration and relish which they feel for the beautiful simplicity of its language have been substituted for the spirit of devotion.

Let our minds be prepared by a few moments of meditation for engaging in prayer,—let them be quickened by the recollection of our necessities, and of the manifold grace and mercy of God,—let us seek to feel alive to the truth and reality of the promise which he has made to answer prayer,—and, above all, let us seek to feel the necessity of the influence of that Divine Spirit, who has promised to help our infirmities, and we shall not want words, and apt words even, in which to make our wants known at the Divine footstool.

They will flow naturally, because they will flow from the heart, and they will be,—what the words of others when adopted by us can seldom be,—the very transcript of what we feel and desire.

After all, whatever difficulties about the manner or matter of prayer may at first perplex a Christian, he will find that the most serious hinderance to its right performance lies in the too frequent want of that devotional spirit to which I have so often alluded. To guard against this want, as preventing the right exercise of spiritual worship, will be his great concern, and will often prompt him to present that petition, in a higher sense even than the disciples presented it, “ Lord, teach us to pray.”—I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

FORMS OF PRAYER.

—SOME of the remarks in the previous letters may lead you to ask, how far forms of prayer appear advisable ; and the question, at any rate, is so often asked, that it may be fairly considered as included in my proposed object of considering some of the difficulties connected with the subject of prayer.

In entering upon this point, I may be permitted to say, that my remarks have no reference to the use of forms in *public* worship, which is a larger and more difficult question, that lies not within my province, and on which, though I had felt inclined to enter, I had been almost debarred by my present circumstances, having been for some time, as you know, worshipping according to those forms,

“ Through which, in fix'd career,
As through a zodiac, moves the ritual year
Of England's Church.”

My remarks will apply solely to forms of prayer for the family or the closet ; and as we are both, I think, of opinion that these have been employed more frequently amongst us of late years than in the days of our fathers, it may deserve to be considered how far this has been, or is likely to be, favourable to the spirit of devotion.

Considered with reference to private prayer, I confess there appears to me hardly any room for doubt which of them is entitled to the preference. It is, in the first place, always more difficult to worship *spiritually* through a form than without one. If we vary the form frequently, an effort of recollection is necessary to recall it, and this interferes with the absorption of the mind in the great object of worship. If, again, the same form, or nearly the same, be retained, the mind becomes so familiar with it, that, without a continual effort of self-recollection, we are in danger of running over it as a mere form,—of repeating it as children are too often permitted to do their little prayers. And then every form of prayer is necessarily deficient in minuteness for private devotion. How is a writer of prayers in his closet to find out expressions which will apply to my ever-varying feelings and circumstances, and which will embody the thoughts of my heart, as I ought to utter them to Him, before whom the secrets of all hearts are manifest? The fact is, that, to render his forms of prayer useful, they must be such as are applicable to the state of men generally,—that is, they must want that particularity which is fitted to render them specially suitable for my devotions. These may be considered as very small matters by some, but they will not be so regarded by those who know what prayer is. The truth will be found to be, that it is in proportion to the minuteness of our prayers that prayer will be profitable. How can we be said to cast our burden on the Lord, if we do not set forth before him our very case in all its circumstances? How can we entertain the comfortable promise given to those who confess their sins, if we have not confessed our sins before him, with all those peculiar aggravations of which we alone can be conscious? Or how can we feel the comfort of having made known our necessities to our Father in heaven, if these have not been spread out with some fulness and distinctness before him? In every case where a form of prayer is employed, there will be many things, and these, perhaps, the most necessary, for which our hearts find no proper ex-

pression in these forms ; and, in so far as this is true, one great design of prayer must be imperfectly attained.

I have made these remarks without thinking it necessary to enter upon the question which has been sometimes mooted, how far extempore prayer is agreeable to Scripture, because I do not find that the pious members of churches employing forms have any objections to join in extempore prayer ; and, above all, because our Lord, in uttering the prayer which bears his name, did no more than give us a model after which we were to pray. Although I am aware that those who have been long accustomed to employ them may feel some difficulty in laying them aside, I must say that the use of them appears to me exceedingly hurtful, and very likely to lead to formality in devotion. What other effect can the daily repetition of prayers, which do not embody the felt wants and necessities of my soul, have upon my mind, but to sink the tone and prevent the proper use of prayer in my case ? Instead of feeling it to be the privilege of making my requests in every thing known to God, must not this have the effect at times of making me experience a painful discrepancy between my prayers and my feelings, as I would utter them to a fellow-creature ? And must not the ultimate effect of this be, not merely to deprive me of the benefit of those prayers which I might have presented, but to contract my mind to the form which I employ, instead of leading me to grow daily in the spirit and habit of prayer ? If there may still be difficulties felt in laying these forms aside, I would only say, have you considered the simplicity of prayer as our Lord has represented it ? or yet more, have you weighed the promise of the Holy Spirit to help our infirmities ? I humbly think that these remarks, with some modification, are applicable also to a family, which is nothing else than a little community, having certain peculiar interests, and feelings, and necessities in common, and upon the proper expression of which in prayer much of its interest and improvement will depend. I am aware that in this case it is not necessary or desirable to have all the minuteness that is

required for private devotion, and that forms of prayer may be had which come more nearly to the state of our families, than to the state of our own selves ; but still every family has its peculiar circumstances,—there are events often happening within the bosom of a family, which ought to have a place in family-prayer,—there are circumstances every day occurring around us, which may, much to our profit, be in like way remembered,—and there are always changes taking place in the situation of our friends, in which every member of the family is interested,—and for the expression of these no form of prayer can suffice, however excellent in other respects it may be.

Besides this, however, there is another view in which family-prayer is to be considered,—in the influence which it exerts on the members of the family. In this case, I do think the argument is entirely against the use of forms of prayer. Which of these is likely to be more impressive on the minds of children and servants, or to convince them more deeply that the parent or the master, to whom they naturally look up, is most anxiously alive to their spiritual interests,—when a prayer is read by him, or when he gives utterance in his own language to his own desires in their behalf ? Either of them will be useful ; but, to my view, the spectacle is likely to be more impressive and edifying when the head of a family, like a priest over his own household, presents his own peculiar offering on the family-altar. A head of a family may read prayers in his family, merely from regard to good example, but he will not be at least so ready to pray without a form from the same motive, nor will it be so readily suspected by others that he does so ; and this is of itself no small matter for securing the great ends of family-religion. Besides, I do not conceive any thing better fitted for impressing upon the minds of those with whom he is connected the reality of prayer, than those peculiar supplications, called forth by the peculiar circumstances of the family, which forms, however excellent, cannot supply. When his children and servants see that every thing which bears upon

their welfare is committed to God,—that he is regarding the various events which befall them in a spiritual point of view, —and that he is asking the blessing and guidance of God upon all their circumstances as a family, it cannot fail, I think, to strengthen the conviction, provided it is not contradicted by his conduct, that he is himself sensible of the supreme importance of the Divine blessing to himself and his house ; and Divine truth must, therefore, come recommended to them by all the force of a parent's or a master's authority.—I am, &c.

LETTER V.

THE ANSWER OF PRAYER.

—IN considering, as I have been led to do, some of the difficulties connected with prayer, I should feel that my task were imperfectly accomplished, should I omit those connected with the answer to prayer,—a subject on which many Christians entertain very vague and perplexed notions. There can be no doubt, in the first place, that the Word of God every where assigns to prayer a real efficacy, in procuring for us the blessings which we need, or in turning aside the evils which we fear,—and that where our prayers have been thus answered, it is our duty to mark and observe it. The man who is indifferent whether his prayers are answered or not, or whether the event has been in accordance with his prayers, virtually acknowledges, either that he has no faith in their efficacy, or that he is indifferent about the things for which he prays; in which case, he can hardly be said to have prayed at all. Nor will there be any thing which a devout mind would wish to treasure up with greater fidelity, as furnishing matter of thanksgiving and praise, than those occasions in which God condescended to the voice of his supplications, and sent relief from his holy hill. Nothing is more remarkable than this state of mind in the holy men whose devotions are set forth to us in the Word of God, and many of the Psalms especially are the breathings of a

devout heart, not merely in the contemplation of the Divine mercies, but of those mercies, as specially vouchsafed in answer to prayer. As to the duty and advantage, therefore, of observing and treasuring up the answer of prayer, there cannot be the smallest doubt.

It is sometimes felt, however, as a difficulty by serious minds, how far they are justified in considering every thing that takes place in accordance with their prayers, as the answer of prayer. They will have little hesitation in acknowledging this, in situations where their hearts and affections have been much interested, and where they have been led frequently and fervently to a throne of grace ; and above all, if the object for which they supplicated was one for which they felt simply their dependence on God. But, in the more ordinary affairs of life, and in cases which never called forth such continued supplications, they may feel doubtful how far it is right in them to believe that their prayers have been answered, or to rest assured that the blessings received have been given because they sought them. The difficulty is doubtless increased, when they see by the history of enthusiasts, how much this subject has been the means of hardening them in error,—how many things have been blasphemously given out as the answer to prayer, which God had no share in furthering,—how often they have mistaken the heated impressions of their own minds for Divine intimations,—and how many things have seemed to take place in accordance with their prayers, which the Hearer of Prayer never ordered, and which have proved only the means of strengthening hem in error.

In such a situation, a serious mind is naturally led to ask how far he may, without subjecting himself to the charge of enthusiasm, consider his prayers as answered, when the event takes place in accordance with his prayers ; or whether there are any marks by which he may be able to distinguish when he is justified in believing that his prayers have been answered, and when he may reasonably leave it doubtful, without entertaining any definite opinion. The difficulty is one which, I

am aware, can only be perfectly cleared up by Him who can alone assign to every agency in the universe under himself its own separate place ; nor will it ever be perfectly known to us in this world, what share our own supplications, or the supplications of others, have had, in obtaining for us either temporal or spiritual blessings. The answer which is promised to prayer, coming as it does through the ordinary providence of God, without any miraculous interposition, may always leave it doubtful, what is the precise efficacy which we are to attribute to prayer, along with the many other means which may have concurred in forwarding it ; and it may not in any case be so distinct and positive, as to convince a man who does not believe in the efficacy of prayer, that this had never been attained, had not prayer gone forth for it. But, for all this, if the Word of God requires us to ask and it shall be given,—if it requires our full and firm conviction of God's willingness to hear and answer us, if we would speed in our supplications,—if it requires us to ask in faith and it shall be done unto us, methinks it can require only an exercise of the same faith to rest satisfied when the event for which we have prayed comes, that it has come in answer to those very prayers which we were required to believe would be answered, before we could speed in them. To believe that, praying for such blessings, I shall have them, and yet when, having prayed for them, they do come, to doubt whether my prayers have had any share in procuring them, is, I venture to say, a thing impossible, if I continue to attach the same power to prayer as when I presented my supplications. The mind naturally, reasonably, and at once infers, that this is the evidence that my confidence was not misplaced, and I cannot but feel myself strengthened in my convictions of the truth of the efficacy of prayer.

It does not at all affect, and ought not to affect this conclusion, that another may say, for any thing that you can tell, the event might have been the same though you had never prayed,—to many a man the same things have occurred who never prayed,—and how can you be assured that prayer has

had a special place in procuring that for you, when it had no place certainly in procuring it for him? In this case, it is true, I cannot repeat the experiment, even though that were lawful for me, in order to convince him that a change in the means would produce a different result, and that the omission of prayer would have a material effect upon the whole train of circumstances which followed. But I am nevertheless justified, on every scriptural principle, in affirming that it would, unless I surrender altogether my belief in the efficacy of prayer. The conviction that such desire in offering up prayer as is properly implied in its very nature, must have been of the Holy Spirit who teaches to pray, is warrant enough that it was not awakened in me to be a vain and useless thing; and the very fact of a Divine agent being concerned in arousing me to this desire and confidence, assures me that my prayer was really a needful link in the chain of causes and effects through which the blessing supplicated has come down to me. If you ask then, am I to regard this thing as specially vouchsafed in answer to prayer? I would answer it by another,—What confidence have you that you really prayed for it,—that is, really asked it of God, trusting in his readiness to give it you? If you are confident that you so besought it,—and besought it not for a selfish or sinful end, but with a view to the Divine honour, what other proof could you ask or obtain in the nature of things, than that, according to your faith, it should be done unto you? The question in this case is not, whether you may or may not account for the event without prayer, but whether prayer and the promises made to it do not render a satisfying reason for the event?

When the nobleman of Capernaum, for example, who came to Jesus, supplicating him in behalf of his dying child, returned to his own house and found his son in some degree restored; and when he found, too, that the time of his recovery was coincident with the time in which Christ said to him, “Thy son liveth,” he might still have found it possible to account for his recovery by natural means,—the fever which

preyed upon him might have been at its crisis when Jesus spoke, and the connexion between his words and his son's amended health might have been merely accidental. But was it not a far juster and more reasonable conclusion, when he inferred from this, that it was the power of Christ which had restored him?—"And himself believed, and all his house." In like manner, though it may be easy for any man to conceive that the blessing for which he prayed might have been given without prayer, is it not in every way the simpler and the truer, as it is the more devout conclusion to infer, when we know what God has promised, that it is nothing less in our case than the answer of prayer? In proportion, then, to the consciousness which we have of *having really* prayed, ought to be,—I had almost said, will be,—our confidence when the event is in accordance with our prayers, that this is the blessing promised; and every man who has so found it, has experienced a proof of the Divine faithfulness, which ought to encourage him to pray again, and to pray more fervently, and ever to watch unto prayer.

The soundness of this conclusion can hardly, I should think, be doubted by any, without casting a reflection on the great truth, which, on the authority of Scripture, I have all along taken for granted,—the efficacy of prayer; nor does it afford, so far as I know, any room for enthusiasts to strengthen themselves in delusion. If men of enthusiastic views and feelings have presumptuously regarded certain very natural and ordinary things as Divine intimations, which God never promised nor authorized them to expect, is this to hinder any other man, who is walking by the rule of the Divine Word, and asking for things agreeable to the Divine will, from believing, when God, in the ordinary tenor of his providence, orders the events according to his prayers, that these prayers have been answered? And if men of the same character have prayed, and found the event often take place, as they thought, in agreement with prayer, or really so, when we know that these prayers had no share

in procuring what only served to confirm them in error, is this to hinder the Christian, who is not regarding iniquity in his heart, and who is seeking in simplicity to know and do the will of God, from placing confidence in the efficacy of prayer? Doubtless, cases like these, and there are many and striking ones in the history of the Church, should lead every man to watch over his own heart,—to walk scripturally, as he would walk surely,—and to put away all iniquity from his heart, as he would wish that the Lord should hear him. But they ought no more to cast doubt on the answer to prayer, than they ought to cast a doubt upon the Divine faithfulness, or upon the Word of God's revelation,—a book which expressly warns us, that many who are unlearned and unstable, wrest it to their own destruction.

I shall only add two observations to those I have already made. I think it is Pascal who remarks, that, in matters of faith, there is always as much light as to convince the humble, and always as much darkness as to confound the proud. So it is, in fact, with the answer to prayer. There is as much evidence of its reality as will satisfy every one who seeks to know God, and to approach him as the hearer of prayer; and there is in appearance, and at first sight, as little reality, as to confirm in his aversion to it the man who dislikes and derides prayer. The one finds, amidst some dark and oftentimes discouraging experience, a connexion between prayer on the one hand, and the ordering of events on the other,—between his supplications for Divine assistance and guidance, and the direction and strength daily given him, as is sufficient of itself to encourage him to pray; the other finds as much occasion of doubt and perplexity, and as much room for questioning its truth, as to give him confidence in refusing to pray; and according to their different states of mind, is their improvement or misimprovement of the privilege. Whilst the path of Divine Providence is every day lightening up to the man who prays, it is every day becoming darker and more obscure to the other. After all, however, the great reason why Christians see so little of

the answer to prayer, is because they pray so little, according to what God has required and invited us to do. If there were in our supplications more of the spirit of faith and child-like confidence, there would be more striking manifestations of the power which God has annexed to it. I cannot do more than touch upon a subject which your own mind will readily pursue of itself; but it is impossible for us to recollect how much even of the little time that we have spent in prayer has been unfruitful,—how many wandering thoughts,—how much formality,—how little confidence, gratitude, and submission,—without feeling that when our supplications come to be weighed in the balance of the sanctuary, a fearful deduction must be made from the apparent amount of them, before we can find those which have really had power with God, and prevailed. It is, I fear, the consciousness of our having thus so little prayed in faith, that makes us often hesitate as to whether our prayers have been answered or not (as it ought rightly to do), as well as makes us so often careless whether it has been as we desired. But let there be only more asking in faith, and there will be more manifestation of the Divine faithfulness; and we shall thus find the tenor of the Divine Providence bearing more steadfast witness to the reality of Divine grace. “Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.”—I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

PERSEVERANCE IN PRAYER.

—I AM persuaded, that not a few of the discouragements connected with the answer to prayer arise from want of right views of the importance which the Word of God attaches to perseverance in prayer. Though the Scripture gives us the fullest assurance of God's willingness to hear us, and that we are not to account of our importunity in prayer as originating this disposition on the part of God, but rather as constituting ground for our importunity, yet it is equally obvious to the most cursory reader of the Word of God, that it does not teach us to expect that our prayers shall be at once answered, or that we shall never have any time to wait for their accomplishment. On the contrary, its many exhortations to continue in prayer, to watch thereunto, to pray always, and never to faint, suppose that there may be a long time, sufficient to try our faith and patience, before the event be as we have desired. As a truth of the Word of God, every one is acquainted with what I have now stated, and recognises it as part of his creed; but how often is it forgotten by all of us in practice?—how often, if the answer is delayed, even though the event for which we prayed remains undetermined, do we cease to pray for it, or pray for it more feebly and more doubtingly than before, till at last, unless it be one of those petitions which we formally retain in our devotions, it ceases to be presented, and is suffered to drop

out of them, as a thing for which it is now in vain to pray ? Instead of persevering and watching with that confidence which the promises of God are fitted to beget in our minds, we rather act the part of spoiled children, who think that every thing which they ask should be instantly granted them, and who, when they find it denied, resent this by giving way to childish passions ; or, in a spirit not very different, some other object of attraction presents itself, and we lose sight of that which a moment before had so deeply engaged us ! It seems, therefore, peculiarly necessary for us to bear in mind the importance of persevering in prayer. Though the Bible assures us that no one believing supplication is lost, yet it equally assures us that every separate supplication has its separate efficacy. If I have prayed once for any thing, the repetition of the prayer is not useless ; it is another and an equally powerful mean employed for the accomplishment of the end ; and so on of all the renewed petitions that may follow. Nor do I see any thing more inconsistent in supposing, that frequent and persevering supplication may in this way accomplish what a solitary prayer might not, than in supposing that God may grant to the united prayers of many what He may yet withhold from the prayers of a single individual. On a subject so mysterious as this, we must, unquestionably, be guided by reference to the Word of God, which so often enjoins us, by the great motive which it presents to all, to continue and persevere in it ; and wherefore should it have bidden us pray always and not faint, unless there were encouragement to believe that such a spirit was the earnest of peculiar success ? I confess that I like this view of the subject better than that which would limit the importance of perseverance to the moral influence produced on our minds by waiting upon God, though this is by no means to be neglected. If, in the economy of Divine Providence, there is an arrangement by which some things are promised to two which are not promised to one, I see not why there may not be provision made in the same economy for a blessing on the successive prayers of an individual,

which is not made for the same individual's solitary prayer. And as our Lord said of certain devils, that they went not out but by prayer and fasting, may it be the case with certain blessings, that they come not down, but in answer to persevering prayer. If you ask me how I reconcile this with the willingness of God to give us spiritual blessings, I answer, how do you reconcile the necessity of prayer at all with such a disposition? You will say, that it is a Divine appointment that we must ask, if we would receive; and I answer, in like manner, that, for any thing you know, it may be equally a Divine appointment regarding certain blessings necessary for ourselves or for others, that we must persevere in asking them, if we would have them. There is nothing in all this to affect the validity of prayer, any more than its validity is affected when our prayers are not answered in the way that we desire. Every Christian knows that his prayer is not lost, and that though it draw not down upon him the precise blessing which he sought, it will draw down others yet more important; and so will it be with those prayers which we have presented, though we failed to persevere in them. Yet what is there in all this to hinder that, if they had been persevered in, they would have drawn down a peculiar blessing? And if God does so honour this disposition of confidence in Him, as to promise to hear and answer our believing supplications, why may He not bestow peculiar and abundant honour upon the same disposition where, believing in hope against hope, we continue instant and persevering in prayer?

The truth which I have now stated may be drawn from our Lord's parable of the friend going to ask of another three loaves. The object of that parable is to impress us with the conviction that we shall receive the blessings which we need, if we only continue knocking; and it is still more clearly testified in the parable of the unjust judge, which is intended to exhibit and embody the precept, that men ought always to pray and not to faint. It is stated in many a scriptural precept besides, such as that of the prophet, "Give God no

rest, till he establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.”

But whilst I would press this as the first of all reasons for perseverance in prayer, and that we should not be discouraged or give way to unbelief, if our prayers are not immediately answered, there are many other considerations which may be profitably suggested for the same purpose, and on which, I doubt not, you have often reflected. In the first place, it is connected with important moral effects, in so far as we ourselves are concerned. It is fitted to exercise our faith and patience,—to keep us in the attitude of dependence,—to make us feel the value of the blessing when it does come,—and often, I doubt not, to prepare us for the right improvement of it. The experience of every Christian will supply examples of this kind, in which he has found the very delay in answering his prayers more profitable than if the blessing had been immediately bestowed. It should be recollected, also, that though God has promised to answer prayer, the way and means by which He may do this are still retained in His own power, and that, according to the usual tenor of His providence, the event may be long delayed, though the means for its accomplishment may be instantly set in operation. The prayers of a Christian for increasing sanctification are often answered by afflictive visitations of Divine Providence, in the midst of which he cannot always see the Divine purpose. No doubt, it were easy for God to accomplish it otherwise, and at once to grant by His Spirit the blessing sought; but still, according to the usual train of His providence, it is by tribulation that He worketh patience, and experience, and hope; and an answer to these prayers is preparing, from the very instant that the time of trial and affliction begins. When the Christian, therefore, comes to know that it has been good for him to be afflicted, he knows at the same time that God has heard his prayer. Besides, I have sometimes thought that, in looking for the answer of prayer, it is right to consider that we are only the

units of a great and infinite system, which are closely united together, and of which, whilst every separate interest is regarded, the interest of an individual is never regarded apart from that of the whole. Who can tell, in a system so complicated as this, though it be all plain to an Almighty mind, how many separate individuals and separate interests every event of his providence may affect? No man is so isolated from his fellows, that the event which befalls him shall not affect others also; though there were no reason for deferring it on his own account, there may be reason for doing so on theirs; and the point of time in which all these separate interests may be best advanced, will be that in which the answer to prayer will best be given. Let me illustrate this by an example. Suppose that prayer is made by a distressed mother for a beloved and suffering child, it is obvious, in this case, that the interest of the mother is not the only one which may enter into the view of the Hearer of Prayer. The affliction may be designed for good to the child, and as the means of its spiritual renovation. Let me suppose, further, that this second interest has been served, and that affliction has been blessed for leading that child to God, there may be yet other interests to be advanced by its continuance,—the spiritual good of other members of the family. Nor until all these ends have been accomplished, may it be seen that God has heard and answered the supplications of the mother, in the recovery of her child. I give this as one very obvious example of what must be continually taking place under such a system as that of Divine Providence in the world; and surely these, and many other circumstances, afford abundant reason to guard us against being discouraged, because our prayers are not immediately or even soon answered. And has not the providence of God afforded proofs yet more extraordinary of his faithfulness as the Hearer of Prayer? Have we not reason to believe, that the prayers which never called forth any response during the life of those who presented them, have yet been fruitful in blessings to others, after those who offered them have been mingled with the clods of the valley?

Have not parents prayed for the spiritual good of their family, which they never saw realized, and which God has, nevertheless, accomplished, by bringing them in, in his good time and way, within the fold of the Great Shepherd? Have not ministers who have seemed to labour in vain, and to have spent their strength for nought, been yet known to leave a blessing behind, which others reaped, though they laboured not for it? And are not those many supplications, which holy men of all ages have offered for the prosperity of the Church on earth, not merely the means of strengthening us to pray, but, in so far as we know, the means of its successive advancement? An unbelieving mind might ask, with an air of triumph, how this could be reconciled with the promised answer to prayer? But though the Christian might not be able in such cases to satisfy him, he yet knows enough to satisfy himself,—he yet knows, and is assured, that these, though delayed, for reasons unknown to him, afford many of them the most illustrious testimonies to the Divine faithfulness; and he is encouraged by these, and by his own experience of the Divine goodness, to rest upon the Divine promise, that, at the great and final winding up of all things, it shall be seen, that no believing supplication passed unheeded, but that they all entered into the ears of the Lord God of Sabaoth. With so much light to direct and guide our path, we may well wait till that time, for a resolution of the difficulties which yet attach to the answer of our prayers. “We walk by faith,” says the Apostle, “not by sight;” and if there were nothing to try our faith in prayer, as in every thing else, we could not be said to walk by it. Let us, therefore, “be sober, and watch unto prayer,”—“praying always with all prayer and supplication, and watching thereunto with all perseverance,”—not doubting that we shall see the happy fruits of it here, and yet more in that blessed world, where, though there may be no room for prayer, there will be yet room for the offering of praise, to Him who has heard the voice of our supplications, and sent relief from his holy hill.—I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

INTERCESSORY PRAYER.

—You have often remarked, I doubt not, that beautiful arrangement of Divine Providence in the natural world, by which one man is made to minister to the necessities of another; and by which every man is so linked to those around him, that he is in a great measure dependent upon them for his comfort and happiness. And you must have remarked too, how much this system is fitted to unite men together, and to call forth and exercise the best feelings and affections of our nature. To such an arrangement we owe, in a great measure, the happiness of the parental and filial relations, the sweets of friendship, the pleasures of sympathy and kindness; and not less, on the other hand, the exercise of gratitude, and that response of generous feeling which so commonly awaits active interference in behalf of others, whether pining in sickness or languishing in poverty. Without diminishing our obligations to the Giver of all good, the blessings which every devout mind will trace ultimately to Him, are enhanced by coming through the ministration of another; and, without detracting from the gratitude which we owe to God, we feel that there is still room for the exercise of another gratitude to him whom He has

made the means of conveying it. The circle of our happiness and enjoyment is thus sensibly enlarged, and our best affections called forth and improved.

* * * * *

THE END.

