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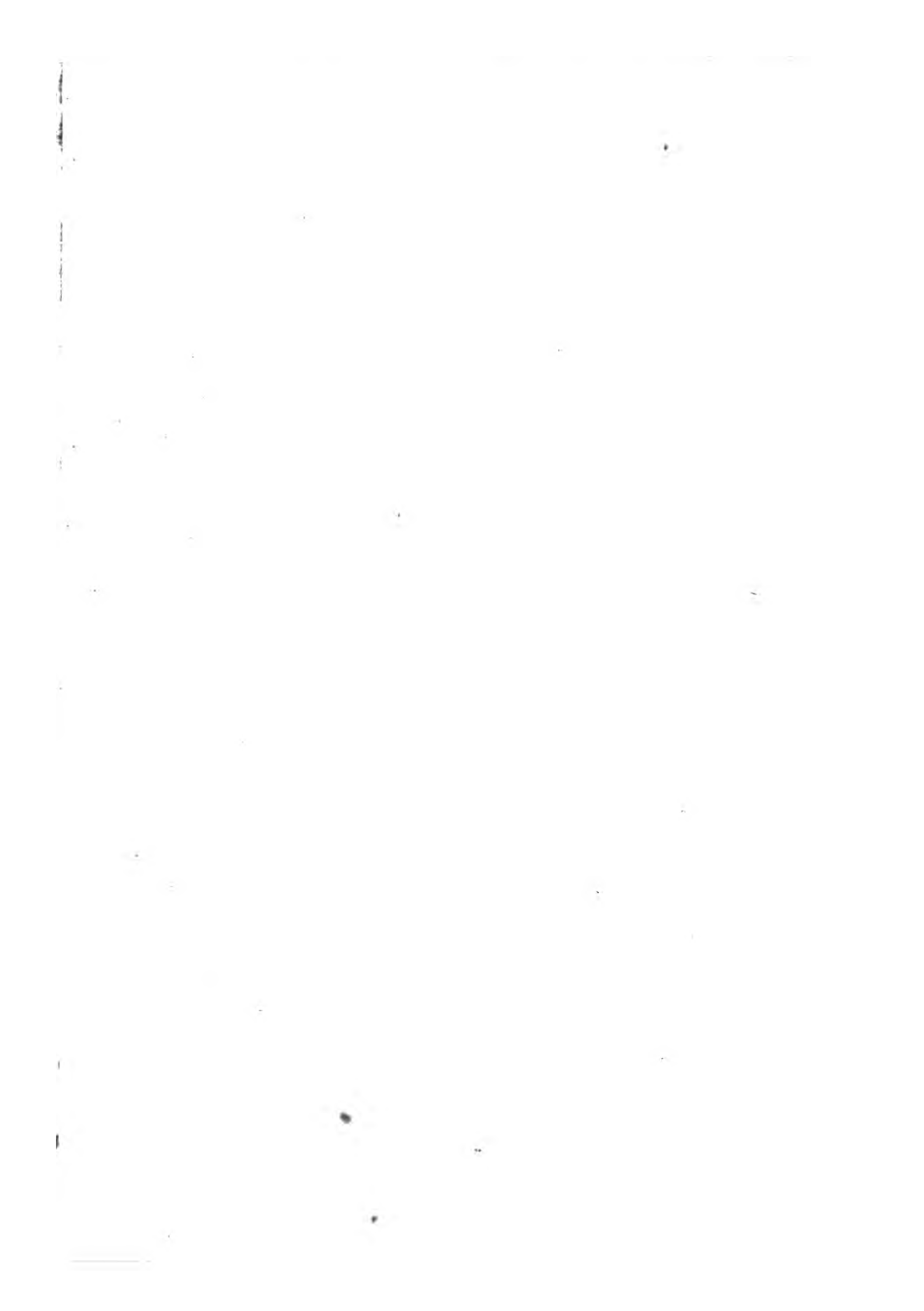


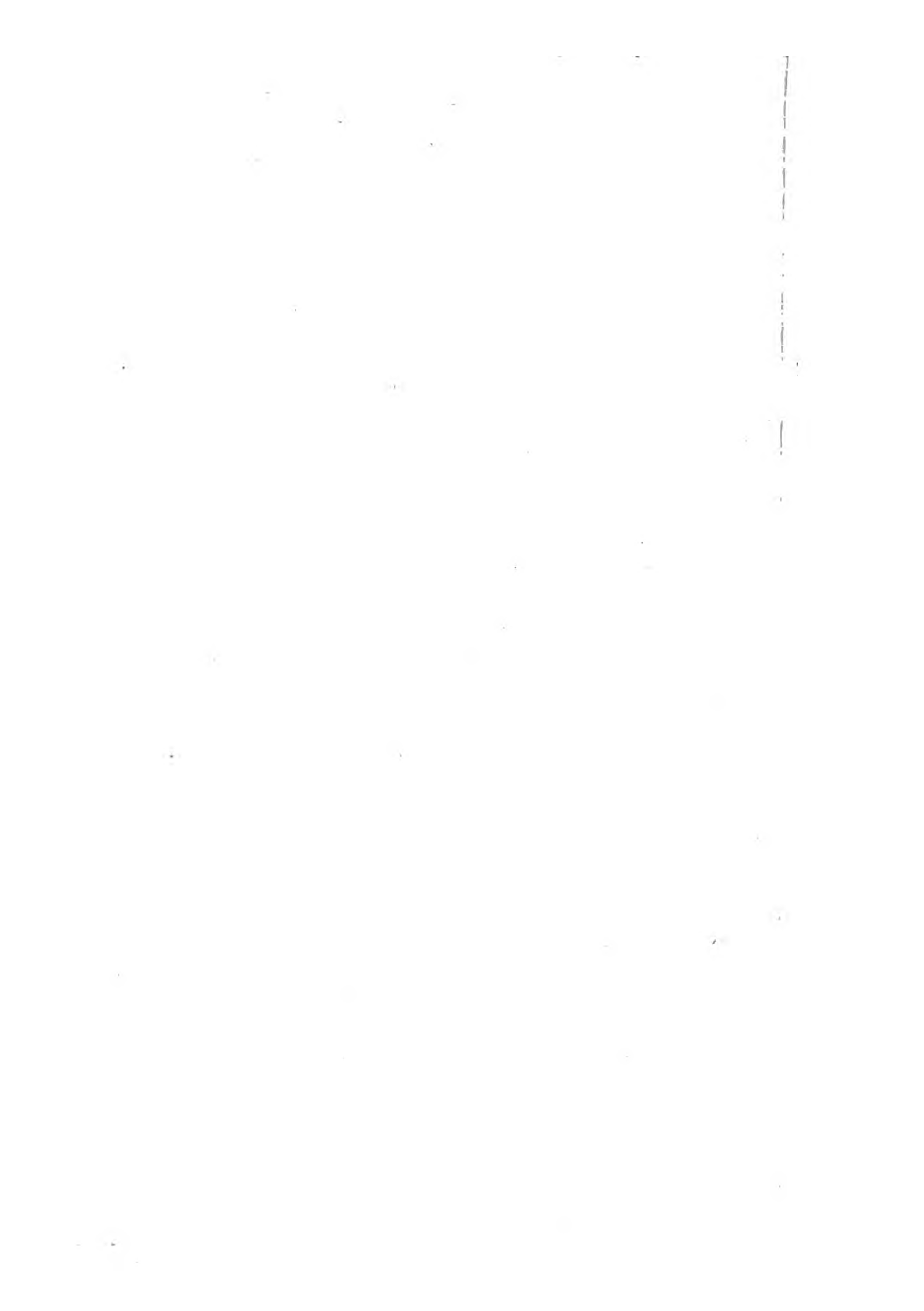
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37.

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SERMONS

ON

THE LESSONS, THE GOSPEL, OR THE EPISTLE,

FOR

EVERY SUNDAY IN THE YEAR ;

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF HODNET,
SALOP :

BY THE LATE

REGINALD HEBER, M. A.

RECTOR OF HODNET :

AND, AFTERWARDS, LORD BISHOP OF CALCUTTA.

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TRINITY SUNDAYS.

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THE SECOND VOLUME.

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TRINITY SUNDAY.

FIRST SERMON.

1 COR. xiii. 12.

*Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face :
now I know in part, but then shall I know even as I am
known.*

WHEN any, after long blindness, have been restored to sight by surgical skill, it has always been thought advisable, and necessary, to prevent the light of the sun from striking too soon on the newly opened sense ; and to keep the patient many days in a dark or shaded chamber, till, by slow degrees, and a cautious disclosure, his eyes have received sufficient strength to sustain without danger the full brightness of noon.

Thus it is, that all the truths, which the Almighty has thought fit to reveal to His creatures, have been shrouded at first in mystery, or prophecy ; and that He gradually inured our minds to wonder and miracle, before

we were admitted to the knowledge of His more perfect will, and to the noon-day brightness of His glory.

At first, among the first men and the patriarchs, we discover the thin dawn and twilight of Revelation; the covenant taught by the mystery of the woman's seed, and the serpent's head, and by the visible sign of the rainbow; or handed down, from age to age, by tradition, by dreams, or by the descent of angels. Then came the break of day, but obscure still, and cloudy; and Christ appeared afar off, but reflected from the face of Moses. And now, every generation, it grew lighter, and more light; as one prophet, after another, announced the approaching Messiah; till, bearing the full brightness of the Godhead, bodily, with healing on His wings, the Sun of Righteousness arose.

Still, however, the whole of God's glory is not yet disclosed; and we see, says the Apostle, "through a glass, darkly." We find even as yet, though amply sufficient is revealed for our *use*, that our curiosity is not yet equally gratified;—that, in all the truths and mysteries of our religion, a part, but not the whole, is discovered. It is only here and there that the clear heaven is shown us, through the clouds and darkness which are beneath the feet of God; and the visions, indulged us of His glorious nature, are no more than sufficient

to strengthen our faith, and to raise and exercise our hope.

It is my intention, in the present discourse, to set the doctrine of the Holy Trinity in this point of view; to prove, that our not understanding every secret of religion is no reason for our not believing it; and to consider the temper of mind with which we ought to contemplate the hidden things of God, and of the world to come.—To expect from the Almighty a perfect revelation of Himself, and of every particular in His wonderful nature, whether it really concerned our interest or not; and to imagine ourselves better judges, than He, what share of revelation He is to give us; or how much, or how little, of the tree of knowledge we may be indulged in, were a very vain curiosity, and a very criminal pride.

And as this principle of entire submission to God, and full confidence in His truth and wisdom, forbids us to attempt to be wise “beyond what is written;” or to seek from our vain fancy to lay down rules for the Almighty; and to penetrate into that Holy of Holies, whither none but our High Priest, His only Son, is permitted to enter; so, on the other hand, the same trust in God, which prevents our seeking to know *more*, will not suffer us to believe *less*, than what He has thought proper to explain. For, as God is holy, we may be

sure, that He will not tell us what is false ;— and, as He is wise, that He will not communicate what is unnecessary. God knows too well the little space which we have to live in this world ; He knows too well the important business, which ought to employ our thoughts and time, to distract our attention with any useless revelation ; or any which was not in itself important to the improvement of our hearts and lives. If, therefore, we can once establish, that any Doctrine is expressly laid down in the Holy Scriptures, (admitting, what all parties admit, that these Scriptures are the word of God,) it will follow, that we must receive it, not only without contradiction, but with *belief* ; not as a bare and unfruitful truth, but as a holy, and wholesome, and necessary doctrine.

And, in this submission of our reason there is, in truth, nothing unreasonable ; it is only the conduct of a child, who, being himself ignorant, trusts to the report of a parent or a friend ; and if the things related should seem strange, he and we have the same reason for thinking them true, namely, our good opinion of the relator, and our confidence that he would not deceive us. If, indeed, he tells us something against our own knowledge, something which we can feel or see to be false, we may be led to doubt his information : but even here, our belief, or disbelief, will be in exact proportion

to our reliance on ourselves, or on him. Even if our senses, our sight, and feeling tell us differently; yet still they may be deceived: and so often are they deceived, that this happens every day: and every day we believe something or other, against their testimony. Any one of you, who was sailing in a ship away from the land, would think, if you trusted your eyes only, that the vessel was remaining fixed in one place, and that it was the land, which was moving from you. The same thing I have known happen to children, going in a carriage, for the first time. But, to speak of something, which we all have known; do not our eyes and feeling seem to bear witness, that the earth stands still, and that the sun and stars move round it? Yet the contrary to this is proved by learned men to be the case: and it is, in fact, the sun, which remains fixed and immoveable, and the earth, which turns round before it, every day and night. So liable are our senses, and that reason which is founded on our senses, — so liable, I say, are these to be in error, and so humbly ought our weakness and ignorance to carry itself, before the revelations of Him, in whose hand we and all things are; whose truth cannot be doubted; and whose wisdom cannot be deceived. But, if this be the case with things before our eyes, and under our feet, how much more so with

wonders, which we have no means of examining, and which we only know from the revelations of God! The doctrine of the Trinity we are told is impossible; but how can we know what is impossible, or what is unlikely, in Heaven, or with the nature of God? What means have we of judging? We can touch, indeed, and taste, and hear, and see, and smell: and from these, and as far as these are concerned, we can judge and reason. But, to apply such means of inquiry to heavenly things, to measure by such powers the wisdom, and might, and majesty of our Maker, or to search by such helps into those spiritual natures, which we only know by faith; and to which nothing on earth, we are sure, can be compared,—is applying our sense and reason to a use which it is practically impossible they should answer: it is measuring distance with a weather-glass, or heat and cold with a carpenter's rule.

But why is the doctrine of the Trinity impossible? It will be answered: "We cannot understand it." It is most true, we cannot; and how many things are there, even upon earth, which the greatest and most learned men have sought to understand in vain: what wonder then, that in the Heaven of Heavens, there should be some secrets hid from all created beings; some, which neither man nor angel can penetrate; but which man and angel are not

the less called upon to believe, and admire, and adore.

“But it is contrary to the analogy of reason and experience.” What do we mean by these words? Do they imply any thing more, than that “we have never seen any thing in this world at all resembling it?” And what is this more than to say, that God has created nothing like Himself?

“But if the doctrine were necessary; if it were even true,” some perhaps may say, “God would have revealed it more clearly.” Are we then thus to make terms with our Creator? Are we to reject such doctrines, as He makes the means of our salvation, because they are not worded exactly as we would have them? or because they do not correspond to the ideas which we had previously formed? Surely, my friends, it is not for us to make terms with the Almighty; it is not for us to answer to the Holy Ghost, as revealing His truth in the Scriptures—“Either explain to us more, or we will believe none:—either tell us, with what bodies the dead arise, or we will not receive the faith of any resurrection:—either tell us, how the world was made out of nothing, or we will not acknowledge that it ever had a beginning.”—Such senseless blasphemies, which need only be named to fill the soul with horror, such blasphemies are really lurking under the objections of those

men, who require mathematical proof for every mystery of religion ; and are unwilling to trust even God Himself for more than they themselves have seen !

True it is, we see as yet through a glass darkly, — but even at present, and on this most mysterious doctrine, sufficient, amply sufficient, is revealed to guide our faith, our praises, and our prayers. We are told in Scripture, that there is but one God : and this God hath revealed to us further, that, in His nature and substance, are three distinct Persons, who have each their separate office ; — and each of whom claims alike our love and reverence. Is not this sufficient, or how do we know that our present faculties could possibly receive further knowledge ?

Suppose with yourselves, that a man who had been born and educated in a dark dungeon, were to deny all existence of light ; because he had never seen it ; nor knew any thing to which it might be compared. How vain, how idle, would be the attempt to explain the nature of light, to such a person ! What notion could he have of colours, to whom every thing alike was gloomy ; — what of the fair varieties of this world ; its hills, and valleys ; its mountains, seas, and rivers ; and the high and glorious arch of Heaven ; — he, who had grown old within the narrow range of four smooth walls ? If, when we spoke of such things to him, he re-

quired of us farther explanation, would not our answer be : — “ I have other things to speak with you, but you cannot bear them now ? — You cannot as yet understand me ; but if these prison walls were away, you would be at once convinced of my truth. On that truth, on your good opinion of me, all these wonders must at present rest : and the faith which you have, that I would not deceive you, must be your evidence of things unseen ! ”

Exactly such as this, my friends, is the condition of mankind on earth ; and this, or nearly this, is the spirit of the language of Scripture. In discoveries, where sense is concerned, in exploring the earth and air, — the plants, and inhabitants of this globe, on which we dwell, — God leaves us to our own curiosity ; and gives us, in no small degree, the means, by our own exertions, to acquire some knowledge. But beyond the walls of this our prison, all is inconceivable and unknown ; it is from Him only, that our information is derived ; and it is, only as we hear, that we dare venture to speak, or to think.

Yet one near and even nearer prospect he always sets before us ; one moment, when all our doubts shall be removed ; and when these things, which we now see through a glass darkly, we shall be permitted to look upon, as it were, face to face.

Dissolve this tabernacle:—rend but this fleshly dungeon in twain: and all shall be clear, which now perplexes us:—all shall be bright, which now appears obscure:—and all, which we doubt of now, shall be known, even as God knoweth us. This is the gate of knowledge; here our discoveries begin; and, the night of the grave once past, we shall enter at once into a day which no cloud shall obscure; no evening, end.

In hope and expectation of this time, it is our duty to possess our souls in patience; not to weary our spirits by an unholy curiosity; or to despise, and turn away from those consolations, which our proud reason cannot comprehend; but humbly and sincerely to accept the means of salvation offered to us,—to believe in God, and to worship Him in the manner, which His Scriptures teach,—and, by a constant endeavour to serve and please Him, prepare ourselves for that awful moment, which is to open our eyes to the secret things of God, and to enable us, with Cherubim and Seraphim, to behold His glory; and to worship, with crowns, and palms, around His footstool,—through the mercies of The Father, the merits of The Son, and the blessed assistance of The Comforter.

Nor should we ever mention or think on such holy mysteries, without an unusual seriousness of mind; figuring to ourselves the great dignity of the Persons whom we contemplate; and our

own infinite unworthiness. And, lastly, and on this point, my brethren, I entreat you, as you value your souls, — if ever you find a doubt arising in your minds on subjects such as these, [for, even in the mind of the most serious believer, Satan will sow such troublesome thoughts,] let me entreat and advise you to betake yourself at once to earnest prayer; entreating the aid of God's Holy Spirit to show you His truth; and to give you faith in His revealed will, hope in His gracious promises, and charity to all such, as differ from you in opinion: — beseeching God to keep you from all bitterness against your weaker brethren; and that it may please Him to lead, in His own good time, both them, and you, into all peace; forgiving to each of you the errors of his faith and life, through the prevailing merits of His only Son.

SERMON XXXI.

TRINITY SUNDAY.

SECOND SERMON.

ST. JOHN, iii. 1, 2.

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews : the same came to Jesus by night.

NICODEMUS was a man of the highest rank among the Jews, and a pharisee of great reputation for his learning and piety. We find him described in the Gospel, as a ruler, or magistrate, and a member of their high court of Sanhedrim, or parliament; and the ancient works of the Jews are full of strange and improbable stories as to his wealth, his magnificent liberality, and the wonderful manner in which his prayers were supposed to be heard by God. His substance was calculated as sufficient to feed all Jerusalem for seven years; his daughter's marriage bed was, in ostentation of wealth, built up with purses of money; his liberality was esteemed as unbounded; and so great was his reputation for piety, that his prayers were,

on more than one occasion, believed by the Jews to have wrought miracles, and called down rain from Heaven. These stories, indeed, are strange and improbable; nor do they rest on any better authority than the traditions of the Rabbins and the Pharisees; but wild as they are, they prove, at least, the high estimation in which he was held; insomuch that the riches of Nicodemus, and the misfortunes of his family, became a sort of proverb, to express the excess and the uncertainty of worldly prosperity.

A grave and learned and wealthy and renowned man, with so much to hazard from any change, and so naturally disposed to favour the present state of things, was not likely to be forward in embracing a new religion, or one which was only recommended by so poor and so young a teacher as our Lord. Besides, as yet, not one of those with whom Nicodemus was most accustomed to associate; none of those, whose good opinion he chiefly valued; none of the rulers of the Jews, none of the rich, none of the learned, had ventured openly to confess their suspicions, that this strange Galilean, whom they persecuted, was, after all, that Messiah which should come into the world: and Nicodemus, it is possible, had joined, as loudly as the rest of his brother magistrates, in discountenancing the new prophet, and his forerunner John; and in deriding the poor fishermen and silly

women who believed in the miracles which Jesus performed.

It is probable, nevertheless, that this ruler of the Jews had been for some time uneasy in his mind. It was impossible for a man so well acquainted with the Law and the Prophets, not to observe, that Jesus of Nazareth did all the works, and displayed all the tokens, which Moses and the Prophets had foretold of the Messiah: and his rank and leisure gave him every opportunity of learning the particulars of our Lord's miraculous birth, and of the circumstances by which His early life was rendered remarkable. He had, doubtless, heard from the Herod family themselves, the visit of the wise men of the east; and the fears, which that visit excited. The star must have been seen by all Judea; and he himself, perhaps, for he was of advanced age, was one of the doctors who had admired the understanding, and the answers of the young Jesus, in the Temple. At all events, the manner, in which John the Baptist proclaimed Him the Lamb of God, was known to all Judea and Galilee; and the wonderful works, which Jesus wrought, were of a kind not to be concealed; nor to be performed by any man, unless the power and presence of God were with him.

We may suppose, perhaps, as these reflections recurred with daily increasing strength to the

mind of Nicodemus, that the ruler's perplexity would increase in proportion. "If Jesus be the Christ, the Messiah, whom we expect, am I justified in delaying to fall down and worship Him? If Moses have commanded us to obey that Prophet, whom God should raise up like unto Him;—am I excusable in delaying to own myself His follower? If this be the Lamb of God, who is to take away the sins of his people, what can I hope for, if I neglect so great a salvation?" Such, we may suppose, were the meditations of this man; but to obey the conviction thus implanted in his soul, involved in itself the sacrifice of much reputation; great danger to his rank, and esteem in society; and, when the temper of the times was considered, the loss of his general property, and perhaps of life itself. These are the seasons, when riches and reputation are real snares to men: when they must be abandoned, for the sake of God; or retained, against our consciences: and there are few, who, when such a sacrifice is called for, have had sufficient courage to cast off their encumbrances; and to enter naked into the kingdom of life. Of these few, Nicodemus was not one: he durst not own Christ publicly; yet he could not help believing on Him; and after, it may be, much inward struggle, between his fear of the world, and his conviction of the truth, he has recourse to the

usual expedient of cowardice : he comes, by night, to Jesus ; and professes himself His disciple privately.

In his manner of doing this, and in the conversation, which followed, we may perceive, I think, much of that pride of rank and riches, which was likely to possess the mind of a nobleman ; much of that confidence in his own learning, and in his own virtues, to which the Pharisees were but too liable. And if we keep these points in mind, during the whole of our Saviour's discourse, we shall be able, I think, to perceive His intention — to humble both these feelings in the heart of his new disciple ; or, at least, by the touchstone of humility, to prove, whether he were sincere.

Nicodemus, perhaps, was of opinion, that, when so mighty and so wise a man as he was, came to Christ, and owned himself His disciple, the Prophet would be willing to accept so eminent a convert, on his own terms : that He would not insist on his submitting to the usual and public ceremonies of a profession of his faith ; but that, in private, and without revealing his secret, Jesus would gladly admit him to far more favour and confidence, than those poor Galileans, who were, as yet, His principal followers. Nor, had Jesus been a deceiver, had He been a mere human teacher of righteousness, would He have hesitated at a step so evidently

conducive to His interest ; nor would then have, even, that haughty compliment been improper, with which the ruler opened his visit : “ Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God,—for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him.” Flattering words these, from the wealthy and the powerful : but on the Son of God no such lip-righteousness could impose. Interrupting him in his unfinished speech, He discovers at once, the knowledge of what was passing in the mind of His visitant ; and reminds him, that he had not yet gone through those previous pledges of sincerity and repentance, which alone could admit men to familiarity with Christ. “ Verily, verily, I say unto thee,” (observe the earnestness of our Lord, while, reading His visitant’s soul, He detects the blended pride, and cowardice, which struggled with his faith, and made him only half a Christian,) “ verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

The kingdom of God, as I have often told you, is generally used in the New Testament, for the Church, or Kingdom of Christ upon earth : and, to see the kingdom of God, means, to be admitted into the privileges of a Christian ; to become a child of God ; a coheir of glory with Jesus Christ ; and a partaker of those helps, and comforts, and graces of the Spirit, which, to

those who seek them truly, are the riches of our faith, our glory, our consolation, our joy! With this meaning of the expression " Kingdom of God," Nicodemus, as a learned Jew, was well acquainted; and he must have been no less so, with the phrase, " being born again ;" which was a common expression, both among Jews and Gentiles, to signify that inward and entire change of heart and habits ; of which baptism was the outward symbol, or pledge : and which both Jews and Gentiles required from those, who were candidates for admission into the higher privileges and mysteries of their respective forms of worship.

The heathens themselves had the custom of sprinkling with water those, who gave themselves up to the worship of any of their gods : and the person, who submitted to this ceremony, was said to be born again ; and to become the child of that deity, to whom he consecrated his after life. The Romans, when they set a slave at liberty, called that ceremony the " regeneration of that slave : " and the same name was given by the Jews to that baptism by which heathens, and idolators, and excommunicated persons, were admitted to the profession of the laws of Moses.

Our Saviour's meaning, then, was (and Nicodemus could not but understand it), to reprove His visitant for thus confessing that faith privately

in which he ought rather to have gloried; and to remind him, that, if he sought to be a disciple of the Messiah, he must first go to His Apostles, and be baptized. But this little suited the ruler's inclination. To make so public a profession of an unpopular faith was discreditable; and might be dangerous:—for baptism, by a tradition of the Jews, was always performed in the day-time, and before witnesses. To humble himself, and receive the pledge of adoption from a publican, like Matthew, or from such mean Galileans as John, or James, or Peter, was, to a ruler, shocking; and, in the eyes of a Pharisee, a doctor of the law, an almost impious degradation. And to own himself a sinner and impure, to profess that his whole nature required a change, and to undergo that ceremony,—which was the seal of confession, and forgiveness, to repentant idolaters, and publicans, and harlots,—appeared to this self-righteous man a strange and unnecessary proposal. A great deal, I think, of surprise and disappointed pride is perceptible in his reply: “How can a man be born again, when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb, and be born?”

He was not, he could not be, I have already proved, he could not be ignorant of our Saviour's meaning; though he thus seeks to evade its application: but he means to urge, in answer to this command of Christ, his age, his high cha-

racter, his privileges as a native Israelite, and a descendant of Abraham; and endeavours to persuade Christ, that a man of his age and consequence, and respectability, could have no need of baptism, or of that repentance, and change of life and habits, of which baptism was a sign. “How can a man be born again, when he is old?” “Dost thou suppose that, at my age, a doctor of the laws, and a master in Israel, I want any change of this sort? What tedious ceremonies, or probation, can I submit to? Old as I am, how long wilt Thou keep me in the same dependance, and humility, which we expect of children, or of heathen converts? What yet is wanting to a descendant of Abraham, like myself? Can I make myself any more a child of promise than I am already? Can I enter a second time into my mother’s womb,” from which former birth I became heir of Israel; and countryman, perhaps, kinsman, of the Messiah? “Verily, verily,” our Lord again replies, “I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.” As if he had said, “Alas! old man, many things are necessary to make thee a child of God; of which thou hast, as yet, but little notion. Not only is the outward sacrament of regeneration by water required; but a great and inward spiritual change, [altogether distinct from those privileges, on which thou layest

“so great a stress, namely, of the birthright of a
“Jew, and thy descent from Abraham,] ‘that
“which is born of the flesh is flesh.’ From thy
“mother’s womb, of which thou talkest, thou
“hast only derived a fleshly life ; those Jewish
“promises, which thou inheritest, and of which
“thou boastest thyself, are all of a worldly
“nature ; and flesh and blood cannot inherit the
“kingdom of God. ‘That which is born of the
“Spirit is Spirit:’ and the birth of the Spirit can
“only introduce us to those spiritual privileges, in
“which the kingdom of God consists. ‘Marvel
“not, that I said unto you, You must be born
“again;’ nor dream, that, because thou art born
“a Jew, thou hast therefore by that natural birth
“an exclusive title to the kingdom. ‘The wind
“bloweth where it listeth ; and thou hearest the
“sound thereof ; but canst not tell whence it
“cometh, nor whither it goeth : so, is every one
“that is born of the Spirit.’” [As if he had said,
Canst thou command its free and blessed breezes
to visit the Jews alone ?] “Yea, thou knowest
“not whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth :
“but thou hearest the sound thereof ; that sound
“which is gone forth into all lands ; and as far
“as the ends of the earth. Can earthly wisdom
“find it, or can the works of man produce it ?
“No, it bloweth where it listeth ; and Jew and
“Gentile, Pharisee and Idolater, are born of the
“Spirit, they know not how, and purified by its

“invisible influence, only known by its effects,
“and by the fruits which it generates.”

The surprise of Nicodemus was now no longer feigned or peevish. That the privileges of the blood of Abraham should be accounted for nothing; and that the revelation of God's will should spread, like the wind, from one corner of heaven to the other,—these, to a Pharisee, were, indeed, unexpected truths: and he replies in wonder, “How can these things be?” Yet, in truth, these very circumstances were all foretold by the prophets, as proofs of the Messiah's coming; it was foretold, that the gathering of the Gentiles should be to Him; it was foretold, that His coming was, like a refiner's fire, to renew the hearts of His people; and the ignorance, which Nicodemus displayed, as to these signs of the times, is a satisfactory proof how much the Pharisees had left off the study of the Scriptures—for the vanity of traditions, and for the useless scruples of outward forms of devotion or reverence. They pored over the commentaries of the scribes, till they forgot Isaiah and Moses: they washed their cups, and strained out their gnats, and made broad their phylacteries, till the real glories, of which their ceremonies were but the shadows, were hidden altogether from their eyes. Well, then, might Christ exclaim against Nicodemus:—“Art thou a master in Israel, and art not
“yet familiar with the prophets? Much, indeed,
“hast thou to learn, and to unlearn, before thou

“ canst be My disciple ; and far art thou, [to whom
“ the outward signs of Christ’s coming are thus
“ new and strange,] from being able yet to under-
“ stand the mysteries of the kingdom of God.” He
then goes on to declare His own divinity ; and
to complain of the slowness of men’s hearts—to
receive that which was revealed to them, by Him,
to whom all things were known. “ We speak
“ that which we do know ; and testify that we
“ have seen ; and ye receive not our witness. If
“ I have told you earthly things, and ye believe
“ not ; how shall ye believe, if I tell you of
“ heavenly things ? And no man hath ascended
“ up into heaven but He, that came down from
“ heaven, even the Son of Man, which is in
“ heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in
“ the wilderness ; even so must the Son of Man
“ be lifted up : that whosoever believeth on Him
“ should not perish, but have eternal life.”

There are in this passage many circumstances
worthy of remark, and of a nature highly appli-
cable, not only to the general faith of a Christian,
but to that particular mystery which we are as-
sembled this day to celebrate. First, it is plain,
that the reasons, for which our Saviour claims to
be believed, in what He asserts, both as to things
earthly, and as to things heavenly, is that He
hath seen them ; that He speaks from His per-
sonal knowledge. “ We testify that, which we
have seen.” And though a mere human prophet

might have revelations of what passes in Heaven, or among the departed souls in Paradise, yet no such prophet could add what follows: "And no man hath ascended into Heaven, but He that came down from Heaven." He here claims to Himself, not only that Heaven had been opened to Him; as it was afterwards opened to St. Paul: but that it was His native country; that He was no passing guest there; but that He originally came down from Heaven; that Heaven was His throne, and the place of His abode. The Son of Man must therefore be more than man. But what follows? "The Son of Man who is in Heaven." WHO IS IN HEAVEN. When did our Lord say this, and to whom? Was He not then present with Nicodemus, in his chamber at Jerusalem? How then could He say, that He, the Son of Man, was, at that very time in Heaven, unless He claimed to Himself that privilege of Godhead, by which the Second Person of the glorious Trinity is, in Heaven, and in earth, and every where, at the same moment; and while the earthly body, which His Spirit animated, was conversing with the sons of men, His boundless Deity filled all space, beheld all things, sustained all things, directed all things?

And to take away all pretence, that He was here speaking of any but Himself, He goes on to say, that the same Son of Man, who was at that moment in Heaven, was He, who should soon be lifted up in the wilderness, to the end, that

whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

In this discourse, then, of our Lord, He declares, sufficiently to satisfy even the most unwilling hearer, that He existed before His descent on earth; that He existed in Heaven; that His existence filled both Heaven and earth at the same moment; that His crucifixion was a sacrifice for sin, which should purchase life and forgiveness, to all who believe in Him. But there are some practical, as well as doctrinal, truths, which I wish to teach you from the story of Nicodemus; of which the first is, that when we see this wise and powerful, and on the whole, perhaps, well-meaning man, rejected as a convert by Christ, because he did not dare to own his faith publicly; and because he thought himself too pure to need baptism and repentance; we may learn, that God will not admit of such a service as, in fear of the world, shrinks from the name of a Christian; or which comes to Him with a reliance on its own merits or purity:—that Christ will, in Heaven, and before His angels, be ashamed of them who are ashamed of Him on earth; and that they, who seek salvation, must seek it by open repentance, and in the character of humbled sinners.

Next, it may be observed, that the best way to endeavour after increase of grace, and clearer views of God's plans and providence, than we now possess, is to make the best use in our

power of our present lights. We are to receive with lowliness what we already know; and to submit ourselves to earthly truths, before we can hope for a knowledge of heavenly. And, lastly, we may learn from this example, the advantage of yielding to our first impressions of piety; and of doing that at once, which our reason tells us must be done before we die. Nicodemus, so long as our Saviour lived, had not sufficient courage to join His disciples; and, when he had seen the fulfilment of His last prophecy, and beheld the Son of Man lifted up like the serpent of Moses; this proof of His divinity overcomes his doubts; and we behold Him coming boldly forward to celebrate His burial with a late, though sincere repentance. How much must he have then lamented his own slackness! how much must have hated himself for that cowardice, which was ashamed of the Messiah, while he might have gazed on His countenance, and listened to His words;—how greatly must he have feared lest his day of grace was gone by for ever! Oh may we, while God is yet present with us, and before the night cometh, when no man can work, make haste to acknowledge the Son of God, for our Lord and King; lest “His wrath be kindled,” and we perish!

To Him, who liveth, and reigneth with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, one God, now and for ever, be all praise, and glory, Amen.

SERMON XXXII.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

ST. LUKE, xvi. 22.

The beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.

THE practical meaning of the awful parable, which you have heard this day, and what was the particular crime, for which the rich man was so severely punished, are not difficult to be understood. Although many and very useful lessons may be derived from their explanation; I shall not, at present, enter into any more than a short consideration of them;—but shall confine myself, principally, to some curious and important questions, which the history itself suggests; and the effects which the answers to them ought to have on our lives and conversations.

The first of these is, whether we have here presented to us the history of two real men, or no.

It is, I believe, a very common idea among the general readers of Scripture, that our Saviour here gives us an account of what had happened to two well-known persons, [well known, at

least, to all His hearers,] who had lived and died, in Jerusalem, a little time before. And the Christians, who now live in that country, are so persuaded of this, that, among many other pretended antiquities, they show to strangers a ruinous building, which they call the house of this very rich man. This, indeed, is quite impossible; because Jerusalem was entirely thrown down by the Romans, and has undergone so many changes, and misfortunes since, that even the Temple can only be traced by its foundations, and by the mountain on which it was built. Nor does there seem to be very great weight in their opinion¹, who think that Lazarus, at least, must have been a real person; because he is mentioned by name: still less in the opinion of those, who suppose that this is the same Lazarus, the friend of Christ, whom He raised from the dead. For that Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary, so far from being a beggar, was a man, to all appearance, in easy if not in wealthy circumstances; living in his own house, in Bethany, and giving feasts and entertainments, not only to our Saviour, but to His twelve apostles, and to numbers of the Jews besides. Nor does it appear possible, that this conversation of our Lord with the Pharisees, could have taken place during the three days between the death of Lazarus and his resurrection.

¹ Calvin, Harmonia.

But Lazarus, which is only the way in which the common people among the Jews pronounced Eleazar, signifies, “our help is in God;” and though the name is very usual among the Jews; and though there may, for aught we know, have been a real beggar of that name, well known in Jerusalem; yet I am myself inclined to think, that our Saviour only used it to give force and clearness to His language; and to teach us, that, even the poorest and most miserable, who believe in Him, shall certainly have God for their helper. We know, however, that the account given by Christ cannot be understood according to the very letter of His expressions; since the bodies of these two men, supposing that they were real persons, must naturally have been rotting in the grave; and “a spirit,” saith Christ, “hath not flesh and bones”¹—to dip its fingers in water, or to have its tongue cooled. But, in truth, these expressions of our Saviour, must be understood, as all other parables are understood, as a comparison, or similitude; in which the persons described are put as an outward covering to a concealed and secondary meaning.

Thus, when Jotham relates the story of the trees choosing a bramble for their king², he does not mean that such a thing could ever really happen: but that the Israelites were acting as

¹ St. Luke, xxiv. 39.

² Judges, ix.

foolishly in making Abimelech their head; as the trees would have done, had they elected a bramble. Again, when Christ in his parables, tells us of a marriage supper; or of a vineyard; or speaks of Himself as the door to a sheepfold; we know, that we are to understand by the marriage supper, the faith and hopes of a Christian; by the vineyard, the Church and nation of the Jews; and by the door, that no one can enter into His kingdom, except by Him, and by His merits only. If we apply the same rule to the explanation of the present parable, it will appear, I think, that Christ, under the persons of the rich man and Lazarus, describes the different situations and prospects of the heathens, or Gentiles, and the Jews.

The professor of the Jewish law was clothed in purple and fine linen, was full of the ostentation and outward show of good works, and fasting, and ceremonies, in which the formal and superstitious Pharisees relied for salvation, on their own merits. “He fared sumptuously every day:” — he had the spiritual food of the law, and the prophets, in abundance; and (like the angel of the Church of Laodicea, mentioned in the book of Revelations) he said that he was rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing; and knew not, that, in the eyes of God, he was “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.”¹

¹ Rev. iii. 17.

To this pride and confidence in their own spiritual privileges, which distinguished the Jewish Pharisee, is strongly and beautifully opposed the helpless outcast state of the Gentile world ; who had no merits of their own, or of their forefathers, to plead ; no spiritual food ; no holy Scriptures ; no prophets, to teach or comfort them : and who desired to be fed even with the crumbs, (this very expression had been used by the poor Canaanitish woman, whose daughter was tormented with a devil¹,) with the very crumbs, or smallest part of that abundance of spiritual knowledge, with which God had blessed the Jews. He was laid at the rich man's gate ; for the Gentiles were not allowed to go beyond the gate of the Temple : but were, in common language, considered as unclean, and hardly fit company for the dogs of Israel. He was covered with sores ; — that is, with the corruptions of unreclaimed nature ; and with those hideous sins, which ignorance of God's law increased, and rendered almost incurable.

This may seem a sad and strange contrast : but the picture is not overcharged — of the spiritual blessings, with which the Jews were favoured ; to whom was the law ; and from whom the prophets came ; who had the first promise of the kingdom ; and to whom the Gospel was first offered ; — and of the helpless

¹ St. Mark, vii. 28.

and abandoned state of the heathen world ; who were given over to a reprobate mind ; and were, as St. Paul, who saw their ways, assures us, “ filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness.”¹

How then was this wretched man to be relieved ? The dogs, by which, perhaps, is meant the light of nature, and the mere animal knowledge of right and wrong, which the heathens enjoyed, might lick his sores ; but could not cure them : — but God was his help ; his name is called Lazarus ; and that God, who came into the world to save that which was lost, redeemed him from the world and its miseries. “ The beggar died ; and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom ; the rich man also died, and was buried : and in hell, he lift up his eyes, being in torments.” Compare this description with what our Lord had said before, that the Gentiles “ shall come from the east, and from “ the west ; and shall sit down with Abraham, “ and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of “ heaven : but the children of the kingdom shall “ be cast out into outer darkness² : ” and you will not fail to observe, that the same thing is spoken of in both places ; and that, here as well as there, the rejection of the Jews and the calling of the Gentiles is understood.

The discourse between the ghost of the rich

¹ Rom. i. 29.

² St. Matt. viii. 11, 12.

man and Abraham, which is, in itself, evidently an allegory, may be best explained, when you are informed, that the Jewish doctors taught, in their Talmud, or commentary on the law, that no Israelites, or circumcised persons, could perish : since Abraham would, after death, snatch them from hell ; and bear them in his bosom to Paradise. This foolish hope is here reprov'd by Christ ; who gives an instance, where a wicked Jew calls on his father Abraham, in vain ; and cannot get from him, so much as a single drop of water, to cool his tongue in torment. But the most awful, and, perhaps, the most striking, part of the whole parable, is the assurance of Abraham at the end of it, that they, who would not hear Moses and the prophets, would not be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.

How truly this was fulfilled in the Jews of that generation, I hardly need tell you. They would not hear, though both Moses and the prophets spake of Christ : they were continually calling out for signs and wonders, to convince them : and yet, when the greatest of all wonders had been repeatedly performed ; when the daughter of Jairus had been raised from her death-bed ; and the widow's son of Nain, from his coffin ; when Lazarus, the namesake of the character in this parable, had been called forth from the grave, in which he had lain four days ; what effect had all this on their minds ? They

also took counsel to put Lazarus to death, because that, by reason of him, many of the Jews believed on Jesus.¹ Nay, when that blessed Lord Himself arose in might and majesty from the grave, even then could they harden their hearts against this last and greatest wonder ; and bribed the poor heathen soldiers to tell a lie, which their own alarm disclaimed. Verily, they, who would not hear Moses and the prophets, were not persuaded, when one rose from the dead !

This, then, appears to me to be the hidden or spiritual meaning which is contained in the Gospel for to-day : and it respects, as you perceive, the dealings of God with the world, through His Son ; the rejection of the Jews ; and the calling of the Gentiles to the true religion. But this, you will, at once, perceive, is not the only instruction to be derived from the present parable : for as every part of the Scriptures, besides these hidden meanings, has, in its very text and outward rind, instruction for the every-day behaviour of each particular man ; we shall be naturally led to examine the history in a new light, and to apply it, by God's grace, to our own hearts and consciences.

The first and most awful question, which will occur, is, What was the crime, for which this rich man was so severely punished ? Many have thought, that he was one of the Sadducees ; who

¹ St. John, xii. 10, 11.

were mostly among the richer class; and who disbelieved a life after death. This may seem countenanced by his petition, that Lazarus might go back to preach to his brethren. Others have accused him of want of charity, and with great appearance of reason; since no charitable man could have suffered such an abject creature to be at his door without relief: and if he had not himself seen him; yet it may be observed, that the servants and family of a good man are seldom hard or cruel. But however this may be, — the best and only certain reason, which we can give for his damnation, (for it is the reason given by Abraham himself,) is, that he set his heart and hope upon this world; — that *his* good things — all that he cared for — were earthly; and the treasures of Heaven were therefore closed against him. But whatever were the particular crimes for which this rich man was punished, the striking contrast, here made between him and Lazarus, is a matter of awful warning to all who have the good things of this world, and of comfort to those who are destitute. Of how little value are costly garments and sumptuous fare, which, in a very few years or months, are to lose all their value; or of those treasures, which cannot buy for their wicked possessor a single drop of water to cool his fevered tongue! And how little does it signify, what may be our condition for a very few years in this world; provided we are sure,

by faith and repentance, of a blessed eternity, in the world to come? Where is the king, or prince, upon the face of the earth, who would not gladly exchange his own health, and power, and pleasures, — for the sores, and hunger, and helplessness of Lazarus, if these sores and hunger were to obtain for him a deliverance from the tormenting flames, and a seat by the side of Abraham? Verily, there are many, whose portion here is but of sorrow and raggedness; at whose feet the rich and mighty of the earth may be thankful to sit in the kingdom of God!

There is another question, and one of real difficulty, which also arises from this parable; — and it is, of what place is that, in which the souls, or spirits, of these three men, Abraham, Lazarus, and the rich sinner, are described as being; and what is the manner of their existence there? It cannot be said, that Abraham and Lazarus are in *Heaven*; for no one, but the Son of Man himself, hath ever ascended there; — nor shall any ascend there till the day of judgement is over; and our souls and bodies are joined again, in the second and immortal life. Nor can it be said, that the rich man was in that same *hell*, in which, after the day of judgement, the bodies and souls of the wicked will be thrown. For here, all the persons mentioned are merely spirits, souls, or ghosts, separated from the body; and waiting alike, though under very different

hopes and feelings, for the great Day, when men and angels shall appear before the judgement-seat of Christ ; and God shall render unto every one, according to his work.

Now, to explain this point, which has perplexed exceedingly many pious and learned men ; it is necessary to tell you, that, in the ancient language of the Scriptures, there are two very different places mentioned under very different names ; the one called Gehinnon, or Tophet, — the other Hades, or Sheol. Both these are called Hell in English ; but, I think, improperly ; as Gehinnon is that dreadful lake, burning with brimstone and fire, into which both the souls and bodies of the wicked will be thrown, after the general judgement and resurrection of the last day, and after this world, and all its elements, shall have melted away with fervent heat ; while Hades is described as a hollow place below the earth, in which the souls of all men shall abide, while separated from their bodies, and while waiting for the day of judgement. Of this place, then, and of its different regions, a description is here given ; and though the words of Christ are certainly not to be understood in a gross or bodily sense ; yet, as we may be sure, that He would not, even in a parable, give us a false idea of the other world, we may learn hence, that, immediately after death, the soul of man does not, as some

have fancied, sleep till the day of judgement ; but that it is immediately carried, either to a place of pain, or to a place of pleasure, (such pain, and such pleasure, as spirits are capable of feeling,) both which should appear to be situated under the earth ; and to be divided by a mighty gulph from each other. In the one of these, which is called Paradise, the spirits of the good remain in joy and hope. Here it was that the penitent thief, on the cross, was promised, that his soul should pass, the very day of his death : thither the soul of Christ himself descended ; while His body remained in the sepulchre : and it is this common abode of all departed souls, which we mean, when we say, that He descended into hell ; for that the blessed Lord went down into the place of torment, it would be wild and wicked to imagine. In the other of these wide regions, which must be the place more properly called Hell, all those abide, whose hope of mercy is past ; and to whom there remaineth but a fearful expectation of judgement to come ; and a lamentable recollection of the time, which they have misspent on earth. Of these regions,—this place of happiness, and this dungeon of misery,—it hath not pleased the Almighty to give us further knowledge : and even these opinions, — though founded, as I verily think, upon the plain word of God, — must be received with caution, as they

are uttered, God knows, with doubt, humility, and fear.

It is not necessary for us to know the secret things of the world to come: but it is most necessary, that we always keep in mind, that there is a world to come; whose fashion passeth not away; where rich, and poor, are on the same level; and where faith, and works, and alms, and prayers, alone can give us entrance into Paradise, or deliverance from the jaws of Hell. We cannot think of these things without being serious: it is impossible for us to look even a little way into that darkness, which follows the grave, without withdrawing our thoughts from the toys and trifles of this world; whose value is mouldering away so soon, and whose noise and clamour will so soon be swallowed up in silence. How do worldly honours come to an end, when the spirit hath unclothed itself of its fleshly robes, and goes in naked apprehension to wait its concluding sentence! How do the friendships and loves of sinners close; when those, who loved each other best on earth, have the great gulph between them, or are doomed together to a dreadful communion of fire!

But how different are the feelings of the pious and hopeful believer, in looking to the land of souls. To him there shall arise up a light in

the darkness : to him shall hope and happiness open the gates of Paradise, where he shall pass his happy time, with the good and wise men, of every age of the world, with his parents and his virtuous friends, who are gone before ; in constant expectation of the goodness of the Lord ; and of that Day, when a nobler Paradise shall invite him to its bowers ; when his body, glorified and made immortal, shall re clothe his soul, in perfect beauty ; and when he shall be admitted to behold the brightness of that God, from whose face the heavens and earth shall flee away.

This is the promise made to us in Scripture : a promise confirmed, not only by Moses, and the prophets ; but by the very evidence which the rich man desired that his brethren might receive ; — the resurrection of a greater than Moses from the dead ! Him let us hear ; let us believe Him ; and in true repentance and in lively faith, let us hope that He, who pardoned the crucified but repentant robber, may open to us, by His merits, the eternal gates of Paradise !

SERMON XXXIII.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

ST. LUKE, xiii. 9.

And if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then, after that, thou shalt cut it down.

AT the time when these words, which you have heard in the second lesson this morning, were first spoken, two dismal occurrences had lately happened in Jerusalem: the first, when, by the cruelty of the Roman governor, Pilate, a number of Galileans had been massacred, while they were sacrificing in the Temple; the other, when a tower, in that part of the city called Siloam, had fallen on, and crushed to death, eighteen persons. And, from these fatal events, our Saviour took occasion to teach his followers, 1st, That all rash judgement of the spiritual state of such unfortunate men was to be avoided, as offensive to God, and uncharitable towards our neighbours; and, 2dly, that the true use, which a sinner should make of another sinner's misfortunes, is to take warning by them, and to fear, lest God should bring down the same, or still heavier, on himself. "Suppose ye,"

said our Lord, "that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye, that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, nay: — but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."

He does not deny, it may be observed, (as He has often been ignorantly supposed to do,) that God very often sends heavy afflictions on sinners, even in the present life, as punishment for their crimes. He does not deny, that the Galileans in question were really sinners; or that the destruction, which had overtaken them, they richly deserved: — but this He *does* say, that, bad as these men may be, many, to the full as bad, were left behind. And that unless these last, (to whom God's mysterious mercy had now accorded a longer time for repentance, than to their fellows), unless these last, and, together with them, the whole guilty nation of the Jews, were warned in time, to flee from the wrath to come, the blood of all the remaining Galileans would, likewise, be mingled with their sacrifices; and the walls of Jerusalem would, likewise, be overturned, to the destruction of its guilty citizens.

I have, on former occasions, told you, with

what dreadful exactness these threatenings were brought to pass ; when, about forty years afterwards, the Romans came against the town ; beat down its towers, and bulwarks ; and filled all the courts of the Temple with the slain. But it is my present wish to explain to you the parable by which our Lord enforced his gracious, but awful warning ; in which, under the likeness of a barren fig-tree, which the Lord of the garden was going to have rooted up, — but which, at the prayer of the gardener, he spared another year, — he represents to them, and to sinners in general, the anger of God against all, who are not fruitful in good works ; the patience in long-suffering, which he is content to show them through the intercession of his beloved Son ; and the means which that merciful Saviour employs, to bring back to life and fruitfulness, those plants which have fallen into unbelief and barrenness.

“ A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard : he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he to the dresser of the vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none : cut it down ; why cumbereth it the ground ? And he, answering, said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it : and if it bear fruit, well ; and if not, then, after that, thou shalt cut it down.”

The vineyard of GOD in His Church, or the society of all those who are in covenant with Him, through His sacraments, and the knowledge of His name and holy word, — this has been described by Him, in all ages, as His own peculiar garden and inclosure—fenced in, and divided, by His grace from the wilderness of a fallen and corrupted world— set apart for His service, watered and enriched by His teaching; and the place from which He, therefore, has a right to expect, in a more abundant measure, the fruits of repentance and righteousness.

The Jewish commonwealth (which was the only church on earth before the coming of our Lord in the flesh) is often thus described by God in the Scriptures, as a “vine which He had brought out of Egypt, and planted in the land of Canaan;” as “a vineyard on a very fruitful hill,” which (when He had done every thing necessary, either to protect or to enrich it,) repaid His toil, by bringing forth none but wild and poisonous grapes.

And the Christian covenant, which succeeded to that of Moses, and in which not only the seed of Abraham alone, but all those of every nation, to whom the word of salvation is sent, are planted together, is, in like manner, spoken of by St. Paul as an olive tree, into which, when certain of the natural branches had been broken off from it, the branches of a wild olive-

tree (that is, of the Gentiles) had, in their stead, been grafted.

But, through all these texts, one general idea prevails,—of protection and cultivation on the one side; and of fruitfulness on the other: of grace, on the part of God; and of good works, on the part of man; and it is the same truth which is taught us in the present parable.

Of God's vineyard, or garden, the dresser and gardener has, in every age of the world, been Christ. It was He, who, (before He took upon Him our flesh, and entered into the Virgin's womb,) being the Word of God, and one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, went forth, in the strength of the Almighty, to make the heaven and the earth. It was He, who, together with two angels attending on Him, appeared to Abraham under the oak of Mamre. It was He, who was seen by Moses in the burning bush; and whose still small voice was heard by Elijah, in the cave of Horeb. Wherever, indeed, we find any appearance of "THE LORD," mentioned in the Old Testament,—as we know that no man hath seen God the Father at any time,—so we also know from St. Paul, that it was the only begotten Son who has on these occasions declared Him; and that, when such things are told, they are to be understood of the same Divine Person, who has since taken on Him the nature of

Adam, and has suffered death for the sins of the world.

But, under the covenant of the New Testament, the Son of God has been still more remarkably displayed, as the dresser of His Father's vineyard, the Church; which He has taught by His word, which He has guided by His example, which He has watered by His grace, and enriched by the virtue of His own precious blood. Even now He enlightens us by His Spirit; He supports us with the power, which His Father has given Him; and He has pleaded in our cause, unnumbered times, when the axe of justice would else have been sharpened against our roots. And shall we yet refuse to give Him back the poor return of fruit, which He expects to receive from us?

I now come to the meaning of the fig-tree, which is planted in God's garden; by which may be intended any single member, or members, in the society of His church, — whether, (as in the case of those Jews, to whom, in the first instance, our Saviour spoke the parable,) a whole tribe, or generation, of wicked men; or (in a larger sense, and one more applicable to the situation of every man,) any single person in the Jewish, or Christian world, whom our Lord may have called to the privileges of His covenant, and the knowledge of His holy name and word.

In short, the fig-tree in question is the image and representative of all, and each of us. From all of us, God has a right to look for the fruit of good works,—love, prayer, obedience, thankfulness. To each of us, He, year by year, and day by day, returns to seek His harvest; and it is for the conscience of each of us to answer seriously, whether, or not, He has found the fruits which He sought for. If to this question we can answer, *yes*; blessed are we of the Lord; and blessed shall we be still more, when we shall be transplanted by His care into a better garden, than that of the present world,—even that Paradise from which our parent-stock was cast forth, as a branch abominable, and defiled. Blessed shall we be, when we have taken root in the soil of Eden; and when, by the side of the river of life, we shall bring forth in due season our fruits of joy and gratitude. But great is our danger, if our hearts are forced to reply, that the lord of the vineyard, on visiting his fig-tree, has sought fruit on it, in vain. And still more, if we are also conscious, that the blessed Friend of man, the Dresser of His Father's vineyard, has already interfered repeatedly between ourselves and the Divine anger, digged about our roots with His warnings, and manured us with His grace. Verily, I say unto you, the axe is already laid to the root of such as these; and they shall be found, in the Great Day of harvest, abominable

and useless plants, twice dead, plucked up by the roots, whose end is only to be burned.

We may learn, then, from the parable of the fig-tree, *first*, the mercy which God has shewn to sinners, and to ourselves among the number, by calling us from the wilderness of the natural world; and by admitting us to the great and glorious privileges enjoyed by all those who are planted in the Christian Church, His vineyard.

There was a time, when the light of the Gospel had not, as yet, been brought to these countries — when our forefathers were corrupt and ignorant, when, instead of worshipping the True and Only God, they bowed down their heads, and cut their bodies with knives and stones, in honor of senseless idols, of oak trees, and branches of the misletoe — vanities, which could not help them; or in honor of devils, whose only pleasure was to afflict or destroy them. It is a shame to speak of the bloodshed and abominations, which those false religions not only allowed, but commanded; — that men should have their wives in common; that they should drink out of the skulls of their slaughtered enemies; that they should offer human sacrifices; burying alive and burning their own sons and daughters, to their false gods, and in atonement for their sins.

The wisest man in Britain did not then know the folly and wickedness of these things, which

are now plain to the worst-taught child among us. How great, and glorious is the change, which has taken place in these respects; now that the fountain of salvation is opened in our land:— that we have weekly opportunities of hearing the word of God, and frequent invitations (invitations, alas! how often despised), to receive fresh supplies of grace, and strength, and comfort, in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

What portion of Christ's Church is there in the world, where the means of salvation (I speak it with thankfulness), where the means of salvation are more abundantly furnished, than in our own? And shall God reap no fruit from this His favored vineyard? And shall the Son of God have labored for our fruitfulness, in vain? God forbid!

Secondly, we learn, what are the marks of thankfulness, which God requires at our hands, for these advantages, which we have already received; and for the far greater mercies, which He has in store for us. He comes to seek fruit on His fig-tree! Alas! how many are there, from whom He has long sought it, in vain. Some there are, who are covered with a goodly shew of leaves; who make a fair profession and outward parade of Christianity;— who can talk well, and wisely, of the power of Grace, the weakness of man, the sinfulness of sin, and the necessity

of conversion ;— who, at a distance, and at first sight, seem the most flourishing trees in the orchard ;— but, when we come nearer, do we find any fruit to repay the master's bounty, and the toil of the dresser of the vineyard ?

Remember all ye, who have a form of godliness, while your secret actions deny its power, remember, that it is *fruit*, not *leaves*, which the Lord seeks on his fig-tree. And remember the curse, which that Lord, while on earth, pronounced on that fig-tree, which He found with leaves only.

But what shall I say of those who have neither fruit nor leaves? who neither are good, nor seem so? who openly dishonor the name of the Lord, by whom they are called— disfiguring his garden, and cumbering the ground in which better plants might grow?— What of those, who, while I am now speaking, having once borne fruit, are suffering the moss of idleness, the canker of envy, the ivy of pleasure to creep round their bark, spoil their growth, and destroy their hopes of abundance? What, but to beware in time, lest the last dressing may have been even now laid to their roots; and, unless they reward the care of the divine gardener, His intercession may be exerted in their favor no more.

For this is the *third* doctrine, which may be drawn from the present parable; namely, that

Christ, out of his mercy, is accustomed (before the sentence of destruction is past, against a sinner,) to give repeated warning of the danger — to call him repeatedly by His word — the voice of His ministers — the influences of His Holy Spirit — the accidents — the deliverances — the afflictions — the mercies — which befall a man's neighbour, and himself, — to be turned in time from the error of his ways — to flee from the wrath to come ; and to bring forth fruit, meet for repentance.

Sometimes, He sends a sickness, or a heavy disappointment, to loosen those worldly engagements and expectations, which, like the hard and clinging earth, round the roots of a plant, check the progress of the sap, and render it barren to holiness.

Sometimes, his blessings come down, as it were rain, to refresh the thirsty soul. Sometimes, His word and sacraments have power to give us inward strength ; like manure at the roots ; and to change our wild and stubborn natures to the reason of men, and the submission of Christians. There are none among us, (I will venture to say) who have not had some such visitations, as I have described, from the heavenly gardener ; but how few among us have duly recollected the object, for which these visitations were sent ; and that, if these do not succeed, in causing us to bring forth fruit, the

axe, and the fiery flame, are all which remain for us.

Let us, then, my friends, earnestly intreat the Almighty, for His Son's sake, that He would not cut us off, in the midst of our sinful barrenness. And let us pray to that blessed Son, that He will graciously continue to give us His help, and that so powerfully, as to correct and support our corrupt and feeble nature:—that we may grow in grace, as we grow in years; and may defy the storms of temptation, and adversity, like the cedars of Lebanon, which the Lord hath planted.

SERMON XXXIV.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

I PETER, v. 8, 9.

Be sober ; be vigilant ; because your adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour : whom resist, stedfast in the faith ; knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

OF those few circumstances, which the Almighty has thought fit to reveal to us, respecting our unseen and ghostly enemy,—a malice without bound, a power, even beyond our fears, and an activity which is ever exerted in acts of seduction or of violence, may seem to make up the sum. He is described in the warm and highly coloured poetry of Job, as walking up and down the earth.¹ He is represented, in the book of Revelations, as coming into the world for a certain space before its conclusion ; having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time : and we find him here, under the likeness of the fiercest of beasts, roaring for rage and hunger, and going about seeking whom he may devour.

¹ Job, ii. 2.

From texts like these, it may seem that there are three lessons to be drawn. First, the certainty of the devil's personal existence and formidable influence; secondly, the constant watchfulness, which the presence of so great dangers requires from us; and, lastly, that, great as the danger may seem, we have no reason for despair, inasmuch as these perils are no more than those to which all our brethren are liable; and over which, by Christ's help, so many, of like infirmity with ourselves, have been, and are at this present hour, successful.

The personal existence and awful power of the Devil are plain from so many passages of Scripture, that it may seem like loss of time, to enlarge on a truth which is so familiar to you all. As, nevertheless, there are some who, though they call themselves Christians, yet are not afraid to clip and pare the word of God at their pleasure; and, as they have rejected, on the one side, the doctrine of Christ's sacrifice, so, on the other hand, are they anxious to deny the reality of those awful dangers, which made that sacrifice necessary to the human race; as there are some such who call this formidable enemy of man,—the creature of fancy only, and of superstition; I shall observe, that the words of Christ are of a meaning so express and positive; that Satan must have blinded those with his power,

who, professing to believe the Scriptures, are led to doubt his existence.

For, first, the devil and his angels are spoken of as persons who have reasoned and conversed; who are capable of faith, and fear, and motion; who give answers to questions, and offer petitions to the Lord; who are, hereafter, to be partakers in everlasting fire, with wicked men; and whose spiritual and airy bodies, the bodies of those wicked men are to resemble after the resurrection; in the same manner as the bodies of the just are to be shaped after the likeness of the angels, and of our glorified Redeemer. Now, if the angels be not imaginary creatures, [and that they are, no one has yet, I believe, ventured to teach,] so neither can the devils be considered as the children of superstitious fancy. We have the same authority for the one, as for the other. Actions, which can only consist with reasonable beings, are attributed to the one, as well as to the other. Now, putting revelation for a moment aside, can any reason be given, why the one sort of beings are more unlikely to be found, than the other; since the same God, who hath suffered the earth to contain both good and evil men, was as likely, it may be thought, to fill the air with spirits, having the same freedom of will as ourselves, and the same capacity of pleasing or displeasing

Him. Wicked spirits are, then, as likely to be found as wicked men; and that there are such, the Scripture assures us. But we are told, that our Saviour condescended to the superstition of the times; that He expressed Himself in the common language of the day, and attributed to spiritual agents those effects, both without and within the mind, which are, in reality, produced by natural causes. In other words, that, by thus accommodating His expressions, He did all that in Him lay to perpetuate errors of the most gloomy kind; that He sanctioned, by His example, the practice of alarming men with false fears; and that He, and His apostles, have thought fit to treat the world as we too often treat unruly children, who are to be kept quiet with a tale of goblins.

We are to suppose, that, when the spirits answered Christ from the body of the possessed man, it was the man himself, whose disturbed imagination led him to answer in their name; and that when Christ gave power to the same spirits to enter into the herd of swine, He not only sanctioned the vain fancies of a madman, but even wrought a miracle to prove them true.¹

But is it not easier, is it not really less offensive to God, to reject all the Bible at once, than thus, I repeat, to clip and pare it to the limits, which our pride, or love of argument, may

¹ St. Mark, v. 1—20.

approve? What can be greater folly, what greater impiety, than to refuse our belief to the words of Him whom we confess to be the Life and the Truth; or, while we admit, in certain points, the reality of things surpassing our own experience, to reject, in others, what are not more difficult to conceive, and are told us on the same authority? As, then, there is nothing contrary to reason in the existence of evil spirits; and as their existence is plainly set forth in Holy Scripture; it follows, that, however alarming such a belief may be, we have no ground for not believing the fact; and that there may be, nay that there are, and must be, such terrible enemies surrounding our path and our bed.

For, in the next place, the same authority of Scripture teaches us, that these beings not only exist, but that they have various ways of working us mischief; and are unceasingly employed in troubling us. There are two lights, in which the devil is represented by God's word,—that of an accuser; and that of a tempter. He is called by St. John, in the Revelation, “the accuser of the brethren, which accused them before our God, day and night.”¹ The prophet Zechariah introduces him, as standing before the judgement seat of God, to “resist²,” or, as we might more properly say, “accuse” the high priest Joshua; and the history of Job, in like

¹ Rev. xii. 10.

² Zech. iii. 1.

manner, represents him, as coming before God to bring a charge of insincerity and unsteadiness against the yet unformed virtue of that holy patriarch.¹ “Accuser,” “enemy,” or, as we might call it, “plaintiff,” is, according to the letter, the meaning of the Hebrew word “Satan;” and many places of Scripture, where this word is met with, may be rendered with equal, or greater, clearness and propriety, according to this less usual sense. The sentence in the Psalms, “Set thou an ungodly man to be ruler over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand²,” is understood by many to signify,—let him have a severe judge, and an accuser be preferred before him. And, doubtless, if this were all, which we had to apprehend from the devil’s power and malice;—if we had only reason to fear him as an active accuser, unweariedly engaged in spying out our ways, and in carrying our backslidings to the throne of the Most High, there would be still very sufficient reason for watching over our own hearts, which are exposed to so vigilant and malicious an enquirer and accuser.

But this is not all: for, in order that the characters of men may be more thoroughly tried and purified, the devil is not only employed in recording and searching out those transgressions, to which our natural infirmities, both of body and mind, are but too apt, of themselves, to lead

¹ Job, i. 6. ii. 1. ² Psalm cix. 5. (Common Prayer Version.)

us ; but he is also permitted by God, to try our patience, as in the case of Job, with bodily afflictions ; — to try our firmness and moderation, as in the case of David, with unbounded worldly prosperity ; to entice us into sin, by offering tempting objects to our senses or fancy ; and to terrify us into despair, by a too gloomy consideration of our fallen state ; and by fixing our attention on the greatness of our own sins ; — without noticing, at the same time, the unbounded mercy of God, and the offers of pardon and assistance, which we have received through Jesus Christ.

If it be demanded, why the devil is thus permitted to vex and ensnare the sons of God ; it would be a sufficient answer to reply, that we know that this is the case ; — that we know, from our daily experience, that there is a great deal of sin and moral blindness in the world, and that, [we have God's word for it,] this is, in a great measure, produced by an unseen enemy. Nor, to those, who allow that God governs the world, and that all things happen by His permission, does it alter the case at all, nor is there any greater difficulty in supposing, that the evil, which we see and meet with, is thus produced, than that it flows from ourselves, and from our own passions. To the sufferer, it is the same, from whatever cause it proceeds ; and what is the cause, as it is best known to God, so

we have only to take it from what He has thought fit to reveal to us.

If, however, I be asked again ; why any sin is allowed in the world ; though I might answer, that God knows what is best for the world ; and I might thus shut up all our useless curiosity, in a reliance on His mercy and wisdom ; yet I will not scruple to say, that we have good reason for supposing, that, as the exercise of free will, and the habit of withstanding temptation, necessarily, include in themselves the power of falling ; — so these trials, in which some doubtless perish, are yet so proportioned to our strength, by a merciful Providence, who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able ; that if we fall, we fall by our own fault and carelessness ; and if we stand, we are repaid ten thousand-fold for such danger and temptation, by the improvement which our minds receive, from such experience of their own weakness, and of the strength which they may obtain from God ; and by the exceeding weight of glory, by which our poor endeavours will be rewarded hereafter. The soldier loves the dangers of war, because, if he overcome them, they bring him renown and reward ; and shall the Christian shrink from that warfare, which God has thought fit to assign him ; and in which his victory will conduct him to a crown of life and glory without end ? “ When He hath tried me,” saith Job, “ I

shall come forth as gold." "Blessed is the man," observes St. James, "who endureth temptation." "Be thou faithful unto death" [it is said in another Scripture], "and I will give thee a crown of life."

But in order that we may be victorious, it is necessary that we first know the extent of our danger; since nothing else can make us sufficiently watchful. Self-government, self-denial, mortification of some of the strongest propensities of our hearts, are not very easy tasks; nor are they pleasurable. And so great is the dislike of our human nature to such necessary exertions, that, unless we know, and are fully persuaded, that there really is an enemy, ready to break into our house, we shall not watch in our own defence. This knowledge, then, so necessary to our safety, is given us in such texts as the present. If we knew, that, in our way home at night, we should be exposed to the attack of a wild beast, we should want no persuasion to keep ourselves cool and sober, ready and able to avoid and resist the danger, whenever it should come on us. "Behold our adversary, the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour:" and shall we be drunken, or sleepy, or careless, or fling away the weapons of God's grace, with which He has furnished us for our defence?

For, again, notwithstanding the power and formidable character of this our great enemy, we shall find, in the latter verse of my text, both sufficient directions, how he is to be conquered; and sufficient hopes of success—to encourage us to undertake the task of resistance. “Resist him,” saith St. Peter, “steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.”

Resistance is our first duty; and we have God’s assurance, that resistance, on right principles, will never be in vain. “Resist the devil; and he will fly from you.” The manner in which we are to resist him, follows; “resist him, steadfast in the faith.” If our faith fail not, if we make a proper use of it, we have a shield, which will quench all his fiery darts,—a sword, the edge of which he cannot endure. If he tempt us with guilty pleasures; our faith will make reply, that we know that we have greater joys laid up for us in heaven; and that we will not risk a life without end, for a few trifling advantages here. If he tempt us to covetousness; our faith will urge, that we have a treasure in the heaven which faileth not:—if to worldly pride; that, in the sight of God, there is no respect of persons:—if to spiritual pride; that he, who thinketh he standeth, should take heed lest he fall:—if to spiritual despondency; that

we know that our Redeemer liveth; and that, though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as wool. This is the manner, in which the shield of faith will defend us; and that we shall be successful, we have the promise of God; and we have further the encouraging hope drawn from the knowledge, that so many, who were assailed with like temptations, subject to like passions with ourselves, have come off victorious, with the same helps as those which God offers us; "knowing, that the same afflictions are accomplished in our brethren which are in the world." Many, no stronger and no wiser than ourselves, have fought in the good fight, under the same and still heavier trials; and many of them are now worshipping, in the triumph of the great Captain of their salvation, their heads crowned with unfading garlands, in white robes, and with branches of heavenly palm in their hands; praising Him, in whose strength they have been more than conquerors. And where others have shown us the possibility of success, shall we draw back in despair? or should we forget that there is no middle course allowed, between glorious triumph, and utter ruin; that we must be crowned with life eternal, or else be chained, in darkness and unquenchable fire. If hope will not rouse us, let fear, at least, give us wings to escape from the jaws of hell. One effort made, our struggle

will afterwards be slight; when we have cast off our one besetting sin, we shall feel ourselves loose from the snare of the fowler; and love will soon perfect the work which a godly fear has begun.

Be of good courage, then, for this battle which we all must go through; bear up yet a while against this hideous roaring; which, if we are not wanting to ourselves, can do us no hurt; but if we hope to escape being devoured, let us not for a moment neglect the shield of faith, which God has given us, or those prayers, those sacraments, those habits of serious thought, by which alone that shield may be preserved, bright and impenetrable.

SERMON XXXV.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1 SAMUEL, xii. 17.

Is it not wheat harvest to-day? I will call upon the LORD, and He shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great which ye have done in the sight of the LORD.

THIS threat was spoken by the prophet Samuel against the Israelites, who had sinned against the Lord, by murmuring against His authority; and by desiring to change the form of government, under which His wisdom had placed them. To the Jews, as to ourselves, and to all the world, such weather, in such a season, was peculiarly disastrous and alarming; but in the hot and thirsty country of the Jews, such visitations were far more uncommon than they are in our northern climate, and so very little rain falls there between the months of March and October, that a thunder shower in harvest would naturally be regarded as a visible and miraculous proof of God's displeasure. With us, indeed, it is not so; but as, with us, the calamity is the same, and as we are now, for

the second time¹, threatened with the return of the same disastrous weather, which, twelve months ago, made vain the hope and labour of nations; I have been led to take these words as the subject of our Sunday's meditation, in the hope, that a comparison of our present fears with those which afflicted the disobedient Israelites, may induce us to compare our sins with theirs, and to seek, like them, for safety, by prayer and due repentance.

The time of harvest, as it is to those who hear me, and to the great body of those who eat the fruits of the ground, the most important season of the year, so it is a time, which a Christian can never see return, without a certain seriousness of mind, and an anxious recurrence of prayer and praise to God, who giveth food to His creatures; and whose frown may withhold, or His blessing largely bestow, whatever things are needful, whether for our bodies, or for our souls. When we witness the many dangers, which threaten the springing or the rising corn, when we reckon up in our thoughts the opposite dangers of drought, or of moisture, of parching heat, or of pinching and untimely cold; the blights, which may taint the ear; the worm, which may consume the root; and all the other alarms which the husbandman feels, or fears; we cannot but perceive

¹ 1817.

that something more than the industry of man is required to render him happy or prosperous ; and that it is, with good reason, that, in our daily prayers, we ask our daily bread, of God : since no day in the year can be found, in which His blessing is not needed, either to preserve the seed ; or to prosper the tender stalk ; or to fill the ear ; or to rebuke the mildew, or the storm, by which the maturer crop is endangered. And, when we behold these perils, for the most part, passed away ; when the corn hath sprung up, we know not how ; and the land is filled with the goodness of the Lord ; and the food of many days is waving before our eyes ; and famine driven far from our doors ; and the heart of the poor made glad within him ; we cannot choose, if our thoughts are guided into a proper channel, — we cannot choose — but feel an anxious joy, a solemn, and, in some degree, a mournful thankfulness, when we compare our own unworthy lives with the unbounded mercies of God ; when we recollect, how little and how seldom we have thought on Him, who careth for us continually ; and when we tremble, lest, even now, our sins should interrupt the stream of His mercy, and that the improper use, which we too often make of plenty, should, even yet, turn our abundance into hunger.

But, if such be the natural and usual feelings of those, who, at this season, walk forth, like

the Patriarch, to meditate in the fields; and to converse with God amid the yearly marks of His bounty, we should seem, my brethren, peculiarly called on, in times of approaching affliction, to cry strongly unto our God, “who hath sent thunder and rain in our wheat harvest:” to read, in His visible judgements, a token of our dependance on Him, — to perceive, like the Israelites, “that our wickedness is great, which we have done in the sight of the Lord;”—and to look up, with humble patience, to His afflicting hand; till such time as He have mercy upon us.

For there is scarcely one single truth to be named, which may be more clearly learned from Scripture, than that, as all the blessings, which we enjoy, proceed from God, and are justly attributable to His mercy, so His justice, and anger, against sin, are made visible in the sorrows which He sends us. “A fruitful land maketh He barren, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein.”¹ “If Israel commit iniquity,” saith the Lord, “I will chastise him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men.” “I offer thee three things,” said the Lord to David, “choose thee one of them;” * * * * “shall seven years of famine come unto thee, in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while

¹ Psalm cvii. 34.

they pursue thee : or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land?"¹ " Foolish men," saith the author² of the 107th Psalm, " are plagued for their offence : their soul abhorreth all manner of meat, and they draw near unto the gates of death." " For this cause," saith St. Paul to the Corinthians, " for this cause " for your provocations, namely, and impieties, " many are weak, and sickly, among you, and many sleep " the sleep of death.³ So greatly mistaken are those, who fancy that the events of this world succeed each other by chance, or by unalterable destiny, or that the Sabbath of the Almighty has continued since the world was made ; and that He has left, since then, without the watchful care of His providence, the goodly frame of things to which His word gave first beginning. Far otherwise ; it is He who chastiseth us when we offend, and visiteth our sins with scourges. All our life long, we are in His hands, and under His guidance ; not a sparrow can fall to the ground, without His decrees ; nor is there any deliverance, or any affliction brought to pass, among the nations, but the counsel of the Lord hath done it.

It is true, indeed, and the observation of

¹ 2 Samuel, xxiv. 12, 13.

² Ps. cvii. 17. Common Prayer, and Bible Version, v. 18.

³ 1 Cor. xi. 30.

this fact has caused many to doubt, whether the providence of God do really descend to the particular fortunes of nations and men; it is true, that we can seldom, or never, in the general course of things, perceive any remarkable difference made between the good or evil fortune of the wicked whom God hateth, and the few whom He condescends to call His children, His beloved, His faithful and chosen servants. On the other hand, we very often behold the faithful, — afflicted and brought low; while the ungodly are in great prosperity: and the happiness, or misery, both of the one, and of the other, apparently determined by circumstances altogether foreign to their religious principles, or to their conduct in the present world. The observation of this fact moved David himself to doubt and murmur; and it provoked from his son Solomon the bitter complaint that “all things come alike to all: that there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.”¹

Now, to this objection it is, perhaps, the most obvious answer to urge, that we know,

¹ Ecclesiastes, ix. 2.

on the other hand, that God both encourages and commands us to ask for worldly blessings and worldly deliverances; that we are exhorted to “cast our care on Him, as knowing that “He careth for us;” that we are directed to pray for daily bread, for peace, for deliverance from evil and temptation; that we are told, “that, if any two of us agree on earth as touching what we shall ask in prayer, it shall be done for us by our Heavenly Father;” — “that the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth” even to change the course of the seasons, and to make the earth either barren or fruitful; that we are encouraged to make supplications for the prosperity of particular persons, and for escape from particular evils, for the safety of the princes, who rule over us; for the ministers, who instruct us; and for the nations, where we dwell; and, that we are assured, moreover, as in the passages which I have already instanced, that the course of this world, yea, and the smallest, and, apparently, the most trifling events in that course, are ordered by the providential care and immediate superintendence of Him, who, “though He hath His dwelling so high, yet humbleth Himself to behold the children of men.”¹ For, as we may be sure, that God would not flatter us

¹ Psalm cxiii. 5.

with vain hopes, or lay on us an unprofitable and useless duty, so we may be also sure, that He would not have commanded us to pray for particular blessings, unless He really designed to hear our prayers ; and, unless the course of the world were really so guided by Him, as that any part of its machinery might, without detriment to the rest, be altered, or delayed, at any moment, for the performance of these His solemn engagements, and the advantage of those, whom He delights to favour.

But, further, there are other ways of accounting for the admitted facts, that the same calamities, or the same blessings, do often, in this world, overtake the sinner and the righteous ; and that our prayers, even when those prayers are offered for things manifestly advantageous, are often, to all appearance, allowed to return without an answer. For, first, the first of these facts may, in many instances, arise from the two-fold effect which the same outward dispensations, whether of prosperity or adversity, are known to have, according as the persons, to whom they are sent, are good, or evil. The same misfortune, which punishes the wicked, or brings him to a knowledge of the error of his ways, may show forth the faith and the patience of the virtuous man ; and be, in his case, as in the case of Job, the beginning and occasion of far greater happiness afterwards.

The same prosperity, whether of mind, or body, or estate, which enables the pious Christian to show forth more widely his good works before men, to the glory of their Heavenly Father; which empowers him to convert the sinner, to strengthen the weak, to comfort the afflicted, and to contribute to the happiness and virtue of all around him, and to augment his own future weight of reward and glory, — these very same advantages, when committed to one, by whom their proper use is unknown, may be so far from blessings, even in the present life, that they may be among the greatest and most terrible judgements, which the justice of God can inflict on His most obstinate adversaries. How many cases are there before our eyes, and how many more may there be which the eyes of men cannot discover, in which the greatest seeming benefits of fortune have been thus turned to the confusion of their envied owners; in which health and strength have done nothing else, than lead their possessors into lust, or violence, or drunkenness; and into all those dreadful consequences, which follow from unbridled passion; — in which wealth and power have been changed into so many instruments of torture, whereby the proud or covetous man has made his own life, and the lives of all around him, more thoroughly and conspicuously miserable; in which learning and talent have

served to show more clearly to the affrighted conscience the hatefulness of that conduct, which its clearest dictates condemned ; and of which, too well for our present repose, but too faintly for our lasting amendment, it points out the dismal consequences ! Many, very many, are there, whose outward condition is the object of envy to half mankind, who would give up all their dazzling splendours, for a single night of sweet sleep, or a single day of quiet conscience ; whose exaltation, above the rest of mankind, is, in truth, only a part of their chastisement ; whose desires have been granted, and leanness sent withal into their souls ; and who have been set in high and slippery places, that their wretchedness might be so much the more visible to others, or, at any rate, more keenly perceptible to themselves.

Secondly, But though it be true that those national calamities, which we are taught in Scripture to consider as the punishment of sin in this life, must, from their very nature, extend to all ; that no visible exception is made in favour of God's servants ; and that the destructive and distressing effects of a flood, a fire, a famine, or a pestilence, be not taught to spare the good amid the general havoc, and to turn aside from the dwellings of those whose doors are marked with the blood of the covenant ; yet is there another way of explaining these sweep-

ing inflictions ; if we reflect, that, though the few, who, by comparison, are called righteous, are certainly less sinners than some of their neighbours, yet is there no man on earth who can plead his virtues as a reason that he should escape the common lot ; no single saint is so holy as not himself to merit punishment, and punishment far more severe than even the bitterness of those visitations, to which, in this world, either saints or sinners are liable. To a good man, who really searches his conduct diligently, the astonishment probably will be, not that he suffers as much as his neighbours, but that neither he nor his neighbours suffer more ; and he will be so far from expecting not to bear his part in the afflictions, which are accomplished in the present world, that he will never cease to glorify God, who, knowing his many sins, has not thought of a yet more exemplary and conspicuous punishment.

But, lastly, the complaint, which is so commonly urged as a discouragement to all our expectations of deliverance by God's hand from worldly afflictions, — namely, that prayer is not answered by Him ; that we ask and receive not, even when we cannot be said to ask amiss ; — this complaint may be met by two questions, of which either the one or the other may well perplex the murmurer against Providence. First, whether our prayers have been really such as God

was likely to approve? and, secondly, whether we have been really thankful for the benefits which we have already received from Him? Those prayers, which only God has promised to hear, are such as are made in faith, with fervour, patience, and a deep repentance. It is what we ask for, believing, and nothing wavering, that we are to expect to receive. We must cry to God with earnestness; or else He will shut His ears: — we must wait patiently on the Lord; and, like the widow in the parable, entreat our Judge day by day; or He will not avenge our cause: we must purify our minds, as well as our lips, and rend our hearts by repentance, before He, who searcheth the heart will receive the offering of our lips. Compare these qualifications of prayer with the short and tame and cold and insincere devotions, which we are too apt to offer to the throne of grace; and I am greatly mistaken, if, far from complaining that our prayers are not heard, we shall not find reason to doubt whether we have ever prayed at all.

But however coldly we have prayed, or however we may have neglected prayer, we have all received protection; and all may find, if we do not shut our eyes to the truth, abundant reasons of thankfulness in the past dispensations of Providence. Have we been thus thankful? have we ever thanked God for His mercies, with the warmth and sincerity, which those mercies

claim? If not, how can we wonder, that He hears our prayers no more, when His former loving kindness has been so unthankfully received by us?

And, now, to return to the immediate occasion of the present sermon. I have shown you, my brethren, that it is to God's hand and His immediate providence, that we are taught by Scripture to ascribe all the blessings and calamities, of what kind soever, which befall us in the present world: — that, of the sorrows which He lays on us, our sins are the righteous cause; and that for all these afflictions sent by Him, repentance and prayer are the proper and most certain remedy.

As, then, I have placed before your eyes, both the cause and the cure of the calamities which, at present, threaten us, let us beware how we, on the one hand, despise the chastisement of the Lord; or, on the other, lest we faint, when we are rebuked of Him. On the one hand, as a due sense of His justice, His power, and His present visible displeasure (a displeasure written in letters of darkness on the face of heaven, and proclaimed aloud to the nations of the earth, in the sound of His waterspouts, and in the voice of His thunder), — as a due sense of His anger and our danger, should move us to fly from the wrath to come, and to endeavour, like the men of Nineveh, to turn

away by prayer the fierceness of His wrath ; and, like the objects of our Saviour's mercy on earth, to sin no more, lest a still worse misfortune come to us ; — so a recollection of the merciful purpose, for which He sends afflictions into the world, may preserve us from despair, and encourage us to persevere in the path which leads to safety. He chasteneth us, indeed, for sin ; but He chasteneth, as a loving father chasteneth his children ; to the intent, that we may return in time from the error of our ways ; and that our souls may be delivered from those far worse sufferings which are the lot of impenitent sinners. The affliction is sent, to lead us to repentance. Repent, then, and it will be taken away. He sent thunder and rain into the harvest of the Israelites ; — but He sent them, only that those Israelites might know that their wickedness was great which they had done before Him. Let *us* also perceive our errors ; let *us* also cry unto the Lord ; and who knows but we, like those Israelites, may receive a speedy and a joyful deliverance ?

True it is that our national offences require a national repentance ; and the obscurity of our stations, and the smallness of our numbers may seem to deprive us of all hope, that our prayers or amendment of life can influence those storms, which are sent for the common chastisement of Britain. Yet who knows, from how small begin-

nings the reformation of the multitude may arise ; who knows, how much the earnest prayers of two or three assembled in Christ's name may avail for the welfare of their brethren ; — who knows, how far the general calamity may be lightened in our particular case, and the destroying angel be instructed to lay his hand more gently on the fields of those whose hearts are right before Him ? All this who knows ? who *can* know ? But this we know (for God Himself has told us), that the present world, its joys and sorrows, its plenty and its want, are the least, the very least portion of a Christian's hopes or fears ; and that, however our Heavenly Father may dispose of the approaching earthly harvest, it is at least in our power, by faith and prayer, to make good our portion in the last great harvest of Eternity, in which Angels will be the reapers, and God, the husbandman ; and where the wheat will be gathered into the stores of Him who has sowed His seed in our hearts ; and the weeds and thorns and brambles of the world, burnt up with fire unquenchable.

Pray then, my friends, with me, that God, who, in His justice, has threatened us this second year with a plague of rain and waters, may, on our true repentance, send us such weather, as that we may receive the fruits of the earth in due season ; but pray, still more earnestly, that whatever share, whether small or great, He

allows to us of the bread which perisheth, He will not shut us out from the marriage supper of His Son, and from that happy land and golden city, where we shall neither hunger, nor thirst any more; where there “shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for God shall wipe away all tears from all eyes.”¹

¹ Revelation, xxi. 4.

SERMON XXXVI.

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

ST. LUKE, x. 42.

But one thing is needful.

IN every pursuit of life, and under every possible chain of circumstances, a wise man will pay most regard to that, which most concerns the object, which he has in view. Some one such object every man must always have, which is the end and aim of his exertions and labour; and which, whether the part, which he has chosen, be wise, or foolish, is the main object of his attention, and the point, upon which he supposes, whether truly or otherwise, his happiness or comfort will depend. Thus, the man, who desires to be rich, will make riches the constant subjects of his thoughts; he will rise early, and late take rest; he will lose no opportunity of a profitable bargain; and will give up many of his comforts, for the sake of saving money, and of bringing himself, by all possible means, nearer to the fortune on which he has fixed his hopes. Other thoughts may, perhaps, enter into his

mind, by the bye : other pleasures, or amusement, or business, will not be entirely forgotten ; but still they will be only indulged, as secondary objects ; and not allowed to interfere with his one great plan, the one main business of his life, that of becoming a wealthy man.

It will be the same with a traveller on a journey, whose aim and wish are to arrive safe and early at his home. You will not see him wandering far and wide about the country, after every object, which may catch an idle fancy ; or loitering in his inn, while the hours of daylight are wasting fast away, and the dangers of the road, and the darkness of the night lie before him in their united terrors. He must, indeed, occasionally stop for refreshment ; he will not shut his eyes to the beauties of the prospect, or to the rarities of the country, through which his path conducts him ; he will not neglect the usual civilities to those with whom he journeys ; his road will sometimes be rough, and sometimes smooth ; he will often have occasion to tread with care, and will be anxious to pick his way, as clean and as safely as possible ; but not one of these subjects will tempt him to unnecessary delays, or to dangerous wanderings. No entertainment, with which he may meet, by the way, will make him forget that he is still a traveller ; and that the main and leading thought, which he should have

in view, is a safe and speedy and happy arrival at his journey's end.

What I have now said of the man who seeks for wealth, and of the man who is going a journey, may be applied to every pursuit and profession of life. He, who seeks for knowledge, must give up his main attention to books and study: he, who is occupied in trade, or in farming,—to the different means of improving his soil, or enlarging his capital. The husbandman, if he wish to thrive, will have little time for books; and the priest, or lawyer, cannot spare many moments for gardening and farming. Every man must follow his own proper business; and that time is little better than lost, which is not conducive to whatever he has fixed upon, as the object of his life and labour.

Thus, then, in our worldly pursuits, every man has some one thing needful, to which his main attention must be given; and in comparison of which, all other things are trifling and unnecessary. But, while almost every man has his separate worldly object, there is, we find by the words of Christ, one common interest, in which all men are equally concerned; one thing which is really needful to all; when compared with which, the most serious cares, the most urgent wants of our mortal nature, sink into as utter insignificance to a rational being, as the

daisies and pebbles by the roadside, to the traveller hastening to his home.

And what this is, we may easily understand, when we recollect the occasion on which the words of my text were spoken.

We read in the Second Lesson for this morning, that our Saviour was entertained on a certain occasion, in the house of two devout sisters : one of these was anxiously employed in making entertainment for such a guest ; the other sat at our Saviour's feet, wrapt up in attention to the doctrines of salvation, which He preached. The elder, finding herself unable to do all the service alone, desires our Lord to command her sister to come and help her : upon this Jesus gently reproves her, " Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things ; but one thing is needful : " and what that thing was, He declares in the next words : " and Mary, " He continues, " has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her. "

He must not be understood as blaming altogether the necessary and hospitable employment, to which Martha was giving her mind ; she was careful, and properly careful, in making entertainment for her Lord and his disciples ; but He must be understood, as blaming the excess to which these cares were carried. She was not wrong in being diligent in her household ; but she was completely so, when she paid

so much attention to it, as to neglect the care of her soul, and those heavenly discourses, and advice, which Christ was then delivering.

Better had it been for her to have finished her work a little sooner, and have shared with her sister in the words of eternal life, and in that care which was of all things the most important, and most indispensable.

A less splendid preparation might have served, or supper might have waited a little, till our Lord's discourse was finished: but the salvation of her soul could not be stayed for; and when Christ was in the house, and speaking as never man spake, the choice of Mary was, no doubt, the wisest; who considered, that such an opportunity might never come again; and that, when eternal happiness was to be obtained, all other things might rest a while, and be considered as of no importance. If Christ had not been preaching, Mary would have been no less diligent than her busy sister.

Our Saviour's meaning then is plain; that the care of our souls is the one thing necessary; which every man should, in the first place, attend to: and that all other pursuits, labours, or wishes, are only to be allowed, in an inferior degree; and so as not to interfere with our religion. Christ does not forbid us to be diligent in our calling; — forbid, do I say? — He commands us repeatedly, by His holy Apostles,

to do the best to provide for our families :—
 “ He, that provideth not for his own, * * * * *
 is worse than an infidel :”¹—and while we are
 to be “ fervent in spirit,” we are cautioned also
 not to be “ slothful in business :”²—but we
 must never forget that, however useful such
 worldly cares may be, yet still one thing is
 needful ; and we must “ seek first the kingdom
 of God, and His righteousness.”

Alas, my friends, how many are there in the
 world, whose thoughts, and wishes, and beha-
 viour, are directly contrary to this solemn truth ;
 who, like Martha, are careful and troubled about
 many things ; yea, about every thing, but one
 alone ; and that one, the most important which
 a human being can think upon, or labour to
 obtain.

They will rise early, and labour late, in the
 pursuit of a livelihood ; to make the trifling
 profit of a few pounds : they will not grudge
 long journeys, or laborious thought : they will
 risk cheerfully their lives, or limbs, for a little
 worldly praise, or an advantageous situation ;
 and yet, when the care of their souls is the
 object, how idle do these active men become.
 Ask such to walk a little mile, to worship in the
 house of God : and he will tell you, the roads
 are deep ; or the weather foul ; or he has some
 trifling business to settle ; or he is tired, or

¹ 1 Timothy, v. 8.

² Romans, xii. 11.

unwell: some excuse is always offered; he is cumbered with much serving; and careful after many things: and no excuse is thought too weak, to offer to his own conscience, and to that terrible God, by whom the secrets of the hearts are known.

Judge your own hearts, my brethren, that you be not judged of the Lord; and answer me unfeignedly: are there not moments, when you would rather repeat any thing than a prayer? when it seems more trouble to read the Scripture, than any other book whatever? when, rather than go to worship in God's Church, you would willingly walk much farther a different way?

And is a behaviour like this (even so far as common sense would teach you), reasonable, or prudent? You do not really believe (I know you cannot) that the hope of Heaven, and the fear of Hell, are less worth attention, than the wants, or comforts, of the day. Common sense will tell you, that the life, which is to last for ever, is of more consequence, than that which cannot last above fifty or sixty years; and may come to an end, perhaps, before to-morrow. You cannot deny, that the care of our souls is at least needful to every one of us; and that it signifies but little, how careful we may be of other things; if all the while we are inattentive to this one treasure. All the world, if it were possible to obtain it, for this short life, — all the

world would not repay us, nor make amends, for the tens of thousands of years of torment, which follow from the loss of our souls. Other things are useful; other things are, perhaps, convenient; but this is, after all, the one thing needful: and bitter, indeed, will one day be his repentance, who neglects it, while it is yet in his power.

You will not deny, then, that your soul is the greatest treasure which you possess; and let me, then, inquire how, in the common business of life, do you prefer one object to another? If a piece of gold, and a painted wooden toy, were offered to you by two different people, at the same moment; which would you lay hold of, first? Would you run eagerly after the plaything; and take your chance of finding the treasure, some other day? Or would you refuse the gold, when it was offered to you, because your hands were already filled, with that, which, in comparison, you knew to be but worthless and mere glittering folly?

Behold then, here, a picture of the worldling's choice! Lo, here, the wisdom of those, who think themselves the prudent and industrious of mankind; — so often as, for the sake of some present advantage, some little paltry temptation of the world, or of the flesh, they neglect, or postpone, or refuse, the offer of grace, and repentance, and pardon, and life without end!

God be merciful to us ! Madmen as we are, how often have we dealt so with His Holy Spirit !

But is the care of a man's soul so easy, and so short a business, that we may safely put it off, as long as we please ; and contrive to work out our salvation, by fits and snatches, and in the intervals of our more serious business ? Alas, how do we know but that — however short our work may be, — the time, allowed to us, may be shorter still ?

But, again, is our task of repentance really so short, or so easy ? When you are reprov'd for a habit of drunkenness, do you not often answer, that you find it hard to leave off, what custom has made a second nature ? Swearing, or bad company, or wicked thoughts, — can we cast these away, whenever we please, as we would a petty garment ? Believe me, fellow Christians, that, by repentance, and newness of life, something more is meant than a few devout expressions ; a hypocritical sigh or two ; and a little talking about Jesus. God does not open the gate of Heaven, to those who have never knocked ; and we must pray long and heartily ; we must strive hard, and earnestly ; — and not only believe, but work out our salvation with fear and trembling ; if we hope to unlearn our accustomed sins, and to acquire that holiness without which no man can see the Lord.

Whenever, therefore, our attention is engaged by the cares, or riches, or pleasures of this life, let us often think on these words of our Saviour; and pray for His help; lest, while we are careful and troubled about many things, we neglect the one thing needful. When the prudent and thriving man is, with reason, attentive to his advantageous bargains, his improvements, and his thrifty management; let him beware, lest covetousness be growing up, like a weed amidst his harvest; and let him watch every action, lest he be tempted to wrong his neighbour, or to harden his heart against the poor. While the rich man is anxious for his credit in the world; when he takes pleasure in the greatness of his house; in the number of his servants; or in the luxury of his table; then let him pray for grace against his besetting sins: lest pride, and gluttony, and needless extravagance, and an eternal chain of amusement, lead him to forget his God; and swallow up in vice and folly that wealth, which he else might spend in charity. And, lastly, when the poor and industrious man is toiling for the day; and taking thought for the morrow;—when all, which he can do, appears too little for the increasing hardness of the times, and the wants of his family; let him remember, that it is God's blessing, which alone can make his labour prosperous; that the better Christian he becomes,

he will be also the better husband and father ; that praying more will not make him work the less ; and that if he seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all, that is necessary for this life, (God himself has promised,) shall be added unto him.

In general, the surest way of withstanding these different snares, which the world spreads for our soul, is by small contradictions to whatever is our ruling passion ; and, when we know which side our bias lies, by leaning our resolution always the other way. If our heart be inclined to covetousness, we must be so much the more resolute to give alms to them that need : if we are growing too fond of amusement, or of splendour, it should be a hint to us to live in greater retirement than we did before : and if business or labour come on us in a fuller stream, we must be so much the more careful, not to shorten, or neglect our prayers.

Above all, whether our besetting temptation be too much pleasure, or too much care, we should be resolute, that neither the one, nor the other, should break in upon these holy days, which God hath appointed, for men to rest themselves from every worldly employment.

Are there not six days, O ye poor, wherein to labour ! Are there not, O ye wealthy, six days for study, or for pleasure, or for the cares of ambition, or of avarice ! Think it not then

too much, to give the seventh part of your time to that, which is of more value than all the rest of your employments ; and to His honour, whose blessing only can make your weekly work either safe, or prosperous !

But to reach at once the root of all these temptations, and to keep us from setting our hearts too much on any earthly thing, no cure is so certain as a frequent attendance at the Lord's Supper, and a solemn preparation for it.

There is not one among you, I believe and firmly trust, who has examined himself duly for that holy mystery, and partaken faithfully in the body and blood of Christ, who does not feel his heart exalted within him above the low level of this mortal state : and who cannot offer up himself, his soul, and body, to the wise disposal of the Almighty. Such an one can commit his earthly welfare to the providence of his Maker ; content with whatever may befall him here, so that the one thing needful be preserved inviolate ; well pleased to lose the world, so he may gain his soul ; and content that worms may destroy this body, so as in his flesh he may see God. To whom be all praise and glory, through the merits of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON XXXVII.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

2 SAMUEL, xii. 13.

And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord And Nathan said unto David, the Lord also hath put away thy sin.

FEW mortal men have been more honoured by God, than David, King of Israel. From a mean condition, he was raised to a throne; in the midst of danger, and of distress, he was protected and comforted by the almost visible hand of Heaven. Himself the youngest son of a private individual, he was made the founder of a long line of kingly descendants; and the King of Glory Himself, the Everlasting Son of God, when He took on Himself the figure of a man, was not ashamed to call David His father, according to the flesh; and to become, by birth, a member of his family. Nor are these the only or the most remarkable tokens, which he received of God's approbation. He was anointed by God to be a prophet, no less than a prince. The Holy Spirit revealed to him, with a clearness which no other prophet, except,

perhaps, Isaiah, enjoyed, the nature of Christ's kingdom, and the circumstances of His destined suffering. His prayers were, on many occasions, answered by God, in an immediate and miraculous manner. For his sake, even after his death, the transgressions of his children were overlooked; and, in spite of their many provocations, the long-suffering of God would not, for many hundred years, forsake his posterity. Above all, he is uniformly spoken of by the Holy Ghost, as a faithful and favoured servant of the Most High: and he has received, in Scripture, the peculiar and appropriate title of "The man after God's own heart."¹

With all these marks of his Maker's love, we should be greatly deceived, if we expected to find in David a character of faultless purity; or if we were induced to hope to acquire God's love, by a course of actions like those recorded of this royal and military prophet. So greatly, indeed, was his life disgraced by sin, and by bloodshed, that the same God, who chose him to reign over Israel, refused to receive from his hands the dedication of his intended Temple.² And there are many of his actions which have given very great occasion to the enemies of God to blaspheme;—as if God, who favoured David, were partial and unjust in His regard; and as if, by accepting his repentance so readily, He

¹ 1 Samuel, xiii. 14. ² 1 Chronicles, xxviii. 3.

afforded an encouragement to offend. It would be easy to prove, if the inquiry would not take up more time, than we can, at present, spare, first, that by far the greater part of those instances, in which David is supposed to have acted with injustice, or cruelty, or falsehood, have been strangely misunderstood, through an ignorance of the language of Scripture; of the laws, under which he lived; and of the circumstances which restrained his authority. Secondly, that the title itself, which has given so much offence, when applied to him, has nothing in it, which could pledge the Almighty to a general approbation of his conduct: — that he is called “the man after God’s own heart,” chiefly as being chosen by God to answer a particular purpose: and that, as an able and indefatigable warrior, by whom God’s people were delivered from their enemies; and as a faithful guardian of the tabernacle, by whom the laws of Moses, and the worship of the Most High, were preserved, in purity, and in splendour; he might still, as being of a character well suited to those special ends, be called by God, — His chosen, His servant, His anointed: though his behaviour were, in other respects, extremely displeasing to that All-seeing Eye, which is too pure to behold iniquity with favour or indulgence.

But there is no occasion for either of these apologies in the case of David, or of the

character which he has received in Scripture. He is there uniformly represented, as dear to the Most High; not for his virtues' sake, but for the sake of his penitence: and he paints himself, in those sacred songs, wherein he seems to have laid open his inmost heart, and most secret sorrows, — in no other light, than that of a sinner, broken-hearted by the burden of his transgressions; but raised from despair to the height of exultation and gratitude, by the contemplation of God's mercy and forgiveness. Nor is there any history, in the Old Testament, more awful to those who as yet stand, and, at the same time, more comfortable to such as are already fallen, than the narrative of those grievous sins, by which this great, and, in many respects, this good man was entangled; and of the gracious pardon, which his sorrowful prayers obtained from his Creator. It is for this reason that I shall now attempt to give a short account of those actions, for which David, as you have heard, in the First Lesson for this morning's service, was reprov'd by the prophet Nathan.

David, we find in the foregoing chapter, had been struck by the beauty of a woman, whom he had accidentally seen from the top of his palace; and so completely was he ensnared, that, though he found on inquiry that she was already married, and therefore no

lawful object of his love, he yet so far forgot his duty to God, and to his neighbour, as to take advantage of the husband's absence with the army; and to seduce her to commit adultery. From this great sin, the natural consequence followed. Bathsheba, for that was the name of his unfortunate partner in iniquity, soon found herself with child; and sent to tell David, and to demand, in all probability, his advice, and protection, in that her great danger. Her danger, indeed, was great; inasmuch as for such a crime the law of the Jews inflicted death without remission; and since David himself, though king of the land, had no power to stop the course of justice; or to act in opposition to the commands of Moses and of God. What then could be done to save the reputation, and the life, of this unhappy woman? It was yet possible; if her husband were brought home soon enough, that the king's child might pass for his: and Uriah was, accordingly, sent for from the army, and by various artifices pressed into his wife's society. The snare, however, did not answer. Uriah, either suspecting the truth, for the tongue of slander may be well supposed to have whispered some suspicion of Bathsheba's visit to the king, or else from a display of soldierly zeal in his monarch's service, refuses to return to his own house at all; and remains in the guard room

of the palace. This hope having failed, the discovery and ruin of the adulteress seemed unavoidable; unless the husband, who would not be deceived, were, by some means, got rid of. The indulgence of one wicked passion had now made murder necessary; and David, to save Bathsheba from deserved shame and punishment, now sealed his own guilt by a treacherous and bloody plot against the life of his brave and zealous servant. By his contrivance, Uriah died in battle; Bathsheba became at liberty; and her sin, and David's were likely to remain concealed, and, as they fondly hoped, unpunished.

There was one eye, however, by which their deeds of darkness were perceived; — one dreadful judge, from whose anger neither art, nor power, could shield them. The prophet, Nathan, was sent by God with a message to David; and by the eloquent artifice of first kindling his anger, and his natural feelings of justice, by a supposed case of oppression, — not altogether unlike the sin, which the king had committed, though of a nature far less flagrant — he proves to him, more than by ten thousand arguments, the exceeding atrocity of his conduct; and speaks to him, as with a voice of thunder, “Thou art the man,” — this very criminal, whom thou thyself hast justly denounced worthy of death! “Thus saith the Lord God

of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel; and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; and I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom; and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and, if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the Lord, to do evil in His sight? Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword; and hast taken his wife to be thy wife; and hast slain him, with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from thy house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the Lord, behold I will raise up evil against thee, out of thine own house; and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour; and he shall lie with thy wives, in the sight of the sun. For thou didst it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, the Lord hath also put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme, the child, that is also born unto thee, shall surely die." How fully and how shortly

all these things were accomplished may be seen by the following chapters of the 2nd book of Samuel. Though David's life was spared, the rest of his days were made miserable by the death of some of his children, and by the sins of others. His own son, Absalom, conspired against his life; and treated his wives even more infamously, than he had himself treated the wife of Uriah: and the sword may be truly said never to have departed from his house, till all the members of his family, who were then alive, had perished from the face of the earth. Nevertheless, so great was his sin, and so wonderful was the forgiveness extended to him, when his own life and soul were spared, and he was not cut off in his sins; — that we lose all sight of his remaining and temporal punishment, in the contemplation of the mercy shown him, in points of more importance.

Such is the outline of David's story. It now remains, that I shortly apply it to the practical improvement of us all.

The first observation, which I am led to make on it, is the perilous mischief of idleness. "At the time," says the sacred writer, "that kings go forth to battle, David sent Joab, and all his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon; and besieged Rabbah: but David tarried still in Jerusalem. And it came to pass, in an even tide, that David arose from off his bed; and walked upon the

roof of the king's house : and, from the roof, he saw a woman washing herself ; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon." What reason, if any good one, David might have for remaining idle in his palace, while his people went forth to war, is not told us in the Scripture. And the picture, which follows, of a king sleeping during the noonday, and rising from his bed in the evening, though the practice be not uncommon in those hot countries, does not give us the idea of one actively employed in the service of his country, or in the important duties of his station. Had David, it may be thought, been fighting the Lord's battles against the heathen, or had he been duly anxious for the happiness and good government of the people, whom God had placed under his care, he would have been far removed from the temptation, which overpowered him, and have had other thoughts to occupy his mind, than the beauty of a stranger. Let us then always remember, that, as the only method of destroying weeds, is by ploughing deep, and diligently labouring the soil, so is it that, by honest labour and rational occupation, we are best able to keep away evil thoughts, from the soul. It is when men are idle, and slumbering, that the devil sows tares in their hearts ; and our hearts, if not employed, will as soon gather defilement, as the sword gathers rust, when suffered to hang idle on the wall.

Secondly, It is of still more importance to resist the beginnings of evil. When David first allowed his thoughts to wander over the beauties of another man's wife, he probably would, even yet, have started at the thought of actually committing adultery ; and have shrunk into himself with horror, if he had been told that he would shortly become a murderer. But I have often told you, and too often it cannot be repeated, that one of those, which we call little sins, will, as certainly, unless prevented by God's especial grace, lead the way to other and more serious disorders, as, in some diseases, the matter, contained in a single pimple, will cover the whole body with one entire infection.

Thus Sabbath-breaking, in many cases, has led to idleness ; idleness, to drunkenness ; drunkenness, to swearing, fornication, robbery, and murder ; and there are those, who, on the point of suffering for their sins, could tell us, how one little temptation resisted, would, in their case, have made the difference between hell and heaven. Be strong, therefore, in the Lord ; and account nothing trifling, which may lead to such awful consequences.

Thirdly, We may learn from a due application of David's case to our own circumstances, to be slow in judging other men harshly, for offences, of which, when we duly examine our own consciences, we might find ourselves far

from blameless. When the prophet told David, — of a rich man, who had spared his own flocks and herds, to take by force the favourite lamb of a poor neighbour, — that was, beyond a doubt, a burst of natural and virtuous indignation, which led the king to exclaim, “As the Lord liveth, the man, that hath done this thing, shall surely die!” But how deeply must his heart have smitten him, when he received for answer, “Thou art the man:” and discovered that he had passed sentence on himself. If, then, we are tempted at any time to enlarge, even with just severity, on the failings and sins of our neighbour, it may be a wholesome check to examine our own hearts; lest we ourselves may, perhaps, be in the same guilt and danger with him, whom we reprobate; — to beware of judging others, lest we ourselves should be judged with the like severity; and to pull out, first, the beam from our own eye, before we undertake to pluck out the mote from the eye of our brother. It was related of himself by a very wise and excellent judge, that he never sentenced a criminal to death, without saying to his own heart with bitter sorrow, “How can I tell, but, considering my greater opportunities of knowledge, and the slighter temptations, by which I have been urged to offend, how can I tell, but that my sins may be more hateful in the eyes of God; and (all circumstances taken into account),

more justly damnable, by His Allwise sentence, than those of this wretched malefactor!" And such seasonable recollections of our own unworthiness may be, in two ways, of essential use to every man; first, as offering the most powerful of all possible motives for repentance and amendment of life; and secondly, as compelling the proudest heart to renounce all high opinions of himself; and, to cast himself, with humble David, before the mercy seat of Christ; with no other hope than His merits and intercession, and with no other plea than the broken-hearted confession, — "I have sinned against the Lord."

And to this we may be induced, by reflecting, that the fourth circumstance which we may learn from the sins of David, is the ready pardon, which God will grant even to the most heinous sinners, on their truly and mournfully turning to Him. When David said, "I have sinned against the Lord;" the Lord answered, by His prophet, Nathan, "I have put away thy sin; thou shalt not die." Here, however, there are two observations to be made. First, it is certain, that, with Him, to whom the inmost heart is known, the sincerity of David's repentance, and the depth of his sorrow, might be at once as evident, from these few words of acknowledgement, as if no words at all had been used, as if he had proved his affliction by a

whole Lent of abstinence, and had remained mourning before God for forty years. If therefore, we should suppose, that David expressed his sorrow in a single word ; and was, at that single word, forgiven ; we should suppose nothing dishonourable to God's justice, or which would take away the necessity of a deep, and, in most cases, a long repentance, for crimes of such enormity. And, accordingly, many, nay most preachers, in explaining this history, have supposed, that David had remained in a state of hardened impenitence, till the moment, when Nathan's reproof opened his eyes to his guilt and danger ; and that his eyes were no sooner opened, than God, even before he had, to judge from our own experience, time to feel the bitterness of a wounded conscience, made haste to heal the wound, and to declare his sin forgiven. But such a conduct on God's part, [even if it were clearly shown to have taken place in this particular instance,] is not what sinners are, in general, to expect : and is, indeed, so contrary to the usual manner of His proceedings with them, that, even in this case, I cannot but be slow to believe that so immediate comfort was given. And there is a circumstance, which I will mention, which still more prevents me from entertaining this opinion. The 51st psalm, which bears every possible mark of being written under great

alarm of spirit, and a deep sense of guilt, is supposed, by the tradition of the Jews, to have been used by David as a prayer on this occasion. Now it is certain, that this prayer could not have been used by him, *after* his pardon had been pronounced by God ; since, in that case, he could not have apprehended himself still liable to blood-guiltiness ; nor could he have entreated God to *blot out* transgressions, which God had already *put away*. It follows, that the 51st psalm must have been written *before* God had expressly assured David of pardon ; and, consequently, either, that, in the history read to you this morning, we have the *substance* given us, of more conversations than one, which passed between Nathan and David on this painful subject, [in the first of which conversations, he awakened him to the sense of his guilt ; and in the last, declared God's pardon to him ;] or else, that David, even before Nathan's visit, had been already touched with a sense of his fallen and miserable and guilty condition, which he had lamented in that beautiful psalm, to which I again refer you ; and that the errand of Nathan was rather of a comforting than a reproofing character ; since, though it began by laying bare his inward grief, it ended by applying to the wound a salve of mercy and pardon. In either case, the penitent sinner may be encouraged, by this example, to perseverance in his prayers ; though

he should not, for many days, receive the comfortable hope of forgiveness, which God's Spirit will, at length, bestow ; seeing that David, who sinned like him, was suffered to continue, for a certain time, little less than hopeless. And he, who is now tempted to sin, may be terrified from every guilty indulgence, by the knowledge, that, though he may, like David, obtain a pardon ; he must seek for it, like David, with agonies unutterable ; and with a bitterness of sorrow, which death itself can scarcely equal.

Lastly, it is worthy of notice, that, though this sin of David was, in consequence of this severe repentance, put away by God ; and though, so far as the other world was concerned, his transgression was fully pardoned ; — yet did not this pardon extend to the punishment, which God had determined to inflict, in this life, on him, and on his family. So far otherwise, that, even when the pardon of his soul was pronounced, an additional burthen was laid on him : and not only death was denounced against those sons, who had been previously threatened ; but against the infant in the cradle ; by whom he doubtless hoped, in failure of his elder progeny, that his line would be lengthened on the throne ; and that the Messiah would, according to the flesh, descend from him. God had before said, that the sword should not depart from his house ;

and He now tells him, “ The child also, that is born unto thee, shall surely die.” And this observation is important; first as proving the greatness of God’s indignation against sin; and that David did not, in fact, escape so freely, as some persons have been apt to imagine; and secondly, that it behoves us, when God has graciously assured us of pardon in the other world, to bear, not only with patience, but with thankfulness, whatever punishment His wisdom thinks fit to inflict on us, in the present transitory life. Such punishments are, indeed, the mark of God’s displeasure: but they are, at the same time, the mark of God’s fatherly affection towards us; who, even when displeased, will not destroy us utterly, but chastises us, in order that we may amend.

From the example, then, of David’s sin, his pardon, and his punishment, we may learn caution, purity, repentance, and patience. And that we may thus profit by what we hear, and read, may God of His mercy grant, for the sake, and through the sufferings, of His Son, the Son of David, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be everlasting praise and glory.

SERMON XXXVIII.

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

SECOND SUBJECT.

ST. LUKE, xvi. 2.

Give an account of thy stewardship ; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

I HAVE selected, as has been often my custom, the subject of my discourse for this day, from that portion of St. Luke's Gospel, which you heard read in the Second Lesson for this¹ morning's service. This choice I have been induced to make ; partly, because the parable itself is still fresh in your memories ; partly, because it contains some seeming difficulties, which it is best to explain, by considering the occasion, on which it was spoken, and the conversation, which passed before and after it.

You will perceive, by a reference to the preceding chapter, that Christ had just been relating the beautiful story of the prodigal son. In this, under the character of a spendthrift, who had gone into a far country, and forgotten

¹ July 4.

his duty to an indulgent father, he expressed, by a very simple and pleasing allegory, the lamentable state of the different nations of the world ; who had lost the worship of the true and only God, and had fallen, by their own blindness, into a state of barbarous and brutish ignorance and idolatry. Their return to the true religion, and the jealousy of the Jews, (the elder brother, who had remained in the father's house), is then foretold ; and the uncharitable temper of this people, sharply and justly reprov'd.

In the parable now before us, our Saviour, still addressing the Jews [for all this took place in the same conversation], considers them in the character of stewards of the mysteries of the kingdom of God. He tells them, that, as they had been wasteful and unprofitable guardians of those precious truths, committed to their care, that care was now at an end ; — that charge was taken from them ; and they were to give an account of their deeds, as they were no longer stewards. All these judgements were then hanging over their heads ; and our Lord exhorts them, by the example of the crafty servant, who made himself friends against that evil day, not to envy the benefits of religion then extended to the Heathen, but to busy themselves in preaching the Gospel ; to impart with a good will their spiritual gifts to the rest of the world ; that, when their own city and temple should be

destroyed ; when their nation should be carried into captivity, and scattered over the face of the whole earth ; they might find favour from those, who ruled over them, and be kindly received into the bosom of the Christian churches.

Well had it been for these miserable people, had they followed His gracious advice ; but their hearts were too hard and too envious to allow, that a heathen could be saved. Their stewardship was taken from them : their city and temple were burnt with fire : they had no friend, no refuge to receive them ; and, at this very day, too proud to beg, too idle to dig, they most of them earn a precarious subsistence, miserable wanderers, without a spot in the wide world, which they can properly call their home.

Such was the fate of them to whom this parable was originally addressed : but we must remember that, in all the parables, besides their application to those, who were then immediately present, there is a wider and more general application, which concerns all mankind ; and from which we ourselves are bound to draw an equal instruction and advantage. We have here the story of a very wicked person ; who, — to save himself from the vengeance of an injured master, — employed himself, [in the few remaining hours, during which his office was to continue in his hands,] in making

friends, who might assist him in the distress which was likely to follow and overwhelm him. The means, by which he effected this, are little to the purpose. They are not proposed as models for our imitation ; but because there is an analogy (that is, a sort of resemblance) between our situation, and that of the unjust steward.

We too, like this criminal and crafty servant, we too, have all our respective stewardships to answer for. We too, I fear, have all neglected, and wasted them ; all of us, like him, are liable to a severe examination, and, without some interposition, to a most certain and terrible punishment. Are we then prepared for our examination ? We cannot plead the want of warning. God awakens our attention by a thousand different visitations. In prosperity, the very mercies of God call us to repentance. In danger, [and who can hope to live free from danger ?] He calls on us with a voice of thunder : while, in the moments of solitude and repose, we hear the still small voice of conscience, more piercing, perhaps, and terrible than the loudest thunder and storms. The sicknesses, which we ourselves endure ; — the accidents, which befall our acquaintance ; every death-bell, which we hear, and every funeral which passes by us, — all these speak to us in a language which we surely cannot

mistake: "Be ready, O man, to give an account of thy doings; thy time is short; and the days of reckoning are at hand; give an account of thy stewardship, for thou mayest be no longer steward."

Is the warning for so distant a period, that we are tempted to disregard it? Alas! my friends, the time of this account will be certainly speedy; — to some of us, perhaps, immediate. This very night, this very hour that I speak, our souls may be perhaps required at our hands. And is it possible to be careless or indifferent, or can we, under such circumstances, delay to seek for help, while it may be found; to employ our few remaining hours, in appeasing the wrath of Heaven; and in obtaining for ourselves an advocate at the throne of Grace? Which of you, where merely your temporal interests were concerned, where life or livelihood, where mere worldly prosperity was at stake, would not exert every faculty, and fear the delay of every moment; lest he should be too late to secure so important an object? And thus it is, that the children of this world are wiser, in their generation, than the children of light. Not that their object is wiser; — not that they are wiser, in following the cares, and riches, and pleasures, of this life; — those pleasures, which endure for a moment, — rather than those heavenly delights,

which eye hath not seen ; nor ear heard ; which are at the right hand of God, for evermore ; and that fulness of joy, which is in His presence. No comparison can be made, between these different objects of pursuit : — to compare them would be both wicked and foolish.

Still, however, in their generation, the children of this world are the wisest : they follow their object, such as it is, with greater diligence and greater prudence, than we do, who strive after an eternal kingdom. The disgraced steward, who was in danger of starving for want, was not long in making up his resolution ; he was not slow, in taking his measures. His time was very short ; he knew, that it was both short and precious ; and while he yet retained the power of making a friend, he seized the opportunity of shunning the approach of ruin ; and caught, like a drowning man, at the first branch which offered. We, too, are in an equal danger ; we, too, are in fear of suffering, not the anger of a human master, but the punishment of a Heavenly Judge ; not a life of poverty, but an eternity of torment. This is our danger : are we really anxious to escape it ?

In this point, it will be clearly seen, that the force of the comparison lies : and a parable, I need scarcely add, is nothing but a comparison,

thrown into the form of a story. On this comparison, the moral depends; and with the other parts of it we have little or no concern. The dishonesty of the wicked man, in this parable; his folly, in labouring solely for the meat, which perisheth;—with these, we have nothing to do: they are not held up for our imitation. Such is, indeed, the case in every parable or similitude. When Solomon sends us to learn diligence of the pismire; or when the apostle bids us, be wise as serpents; we never can suppose, that they mean us to crawl in the dust;—to be sly, or venomous, or double-tongued. Be assured, my friends, the Spirit of God can never so trifle with us;—but these poor animals, these unfortunate and wicked men, are set before our eyes, in order to make us ashamed of our own idleness, and folly. When, indeed, we see them so wise and diligent in the pursuit of their mean and short-lived comforts, we may well blush for ourselves, that we are such careless followers of an Eternal Kingdom, and of life and joy without end. “The ox knoweth his owner; and the ass, his master’s crib: but Israel doth not know; my people doth not consider.” O consider this, ye that forget God; consider it, while you have a moment left for thought: or you will too late repent your carelessness; when the publicans and sinners deride you; and the very

beasts of the field arise against you, in judgement.

There may be an objection made, [I scarcely believe there will, but it is, however, as well to mention it,] there may be an objection made by some, that they do not perceive, wherein they resemble the steward in the parable : they have no charge, to misapply ; no entrusted property, to waste ; they have but little ; that little is their own ; and what can be expected from them ? My friends, what do the poorest, what do the richest, of us possess, which we can truly call our own ? Our property, however acquired, our wives, and children, our own bodies, and minds, are all intended as so many instruments of God's glory. We are all God's labourers, all, in our several stations, at work in His vineyard : and all our power and riches, our bodily strength, and strength of mind, are but so many tools to labour with ; — tools which He lends us for the day ; and which at night He takes again. That day is already far spent ; that night is fast approaching ; and which of us is prepared to give an account of his labour ? Which of us can say in his heart, that he has done his whole duty ; and is at peace with God ? The steward, in the parable, had gotten himself friends, wicked ones, no doubt, and wickedly gotten : but still they were friends, and defenders against the coming storm ; but what

defenders shall we find? on whom shall we depend, in the time of visitation? who will deliver us, in the hour of death, and in the Day of Judgement?

Praise and glory be to God, we have still one powerful friend; — a friend who died for us; who is now pleading our cause; and by whose merits and mediation, our repentance will be still accepted. To Him, our blessed Redeemer and Saviour, and to God through Him, let us sanctify the moments which are still our own; the talents, which still remain in our hands. Much of the past we have already wasted; let us be careful to employ the future well. For in this, let no man deceive us: unless we repent, we can find no mercy: we cannot plead the blood of Christ, while, by a wilful continuance in sin, we crucify Him, every day afresh. The wicked servant might procure himself friends, by flattery, by bribes, or by falsehood: — but our Almighty Redeemer is not so mocked of men; it is not an hypocritical and formal behaviour, nor a pretended faith, which is dead for want of works, nor a vain trust in our predestination to eternal life, which can procure for us the love and blessing of our Saviour. He knows the heart; and demands, of those who call on Him, a sincere repentance, a lively faith, and above all, a charity which never faileth. For though our Divine friend and advocate be above all sacri-

fice ; and need not any service, which we can render ; yet is He graciously pleased to accept our weakest efforts ; and to consider, as done to Himself, that good which we do to our fellow-creatures. On Him we can confer no obligation ; Him we cannot clothe or feed ; Him we cannot visit in prison ; but He Himself hath said, and the time must come, [whether sooner or later, is known to Him only who seeth all things,] the time must come when, before men and angels, He will repeat His blessed declaration ; “ Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”¹

¹ St. Matt. xxv. 40.

SERMON XXXIX.

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

ROM. vi. 23.

*The wages of sin is death ; but the gift of God is eternal life,
through Jesus Christ our LORD.*

IN the passage, from which these words are taken, and which has been read to you for the Epistle of to-day, a comparison is made by the apostle, between the different consequences of sin, and of holiness, under the likeness of the different wages, which two several masters offer, to entice us into their service. “ I speak, ” says he, “ after the manner of men, because of your infirmities.” As if he had said, “ In order that your weak capacities may the better understand me, I speak of spiritual matters, as if they were an ordinary transaction between man and man, — a bargain between a labourer and his employer. And I therefore exhort you, that, as ye have yielded your members (servants to uncleanness and to iniquity) unto iniquity, even so now yield your members (servants to righteousness) unto holiness.”

This argument appears, at first sight, a little confused; I will therefore endeavour to explain it. — The apostle means to say, that, as every man must needs be either good, or wicked; so all the world are servants either to God, or to the power of sin. And those, who flatter themselves, that they are set free by the blood of Christ from the yoke of the devil, must lose no time in proving the reality of this deliverance, by entering into the service of God; and by walking thenceforth in His holy ways. Your bodies, he continues, your limbs, your hearts, every member belonging to you, were lately servants to iniquity, and to uncleanness: and you gave them up to do the hateful will of those impure and abominable tyrants; and to work whatever iniquity they required at your hands. But you are now, you tell me, the servants of God; — then are your members now servants to holiness; and ye must give them up to work holiness, with the same readiness as you formerly did to the service of sin. The tongue, which was lately, as a servant of sin, occupied in lying and blasphemy, must now be employed, as a servant of righteousness, in giving glory to God, and good advice to your neighbours. The hands, which were exercised in theft, or in quarrelling, must now be employed in honest labour; and must delight to give relief to those who are in need. The heart, which was

lately full of evil thoughts, uncleanness, and envy, as well became the dwelling-place of Satan and his angels, must now be swept and garnished; made clean from all which may offend; and rendered, by God's grace and help, a habitation less unfit to receive His Holy Spirit. "For," continues the apostle, when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness." As if he had said, — "if ye desire to know, in what manner ye can please that God, whom ye profess to serve, ye have only to recollect the perfect obedience, which ye paid to your former master, the devil; and to be as active and hearty in the cause of your Maker, as you were of late in that of your tempter and destroyer." "When ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness." When ye lived a wicked life in the cares and pleasures of the world, ye were then, at least, consistent in your obedience. You gave no ear to the whispers of conscience; you had no taste for the delights of prayer, or praise, or godly meditation, or the study of the sacred Scriptures. Your hellish master had no reason to complain, that you wandered from his service to the service of God: you vexed him by no stolen good deeds, or pious thoughts; you were his entirely, body and soul, his active and zealous soldiers. Is this the case? let your own hearts answer, in the obedience, which you now profess to pay to

God, and His Son Jesus Christ. When holiness called you to her service in former times, how deaf an ear did you turn! Are you equally deaf at present to the allurements of your old tyrant, sin? Are your feet as active in the path, which leads to church, as they once were in those ways, which led to shame and guilty pleasure? Are you as free from evil thoughts, as you used to be from pious meditation? If this be not the case, never dream that you are really a servant of God; since your common sense will tell you, that God must, at least, require as hearty obedience from His subjects, as the devil, from his infatuated slaves; and since your conscience will tell you, that your labour, in the cause of evil, was far more active and zealous, than that, of which you now boast yourself, in the cause of holiness and Heaven. It is thus, that the children of this world are said to be, in their generation, wiser than the children of light. It is not, that they are wiser in the objects, which they pursue; for they are, in comparison, mean and wretched. It is not, that they are wiser in the master, whom they have chosen to serve; for they serve the common enemy of God, and of their own souls; they serve that wretched evil spirit, who neither has it in his power to do them any good in return; nor, if he had the power, has the inclination to cause them anything but misery. But,

in this respect, they are wiser than the children of light; because, having made their choice between good and evil, they abide by the choice which they have made; because, having entered into the service of hell, they do the work required of them, with readiness, with activity, with patience; and because, preferring as they do, however foolishly, the praise of men to the praise of God, and the interests and amusements of a few years to the glory and happiness of eternity, they take, at least, the wisest and the surest means of obtaining those objects, which they chiefly value. And, miserably blind and foolish as they are in making such an option, they are, at least, in their generation, more consistent, than those who, while they call themselves the children of light, and profess an impatient desire of Heaven, take no means at all, no proper means, at least, of forwarding the object, to which they worthily affix so great a value.

Two men, we may suppose, are setting out on very different journeys; but both one and the other, in pursuit of that, which they respectively esteem most highly. Now, if one of them goes forward steadily to his purpose; omitting no opportunity of quickening his pace; resisting all entreaty to turn from that broad and beaten path, which he travels; occupied altogether with that, which he most wishes for; and careful to

let nothing pass unnoticed, which may eventually favour his designs: — and if we saw the other, continually halting at the least difficulty, which presented itself; continually looking round him at every trifling object, which might serve to divert his attention; continually leaving the direct road, to pick up flowers and straws; and but too often doing things, which he well knew were likely for ever to disappoint the purposes of his journey; — and if, of these two men, we were told, that the first was going to drown himself; and the other to receive an estate, to which he had become entitled; should we not say, in our hearts, the first man is indeed a madman for desiring destruction; but he shows, at least, his wisdom, in the means, which he employs in the prosecution of that his purpose? But what folly, or idiotcy, can equal that of the other; who is throwing away so fair a hope, as lies before him, in utter idleness and folly; who loses, at once, both the pleasures of indulgence, and the reward of self-denial; and, while he knows and dreads the consequences of his inconsistency, cannot, for pure weakness, resolve to be consistent. Is it not plain, that, in this case, the very worthiness of the object thus negligently followed, is the strongest rebuke of that negligence, which we display? Is it not plain, that the goodness of the Master, whom we serve, is the very circumstance, which sets,

in the worst and strongest light, our folly, our base ingratitude, in serving Him thus carelessly? And will not this disobedience, and thanklessness, be strangely contrasted with that zeal, which we once showed, in the cause of the world, and of the wicked one? When did we complain, that a day employed in sin was wearisome? When did we, in the days of our wickedness, lose an opportunity of acquiring ungodly gain? And can we, now that we are the servants, yea, the sons, of God Most High, find His sabbaths a burthen; and His services, tedious; and regret, as we do, any little sacrifice of comfort, or of interest, which He calls on us to make, in His cause, and as evidence of our love to Him? Alas, my friends, — if we would but yield the same obedience to our Maker and Redeemer, in our regenerate state, as we have often given to the enemies of both, while we were slaves to sin; little more would be wanting to rank us among the most forward and most fortunate soldiers of Christ; and among those, for whom the crowns of glory are already woven in Paradise; and whom the harps of angels shall receive in triumph along the golden streets of Heaven! All that is required of us, all that God expects, or commands, so far as our active duties are concerned, is comprised in the words, which have been read to you, that “as ye have yielded your members (servants to iniquity)

unto iniquity, so now yield your members (servants to righteousness) unto holiness.”

Nor is there any way more likely so to affect our minds, as to produce these corresponding fruits in our conduct, than the due consideration and comparison, in the manner recommended by the apostle, of the rewards, which our rival masters, God, and Mammon, are severally able to offer. What fruit, we may ask ourselves, with reason, what fruit had we in those things, whereof we are now ashamed? And the answer will follow, [unless we wilfully blind our eyes to it,] that the end of those things is death; eternal death of body and of soul. We know, from the Scriptures, that it was sin, which brought death into the world at all. We know, from experience, that it is sin, by which, in every state of life, the progress of death is hastened, his ravages multiplied, his dominion extended over the world, in its most horrible and disgusting form. By Adam’s sin, indeed, a necessity is entailed on us of, sooner or later, dying. But how long might we live, and in how much comparative happiness, if sin did not shorten our days; if the excesses of youth did not weaken our constitutions; if the offences of parents were not visited, and set forth, in the weak and sickly frames of their unfortunate children! How many perish by slow disease, which a resistance of temptation might have

prevented; to how many victims does the tyranny and pride of some few extend; and how many have perished in the flower of age, for the wickedness of a single conqueror!

But this is not the only, nor the most frightful death, to which sin conducts her subjects. The eye of faith, which pierces beyond the grave, may there behold, in flames and never-ending agonies, the bitter wages which Satan has to bestow, the sad return which only he is able to make, for all which, on earth, we do or suffer in obedience to his commands. "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord!" And shall we not labour now as hard to purchase Heaven, as we have formerly toiled to earn disgrace and fear, and an untimely grave, and fires which never shall be quenched? Or will not the recollection of such a deliverance as, by the free grace of God, we have received, such a reward as, by the same free grace, we are instructed to anticipate, will not this awful recollection, this blessed and comfortable hope, awake in our hearts so strong a love for Him, to whom we owe our all, as that we shall scorn to be more slack in His service and warfare, than we have formerly been in the service of His adversary?

O Lord, Thou hast bought us with Thy blood; therefore will we be Thine for evermore. O

Lord, Thou hast opened the gates of life, and immortality to us, who were Thine enemies ; and the souls which Thou hast rescued from everlasting death, and the bodies which, but for Thee, would have writhed in tortures unspeakable, are all but too little to express our devotion and gratitude ;— all but too poor an offering, in return for the favour, which has been shown us. “ What shall we give unto the Lord, for all the benefits which He hath done unto us ? ”¹ Sacrifice and burnt offering He hath ceased to require : but lo ! we come, to do Thy will, O Lord ; and to offer up at Thy Mercy-seat, ourselves, our souls, and bodies, as a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice to Thee, O Father, by whom we are forgiven ; to Thee, O Blessed Son, by whose blood we are redeemed ; and to Thee, thou pure and eternal Spirit, through whose blessed inspiration alone we can think, or do, what is pleasing in the sight of our Divine Benefactor ! Enter then, O God, into our bosom thus prepared ; and may Thy grace and comfortable presence dwell therein for evermore, in this world where we are strangers and pilgrims ; and, in the world to come, where we shall live, and reign, with Thee : Amen, and Amen !

¹ Psalm cxvi. 12.

SERMON XL.

EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1 KINGS, xiii. 6.

*And the king answered and said unto the man of God,
Entreat now the face of the LORD thy God, and pray for
me, that my hand may be restored me again.*

THE occasion of these words has been read to you in the proper Lesson for this morning's service; the history contained in which you may understand more clearly, from the following remarks on its different circumstances.

A short time before the events, which it records, took place, the kingdom of David had been divided, by the rebellion of ten of the tribes under Jeroboam; who established a rival monarchy at Samaria, in opposition to that at Jerusalem. The account of this revolution may be found in the 11th and 12th chapters of the same book of Kings; — where you will read, how King Solomon's compliance with his heathen wives and concubines entailed on his children the loss of the greater part of his kingdom: — how the folly of his son Rehoboam was the im-

mediate cause of the calamity ; and, more particularly, with what a wicked artifice Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, endeavoured to make a religious, as well as a political, breach between the two great families of Israel and Judah. It had been, till then, the custom of all the nation, — a custom enjoined in the most solemn manner by God Himself, — that no sacrifice or burnt-offering should be offered to Him in any other place, than the temple which was on Mount Sion : and that all the males of every tribe should come up thither, three times in the year, to worship in the presence of God. But this custom, as Jeroboam apprehended, might be dangerous to the political greatness of himself and his successors. “ If this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam, king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again unto Rehoboam king of Judah. Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, ‘ It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem : Behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt ! ’ And he set the one in Beth-el, the other put he in Dan : and this thing became a sin, for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. And he made an house of high-places, and made

priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of the sons of Levi.”¹

The folly, as well as the wickedness, of such a proceeding, it is hardly necessary to point out to you. The exaltation of Jeroboam and his family to the throne of Samaria had been brought about, as we have seen, by the providence of God; and had been expressly foretold by Him, through the mouth of His prophet Abijah. Jeroboam, then, might well have trusted, that the same Almighty power, which had made him King, could keep the crown on the heads of himself and his children, without the help of any such crooked policy. Jeroboam might well have feared, that the same sin of idolatry, which, in the case of King Solomon, had been so offensive to God, would be required with still greater severity at his own hands, and those of his descendants: nor can we conceive a greater proof of unthankfulness, than that a king, on being promoted to the throne, should employ the first moments of his reign, in debasing the glory, and in transgressing the laws, of that Heavenly King, who had placed him there. Under such circumstances of folly and unthankfulness, it might have been, perhaps, in the first instance expected, that God would, at once, destroy the work of His hands; and would sentence to severe and unexampled pu-

¹ 1 Kings, xii. 27—31.

nishment the seducer, and the seduced ; — the ungodly prince, and the people, who so willingly complied with his impious devices. This might, I say, have been expected from the justice of God : but with God there is also mercy ; and He strikes not the sinner, till He hath first called him to repentance.

To both prince and people, in the very midst of their sins, a solemn and most merciful warning was afforded : which, if it had sunk into their hearts thereafter, as it seems to have awed them for a time, might have preserved both prince and people from the destruction, which afterwards overtook them. It was on the day, which the king of Israel had appointed for the first public performance of his new religious ceremonies, and for setting up, on its altar, the golden idol, to which he had likened the Majesty of Him whom the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain : — “ He offered upon the altar, which he had made in Beth-el, on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart ; and he ordained a feast unto the children of Israel.”¹ The people were assembled ; their prince stood before them ; engaged in a solemn act of worship ; and both prince and people either had forgotten, or disregarded, the vengeance, which, for the like offence, of worshipping a golden

¹ 1 Kings, xii. 33.

calf, the LORD had inflicted on their forefathers, in the wilderness. But, as Jeroboam was thus standing by the altar, “there came a man of God, out of Judah, by the word of the LORD, unto Beth-el:” who declared the high displeasure of His Master against those vanities, whereby they professed to honour Him; and foretold, that the very place, where the new religion was begun, should fall into the power of the kings of Judah; and that, on that very altar, should be burned the bones of those idolatrous priests, who now were burning incense around it. And to prove, that he, who spake thus, was not actuated by a spirit of enthusiasm, or by imposture, — that he had, in good truth, his errand from God, and that he, who had threatened, was fully able to perform, — he gave a sign, the same day, saying, “This is the sign which the LORD hath spoken. Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out.” Did Jeroboam believe this warning? His first impression was to secure and punish the seditious madman, who sought, by vain threats, to overcome the dictates of national policy, and who durst insult a king, in the midst of his people, and in the sunshine of his power and prosperity. His first impression was to secure and punish him. “He put forth his hand from the altar, saying, lay hold on him.” But, before one of that mighty multitude could

execute his command, before a single priest could avenge the honour of the new creed, or a single soldier stand up to defend the king of Israel, One, mightier than the king, had shown forth His power; and Jeroboam's outstretched arm, and his idolatrous altar, were alike smitten by Jehovah. "His hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him. The altar also was rent; and the ashes poured out from the altar; according to the sign, which the man of God had given, by the word of the LORD."¹

Are you curious to know the state of Jeroboam's altered feelings; when, in the midst of his pride, the visible hand of God thus smote him? Go, ask of the sinner, who has been visited,—when his lusts were hottest, and his pride at its highest pitch,—with some sore disease, or with some great and pressing calamity! Ask your own hearts, what your language has been, when, from a bed of sickness and pain, you have cried bitterly to the LORD for mercy and forgiveness; and for some little time to make your peace, before you went hence, and were no more seen! Instead of punishing the boldness of the prophet, Jeroboam becomes a petitioner for his pardon and his prayers. "Intreat now the face of the LORD thy God; and pray for me, that my arm may

¹ 1 Kings, xiii. 1—5.

be restored to me again. And the man of God besought the LORD ; and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as before." — Well had it been for Jeroboam, and for Israel, if this merciful chastisement had produced a lasting effect on the king, and on the people ;— a lasting and sincere repentance ! But how often do we find that the warnings of God, even when those warnings are miraculous, [though, for the time, they may alarm ; though, for the time, they may convince ; though, for the time, they may give rise to resolutions of amendment,] are forgotten but too soon, when they have been withdrawn ; when the tide of business and pleasure has resumed its former channel. I referred you to your own feelings on a bed of sickness, — to know, what were the feelings of Jeroboam, when he beheld the altar, by which he stood, swept away, as by an earthquake ; and his own right hand, dried up and withered, in the act of kingly authority. If you would know, how little lasting effect these awful dispensations produced in him ; how speedily he returned to his plans of worldly pride ; and to the same interested policy, which made religion a cloak for ambition ; you have only to recollect, how speedily you yourselves, when in health, have forgotten the fears, and promises, of sickness : and have been ensnared anew by the same temptations, which had formerly led you captive : —

Jeroboam's hand was restored; his days were not cut short; and he and his people built up once more the altar, which God's own power had, in a visible manner, cast down! ¹ Therefore it was, as you may read in the chapter which immediately follows, that the same prophet Abijah, who had foretold Jeroboam's advancement to the throne, pronounced, some short time after, a most grievous curse against him and his posterity. The very son, to secure whom in possession of the throne, he had sinned against his Heavenly Benefactor, was cut off in the flower of his days; while God declared His purpose of "bringing evil on the house of Jeroboam, and of taking away its remnant, as a man taketh away dung." He, that died of Jeroboam's family in the field, was eaten by dogs; and he, that died in the city, by the fowls of the air. Yea, Israel itself was smitten, "as a reed is shaken in the water;" and was rooted up out of the good land, which the LORD had given unto their fathers, "because of the sins of Jeroboam who did sin, and who made Israel to sin." ²

From the early part then, of the present chapter, we may learn, First, the exceeding vanity and folly of attempting, by crooked and sinful means, to further our worldly interests; seeing that these interests, and all the affairs of this life, are in the hands of God; who, without our

¹ 1 Kings, xiii. 33.

² 1 Kings, xiv. 16.

help, if He sees fit, may make us great and prosperous; without whose blessing, all our labour is but vain; and whose blessing cannot possibly be looked for, by those, who seek to found their prosperity on a defiance of His laws. If Jeroboam had not been too anxious to secure the crown to his children; the same God, who made him king, might have kept it on their heads for evermore: but when he sought to strengthen himself against Judah, by schism and idolatry, the hand of the Lord was turned against his house; and his name became a proverb in Israel, for crime and calamity.

Secondly, We may learn the true use, which should be made of afflictions sent by God; and that, when visited by His correcting hand, we should pray for deliverance, not only from our present calamity, but from the sins, which brought it on; and from the lusts, whereby we shall be again led into the commission of fresh crimes, and into the danger of still heavier punishments. Jeroboam prayed, that his hand might be cured: — it was cured; and yet he went on, offending God, till he had sealed the ruin of his family. If he had prayed for true repentance; for a hearty desire to forsake those sins, which had brought down God's anger on him; for strength to fight against the temptations of pride, and of carnal fear; and for grace to worship God, in spirit and in truth;

and to trust, in Him only, for defence and safety ; how different would the consequences have been ! Remember, then, when you are in sorrow, or in pain, that you should pray to your Maker, not only for present relief, but for future grace, and blessing ; knowing, that it is a small thing to be now set free ; if we have the same sinful habits about us, which will soon bring down a new judgement upon us : and that, since all our suffering is the fruit of sin, the surest means of obtaining deliverance is to seek, first, the kingdom of God, and His righteousness !

Thirdly, The last which I shall mention of those wholesome lessons, with which the present chapter abounds, is the great necessity of attending to God's warnings, if we hope to escape His punishments. God seldom sends the last, before He has graciously tried the former : but, where His warnings have been slighted, or despised, His punishments are sure to follow. Jeroboam was not brought to himself, by the drying up of his hand, and by the rending of his altar ; and the days soon came, in which his children withered away from the face of the earth, as the grass withereth under the burning heat of the sun : and his throne, which he had made so strong for himself, was plucked up, and cast down, as the stubble before the whirlwind ! Hath God visited *us* with no calamities ? Have no warnings been brought to *us*, of His anger,

and of our own danger and sinfulness? Have not His judgements been abroad in the world, to bring the nations to repentance? Have not His gracious visitations been brought to our own doors, our own tables, and bed-chambers; when by the sorrows, which He sent into our hearts, He taught us, how weak we were; and admonished us to apply to Him, for help and pardon? O ye, that complain of evil times, why will ye not understand, that “foolish men are plagued, because of their offences!”¹ O ye, whose heads have been bowed down by sickness, or by sorrow, how long will you set your hearts on a world, which ye have found to be nothing else than vanity?—How long will ye suffer God to call, while ye refuse to obey His invitation?—How long will ye not perceive, that every groan, which is drawn from our mortal nature, is, as it were, a passing bell, which warns us of our own approaching funeral; a summons, which bids us make ready for the grave, and for the dreadful sentence which must follow?

These pains and calamities are the messengers of God; which tell us, that He is on His road to judge the earth. *On His road*, did I say? Even now, perchance, He standeth at the door: and blessed, thrice blessed are they whom, when He cometh, He shall find watching!

¹ Psalm, cvii. 17.

There are other very useful topics of instruction afforded in this same chapter ; by the history and melancholy end of the prophet, who bore God's message to Jeroboam ; but the time forbids me now to enter on their discussion. Hereafter, by His help and blessing, I may again return to the subject.

SERMON XLI.

NINTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1 KINGS, xviii. 17, 18.

And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he, that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim.

FEW names are more remarkable, in the volume of Scripture, nor has any mere man been more conspicuously honoured by the power and protection of the Most High, than Elijah, or Elias, the prophet. Yet it may be observed, in his case, as well as in that of many others of the most eminent servants of God, that the Holy Ghost, as if to reprove the vanity of human curiosity, and to expose the nothingness of human renown, has given us very few particulars of the history, or character of those, in whom God has been most pleased; and those particulars are such, in a great degree, as, in a worldly point of view, would seem most adverse to the passions and prejudices of mankind.

Of the parentage, the birth, or the education of Elias, as of Melchisedec, nothing is told us. We only hear of him as a native of Tishbi, a small village in Gilead; as a person of coarse dress; of humble appearance; and of habits retired, and melancholy; like John the Baptist, who was, in after times, compared to him,—a dweller in the wilderness, a hairy man, and girded with a leathern girdle. Yet, of this man, so mean in his outward show, and, in his worldly enjoyments, so little to be envied, we also read such actions, as would almost tempt us to suppose him more than human. His curse could call down fire from Heaven, on his enemies; and “make a fruitful land barren, for the wickedness of them that dwelt therein.”¹ His prayers could bring down rain and fertility on the same parched soil, on which, for three years, no dew had rested; the ravenous birds of the wilderness were employed by God to bring him bread and flesh; and the oil and flour of his Sidonian hostess knew no decay, while she shared them with Elijah. His voice and touch restored the dead to life; his mantle, waved over the waters of the river Jordan, divided the deep and rapid stream, and made a dry tract for the prophet’s journey. Like Moses, and like Christ, he fasted forty days; an angel ministered unto him, as unto Christ, in the wilderness; like Moses, he

¹ Psalm cvii. 34.

heard the voice of God; and spake with Him in Horeb, face to face; though he cast his mantle over his eyes, and adventured not to gaze on His glory; and, like Enoch, distinguished in this from all others who have borne our nature, he did not sleep the sleep of death; but was changed, as at the last day, in the twinkling of an eye, and caught up to Heaven, by a whirlwind, in a fiery chariot.

Such was the man, of whom King Ahab said, that he "troubled Israel;" the cause of which accusation it will now be useful to explain to you. Of the general wickedness and weakness of Ahab's character, I shall take another occasion to speak; it is now sufficient to observe that, by the persuasion of his wicked queen, he had set up the altars of the idol Baal; and had raised a bitter persecution against the worshippers of the true God; destroying all the prophets, or preachers of the word, whom he could apprehend; and driving the rest for shelter to wildernesses and caves, where a few good men, like Obadiah, the king's steward, supported them, in silence, and in secrecy.

It was in consequence, as it should seem, of this apostacy and cruelty, that Elijah pronounced, on the part of God, and by His authority, that dreadful threat, which occasioned Ahab's charge against him: namely, that no rain should fall, during three years, on all the land of Israel.

Where he spake this, does not appear : in public; and very solemnly, it must have been spoken; and that God, who sent him with such a message, could easily, and doubtless did, protect him, for the time, by some Divine terror and dignity of appearance, from the violence of Ahab and Jezebel.

But, his message once delivered, he was commanded by God, as you may read in the 17th chapter, to fly into the desert, first; and into the border country of Zidon, afterwards, where he was miraculously nourished, till the three years had passed away, and the period of God's curse was completed. He then returned to the neighbourhood of Samaria : where he made himself known, first to Obadiah; afterwards, to the king; and lastly, to all the people of Israel; in that memorable trial of the different claims of Baal and of Jehovah, to the worship and faith of mankind, which has been read to you in the proper lesson for this morning. Of that trial, in which the True God so remarkably showed forth His power, by consuming the sacrifice with fire from Heaven, and, afterwards, by sending rain on the land, which had so long continued waterless, and desolate, it is unnecessary to renew your recollection. What I now mean chiefly to enlarge on, is the accusation brought by Ahab, in the words of my text, against Elijah; and the answer, which Elijah returned to

it. “When Ahab saw Elijah, he said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he said, *I* have not troubled Israel; but *thou* and thy father’s house; in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim!” How was it, that Ahab supposed Elijah to have troubled Israel? Could Ahab be weak enough to believe, that the drought, which had, for three years, afflicted the land, was Elijah’s doing? Could he dream, that a mortal man had the windows of heaven in his keeping? that the clouds were his to give, or to withhold; that he could bring the rain out of his treasures? No, but Elijah, as the minister of God, had reproved the prince and people of Israel, for their manifold provocations; he had spoken, with honest plainness, of their sins, and of their dangers; he had, lastly, as God’s herald and messenger, given warning of the calamity, which, except on their speedy repentance, the Almighty was about to bring on them; and, for these actions, which, so far from being injurious, were deserving of their best honour and thankfulness, — for these public services of the most inestimable kind, was Elijah regarded as a public enemy, as one that “troubleth Israel.” Nor was Elijah, in this respect, more unfortunate than the greater number of the other prophets, whom the Almighty sent to preach righteousness to His

chosen tribes; since all, or nearly all, were received with anger and murmuring, by those, whose lives they came to reform, and whose ignorance they sought to enlighten.

The lives of almost all were a series of afflictions and persecutions; — the deaths of almost all were martyrdoms. They, “of whom the world was not worthy¹,” — “wandered in sheepskins, and goat-skins, desolate, tormented, afflicted:” — “they were stoned; they were killed with the sword; they were sawn asunder;” and, — from the first messenger, whom the Lord of the vineyard sent to His husbandmen, down to the only beloved Son, whom they slew, that they might seize his inheritance, — hatred or contempt, neglect or persecution, was the almost uniform portion of the preachers of righteousness, the ambassadors of the King of kings.

On all this, two important observations may be grounded. First, of how small estimation is worldly prosperity, in the eyes of Infinite Wisdom; when God has thought fit to allot so small a share to those, in whom He has been most pleased. Secondly, that we must seek the cause of this uniform ill-treatment of God’s most faithful servants, in some pervading and general principle of that human nature, which it was their endeavour to reclaim, and to make

¹ Heb. xi. 37, 38.

better. And such a principle we shall find in the dislike, which every man is inclined to feel towards whatever causes him pain ; even though the person, or thing, from which his pain proceeds, is altogether free from any desire to injure him.

In the brute creation this principle of undistinguishing resentment is often and conspicuously perceivable. And with savages, whose brutal passions are little more under restraint than those of the beasts which perish ; and with the barbarous kings of the East, whose fury of temper is stimulated by flattery, and by absolute power ; such instances of rage are common, and prove, that it is instruction only, which, in cases like these, makes the man and the brute to differ. Fling a stone at a dog ; and he will turn to bite the stone. Of savages, it is said, that, when wounded by an arrow, they will rage against the senseless wood, as if that were their enemy : and we are told of an ancient Moorish king, that, when news was brought him of the loss of one of his cities, he smote off the head of the guiltless messenger, who had only done his duty by delivering to him the melancholy tidings. These are instances, indeed, of this passion carried to an excess, from which the education and restraints, under which most men lie, in a great measure, happily forbid them ; but the passion, which I have described, is the same with that which

leads men, every day, to curse the tool, which breaks in their hands; or the weather, which is unfavourable to their business; which leads them to take offence at all those who, however unknowingly or unwillingly, have been hinderances to their advancement; and to quarrel with those, who, even as a matter of duty and of kindness, have given them advice, which they were unwilling to receive, or to profit by. We need not, therefore, wonder, that, whoever discharges the duty of warning mankind, — of the error of their ways, and of the wrath of God, which burns against them, — whoever attempts to convince them of their wickedness, their folly, and their probable misery hereafter, is almost sure to be regarded, not as their best friend; but as the disturber of their peace, and the enemy of their happiness; that the picture, which is held out to the sinner, of his future dangers, is supposed to proceed, not from a concern for his safety, but from a wish that he may perish; and that plainness of speech, which is, in a desperate case, the truest charity, is esteemed sufficient to stamp the person, who employs it, as uncharitable and unfeeling. To cure men, so far as the weakness of our nature will allow, of a fault so common, and so natural, it may be useful, first, to expose the folly of those pretensions, by which a man usually seeks to justify to himself and others, a conduct such

as I have been describing. Secondly, to suggest some considerations, by which the advantage and value of reproof may be made plain to all of us; and we may be led to overcome our unwillingness to receive it, by a sense of the important use, which it becomes us, as reasonable creatures, to make of it.

The usual reasons, which we give, for being angry with those persons, who tell us of our faults, our folly, or our danger, are, either that it is no concern of theirs; or, that they have spoken of us, unjustly and uncandidly; or, that they have not given the advice, for our sake, but for their own, — out of pride to show forth their own wisdom, by exposing our weakness; — out of malice to give us pain, or to lessen our reputation in the world; — or out of hypocrisy, to obtain from mankind the praise of being zealous in the cause of God, and in the conviction, or conversion, of sinners.

Now, to the first of these objections, that it is no concern of theirs, — the situation of the friendly adviser will generally furnish an answer: since, if he be our relation, our friend, our master, or other superior, or, above all, if he be a minister of God's word, he is not only justified in interfering; but it is his bounden duty to interfere, with his advice, and with his reproof, in every instance, where that advice, or that reproof, can be serviceable to us. He is,

by the place which he holds, the guardian of our souls: and he must answer it, at the peril of his own soul, to God, if we perish, without his taking due pains to point out to us our danger. “Son of man,” said God to Ezekiel, [and the same commandment is addressed to all those, who, whether by friendship, or by authority, or by office, have the opportunity of calling sinners to repentance]—“Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand!”¹

So far, then, is the advice, of which we complain, an unjustifiable interference, that, in nine out of ten of the cases, in which advice is generally offered, there is a necessity, an obligation, of the strictest and most awful kind, imposed on men to advise us.

And, in truth, whether the relations, of which I have spoken, exist between us and our friendly reprove, or no, yet, — if our sins be great, or our errors, great and notorious, — even a stranger may be called on to advise, and to reprove, us

¹ Ezek. iii. 17, 18.

for our good ; no less than a stranger would be called on to give us food, or medicine, when we were starving, or sick ; or to pluck us from the river, when we were in danger of drowning ; or to call us back from the precipice, towards which we were blindly wandering.

But, “ they have spoken of us, unjustly, or unfairly ! ” To whom have they thus spoken ? to others, or to ourselves ? If to others, they have committed a grievous fault ; but this is not reproof, but slander. If to ourselves, and privately, let us seriously consider, first, whether the harshness of their rebukes can, possibly, have done us any harm. Secondly, whether it may not have been anxiety for our welfare, which prompted their over earnestness ; and whether we ought not to love, rather than hate, an error which flowed from such a feeling. Thirdly, whether we can, indeed, be sure, that their reproofs have been unjust, or unfair ; whether it is not more likely, that our self-opinion blinds us to our own faults, than that others should think worse of us than we deserve ; or, whether, at least, we are not as much too favourable to ourselves, as they are too severe.

But, “ the advice has been given from selfish motives, from pride, from a desire to give pain, from hypocrisy.” Supposing this to be the fact, is the advice, on that account, the less valuable ? If what has been said be true, it is, surely, wiser

to profit by the truth, than to quarrel with the person who tells it.

But, when the advice is good, what right have we to suppose that it is given with a bad intention? Can we read the hearts of men? or is it not from their actions only, that we can judge of their inclinations towards us? If we were hungry, or sick, or naked; and if our present adviser had given us raiment, food, or medicine; would it have been just, or wise, or grateful, to cry out, that he had only helped us out of hypocrisy, or out of pride? He has now given us, what may, perhaps, be far more valuable than either medicine, clothing, or food; and can we, dare we, speak of him with harshness or unthankfulness? Throw pearls before swine; and they tread them under feet, and turn again, and rend you; but let it not be said, that men, that Christians, receive the pearl of good counsel, with the heedlessness and savage brutality of the beasts which perish! O ye, who are in error, and who are warned of the evil and danger of your ways, — whether that warning has proceeded from a minister of the Gospel, from a parent, a friend, a kind neighbour, or a compassionate and pious stranger, if ye will not hear the advice, yet at least be thankful to the adviser: lest ye be found in the number of those, who despise and persecute the messengers

of God; and who, like Ahab, account his servants among those who "trouble Israel!"

The true and only cure, for this hatred of reproof and godly counsel, is a serious recollection of the great importance of the interests concerned; and the dreadful danger, to which a neglect of such warnings may expose us. To be wakened suddenly from sleep is always disagreeable: and, like all other disagreeable sensations, produces too frequently, in the first place, anger against the person, who has thus disturbed us. But if we found our house on fire, — if we found that the flames were climbing our staircase, and that the wreaths of suffocating smoke already filled our chamber, how soon would our anger be turned into blessings on the preserver who called us to a sense of the approaching calamity, and to those exertions by which only our bodies were to be snatched from the burning! We are fallen asleep in our sins; the mouth of hell is gaping wide to devour us; on our awaking now, and on the endeavours of the present moment, the happiness or misery of eternal ages may depend. And are we angry with that blessed roughness, which disturbs our fatal security? and do we prefer to sleep on, though we should thus awake at length in everlasting torments?

O Father of mercies, suffer not thy children

to perish ! but call us, LORD, by the voice of Thy ministers ; send to our warning the counsel and reproof of friends ; and send, at the same time, Thy powerful and penetrating Spirit of Grace, that we may so hear the reproof, and love the charitable reprover, that, with him, we may enter into that land, where the voice of chiding shall be heard no more : and where virtue, and wisdom, and love, and joy, shall encircle our steps eternally.

SERMON XLII.

TENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

1 KINGS, xxi. 25.

But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.

THE name of Ahab, son of Omri, king of Israel, is conspicuous above all the rulers of that unhappy and rebellious nation, for the weight of sin imputed to him, in Scripture; and for the miserable ruin, which those unrepented transgressions brought down upon himself and his family.—“There was none”—we are told in the words, which I have chosen for my text,—“there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up.”—And, as were his crimes, such also was his punishment. He perished himself, by an untimely end, in a lost and hopeless battle; his wife, his children, his brethren, and kindred, fell the victims of successful rebellions; and in few, very few years from the event recorded in the First Lesson

in this morning's service, the family of Ahab had, as utterly and as violently, been swept away from the face of the earth ; as the former evil race of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin, and as the house of Baasha, the son of Ahijah.

It may perhaps be no unprofitable exercise to examine into the leading features of a character so severely reprobated by God's Spirit ; and which received a punishment so exemplary : — and most happy will it be for our souls, if we are enabled, on such inquiry, to amend in ourselves any lurking point of likeness, which we may there discover, to the wretched husband of Jezebel.

Of all the kings of Israel the besetting sin was idolatry ; a crime against which the Almighty had levelled his severest censures ; and to correct the advances of which he had sent, in each successive generation, a succession of inspired and holy men, as prophets and teachers of His word ; whose miracles and judgements were sufficient, as may be thought, to enforce, even on the most obstinate offenders, a knowledge of their duty, and a sense of their danger. In spite of all, however, the kings, and people, of Israel persevered in the error of their ways ; till their total departure from the true faith and acceptable worship of God was punished by the utter overthrow of their crown and country, and the transportation of all who

did not perish in battle, to dwell as slaves in the country of their invaders.

This obstinacy in error may seem to demand explanation. It may be therefore well to inform you, that, having rebelled from their rightful sovereigns, the kings of Judah,—the rulers of Israel, as we read in the 12th chapter of this same book of Kings, were anxious to keep the ten tribes, which obeyed their authority, as much divided as possible from the two which remained faithful to the family of David.—With this view, Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, under pretence of saving his people the trouble of going twice in every year to offer sacrifices at Jerusalem in the temple built by Solomon,—the place which God Himself had appointed,—brought back, by the full force of his example and authority, the old idolatry of the golden calf, which the tribes had worshipped in Horeb: and he had the audacity to proclaim once more, in defiance of all God's judgements and threatenings, that these were a fit representation of the God, which brought them out of the land of Egypt.

As this was neither more nor less than open rebellion against the acknowledged will of Jehovah, they were repeatedly warned, and punished with a merciful severity, which, if they had known how to profit by it to repentance, might have saved them from total ruin.—

But the voice of worldly wisdom was always louder than the whispers of conscience; and that short-sighted cunning, which led them, by whatever means, to avoid any intercourse with the kingdom of Judah, led them also to despise, or distrust, as enthusiastic, or treasonable, all the exhortations of the different religious men, whom God raised up for their amendment.

To this national and customary transgression of the divine laws, Ahab, as we read in the chapter which goes before, was persuaded to add a new and still more unpardonable abomination, in worshipping the idol of the Sidonians, Baal, or the Sun. I call this error still more unpardonable than the sin of Jeroboam, because this was an absolute departure from the worship of the true GOD; whereas that of the golden calves was only worshipping God under an absurd and degrading form. The worshippers of the golden calves, however strange it may appear, did not mean to adore any other Divinity than the JEHOVAH, who made both earth and heaven, and who had brought their forefathers out of the land of Egypt. They broke the second commandment, in fancying that they could represent by this image [which, though the men of Judah called it a calf, in contempt of its weakness, is supposed to have been that of an animal composed of the bull and the lion, with wings, also,] — that they could represent,

by this image, the strength, and swiftness, of the unseen God: and they were doubtless most absurd in transforming the similitude of their glory to the likeness of an ox that eateth grass; and most guilty in transgressing, from motives of worldly prudence, the two positive commands of God: the first in pretending to make any image or likeness of Him; the second in offering their sacrifices any where else, than at Jerusalem, where He had commanded.

But the worshippers of Baal were not content with adoring, as the true God, an image made with hands:—they sinned against the first command, no less than against the second; inasmuch, as in the person of their fancied thunderer, they set up an absolute rival to Jehovah; and, by paying their vows and prayers and sacrifices to another, declared, in no doubtful language, that the God of their forefathers should not be their king.

The question between the followers of Jeroboam, and those faithful Israelites who still continued to worship at Jerusalem, was only whether God might lawfully be worshipped at Bethel; and whether it were right to represent His glory by a golden image:—but they were both agreed, that the LORD only was to be adored and honoured. The question between the prophets of the groves, and Elijah, was, whether the LORD, or Baal, was God?—and while

Elijah exhorted his countrymen to return to the worship of Jehovah, the agents of Jezebel attempted to persuade them that it was not Jehovah, but Baal, who was the proper object of prayer. It was the worship of this idol, which Ahab, king of Israel, allowed his wife to introduce into the land; and which he himself was led, by her example, to serve and honour; though, at the same time, with an inconsistency which shall be hereafter explained, he continued himself to worship occasionally the true God, after the irregular and unlawful manner which Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, had first, as we have seen, from worldly motives, introduced.

Of the crimes of Ahab's after life, and of the curse which God laid on him, and on all his family, you have heard in the Lesson which has been read to-day; and I shall take an opportunity, very shortly, of speaking on them more at large. Yet may it be noticed here, that, in all his offences, the man himself does not appear to have been a hardy and determined sinner:—when reproved, he repented;—although when tempted, he immediately fell; and his character discovers itself, as one which was rather easily led into wickedness, than one which took delight in transgression.

When, in punishment for the horrid massacre which the queen had instigated, of all the prophets of the Lord, the windows of Heaven were

shut up for three years, so that no rain fell in the land of Israel; though Ahab at first turned all his anger, not on his wicked wife, whose cruelty had brought this curse on his country, but on the prophet Elijah, who had forewarned him of it, in order to his repentance; yet when at length Elijah met him, the king, we find, is awed and overcome by the awful presence of him whom he had persecuted; and yields a ready obedience to his injunctions, first in calling together all the prophets of Baal, to meet the one surviving teacher of righteousness, in a solemn trial of the truth of their different creeds; and, afterwards, in putting to a merited death those bloody deceivers, who had so long persecuted the worshippers of the living God.

But, though, for this act of justice, he was immediately rewarded by the fertile rain, which he had for three years desired; and, though Elijah entered Jezreel with him, on terms of seeming reconciliation; yet no sooner was the feeble mind of the king exposed to the arts of his wife, than he gives up at once to her vengeance that prophet, by whose prayers his country had just been saved from ruin. In the evening of the first day, Elijah and Ahab are friends; and the worship of the true God is restored by acclamation in Israel: in the morning of the second, Jezebel has sufficient power to drive away into the desert, as one who fled for his life, that person

whom her husband, the king of the land, had the day before acknowledged as the appointed minister of the Most High. Not yet, however, were the sins or the follies of Ahab complete; nor was the Lord of heaven and earth weary, as yet, of showing him mercy. Benhadad, king of Syria, made war on Israel; — a powerful and bloody conqueror, who had already two and thirty kings who served him, and whose army, as he himself boasted, was so numerous, that the “dust of Samaria would not suffice for handfuls to all the people that followed him.”¹ In this distress, another prophet was sent to Ahab, promising him deliverance and victory: and Ahab again, when victorious, from foolish lenity, or from a desire to obtain the friendship of an idolatrous king, thought fit to sacrifice the interests of his country to an imprudent peace; and let go out of his hand a tyrant “whom the LORD had appointed to utter destruction.”² For this, he was again threatened with ruin by a prophet of the LORD; and again, so strange was his inconsistency, returned to his house in affliction; and, as the Hebrew word may be translated, which our English Bible renders “displeased,” — angry with himself, and penitent.

How little, however, this penitence availed, against the destructive influence of Jezebel, appears by the history of Naboth's vineyard.

¹ 1 Kings, xx. 1. 10.

² 1 Kings, xx. 42.

This vineyard Ahab desired to purchase of its owner ; nor was there any thing displeasing, or unfair, in the sight of God, or of man, in the offer which he made, either to exchange on advantageous terms, or to give its worth in money. Being refused, however, and refused, as it may seem, with some degree of roughness, how striking a picture of a weak and selfish man does his conduct afterwards display. “ He came into his house heavy and displeased, because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken ; and he laid him down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no bread.”

What a temper does this exhibit ! Could not all the kingdom of Israel satisfy this man ; unless he could get this little patch of ground, as a garden of herbs for his palace ? What right had he to be displeased and heavy, because Naboth, possibly, did not know his own interest ; or because, from whatever motive, he was unwilling to part with the heritage of his fathers ? Yet, cannot the King of Israel, in this slight matter, endure contradiction to his will ; and, like a peevish child, he refuses meat and drink ; and lies down, and turns his head away from conversation or comfort. Wicked, however, as it doubtless was, (for folly and wickedness more frequently go together, than is thought ; and, as the wicked man is always so far foolish as his

wickedness is concerned, so the foolish man is seldom very far from being wicked), wicked, as it doubtless was, to covet thus the property which he had no chance of obtaining honestly, it does not appear, that Ahab, for a moment, thought of seizing the vineyard by violence.

That was the suggestion of a worse and a bolder spirit than his — “Jezebel his wife said unto him, Dost thou now govern Israel? Arise and eat bread, and let thy heart be merry; I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.”

How she was to obtain it for him, she does not appear to have told. Perhaps his conscience would even yet have taken alarm at the idea of deliberate and wilful murder — wicked, however (he must have known from her character), her designs undoubtedly were; and when he gave her his royal seal, and permission to use his name, in the orders which she sent forth, he made himself justly answerable for whatever horrors she might, by means of such a privilege, perpetrate.

I need not now repeat the wicked and artful manner, in which she brought Naboth to a cruel and shameful death; wicked, from the damnable hypocrisy, with which this worshipper of Baal pretended to prosecute a man for cursing the God of Israel; wicked and artful above all, inasmuch as it deprived an innocent man not only

of his life, but of his character and good name : and, — by the laws against treason, which, in every country, ordain that the property of the guilty person shall go to the crown, — not only took away the life of the father, but the property also of the sons ; — and thus obtained, in the natural course of things, possession of the envied vineyard !

And how does Ahab receive these bloody tidings ?—like every other wicked man, who is also a weak one, he is glad that the thing is done, so that he did not do it himself ; he rejoices most likely in the secrecy, with which it has been accomplished ; and hopes, perhaps, by this new pretended zeal for the honour of God, not only to escape the censures, but to obtain the praise, of his formidable monitor, Elijah.

To the world, indeed, the death of Naboth, (so craftily had it been contrived) might have passed as an act of ordinary justice, or of a pure religious zeal. The people had been called together to fast, and to pray ; that the greatness of Naboth's supposed blasphemy might be forgiven to the land. Two witnesses had appeared, who deposed to his having spoken the words laid to his charge ; he was consequently condemned, and executed, in the usual and legal manner, appointed in such cases by God Himself. All, in the sight of men, was upright and regular. But there was one eye, by whom the

thoughts of Ahab's heart were seen, as he lay murmuring on his uneasy bed ; one ear, which heard the counsel of Jezebel ; and one upright Judge, to whom the blood of Naboth cried from the ground, and by whom the cry was not disregarded.

“ When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it. And the word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, which is in Samaria : behold he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to possess it. And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, hast thou killed, and also taken possession ? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith the LORD, in the place, where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine ! ”

How this curse was accomplished, and how great was the subsequent ruin of Ahab's family, including in their number that bold and wicked woman who was the cause of all his sins, may be seen in the chapters which follow ; at present I shall only offer a few general observations on that character, which I have endeavoured to illustrate ; and from the consideration of which many useful hints may be derived for the conduct of us all.

Ahab, as we have seen, was a man very easily influenced either to good or evil : when Elijah reproved him, he repented, for the time, of his sins ; and, like Herod under the rebukes of John, did many things, which he was commanded, gladly. But when Jezebel was by his side, there was no superstition, no cruelty, no violence, of which he was not capable ; and the good advice, which he had received from the prophet, and the good resolutions, which he had made during his presence, were scattered like a morning dream.

This conduct is notoriously common with irresolute sinners ; and it springs, in all of them, from too great regard for their present ease or gratification, and from too little attention to past resolutions or to future consequences. And the cure for this is, whenever we are tempted to do that of which our conscience secretly disapproves, first, to consider immediately what our thoughts will one day be on the subject, when we are called to the judgement-seat of Christ, to give an account of our works ; and secondly, to endeavour to drive out the fear of present trouble or self-denial, by the far greater and more reasonable terrors of future torment without end.

But further, Ahab, it is evident, was a man completely devoted to his own selfish gratification ; and who could not therefore endure to

have his wishes crossed in the smallest trifle. We have seen how he took to his bed in despair, on being refused permission to purchase a garden of herbs for his palace: and there is no doubt, that the envy and evil passions, which he thus indulged, had as natural a tendency to make him wish at least for Naboth's death, if not to murder him, as a drop of rain has, in falling on the ground, to return to the sea, from which it first evaporated. Since, therefore, a love of trifles may lead to such grievous crimes, we shall do wisely often to practise self-denial in small matters; and so to keep our hearts in check by due self-government, and so to occupy our attention with our lawful business, and with acts of piety and charity, as that our self-gratification shall have no room to grow into a weed so formidable as to choak up and overshadow all the better seeds around it. Selfishness is the child of idleness. Had Ahab governed Israel himself, and paid due attention to the business of his station, instead of committing all to Jezebel, he would have had other things to think of, than a new place for his garden of herbs.

Thirdly, it may be worth our notice to consider the manner in which Jezebel begins to persuade him to consent to the means, however wicked, which she might use to obtain for him the object of his desires; it is the

artifice, by which, of all others, a weak and selfish mind is assailable — that of persuading him, that others will despise him for his tameness, if he did not, in such affairs, insist on his own way.— “Dost thou not govern Israel?” If I were king, would I suffer an insolent subject to cross my royal pleasure? Shall Naboth mock his sovereign to his face; and shall not that sovereign dare to revenge himself?

Had Ahab been a wise man, had he been a good or a firm man, he might have answered, “I should not be worthy to govern Israel, if I did not govern my own selfish passions. Verily I will govern Israel; and in governing it, I will govern both myself and thee!” This he might have said; but, instead of this, he took the very surest way to prove that he did not govern Israel, when he gave up, to be revenged on Naboth, his royal seal and royal authority, into the hands of a malicious woman.

But it may be of use to all of us, if we observe, that he, who, in persuading us to adopt any line of behaviour, persuades us by an appeal to our wicked passions, our pride, our resentment, our covetousness,—we may be sure, by that very circumstance, is not our real friend, and is not advising us for our advantage. And if we are desired to act thus, or thus, because a different conduct will appear too weak, too religious, too just, or too gentle, this very argument is a

sufficient reason to examine with greater jealousy the advice which is given, lest it should lead us into some grievous sin.

Fourthly, We may remark, that, though Ahab did not himself contrive or execute the death of Naboth, yet, by taking advantage of this foul murder, and by keeping possession of the vineyard thus acquired, he made the guilt of it as much his own, as if he had, with his own hands, sent the victim of his avarice to the grave. — Accordingly, we are bound to restitution of every thing which has not come fairly into our possession ; whether it be derived from our own sins, or from the sins of other men ; whether we have ourselves obtained it by deceit, or it have descended to us from a wicked ancestor. Till restitution is made, the ill-gotten property will be a curse on ourselves and on our posterity ; and though our sorrow may, like that of Ahab, induce God to indulge us with a little longer time for repentance ; yet, if this repentance proceeds no further than the outward signs of grief,— than rending our clothes, and wearing sackcloth, and fasting, and going softly, — if we do not put away the accursed thing from us, and give it up to the rightful owner, or to the poor,—the curse of Naboth the Jezreelite will cleave, we may depend on it, to us and to our posterity ; till our houses

are like the houses of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and of Ahab the son of Omri.

But lastly, — With Ahab, the root of all his offences lay deeper far, than in this unsteadiness of conduct which I have described. He was a man of no religious principle. He appears, indeed, to have believed in God ; but he appears to have cared so little about the matter, that he served Baal, or Ashtaroth, or any other idol, which the bloody superstition of those around him might recommend.

Let it be remembered, then, that he, who does not love God above all things, will never love his brother properly : that, where we are wanting in our obedience to the first commandment, all the rest of the ten are likely to be disregarded. And that no resolutions of repentance or virtue can be availing or constant, which are not laid in faith unfeigned, and in earnest and continued prayer. That God may hear us, and help our endeavours, may He grant for the sake of His dear Son Jesus Christ our Saviour !

SERMON XLIII.

ELEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

2 KINGS, v. 26.

*Went not my heart with thee, when the man turned again
from his chariot to meet thee ?*

THE occasion, on which these words were spoken, you have heard, in the First Lesson for this morning's service. Naaman, the chief captain of the armies of Syria, had received a miraculous cure of his leprosy, by following the directions of the prophet Elisha. Desirous of showing his thankfulness, he had earnestly pressed his deliverer to receive a present, or, as an offering of the kind is called by the Eastern people, a blessing, at his hands. The prophet, for reasons which will be hereafter explained, was fixed in his determination to accept of nothing : but his servant, Gehazi, was less scrupulous. He could not endure the thought of letting such an opportunity of obtaining wealth escape him : nor could he understand the delicacy of his master, in refusing such an offer from one, on whom his claims were so strong. " Gehazi, the

servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master has spared Naaman, this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him. So Gehazi followed after Naaman; and when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well? And he said, All is well; my master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now, there be come to me from Mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets; give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garment, and laid them upon two of his servants, and they bare them before him. And when he came to the tower," (the gateway, that is, of his master's house) "he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed. But he went in and stood before his master."

A wise man he thought himself, no doubt, and a fortunate man! By an easy lie he had brought back two costly suits of clothes, (for mean apparel would never be sent by the general of Syria to a prophet, whom he so greatly honoured,) he had brought back two talents of silver, or little less than 500*l.*; and he had done

all so closely, and in so short a space of time, that Elisha, he hoped, could scarcely have missed him ; far less could he suspect what a treasure he had hidden in the house. He went in and stood before his master. But though Elisha's bodily eyes might have seen him not, there was One, whose ever waking eye had seen him all the time, and whose Spirit was not slow to communicate to Elisha the falsehood and covetousness of his servant. That servant had scarcely time to enjoy, in thought, the treasure which his deceit had purchased, when Elisha said unto him, "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" Another lie was now necessary to save him from the consequence of the lie which he had already told ; and he answered, "Thy servant went no whither." "Went not my heart with thee," was Elisha's reply,—“went not my heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is this a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive-yards, and vine-yards, and sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and maid-servants? The leprosy, therefore, of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever! And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.”

The severity of this punishment may be accounted for, by the following considerations, which prove both the greatness of Gehazi's guilt, and the necessity, under which the prophet lay,

to make him a public example. In refusing the presents of Naaman for himself, Elisha had been guided by a fitting sense of his dignity, as minister of the God of Israel, and of his total dependance on the immediate aid of God, for whatever spiritual gift he enjoyed or exercised. The pretended deities of the heathen were, all of them, supposed not to be above the influence of bribes and offerings; and whoever sought their aid was expected to pay largely both to the idol itself, in sacrifices, or in ornaments for its temple; and to the idol's priests, for their supposed influence with their deity. If, then, there had been any possible appearance, or suspicion, that Naaman had bought his cure, one of two things must have been supposed; either that the Lord of Hosts might be like Ashtaroth, and Baalim, influenced by the sordid views and avaricious expectations of his prophets; or that these prophets had some independent power of their own, which they could exercise at their own will and pleasure, to kill and make alive, without the help, or immediate authority, of the Almighty. It was fit, therefore, to show to this Naaman, and through him to all the nations of the world, that the only offering, which God required from the sick, was repentance and faith unfeigned; that Elisha had no power to point out the means of his recovery, save by the immediate direction and command of God; and

that it was a sin to apprehend, that the health, which was the gift of God, could possibly be purchased with money.

But, by how much the more Elisha's dignified and disinterested conduct was calculated to raise the character of the true religion, in the eyes of the Syrian chief, and of all his countrymen, so much the greater injury would the prophet and his creed receive from the contrary behaviour of Gehazi. What could Naaman possibly think of the teacher of religion, who, having publicly refused at his hands the smallest acknowledgment of his gratitude, throws aside this assumed delicacy so soon as his back was turned; and sends privately after him to ask for such a sum, as two hundred and fifty pounds? He pretends, indeed, that neither this, nor the garments, which he also requested, were for himself; but, even if that pretence were true, there was something mean and inconsistent in recommending his friends to a bounty which he had himself declined. And if Naaman heard, as he was not unlikely to hear, through his servants, in the course of his remaining journey through the territories of Israel, that no such travellers, as Elisha's servant spoke of, had really come to his master's house that day, would he not have thought, that the God of Israel might, indeed, be stronger than the gods of Damascus; but that his ministers were to the full as sordid

hypocrites, as those of Thammuz, of Bel, and of Dagon?

By his conduct, then, in requesting a gift of Naaman in his master's name, Gehazi had not only told a falsehood; but he had told a falsehood of a nature extremely injurious to his masters character, and to the cause of true religion. He had done dishonour to the God of Israel, by obtaining money on false pretences, in the name of a prophet, and in the expectation, that he should be able to escape the knowledge of his master: and, by the lie, which, to his face, he ventured to tell him, he proved, that he did not believe that Elisha was a prophet of God; or, if he were, that God had power to detect and punish his falsehood. To lie to God's inspired minister is the same thing, indeed, as we learn in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, with lying to God: it is an audacious putting of His knowledge to the test, — a defiance of His power and vengeance. In the case, which I have just mentioned, it was punished by sudden death: and we cannot, therefore, wonder that a painful and disfiguring disease was inflicted on Gehazi.

Having, thus far, explained the nature of his offence, and the propriety of his punishment; I would wish to call your attention to certain truths of more general interest and importance, which a consideration of the present history

suggests to us. First, we may observe an example, in the case of Gehazi's punishment, of a dispensation of Providence, which is, in the present life, as common, as it is awful and remarkable; namely, that the possessors of ill-gotten wealth are often punished, not by the loss of the property, which they have thus unjustly acquired; but by some calamity, which shows, more plainly still, the vanity of those hopes, for which they have bartered their souls, — by taking away from them the power of enjoying the object, which they have so unduly coveted. There are many rods, in the hand of our Heavenly Father; and this is one of the severest and most painful; that, when a man shall have sold his hopes of everlasting salvation, in pursuit of a worldly object, that object, when within his grasp, turns into bitterness; and the fruit becomes ashes in his mouth, which he had plucked with so much guilty daring. This man, for instance, will have scrupled at no means, either right or wrong, to scrape wealth together, and to climb up to distinction, in the hope, that his favourite son shall enjoy what his father has toiled so hard, and sinned so grievously, to accomplish; and this son, when his father has reached, for his sake, the utmost height of his wishes, shall be cut off, in the flower of his days; or, living, shall be grief to that father's eyes and bitterness to his heart, unthankful, and unnatural,

a drunkard, a spendthrift, or a fool. Others there have been, who, after working through every species of disgrace and guilt, to raise themselves in the world, and come forward as men of consequence, have found, too late, that, though they had succeeded in procuring rank, they had not the qualifications necessary for making rank respectable; that their new friends disclaimed them; and that their old friends enjoyed their mortifications; and that the higher they have climbed, they have only made themselves more conspicuously ridiculous. There is, again, another, who, when, by his successful frauds, or by his more daring violence, he has made himself independent and prosperous among men, is smitten, at the very entrance of his enjoyments, by the hand of God; and, like this Gehazi, in the pangs of an incurable disease, is condemned to give up his expected plans of pleasure, for a crutch and a sick bed; and the strong drink and delicate food, with which he pampered his imagination, for a long course of abstinence and medicine. "Is this a time," said Elisha to his servant, "Is this a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and olive-yards, and vineyards, and sheep and oxen, and men-servants and maid-servants?" Is it a time for thee to multiply thy possessions, when thou art doomed to an evil and tormenting malady?

Will costly garments be any comfort to thy parched and ulcered skin? Can oliveyards and vineyards and sheep and oxen help him, whose stomach loathes food; or can the pomp of attendance of men-servants and maid-servants give a single night's sweet rest to the feverish and heavy eyelids? "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun," saith Solomon, "and it is common among men. A man, to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honour, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul, of all that he desireth; yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof; but a stranger eateth it: this is vanity, and it is an evil disease."¹ Nor can any thing more strongly prove the folly of seeking after worldly goods by dishonest means, than the knowledge, that, without God's blessing, and the continuance of His favour, the best things, which the world can bestow, cannot possibly add anything to his happiness.

Secondly, I would wish you to observe the nature of that miraculous knowledge, which Elisha possessed, as to the conduct of an absent person. "Went not mine heart with thee," said the prophet to his guilty servant, "went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?" Not that Elisha, in his own power, had the gift of

¹ Eccles. vi. 1, 2.

being in more places than one ; or that, like Christ who saw Nathanael under his fig-tree, his eye embraced the wide scope of all created things ; but that his heart, or understanding, was possessed by God with a knowledge of the crimes of his servants. But, however this knowledge was conveyed to Elisha, is it not plain, that, if Gehazi had supposed for a moment that his master was privy to his goings on, he would never have ventured to make an improper use of his name, or to have tricked, by such a shameful fraud, the grateful Naaman out of a valuable present ?

And shall we forget that a greater than Elisha is privy to all our ways, our words, and our wishes :— that a purer eye, than that of any earthly prophet, follows us into our darkest retirements ; that the hand of God is upon us, when we seem most alone ; that He is about our bed, and above our path ; and spieth out all our ways ; that he knoweth our words, and our thoughts, long before ; and setteth our secret sins in the light of his countenance ? How many actions are there, which the presence of any human being, of a servant, of a perfect stranger, whom we never expected to see again, would effectually make us ashamed, or afraid, of attempting ? And yet, how many of these do we perpetrate without reluctance, while angels and

devils are watching every thing which we are about,—and while God over all is looking on, and treasuring up, these our secret sins against the great day of wrath and burning? This is a truth as certain, as that it is now day; as certain, as that we ourselves live and move; as certain, as that there is a God, who governs all things, and a dreadful hell, to which He will, one day, sentence the wicked. While I speak, God watches the eyes, and hand, and tongue, and thoughts, of every individual among you; and of every one, who lives in the world. He knew, last night, which of you went to sleep without first praying to Him;—which of you employed the darkness, as a season for wholesome repose; and which of you, as a mantle for unlawful lust, or drunkenness, or fraud, and plunder. He knows, at this moment, what heart is fixed on the solemn duties of this place, and this day; and who they are, who are thinking of the world, its pleasures, or cares; or feeding their eyes, or their fancies, with unholy or forbidden objects! “Went not my heart with thee?” said Elisha; and “went not my heart with thee, in thy secret thefts, thy secret lusts, thy secret drunkenness, thy secret envyings and repinings?” “Surely,” said Jacob, “God is in this place: and I knew it not!” Oh that we might be warned in time, to acknowledge His unseen

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presence every where ; and so to conduct ourselves before Him, as that we may endure, with less terror, His visible glory in that day, when they, who denied His power, shall call on the mountains to fall on them ; and on the hills to cover them, from the wrath of Him, that sitteth on the throne, and of the Lamb !

SERMON XLIV.

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

2 KINGS, x. 10.

Know now that there shall fall unto the earth nothing of the word of the LORD, which the LORD spake concerning the house of Ahab : for the LORD hath done that which he spake by his servant Elijah.

IT was related in the proper Lesson¹ for last Sunday evening, in what manner the Almighty stirred up the spirit of Jehu, the son of Nimshi, to rebel against his master, Joram, king of Israel ; and the dismal end of that monarch, as well as of his mother Jezabel, and his cousin Ahaziah, king of Judah. In the chapter, from which the words of my text are taken, we have the conclusion of the same bloody story, in the deaths of the seventy surviving children of Ahab, and of his forty-two kinsmen, the brethren of the above-named Ahaziah, events by which the family of Ahab was entirely cut off from Israel ; and his name, handed down to posterity, as a signal monument of the vengeance of God for innocent blood.

For we must not lose sight of the fact, which is related in the 21st chapter of the 1st book

¹ 2 Kings, ix.

of Kings; and which is often referred to in the course of the following history; that all these calamities were the fulfilment of the curse pronounced, at God's command, by the prophet Elijah, on Ahab and Jezebel, on account of Naboth and his sons, whose lives they had taken away by false accusation, in order to gain possession of their property. In most righteous vengeance for this murder, the dogs were to lick the blood of Ahab, in the same place where Naboth was slain; the dogs were to eat the carcass of Jezebel, in the streets of Jezreel; the posterity of Ahab was to be cut off, with every circumstance of disgrace and misery; him, that died of Ahab, in the city, the dogs were to eat; and they, who died in the field, were to lie there unburied, a prey for the birds of the air.

How truly all these things were accomplished, the subsequent history shows. On Ahab himself (who, as we read in the same chapter, showed many signs of public and sincere repentance,) the curse, though not to be recalled, was suffered to fall with less tremendous weight. The evil was not brought on in his days. He was not doomed to see with his own eyes the deaths of his children and the desolation of his family. He fell, if before his time, yet openly and honourably, in the field of battle, with the

¹ 1 Kings, xxii. 38.

enemies of his country. He slept in the tomb of his fathers ; and it was only the blood, which flowed from his wound, which the dogs licked, as men were washing his chariot.¹

Of his wife and his descendants the fate was very different : Joram and Ahaziah fell by the hands of their own rebellious servants ; and the carcass of the former was cast out, with every circumstance of insult and infamy, into the very field which had once belonged to the injured and murdered Naboth. The proud and cruel Jezebel, who had heard the sentence of God without repentance or humiliation, and who, — painted as for a feast, and dressed in her richest ornaments, — sate in her palace window to meet her fate like a queen, and brave the fury of him who had slain her son, was cast into the street by her own cowardly attendants ; and trampled on by the horses of her enemy ; and, while the wretched soul was yet lingering in her mangled body, devoured by dogs, which swarm in the streets of every eastern city. The seventy younger sons of Ahab (in those countries, where a king has many hundred wives, such families are not uncommon) the seventy younger sons were murdered by the persons to whom their education was entrusted ; and their heads exposed, like those of common criminals, at the entrance of Jezreel ; and the forty and two

¹ 1 Kings, xxii. 38.

brethren of Ahaziah fell, like sheep under the butcher's knife, at the pool of the shearing-house near Samaria.

Thus Jehu "slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men and his kinsfolk, and his priests, until he left him none remaining."¹ And thus the Lord accomplished that, which he spake by His servant Elijah, insomuch that nothing fell unto the ground, of the word which the Lord spake concerning the house of Ahab.

In reading the history of these bloody transactions, there are two reflections which can hardly fail to recur to a thoughtful mind: first, that God sometimes brings about the ruin of wicked men, by the agency of others little less bloody and wicked than they: secondly, that the fate of Ahab's family is a remarkable instance of that awful, and, at first sight, revolting dispensation, whereby the sins of the parents are visited on their children and kindred.

Jehu, the son of Nimshi, who was God's instrument in this work of destruction, was, so far as his conduct is related to us in Scripture, as far from being a holy or conscientious person, as any other of those fortunate and unscrupulous adventurers, who have, in other ages of the world, rebelled against and slew their master. His zeal for the true God, if he really felt any,

¹ 2 Kings, x. 11.

was, at least, by no means “according unto knowledge;” inasmuch as, though he destroyed the temple and worshippers of Baal, he continued to worship Jehovah in the form which was most displeasing to Him; and which was expressly forbidden, both by the law of Moses, and by the denunciations of all the prophets. “From the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit the golden calves that were in Beth-el, and that were in Dan.”¹ In the slaughter of Ahaziah and his brethren, who, though the kindred of Ahab, were not his children, he may be thought to have followed, not the will of God, but the dictates of his own bloody policy; and in the hypocrisy, with which he disclaimed the death of Ahab’s sons², when their death was the consequence of his own express though secret order, we may perceive a crafty and deceitful, as well as a bloody character, little calculated, as it might be thought, to call forth the approbation of God, or to be rewarded by the gift of sovereignty. Yet we find that God did, in fact, commend him, for “executing that which was right in His eyes;” and for doing “unto the house of Ahab, according unto all that was in His heart:” and that a promise was, therefore, given, that Jehu’s children “of the fourth generation should sit

¹ 2 Kings, x. 29.

² 2 Kings, x. 9.

upon the throne of Israel." Nor can we wonder, that some inattentive observers of God's providence have been found, who have argued hence against the truth of Scripture; inasmuch as sentiments like these could not, as they have maintained, have proceeded from the All-righteous and All-merciful.

A little consideration, however, will enable us to perceive the propriety of such a dispensation; and to reconcile these ways of God to the known attributes of His nature, and to the general course of His doings with the children of men. It should be, in the first place, observed, that the favour and protection, which God promised to Jehu, and to his children of the fourth generation, were promised to them, in this life only; they were to sit on the throne of Israel. But many sufficient reasons may be conceived, which may induce God to confer worldly prosperity or grandeur on men, not only without reference to their virtuous or vicious qualities, but even in spite of a great deal of vice and disobedience. The power and prosperity, thus bestowed on them, may be not for their own advantage; but in order to the advantage of other persons, as of the nations given to their charge, and of the Church of God, whose interests they may, from worldly motives, be disposed to favour. It may be, as in the case of Ahab and Jehu, that others may be punished by

their means ; — it may be, in order to their own punishment. High rank and outward prosperity are not always, I might have said, are not often, productive of genuine happiness : and the promise made to Jehu was simply, that his seed should reign ; not that either he, or they, should reign in peace, or be exempt from the ordinary visitations and disappointments, to which all those, who wear a crown, are liable. And though we should allow, as, indeed, we are compelled to do, by the words of Scripture, that the kingly state was promised to Jehu and his posterity, in the terms of a reward, it cannot be said that the bare possession of a crown might not be fairly the recompence for the ready faith in God's promise, and for the courageous obedience to His will, which sent him forward, so slenderly attended, to attack two kings¹ ; while it may be said, that the cutting short of his territory, and the continual wars, to which he and his family were exposed, were a punishment not only for his negligence, in the case of the golden calves, but for the cruelty with which he outstepped the necessary limits of the Divine commission.

They, indeed, who murmur against God, for employing a wicked person, or bloody and wicked actions, to the effecting of His wise and beneficial purposes, forget, that their objections will reach far beyond the scope of revealed

¹ 2 Kings, ix. 16. 28.

religion ; and must equally operate against the general and necessary doctrine of God's superintending Providence. That the ungodly are often outwardly prosperous in the world, is a fact beyond dispute ; and that they are so, by God's appointment, will not be denied by any, whether they believe in the Scriptures or no, who acknowledge that the events and fortunes of earth are in His hands ; and that " He giveth the kingdom of men to whomsoever He will."¹ But, if the prosperity of the wicked, even when no cause can be assigned for it, is not inconsistent with the power and justice of God, how can we deny that God *may*, to answer an useful end in the punishment of an incorrigible offender, invest a wicked person with extensive power, and raise him to the royal dignity ? The only difference is, that the film of our mortality is, in the present instance, removed ; — that God exposes to our view the machinery, whereby He guides the world ; — and that what He does, in one case, secretly, and by the operations of secondary causes, He does, in the other, publicly and directly.

But let those, who murmur that a wicked man is employed to punish the wicked, consider, how little a virtuous person is adapted to undertake the office. In the first place, it is an office for which, the more just, and mild, and amiable,

¹ Daniel, iv. 25.

men are, they are so much the worse fitted. To execute exemplary vengeance on those whose day of grace is over, to harden their hearts against complaints, and tears, and ancient and honourable prejudices, is a task which, though a genuine servant of God might, by a clear and indisputable call from God, be induced, and obliged, to undertake, he must of necessity undertake with the greatest unwillingness: and which he would be, almost, irresistibly tempted to execute by halves and tardily. Even in the highest orders of creation, they are not His *good* angels to whom God assigns the necessary parts of accusers and tormentors. The toils of the princes of the Seraphim are confined to the more pleasing charge of ministering to the wants, and warding off the dangers, and assisting the prayers, of the heirs of salvation: while it is Satan, who has the task, to which his malice best adapts him, of proving the faith, and of exercising the patience, and of avenging the crimes, of men, as their tempter, their persecutor, their adversary. What wonder then that the Almighty, when He desires to cut off an incorrigible offender, should choose His instruments from among those, whose tempers are fitted to acts of severity; and whose furious passions, like those storms which the heathens feigned to murmur in their parent cave, till a breach was made for their passage, rush, violently

and with blind rage, through whatever channel the Almighty sceptre opens for them.

Again, the task of punishing incorrigible sinners is a task extremely odious in itself; and which, if laid on a virtuous man, must materially diminish his influence among his fellow-creatures, and, consequently, the degree in which he can be useful. We do not, and we cannot, love the man, who inflicts pain on his brethren: and the feelings of pity, which even a guilty sufferer raises in our hearts, are accompanied with feelings of indignation against the immediate cause of his suffering. The public executioner is, in no nation of the world, a popular character; nor can we suppose that God would usually invest those, whom He really favours, with the character of His ministers of wrath to their fellows.

Nor is this all; the task of executing God's anger on sinners would, to a good man, be not only painful and odious; it would also be often dangerous. He, who was once accustomed to inflict pain on others as a matter of duty, would be likely, by degrees, to find an unholy pleasure in the act, and to become the persecutor and oppressor of his brethren, not for God's sake, but for his own. Nor can we wonder, therefore, that He, who will not lead His people into temptation, should choose, for the most part, the rods of His anger and

the instruments of His righteous judgements, from among those, who are not called by His name; and who are already filled with the leading elements of rage and bitterness: nor that such a person, as Jehu, was taken as a fit agent to destroy the house of Ahab. Such men as these, indeed, are to the moral creation of God, what storms and tempests are to the natural: it is by the whirlwind, and by the hurricane, not by the gentle breeze, that the air is purified from pestilence.

But, though such a person, as Jehu, might be an extremely proper instrument to effect the end proposed by God, it is still maintained by those, with whom I contend, that the end itself was unmerciful and unrighteous. "Jezebel, indeed," it will be said, "deserved her fate; but why were Joram and his threescore and ten brethren to perish for the sins of their parents? Surely that is a monstrous doctrine, which teaches, that, when the fathers have eaten a sour grape, the children's teeth shall be set on edge¹; and the present instance of its application becomes still more prodigious, from the fact, that the death of Ahab, the original and actual offender, was, in the eyes of men, less grievous and more honourable, than the fate which overtook his children."

In answer to this objection, by which many

¹ Jer. xxxi. 29.

weak brethren have been considerably scandalized, it is necessary, first, to call to your recollection, that the sufferings, which overtook the children of Ahab, as well as those, which are denounced against the descendants of such as broke the second commandment, were of a worldly and temporal nature only. It is not said, that God “visits the offences of the fathers, on the children”—by damnation. God forbid! It is threatened only, that untimely death and disgrace in this world shall overtake them. But our worldly fortunes are well known to be regulated by God, in the ordinary course of His providence, on other principles than those of an exact adjustment of good and evil to the virtues and vices of the individual. The day is not yet come, in which every man is to rise with his body, and to give an account of his works. The eighteen, on whom the tower of Siloam fell, were not greater sinners, than all the rest who dwelt in Jerusalem: and if Ahab and Jezebel had been blameless characters, it would still have been no impeachment of God’s justice, though they and their family had all come to disgraceful and untimely ends. But if God may, with perfect justice, dispose of the lives and fortunes of His creatures, as seemeth best to Him, without reference to any peculiar transgression whatever, it is too much to say, that He may

not in perfect consistency with all his attributes, exercise the same power, where a great example is to be made ; and where, by the death of a few, a salutary terror may be struck into the multitude of His creatures.

In point of fact, indeed, it is certain, not only from Scripture, but from experience, that God has so ordered the course of this world, that, in very many instances, the sins of the fathers are, and must be, visited on their children. If a father be a proud and debauched spendthrift, he entails poverty, shame, and disease of body and mind on more than one generation of his descendants. If a father has acquired money or power by deceit or violence, it almost invariably happens, — so much so as to be a common proverb among men, — that these his ill-gotten goods are soon lost by his heirs ; who are thereby left in a worse condition, than if those goods had never been left to them. And these things are well and wisely thus ordained ; because there is, with most men, no stronger restraint on their vices, than the apprehension that, by indulging them, they may injure, not only themselves, but those most dear to them : and because, in particular, the chief temptation to acts of violence or deceit arises from the hopes of founding a family, and of leaving our children wealthy and powerful.

It is plain, then, that the objection, if it were

good for any thing, would apply, not only against God's dispensations as revealed to us in Scripture, but against the ordinary course of His providence ; not only against the law of Moses, but against the religion of nature. But, in the particular instance of those nations, to whom the law of Moses was given, as the promises and threats which God thought proper to make to them were all of a temporal nature, so was there a peculiar propriety in thus strengthening their motives to virtue, by making the good or evil fortune of those, most dear to every man, depend on every man's good or evil conduct. Since, indeed, the great object of all punishment is either the amendment of the offender himself, or the terrifying others from the commission of similar offences, it is plain that these ends were answered, in a very remarkable manner, by such an awful sentence as that which was passed on the family of Ahab. To Ahab, himself, it might be expected to operate, and really did, as a serious and dreadful warning to humble himself betimes under the chastening hand of God, and to suffer his sentence in patience, lest a worse thing should be denounced against him. On his sons, the foreknowledge of those misfortunes, which impended over his family, might be reasonably expected to produce a deep and favourable, though, doubtless, a melancholy impression. The expectation of an early death

has a natural tendency to wean a youthful mind from the excesses, to which youth is most liable ; and he, over whom the sentence of approaching adversity impends, is likely, for the most part, to make a better use of prosperity. We know not but the same curse which doomed Ahab and his sons to exemplary destruction in this life, may have been the means of saving many of their number from a worse destruction in the life to come. And as it was not man, but God, by whom the curse was both pronounced and accomplished, we may be sure that He knew how so to strike, as to make all due distinctions in His anger ; and to temper His blow to the criminality or innocence of each among their number.

But, to the Israelites, who heard the sentence, and beheld its fulfilment, no more awful proof could be given that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men — no stronger lesson to their kings, to beware of violence or tyranny ; or to the people in general, to respect the words of their prophets ; seeing that “ there fell unto the ground nothing of the word, which the LORD spake by His servant Elijah.”

From the history, then, of Ahab and Jehu, we may derive the following lessons. First, We may cease to wonder at the exaltation of worldly and wicked men to situations of great power and outward prosperity ; seeing, that, by such

instruments as these, the work of Heaven is often best brought to pass : and seeing, that the power, which is conferred on them, is, for the most part, precisely of that nature, which a really good man should, one should think, be least disposed to desire or emulate.

Secondly, We may learn the great advantage of holiness, and the great misery of vice, in their immediate and worldly consequences : since these consequences are, often, not confined to the offender himself, but extend to his children and connections.

Thirdly, What has been said may confirm our trust in God ; that (even in those dispensations, which are, at first sight, most perplexing to human feelings) His ways are always righteous ; and His judgments done in truth and equity.

And, lastly, Since so many causes, [independent of ourselves, our own actions, or even merits, if merits we could have to plead,] may operate to produce our worldly prosperity or adversity, it behoves us then to set our affections, where every man must stand or fall by himself, or according to his own actions only : applying ourselves chiefly to make such an use of God's dispensations in this present life, as that both our prosperity and adversity may be sanctified to His praise, and be the means of laying up for ourselves a more exceeding weight of future and eternal glory ; when He, whom we serve, and in

whom our hope is fixed, shall return to wipe away every tear from our eyes, and to render back to us in abundant and everlasting blessedness the short affliction which we have, for His sake, suffered patiently.

SERMON XLV.

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

ST. MATTHEW, xxv. 29.

Unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance ; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath.

WITH this awful declaration our Saviour ends the parable of the talents, in which, as it is told by St. Matthew, He describes Himself as a master who, on leaving His family for a time, gives to his different servants their different tasks to perform ; and who, on His return, examines into their behaviour during His absence, rewarding the diligence of some, and punishing the neglect of others. “ The kingdom of Heaven,” He tells us, “ is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents ; unto another, two ; and unto another, one ; to every man according unto his several ability ; and straightway took his journey. Then he, that had received the five talents, went and traded with the same ; and

made them other five talents : and, likewise, he that had received two,—he also gained other two. But he, that had received one, went and digged in the earth, and hid his Lord's money. After a long time, the Lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he, that had received five talents, came and brought the other five talents, and saith unto him, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents ; behold, I have gained, beside them, five talents more. His Lord said unto him, well done, thou good and faithful servant : Thou hast been faithful over a few things : I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. He also, that had received two talents, came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents : behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His Lord said unto him, well done, good and faithful servant ; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things : enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. Then he, which had received the one talent, came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed ; and I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth : lo, there thou hast that is thine. His Lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knowest that I reap where I sowed not,

and gather where I have not strawed : Thou oughtest, therefore, to have put my money to the exchangers ; and then, at my coming, I should have received mine own with usury. Take, therefore, the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance, but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath : And cast ye the unprofitable servant into utter darkness : there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

The substance of the same parable is related by St. Luke, with some other circumstances which serve to explain the manner in which Christ described the nobleman (as he is there called) to have disposed of his property, a manner, indeed, not uncommon at that time and in those countries. It is, probably, well known to most of you that, in the dominions of the emperor of Rome, and the lands which the Romans had conquered, a great part of the property of wealthy and powerful persons consisted in slaves. Free servants were, in comparison, very unusual ; almost all the business of families being done by those who were bought for money, and might be sold again ; whom the Scriptures call “ bond men and bond women ;” because they were, in reality, as much their master’s property as his horses, and were too

often treated with even less humanity and tenderness.

Of these unfortunate persons, however, all were not employed in the labours of the field, or of the household. Many of the most ingenious were brought up to different trades, which they exercised for their master's benefit; accounting to him for all the profits which they received; and receiving from him, in return, such a share as he thought proper, to supply their food and clothing, and to reward their diligence and honesty. Thus it is, at present, in Russia, where a man's wealth is reckoned, not so much by the number of his acres, as by that of his servants, or slaves, whose labour and industry he commands: and I was told of one of the principal goldsmiths in Petersburgh, who, notwithstanding the extensive trade which he carried on, and the number of workmen whom he employed, was still a slave, and accounted to his master for all his earnings.

It is plain, however, that such slaves as these, to enable them to make their ingenuity and industry profitable either to themselves or their lords, would require sums of money to set them up in their different ways of life; and we need not, therefore, think it strange to hear of a nobleman, on going into a distant land, advancing such sums as five talents, that is, about 1250*l.*, to one of his servants, two talents to

another, and one to a third, “to each man according to his several ability,” in the hope of receiving back a far greater sum at his return ; and with the intention of rewarding liberally, or of punishing severely, each man according to his diligence, or to his want of care. We need not think it strange, that a kind and just master should bestow on the person whom he found most trustworthy, one talent by way of encouragement ; — that he should take this talent away from that slave who, from fear, or idleness, or malice, had made no proper use of the property entrusted to him ; and that this unprofitable servant should be shut out, — in darkness, and confinement — from the feast and rejoicings with which his lord’s return was celebrated.

The story, then, if it were understood of an earthly master only, was one which might have happened any day in those times and countries ; but, as it was told by our LORD, by way of comparison to His Kingdom, and in order to show forth and explain His dealings with the children of men, it conveys to us, as it did to those who first heard it, a solemn and most important lesson, in which there are several circumstances which seem to require a separate and attentive consideration. — In the first place, the Kingdom of Heaven (that is, Christ’s government of the world, as Saviour, Teacher, and Judge) is likened unto a man who called his own servants

and delivered unto them his goods : the servants, or slaves, were his own property, and so were the goods, which he entrusted to their care. No one man among them could say, that he had any thing of his own. His very arms and legs, his strength and health were, according to the laws of that country, his master's property, who had bought him with a price, and to whom belonged, to dispose of as he pleased, not only the five talents, and the two, and the one, but whatever advantage the skill and industry of his bondmen could make of the sums entrusted to them. But how much more truly, how much more entirely, how much more humbly ought we to look on ourselves as the servants of Christ, as bought by Him with a price which the wealth of ten thousand worlds could not equal, — His own most precious blood? How much more are we bound to look on everything, which we possess, as proceeding from God alone, as God's goods which we are to employ in His service, and to His glory, of our use of which we are one day to render a strict account ; and which, though lent us for a time to enjoy, are no more our own, than the sun is ours, which shines on us, and warms us? And can we be proud of possessions like these, which, though we claim them, belong to another? Can we be lifted up in heart, against our fellow-servants, to whom God has

given a less share of outward advantages, but who are, in their nature, and in the eyes of their Maker, equal with ourselves? Can we (God be merciful to us!) can we be lifted up and talk of our own merits, our own wisdom, our own wealth and power, in the sight of that God to whom all these belong, and from whom we have them all? I can conceive it possible, that a man may be drawn away by his lusts, and yet remain a Christian. I can suppose it possible, that he may be terrified from his duty by worldly dangers, and yet remain in his heart a Christian. But a Christian the proud man cannot be, since, in order to be proud, he must have first forgotten all which Christ has taught him of himself, his condition, and his duties.

But, secondly, not only is pride shut out by a due consideration of the present parable; discontent and murmuring are also shown to be most unreasonable. To the different servants, indeed, their Lord entrusted very different sums of money. One had five talents; another, had two; and another, only one. And who does not perceive that this is a lively image and representation of that unequal distribution of the powers of body and mind, of wealth and poverty, of rank and servitude, of prosperity and disappointment, which, in the present world, so continually exercises the faith, the submission, and the patience of those who see others possess

advantages which are denied to themselves? But let us examine whether any of the servants in the parable had any just reason for envying their companions, or murmuring against their Lord. Were their companions to blame; did *they* deserve their hatred or ill-will for accepting or using the favours which a bountiful master gave them? Our Master, which is in Heaven, gives us all. The richest man in the world has nothing but what God has seen fit to entrust him with. Promotion cometh not by man's disposal; and who is our fellow-servant, that we should murmur against *him*? Or shall we murmur against the Giver of all good things, because He bestows the advantages of this life in a manner, of which we do not exactly approve? God forbid! May not a man do that which he will with his own? Might not the nobleman, in the parable, divide his own goods, to his own servants, in such proportions as pleased him? Or, the prerogative which we willingly allow to weak and partial man, — shall we deny to the All-wise, the All-just, the All-gracious? The master, in the parable, you may further take notice, is said not to have bestowed his treasure at hazard, or without some certain rule of prudence and fitness. He divided his goods, among his servants, to trade with them, not equally, indeed, but “to every man according to his several ability,” according

to the skill and opportunity, which every man possessed, of employing more or less money to advantage. What I have already observed, concerning the different trades, in which the slaves of ancient times were brought up, will explain the needfulness of such a difference. The goldsmith, for instance, or the linen-draper, would require a larger capital, than the person who had been brought up as a carpenter or a blacksmith; a sum of money, which was necessary for the success of the one, would be, to the other, only an encumbrance or a temptation; and no master in his senses would place the same trust in an idle, or drunken, or stupid slave, as he placed in one whose abilities and integrity were well known to him. The nobleman, we may be sure, would give to each of his servants the task for which he thought him best suited; and can we doubt that God is, at least, as wise; at least, as reasonable; — at least as kind and considerate, in His distribution to every man of his lot in life, and the duties which He expects from him? We may, in our present state of blindness and ignorance, be tempted to fancy that we might have been better placed in life; that we might, in the situation which our neighbour holds, have been happier or more useful than he is, or than we now are. But God knows best — yea God knoweth all things; and it is surely not too

much for Him to ask, that we should not murmur against a Providence which we cannot understand; — that we should recollect, that though we may not have all which we desire, we have each of us, far more than we deserve: and that it is better to employ our one talent well, than to complain that we have not more committed to us. More might be a snare; more might be a burthen. But if we use, what we have, to God's glory, and to our own increase in holiness, the time will come when to him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more abundantly, — more — if God sees it good for him, of worldly blessings and advantages, — more, beyond a doubt, ten thousand fold-more of glory and happiness, when our Lord shall come home, having received His kingdom, and when they, who have been “faithful in a very little,” shall enter with Him into His joy.

For this is the third lesson which we may learn from the parable of the talents; the necessity, I mean, of active exertion in good works, diligent endeavours after holiness, and, more particularly, an unceasing attention to those particular duties, which belong to that state of life, to which it has pleased God to call us. What others possess is nothing to us: — but, of what we ourselves possess, be it much or little, we must one day give a strict account; and though much will not be ex-

pected from those, who have received little ; yet that little, well employed, will bring us back a blessed harvest of recompense ; and, if neglected in idleness, will draw down on us a heavy curse hereafter.

We cannot plead having received no talents ; every man has some duties in his power ; some way, in which he may glorify God, and do good to his fellow creatures, by comfort, if not by alms ; by patience and gentleness, if not by active help ; by good example and by prayer, if not by learned advice or by powerful protection. We cannot plead ignorance of God's will and expectations. We know, that He expects all His gifts to be employed, and improved, to the uttermost ; that He expects to reap where He did not sow, and gather where He did not strew. We cannot doubt His power to reward our diligence ; or to punish our idleness ; why then do we bury His good gifts in the earth ; why pass through life like a dream, eating, sleeping, and taking our pleasure, without caring for the poor, without leaving one trace in our path which may tell those which come after, that a Christian has journeyed that way in his passage to his final inheritance ? While we have time, let us do good unto all men ; behold the night cometh, when no man can work !

Above all, however, if mere idleness and

neglect of duty is a crime so great in God's sight, and one which He will punish so heavily ; if the means of blessing are to be withdrawn from those who make no use of them ;— and if the servant in the parable were cast into darkness, merely because he was unprofitable, of how much sorer punishment are those servants worthy, who waste and abuse the talents entrusted to them, to purposes the most hateful in the sight of God ? Where shall they be found, in that dreadful hour, who have made their wealth the means of oppression ; their power, the instrument of cruelty ; their wit and wisdom, the ornaments of blasphemy and wicked counsel and false doctrine ; their beauty, the enticement to others to do evil ; their strength, an occasion of lewdness, of drunkenness, and of violence ? O think of this, ye that work wickedness ; and do Thou, O blessed Lord, give to each of us a godly sorrow, a lively faith, and a sure and lasting repentance, that we may cease from the works of darkness, and occupy ourselves in the labours of light and love, so that, when Thou shalt return again to reckon with Thy servants, our lot may be with those whom Thou shalt call to partake of Thy glory !

SERMON XLVI.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

JEREMIAH, v. 23, 24.

This people hath a revolting and rebellious heart, they are revolted and gone ; neither say they in their hearts, Let us now fear the Lord our God, that giveth rain, both the former and the latter, in his season. He reserveth unto us the appointed weeks of harvest.

JEREMIAH, the prophet, by whom this charge was brought against the nation of the Jews, and a part of whose writings is appointed for this morning's proper lesson, appears to have lived in a time of peculiar wickedness and misery, when the patience of the Lord was wearied out with the offences of His people, and when He was about to bring on them that grievous destruction and desolation which is known by the name of the Babylonish captivity. Before the blow fell, however, and while as yet their ruin was not completed, the mercy of the Most High was active in warning them of their sins, and inviting them to a timely repentance ; and in these warnings and these gracious invitations, Jeremiah was God's appointed instrument and

messenger. How little his reproofs prevailed against their hardened wickedness ; — how fiercely they raged against him for courageously telling them the truth ; how his concern for the safety of the kingdom was accounted sedition, and his revelations of God's will disregarded as the dreams of madness ; how he was insulted, beaten, chained, and cast into a most loathsome dungeon, by those for whose amendment and instruction he laboured, and whom his counsels might have snatched from the wrath to come ; how, lastly, all the evil, which he had foretold, came on his stubborn countrymen ; how their city and temple, after being defended by them with an obstinacy of courage and endurance almost unexampled, were taken by the Chaldeans, and burnt with fire ; how the eyes of the king were put out, after his children had been slain before him ; and how all the great men and nobles of the land were carried away, as slaves, to Babylon, — all this may be read in the second books of Kings and Chronicles, as well as in the prophecies and lamentations of Jeremiah himself. The whole history forms, indeed, one of the fullest accounts, which God has given us, of His dealings with a sinful and impenitent nation ; and one of the most awful warnings, which the world has received, of the fate of all such as resist the grace, and despise the long suffering, and harden themselves against the

loving correction, of the Father and Judge of mankind.

For, as that, which befel the people of the Jews, may be reasonably expected to befall any other nation, whose offences against God are equally great and grievous with theirs, it becomes the duty and interest of every nation in the world, to take heed, lest they themselves fall into the same abominable practices, for which the Jews were so severely punished; and it is on this account, in no small degree, that the history of the Jews is thus read in our churches, in order that we, taking notice what their peculiar sins were, may learn, with double care, to avoid them, and may thus, by God's grace, escape those miseries which they, for their iniquities, endured.

What those sins were, what sins they were, which were most prevalent in the land, and which, more than all the rest, provoked the indignation of Heaven, may be learned from this and the following chapters. They were, first, idolatry and the worship of false gods, besides and instead of the True. "They forsook the Lord, and served strange gods in their land." Secondly, they were guilty of habitual and impious perjury. They swore by God, and as "the Lord liveth;" and yet they "swore falsely."¹ They were, in the third place, guilty

¹ Jer. v. 2.

of scandalous uncleanness, "assembling themselves by troops in the harlots' houses."¹ Fourthly, they were covetous, cruel and oppressive to the poor, "setting snares to catch men², having their houses full of deceit, as a cage full of birds, refusing to judge and do right to the cause of the fatherless and needy." And fifthly, They were destitute of a habitual sense of God's presence and power, in the ordinary, and, what we call, the natural dispensations of His mercy and providence. "They said not in their hearts, let us now fear the Lord our God who giveth rain, both the former and the latter in his season, and who reserveth for us the appointed weeks of harvest."

Well would it be for the nation, to which we ourselves belong; great would be our public prosperity in this world; and great, the happiness and glory of each of us in the world to come, if in these several particulars, we could stand such an examination, as would make our consciences clear before Him to whom the secrets of every heart are known. It is true, that we are better taught than to bow down to sticks and stones, to worship them; that perjury and uncleanness are, perhaps, less openly committed, than they seem to have been among the Jews; and that the goodness of our equal laws and free constitution secures us from that excessive and shame-

¹ Jer. v. 7.

² Ver. 26.

less violence of oppression, which, with them, was but too frequent. But if the numbers of those could be reckoned up, by whom, in works and will, if not in outward expressions, the creature is preferred before the Creator ; if the worshippers of wealth, of rank, of power, and of pleasure were gathered together, who knows, whether we should find fewer idolaters in our own land, than were found among the Jews ? If every instance of perjury, every secret, yea, every public, lust and debauchery, every deceit and covetous meanness, into which the greediness of gain, and the pressure of extravagance, lead men, — if all these were laid before our eyes, as they are before His, on whose favour the continuance of our nation depends, could we boast ourselves more blameless than the House of Israel, or hope for a milder sentence, than that which they experienced ? When, above all, we find that a habitual inattention to the Providence and mercies of God was objected to them, as a principal source of God's displeasure, shall we not feel something like an inward shudder at the thought, how greatly we ourselves have, each of us, in like manner offended ? It is this common, I had almost said, this universal sin, against which I am now desirous of warning you.

Nor can there be a more appropriate subject for the present time of year, when we are wit-

nessing one of the most remarkable and important of the merciful dispensations of God's providence, in the yearly gathering in of the food which He hath given for man, and in the renewal of "the appointed weeks of harvest." Happy shall we be, if, from the present season, we may draw a spiritual as well as an earthly blessing, and improve God's bounty to the nourishment not only of our bodies, but of our immortal souls !

An attentive observance of the ordinary dispensations of Providence, and a habit of tracing up all the wonders of mercy, of wisdom, and of power, which surround us in the visible world, to their great unseen cause,—such an observance, till the glorious light of the Gospel was communicated to the world, was the only, or, at least, the principal, means whereby God's spirit drew the hearts of the Gentiles to Himself, and led them to piety and obedience. It was the foundation and support of what is called the religion of nature ; and it is so represented in many striking passages of Scripture. Thus St. Paul, at Lystra, told the multitude, that "the living God which made Heaven and earth and the sea and all things which are therein," though He had in times past suffered the Gentiles to walk in their own ways, and without the advantage of a positive revelation from Heaven, "yet left not Himself without witness, in that he did

good, and gave us rain from Heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”¹ In like manner, the same great apostle, in the 1st chapter of his epistle to the Romans, assures us that, even to the heathen, “that which may be known of God is manifest in them, for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, even His eternal power and Godhead, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.”²

Nor is there any doubt, that, by a due consideration of the objects of nature alone, even without the advantages of revelation, or, putting those advantages out of the question, from the visible works of God alone, His Being, His Power, and His Mercy, may be fully and satisfactorily proved, and have been so proved, by many wise and good men, both among the heathens and the Christians. Thus it is easy to show, even to the plainest understanding, that every thing around us must be the work of some thinking and most wise Being; because every thing around us bears the marks of design, of plan, of contrivance to answer some particular and useful purpose. If a man finds a watch in a field, even if he has never seen a watch before, he knows, at first sight, that this engine must have had a maker; since it is plain that it could not make

¹ Acts, xiv. 15—17.

² Romans, i. 19, 20.

itself; and since it would be equally unreasonable to pretend that mere chance could bring so many small pieces of gold, and silver, and glass, and steel together, and join them in a form so regular, and producing motions so well qualified to answer a particular and useful end. It would never enter into the head of the wildest savage to say that a house, a ship, a pump, a gun, were the work of chance; because he must have daily experienced how very little blind chance could perform; and what irregular, and clumsy, and useless results proceed from merely allowing things to come together by accident. Throw bricks and mortar and beams and boards and slates together, in any quantity, or for any length of time you please, what sort of approach will they make, I will not say to such a building as that wherein we are now assembled, but to the meanest and most miserable cottage? Chance may make a heap of rubbish: but to build a house something more, much more than chance is surely necessary. And who will dare to say that the many wonderful objects which are under our feet and over our heads, the lilies of the field, whose garments surpass the proudest robes of mortal majesty, the sun, the moon, the stars, those glorious and shining lights, which, with so much order and regularity, perform their stated rounds, and bless us with the returns of night and day, of seed time and harvest, — that these

can owe their existence to a power which never, that we know of, has been able to produce a single regular or complicated body? Look on our bodies, so fearfully and wonderfully made as we are; look on an ear of corn, and judge for yourselves, whether chance could have drawn forth from the mother's womb, all that strange anatomy of muscles and bones, of veins and blood and flesh, which we find about ourselves? or could have multiplied one single grain into many, and raised it from the earth, in which it was buried, and clothed it in that machinery of stalk and root and ear, and appointed it to draw nourishment from the ground, and ordained that the rain should so fall, and the sun so shine, as exactly to be sufficient to bring it to strength and ripeness? "Oh God, how manifold are Thy works: in wisdom hast Thou made them all: the earth is full of Thy riches!"¹

With as little reason can it be pretended that the earth has lasted for ever, and has, therefore, required no Creator. We know that this cannot have been the case, since, if it were, no man can doubt, who notices the rate at which men increase and multiply, that the world would, long since, have been peopled to the utmost amount which it is capable of supporting. But so far is the case from standing thus, that no country in the world can be

¹ Psalm civ. 34.

named, where there are not waste lands, and, apparently, room for more inhabitants, while some of the finest countries in the world are nearly without people.

Nor is this all ; those observers of nature, who have most carefully studied the different rocks and mountains which are, as it were, the earth's bones and sinews, tell us that there are evident signs, to be found every where, that the earth has been some time or other moulded, in its present form, by the two most powerful elements, of which we have any knowledge : that it must have been, at one time, steeped, for a long period together, in water ; and, at another time, have been in a state of melting and red heat, from fire. But not only does the former of these facts remarkably confirm what Scripture tells us, — that, for a whole year, the world was overflowed in the days of Noah : but the latter proves most clearly, that the earth, in its present form, and covered as it is with herbs, trees and living creatures, cannot have lasted for ever ; and, in consequence, that, at whatever time these first appeared, they must have needed a Creator.

It is thus, that, even if there had been no revealed religion in the world, we should still have been enabled, though with less clearness than at present, to discern God in His works ; to prove the being of an invisible Creator, from

the visible things, with which we are surrounded ; and to trace the witness of the Most High, in that silent proclamation of His greatness and majesty which the sun makes, day by day, to all lands ; and the moon and stars, by night, to all that walk under the spangled arch of Heaven. We might learn to acknowledge His power and goodness, “ in that He giveth us rain from Heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness ; ” and we might well say, one to another, “ Let us fear the Lord our God, who giveth us rain, even the former and the latter in his season ; He hath reserved unto us the appointed weeks of harvest ! ”

Nor, though it might seem, that we, who enjoy the full light and manifold comforts of the glorious Gospel, have less need, than the heathen had, to observe God in His outward and visible works ; or, nourished as we are with the bread which came down from Heaven, to bring arguments of His goodness from the food which perisheth ; yet can we never too closely or too constantly keep in mind the fact, that all things, which we see and enjoy, are ordained by God ; and are made and appropriated by His mercy for our use and enjoyment ; and that, for every loaf of bread which we taste, and for every tree which gives us food and shelter, and for every living thing which gives us flesh or milk or clothing, we are as much

beholden to His providence, as if we beheld Him with our outward eyes, filling all things living with plenteousness.

It is not only not true that God, who, in the beginning, ordained the world, has left it since to keep of itself that course which He first assigned it, and that things should be born and die, spring up and ripen, and decay of themselves, and without His further interference ; but it is true that unless God preserved, as well as created, His creation, constituted as we behold it, could never have continued so long ; all things bear in themselves the evident stamp of mortality ; and when we consider the countless accidents, to which every thing, which lives or grows, is liable, we cannot, I think, help perceiving, that a child would never come to be a man, nor a blade of green corn be fit to be made bread of, if it were not for the fatherly care of that God who, having made us, will not leave us to perish ; and since He has not withheld His own Son from our spiritual necessity, will so much the rather not deny us any thing which is needful for us !

Our total dependance on God is that, then, which we may learn, and which, having learnt, we shall be the better able to keep in mind from a study of the book of nature. And from hence three consequences will follow ; 1st, a perfect resignation to His will and trust in His

mercy ; secondly that we must neither pride ourselves on our worldly goods, as if they were our own, nor set our hearts on them, as if we were sure of keeping them for ever. And thirdly, that, as God giveth us all things, there is only one sure way of obtaining, in this world, whatever is needful and good for us ; and that is, by constantly making our wants known to Him in prayer, constantly blessing and praising Him for all the benefits which He bestows on us, and constantly endeavouring so to use His good creatures, as that our waste, our greediness, our intemperance, our tyranny, may not make it necessary for Him to withdraw His bounties from us.

Nor is this all. From the daily occurrences of life, we may draw yet another lesson ; and may learn diligence in our spiritual concerns, while our eyes are turned on the outward dispensations of God's Providence. When we see the seed cast into the ground, we may think of that word of life, which is to ripen in our hearts ; and may pray that the Heavenly Sower would not pass us by in barrenness, as He goes over the field of His heritage. When we remark the tender blade just rising above the soil, and gradually winning its way through frost and snow, through rain and sunshine, we may reflect on the weakness and imperfection of our advances in piety, and may entreat that He, who tempers all the elements

for that green herb which riseth for the use of man, would also make all things to work together for good to those who love Him.

When, lastly, the hour of harvest is nigh, and we begin to count the few remaining days which must pass over, before the wheat hangs its hoary head in ripeness for the sickle ; let us think how short our own time, perhaps, may be ; and let us pray earnestly to Him who only giveth the increase, that we may not be found light, or blasted, or unfruitful, in that great harvest of His glory, when the angels shall be His reapers, and the wheat shall be gathered into His barn, and the chaff and weeds burned up with fire unquenchable.

SERMON XLVII.

FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

JEREMIAH, xxxv. 18, 19.

Because ye have obeyed the command of Jonadab, the son of Rechab, your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you, Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever.

THE family of the sons of Rechab, to whom this singular promise was made, and of whose peculiar customs an account has been given you in the First Lesson for this morning, were originally an Ethiopian or black tribe, dwelling in the north of Arabia, known by the name of Kenites, and a branch of the more numerous nation of Midian.¹ Moses, during his banishment from Egypt, found in Jethro, or Reuel, their priest and governor, a protector and father-in-law; and, though the complexion or family of his wife Zipporah occasioned very unreasonable murmurs, on the part of his own brothers and sisters², yet was the marriage approved by God; and Moses himself, and the whole nation of Israel appear

¹ Judges, i. 16; 1 Chron. ii. 55.

² Numbers, xii. 1.

to have drawn much advantage from the wise counsels of good old Jethro, and from the perfect knowledge of the country, through which they were to pass, as displayed by his son Hobab. Attached to Moses by a near and dear connexion, and agreeing with the Israelites in their worship of the one true God, the Kenites followed their powerful allies into the land which God had appointed for their inheritance ; and continued, during many ages of peaceful obscurity, to pitch their tents, and feed their cattle, amid the cities and cultivated lands of Israel. In the wars and revolutions of the neighbouring people, they seem to have seldom, if ever, interfered. They were at peace, at once, with the army of Barak, and with that of Jabin king of Canaan ; and Sisera, though his confidence was, as it happened, horribly betrayed, considered himself as safe in a Kenite tent from the fury of a pursuing enemy. In somewhat later times, when Saul was sent by God on a warlike expedition against the Amalekites, we find him sending a message to the scattered families of the Kenites, who dwelt in his enemy's country, to remove from their present abode, lest they should be unintentionally involved in the general slaughter¹ ; and, many hundred years after, we find them, in the present chapter, remaining as a distinct and

¹ 1 Samuel, xv. 6.

numerous race, held up by God as an example to the Jews, for their attachment to the customs of their ancestors; and honoured by Him with a gracious and remarkable promise, that their family should endure so long as the world itself.

Of Jonadab, the son of Rechab, in honour of whom they changed their name from Kenites to Rechabites, we are told but little; and that little is contained in the present chapter, and in the 10th chapter of the 2nd Book of Kings. When Jehu, son of Nimshi, had seized the government of Israel, and when he was on his way to execute a severe justice on the idolatrous worshippers of Baal, he met, we are told, this Jonadab, or Jehonadab, and paid him, before all the people, a very extraordinary and respectful attention; being the first to salute him, expressing great anxiety for his approbation and good-will, and taking him up into his own chariot, to go with him, and to witness his zeal for the Lord. Such a degree of deference, shown by this cruel and daring adventurer, [for such Jehu, doubtless, was, though he were an appointed instrument in the hands of God to execute a particular purpose,] such deference shown by such a person, in the moment of his triumph, may reasonably lead us to suppose, that Jonadab, the son of Rechab, was a man of high character and popularity; and we may also guess from the manner, in which Jehu commends his own

zeal to his companion, that he had been remarkable, in those evil times of persecution and temptation, for faithfully adhering to the worship of the one true God, against all the threats and enticements of Ahab and Jezebel, and the bad example of the great body of the Israelitish nation. Certain it is, however, that, with his own clan, Jonadab was possessed of a very great degree of influence; since we find, in the present chapter, that, two hundred years after his death, the Rechabites continued to observe, with unvarying strictness, the customs, which he had enjoined them. "Jonadab," said they to Jeremiah, "Jonadab, the son of Rechab our father, commanded us, saying, ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever; neither shall ye build houses, nor sow seed, nor plant vineyards, nor have any; but all your days ye shall dwell in tents, that ye may live many days in the land in which ye are strangers. Thus," they continued, "have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father, in all that he hath charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, and our sons, and our daughters; nor to build houses for us to dwell in, neither have we vineyard, nor field, nor seed. But we have dwelt in tents; and have done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us."

This obedience of the Rechabites to the tradition of their ancestors is then contrasted by

the prophet, in a strain of bitter expostulation, with the indifference shown by the Jews to ordinances, which had God Himself for their author : and he concludes, by the assurance on God's part, which is contained in the words of my text ; “ Thus saith the Lord God of Hosts, the God of Israel, Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab the son of Rechab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according to all that he hath commanded you, therefore thus saith the Lord, Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before Me for ever.”

That this promise has been exactly performed, no reasonable doubt can be entertained, by those who believe it to have been given by command of God : though, from the little knowledge, which we possess, of those wildernesses, where the Rechabites dwelt, and of the tribes and families, which at present, inhabit them, we cannot possibly fix on any particular clan, as descended from the ancient Kenites.¹ Many thousand families there are, however, and always have been, in those countries, who dwell in tents, neither ploughing nor sowing, but rambling from place to place, with their cattle over the whole country, which is like one great common ; and religiously refraining from wine, and from all other spirituous or fermented liquors. And

¹ See Heber's Sermons in England, p. 277.

among these, no doubt, the family of Rechab may still continue to cherish the customs of their ancestry; though their ancient descent has been long since forgotten, alike by themselves, and by their countrymen, and by all, but that God who, for the sake of His promise, has preserved them, amid the fall of so many mighty nations. But though their present fate be thus obscure, the little, which we learn in this chapter, of their former history, affords us a great deal of very useful instruction; and it shall be my endeavour, on the present occasion, to convey to my hearers some idea of those leading truths, which, in my opinion, may be fairly inferred from the history and example of Jonadab and his descendants.

First of all, it may be, I think, inferred from this example, how well-pleasing in the sight of God is, not only obedience to parental authority, but (in matters indifferent, and where such precedent may be usefully or harmlessly followed) a respectful attention to the discipline and traditions of former times; above all, when such discipline or tradition comes down to us, recommended by the example and authority of those persons, whose memory we have good reason to esteem and honour. In the general course of experience (and what is experience, but the will of God, declared by His ordinary manner of governing the world?)—in the course of experience, we mostly find, that, where the institutions of any

society are not readily changed, the permanence of the society itself is greatly secured. But, in the present instance, we have something more; —we have a promise, made by God, of a blessing, which cannot be ranked among the natural and ordinary effects of any institution whatever,—a promise of continued fruitfulness to a numerous family, a promise of endurance to a particular clan or nation, not for a few generations only, but so long as the world endures: —“Jonadab, the son of Rechab, shall not want a man to stand before me, for ever.” And for this extraordinary blessing a specific reason is assigned; “Because ye have obeyed the commands of your father” (your ancestor, as we should say, since two hundred years had passed in the interval) “because ye have obeyed his commands and kept all his precepts, and done according to all that he hath commanded you.” It was, then, because they adhered to the rules laid down by their ancestors, that they were thus rewarded; and these rules, it may be observed, were not such moral laws, as derived their value from a far higher sanction than any human authority or tradition, and which would have been binding, whether Jonadab had sanctioned them, or not; but they were things strictly indifferent. They were, as we have seen, to abstain from wine, and to live in tents. It may, therefore, be laid down as certain, from this text, that the Most High

regards with no common approbation those, who, in things lawful or indifferent, adhere to the customs of their forefathers, and the precepts and traditions of their elders; and who, according to the advice of Solomon, display a modest reluctance “to meddle with those who are given to change.”¹

This rule, however, like every other, must be taken with several limitations; which, if they were overlooked, its observance would be loaded with such mischievous consequences, as, instead of preserving, must destroy, and bring to an untimely end, any nation or family whatever.

These limitations are, as follows. First, the precept or custom, if it be not good in itself, must, at least, be a matter of indifference. That, which, at first, was evil, cannot become good, by any lapse of time whatever; that, which God has forbidden, no length of precedent can make lawful; and that, which ought never to have been begun, ought to be forsaken, as soon as possible. Had the precepts of Jonadab enjoined drunkenness, plunder, or idolatry, no question can exist, but that his family, in obeying them, would have brought on themselves a curse, and not a blessing. It is necessary, therefore, I repeat, in order to make the observance of an ancient custom, meritorious,—that the ordinance, if not good in itself, be, at least, indifferent.

¹ Proverbs, xxiv. 21.

Secondly, if this ordinance, though in itself, harmless, should, in its consequences, produce any breach of God's laws,—if, by the natural corruption, to which all human institutions are liable, it should, in time, be so applied, as to become mischievous; there is no doubt, but that the commandment of God is not to be rendered of none effect by our tradition; we cannot doubt, that, where two authors are at variance, the Divine command should have more force, than the precept of men.

The custom, thus, which prevailed with the Jews, by which it was lawful for any man to devote a part of his fortune to be Corban, that is, a gift for the service of the Temple, was, in itself, not only harmless, but laudable; yet, when this custom was so far abused, as to interfere with the duty and maintenance, which a child ought to yield to its parents, the custom was, by the law itself, in that case repealed; and, if persevered in, was of a nature, which rendered vain and abominable all the service, which the Jews pretended to pay to God.¹ The custom, then, in order to be binding, must be lawful, not only in itself, but in its consequences. If the evil consequence can be separated from the good custom, the one must be avoided, and yet the other not left undone; but if both must stand or fall together, there can be

¹ St. Matt. xv. 5, 6. St. Mark, vii. 11—13.

no hesitation which course we should prefer. It is reasonable, that we obey God more than man.

Thirdly, a precept, to be binding, must either proceed from some competent authority, or must, at least, have such a degree of antiquity to plead, as, in all cases, is regarded as authoritative. We know not, what was the nature of Jonadab's power over the Kenites, though it was probably that of being chieftain, or head of the tribe; but whatever were the grounds, which originally induced them to conform to his regulations, their continuance in them, for two hundred years, was sufficient to cause that compliance to be binding, which, at first, was merely a matter of choice with each individual of the family; and the Rechabites are, accordingly, praised by God, for observing the institutions of their fathers. A distinction, however, must always be made, both in words and estimation, between those rules, of which the observation is merely expedient, as being appointed by human wisdom, and those which are absolutely and universally binding, as being given by God Himself. Both have, indeed, their force on the conscience; but this force is by no means equal: and we are but laying snares for the souls of our brethren, if we "teach as doctrines,"—that is, if, in our teaching, we put on the same level with Divine doctrines, — "the command-

ments of men :” we are digging a pit, for our own souls, if we rashly judge others ; or if we impose on them, as terms of salvation, any but those, which the law of nature and the Gospel of Christ have laid down. We read not, that the Rechabites supposed the dwelling in tents, a sufficient expiation for theft and adultery ; — that they regarded those as accursed, who indulged themselves *moderately* in the luxuries, which their own tradition forbade. Transgression, in these respects, among themselves, was probably punished by expulsion from their society ; but they do not appear to have judged the conduct, or the motives, of others. Jeremiah drank wine before them : and yet they treat him, with sufficient respect and deference.

Fourthly, as all human and ceremonial laws or customs have their motives, and derive their value, from their tendency to preserve the society, for which they are intended, so there may be cases of necessity, so apparent, for their repeal or suspension, as not only to justify, but to make it the bounden duty of every one to break them. Thus, when the Rechabites saw the country menaced by a dreadful invasion, they made no scruple to preserve the existence of their community by a temporary departure from their principles ; and came, as we find in the present chapter, to seek, within the walls and houses of Jerusalem, a shelter from the armies of Assyria.

It is the same with all ceremonial laws, even those given by God Himself; and this is the difference between laws merely ceremonial, and those which have respect to the great points of practice and moral duty. When a life, though it were only the life of an useful animal, was in danger, the sabbath, we are told by our Saviour, might be, with a safe conscience¹, profaned; but not to save ten thousand lives, no, nor if it were possible, to save a soul, would murder, or adultery, or blasphemy be excused. We must not do evil,—that is, any thing which is absolutely and in itself evil,—that good, even the greatest good, may come. If God choose to bring about the good which we desire, He can do it, we may be sure, without our sin. The Ruler of heaven and earth has no need of our insolent and impious interference. But, where a law is merely ritual, the same authority which made, may, no doubt, repeal it; and in cases of necessity, [of which, however, as every man's conscience is judge, —so must every man be careful not to dissemble with God, in cases of necessity,] — to break a ritual law, may, not only, be lawful but laudable.

With these restrictions, which may be easily applied by a serious mind to any possible case which may arise, the lesson to be drawn from the conduct of the Rechabites, and from God's promise to them, is plain. Obedience to existing

¹ St. Matt. xii. 7.

laws and institutions is highly pleasing in the sight of God ; even when those institutions are altogether unconnected with the laws of morality, or the higher interests of society ; and it is, also, a conduct which God, has, in this instance, honoured with a very marked approbation,— that nations and communities adhere to their ancient customs, and display a prudent reluctance to alter, what being in itself indifferent, has, by lapse of years, acquired a hold on the feelings and reverence of the world. The first of these truths may show the falsehood of their opinion, who think, that laws merely human have no sanction but the punishments which they inflict ; and that smuggling, or evasion of the excise laws, or transgressions of church ceremonies and canons, are trifles beneath the notice of an Eternal Judge. That the second is no unreasonable caution, in times, like these, of universal thirst after change, when novelties of every kind are sought after with frantic eagerness ; and when a respect for the memories and institutions of our ancestors is, by many, regarded as the height of superstitious folly, how truly we may learn, from the blessing here pronounced on those, who were so remarkably distinguished by reverence for ancient precedent. There are, indeed, many obvious reasons why a fondness for change should be displeasing to God, inasmuch as it is not only a symptom of,

but an increasing stimulus to, a lightness of mind unfriendly both to happiness and to piety. New customs, or systematic departure from ancient habits, in indifferent matters, arise almost always from vanity, or from something worse; and so greatly are mankind the creatures of habit and of form, that even the observances of, apparently least consequence, are often very important links in the general chain of our lives or examples. Where a rule is harmless, it is almost always advantageous; and if it do no more than give us an additional lesson of forbearance and self command, if it have no further effect than to increase, by a single precedent, our habits of obedience, these seeming trifles, we may be sure, are not without their inherent grace, nor are altogether unworthy the sanction of that God who presides over order and harmony.

If then, my friends, you are at any time, tempted to sigh after unnecessary change, to seek distinction by unmeaning novelties, or to slight, as insignificant and superstitious, the ceremonies of our Church, the forms and decencies of society, and those national laws, which rest not, perhaps, on the revealed will of God, but, certainly, on our duty to lawful superiors;—the answer will be, that it is necessary to obey not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake; that the wisest of men exhorts us to meddle not with those who are given to change, that Jere-

miah hath commanded that we do not exchange old ways for new, and that we learn from the example of the Rechabites, that a blessing rests on those who reverence the institutions of their ancestors.

There is yet one remaining lesson to be drawn from this history, and which appears to have been the especial and immediate end for which the conduct of the Rechabites was brought before the notice of the Jews. While we see these men, and men like these, conforming so long and so strictly to burdensome restrictions, from respect to the memory of a mortal and deceased lawgiver,—when we regard the numerous and often painful regulations, to which, for the sake of the world, its applause, and its fashions, we submit with cheerfulness,—can we reflect without shame and alarm on our own continued disobedience to the commands, the reasonable service, of our Maker, our Redeemer, and our Sanctifier? “Will ye not receive instructions to hearken to My words, saith the Lord? The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed; notwithstanding I, saith the Lord, have spoken unto you, but ye hearkened not unto me; I have also sent unto you my servants, the prophets, saying, return ye every man from his evil way and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, but

ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me!" May God forgive us these our former provocations; and that He may not hereafter call on us in vain, may He subdue our stony hearts with the searching graces of His Holy Spirit, through the merits and mediation of His Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour!

SERMON XLVIII.

SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

[SERMON BEFORE THE COMMUNION OF THE
LORD'S SUPPER.]

EPHESIANS, iii. 15, 16, 17.

I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in Heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man ; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.

IN this earnest and moving prayer there are several circumstances which well deserve the devout attention of those who believe that St. Paul spake and wrote by the help of The Holy Ghost ; and that his doctrines are to be no otherwise received than as the teaching and lessons of The Most High, and of The Lord Jesus Christ, of whom he was the faithful minister. The points which are most striking, however, are, first, the example here afforded us of earnest prayer in behalf of other and absent persons :—secondly, the benefit and privilege which he thus earnestly desired might be be-

stowed on his Ephesian converts : and, thirdly, the consequence which he expected to follow, if his prayer were heard, and those gifts and graces granted to them which he desired that they might receive. “ I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in Heaven and earth is named, that He would grant *you* ;” — here we have the example, which I noticed, of prayer in behalf of other and absent persons : — “ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His spirit in the inner man ;” here is the benefit and privilege which he prayed that those persons might receive : — “ that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith :” there follows the blessed consequence of such a spiritual strengthening. So that we may learn from these words, *whom* we are to pray for, *what* we are to ask for, and *what* will be the consequence and certain token that such our intercession has been heard and accepted by the Almighty.

We are to pray for our fellow Christians ; we are to pray that the grace of God may renew and strengthen their hearts ; — and we may be sure, that these our prayers are heard, if the natural consequence of that grace follows, and Christ is made to dwell in their hearts by faith. Of these doctrines it is the first only, which I shall now endeavour to assert and explain, namely,

that it is our duty and privilege to address the throne of grace, in prayer for one another.

That, sinners as we are, and stained with sin, as even our best services must be in the present world, we should be permitted, far more, encouraged and commanded, to intercede at the throne of mercy and power, for our brethren in transgression and infirmity, has seemed strange to many, whose attention has been fixed on the weakness and worthlessness of human nature. Who are we, that we should plead with God on our brother's behalf, when all, which we can say or do, is but too little to show forth the sense of our own deep misery, and to obtain assistance for ourselves? Shall the prisoner for debt busy himself in obtaining a discharge for his neighbour, and forget that all the time, all the money, which he contributes to this end, is the property of his own creditor? Shall the malefactor, under sentence of death, instead of soliciting his own pardon, draw up petitions for his comrade in sin and shame? Is there not something more than foolish,—is there not something presumptuous and offensive,—in giving ourselves the airs of a mediator, an indifferent person, a bystander, a common friend to God and our offending neighbour, when we are, in truth, as deeply, perhaps more deeply stained with sin than he, and more liable, than he is, to the righteous vengeance of God?

If we are forbidden to pluck out the mote which is in our brother's eye, till the beam from our own eyes be removed, is it not a presumptuous neglect if our own urgent wants, to spend our time and prayers in asking that grace for others, which we ourselves so greatly need? Does not the very act of doing so imply, that, in our opinion, our own wants are less than theirs; that their danger, their sin is greater than ours; and that, in our comparative safety and innocence, we can spare some time to the consideration of their distress, and approach the Almighty on their behalf with more confidence, than they can do it for themselves? Is it not, in another sense, also, presumptuous, as undertaking an office which belongs to one greater than ourselves, — the proper Mediator between God and man, the Intercessor for the sins of the universe? Is “no man can redeem his brother, neither give to God a ransom for him,”¹ can we hope that our breath will do that, which our blood could not have done? or that God will accept our prayers as atonement for those sins, for the pardon of which His own Son was content to lay down His life? To His mercy, therefore, and to the mediation of that Blessed Son, let us leave, it has been said, our erring brethren, employing what time remains to us to make our own peace with Him, and giving diligence,

¹ Psalm xlix. 7:

lest, while we care for others, we ourselves should be cast away!

These objections, or something like them, have arisen, I believe, in the hearts of many persons, when, either in their public or private devotions, they have been called on to pray for other men; and, as they really are not without plausibility, I have expressed them with all the force, of which they are fairly capable. Plausible, however, as they are, they admit of a satisfactory and easy answer.

In the first place, though, in a certain sense, it be most true, that we are all of us, to an infinite extent, debtors in the sight of God, and in the situation of criminals begging for our lives before His judgment seat, yet, in another point of view, our situation cannot be said to be one of such extreme and imminent danger as to leave us no time nor power to think of any man's soul but our own. To each of us a hope, a hope how blessed! how comfortable! yea, if we are not wanting to ourselves, a hope how certain and sure! to each of us a hope is held out that our debt will be cancelled, that our pardon will be sealed, and our souls delivered from the snare of the fowler, for His sake, and through His meritorious sufferings, in whose name we are encouraged to ask forgiveness. That in this hope, offered to all, we ourselves are personally partakers, we

may be assured, by that very desire to pray, which only can proceed from the inspiration of God the Holy Ghost, and by that sense of our own unworthiness, of which we complain; and which, painful as it is, and greatly as it may seem to unfit us for the office of intercessors, is yet a sure evidence, that we precisely answer to that description of persons, to whom His promises are made, who “came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”¹ But if we have hope ourselves, and, under certain conditions, assurance of pardon (and who, that has grace to pray, is without this hope and this assurance?) is it not natural, is it not pardonable, is it not holy,—our own exceeding fear abated,—to care for those who are struggling with us in the same stormy sea of sin and suffering? May not the respited malefactor plead for his comrade also? May not Abraham, when Isaac is declared the child of promise, pray that Ishmael also may live before God? Surely—if our friend be left to perish, we ourselves are but half delivered; surely when, unworthy as we are, we see, afar off, a hand stretched out to snatch us from our ruin, we do not decline the mercy for ourselves, when we cry out in the agony of affection, Save, Oh save my brethren!

For, secondly, it is by no means true, that the act of praying for others implies a sense of

¹ St. Matt. ix. 13.

security in ourselves, or an ignorance of the greatness of our own danger. It only proves, that our sense of danger is not altogether selfish; that our misery is greater because our friend partakes in it; and that the greater our sense is of the punishment which we have deserved at God's hands, the more is our sorrow that those whom we love should lie under the same condemnation. We may, therefore, pray for others, as well as for ourselves; since the feeling, which we have of their proper danger, is a part, and a very great part, of our own personal misery. The rich man, in the parable, even when in hell, was anxious that his brethren should not come into the same place of torment. He was the more anxious as, himself in his own person, knowing but too well the sufferings which inhabit there. And, in like manner, whoever is most sensible of the danger and misery of sin in himself, will be the most ready to include the names of those, whom he loves, in his petitions for mercy and deliverance.

It would, indeed, be a mark of strange blindness to our own danger, or of strange desperation of our own souls, to pray for other men only, without any mention of ourselves. But to pray for others, as well as for ourselves, may be done without any undue assumption either of superiority to them, or of our own integrity before our Judge and theirs.

Nor, thirdly, can we be said with reason,

while mediating with God for our brethren, to be taking on ourselves that office, which belongs to Christ alone, and for which His perfect obedience and sinless death have fitted Him only. It is not, at least it ought not to be, in our own merits, or in our own names, that, whether our petitions are for ourselves, or for others, we approach the Mercy-Seat of the Most High. It is in Christ's name, which He permits us to use, it is through Christ's merits, which He permits us to plead, that we have boldness to ask any thing of God : and there is no reason, why all things, in which our happiness is either immediately or mediately concerned, should not be asked under this recommendation.

But, still more, the salvation, which our Lord has purchased for mankind, and the intercession, which he continues to exercise on their behalf, are each, in a great degree, made available to the benefit of individuals, through the endeavours of instruments taken from among their brethren. Christ might, if He had so pleased, have conveyed the saving knowledge of His Gospel, to the farthest nations of the earth, at once, and by the trumpets of angels. But He rather chose to employ men, like ourselves, to teach us the way of truth ; and, instead of immediately, and by an instantaneous work of His Spirit, converting the world, He gave power to the world, if the expression may be allowed, to

convert itself to Christianity. "But if the preaching of men may be a means of bringing their brethren to repentance, without encroaching on the value of His grace, by whom only the increase is given to the spiritual husbandman, why should not the prayers of men be also admitted means of calling down that inward grace, without taking one jot away from the necessity of His intercession, through whom alone, whether for others or for ourselves, our prayers can hope for a favourable answer?" The objection, if it were good for anything, would apply not only against praying for our brethren, but against prayer of every kind, and against preaching and good works of every kind, since, with Christ's merits and intercession, all human endeavours, it might be urged, are needless and presumptuous. But the fact is, that, as Christ's merits do not release us from the necessity of doing our best, but make that little, which we can do, acceptable in the sight of God; so Christ's mediation does not take away the propriety or necessity of our own prayers, but adds to those prayers, whether for others or for ourselves, a force and value, which, by nature, they cannot have.

And as thus, from the general analogy of reason and religion, the practice of praying for our fellow creatures is amply justified and recommended; so are we still more encouraged

and directed to the use of the same blessed privilege, by many express authorities of Scripture, and by the examples of those Holy men, who were led by the Spirit of God, and were the prophets of His will to their fellow creatures. "Brethren," saith St. Paul, "pray for us."¹ "You also," he saith again, "you helping together with prayer for us."² "I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers."³ "I command," we find again, "that prayer be made for all men, for kings and all that are in authority."⁴ "Confess your faults," saith St. James, "and pray one for another."⁵ "If any man," saith St. John, "see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask of God, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death."⁶

By how many examples these commands are established, how perfectly the Holy Apostles practised the doctrine which they taught, how earnestly and how continually they recommended to God the souls of their brethren, and "bowed their knees," on behalf of the Church, "to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," the least attentive reader of their works will, in every page, discover. But why should I urge to you the example of men, when the example of God is greater? or wherefore was God made

¹ Thess. 25.² 2 Cor. i. 11.³ Phil. 4.⁴ 1 Tim. ii. 1, 2.⁵ James, v. 16.⁶ 1 John, v. 16.

man in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, if it were not to give us an example that we should follow His steps, who prayed for Peter that his faith should not fail ; who prayed for His disciples, that the Father should send them the Comforter ; — who, in the pangs of death, prayed for forgiveness to His murderers ; and whose eternity is passed, at His Father's right hand, in interceding for His guilty creatures !

Christianity, indeed, is no solitary concern to any of us. We must neither hope, nor grieve, nor rejoice, nor tremble, each man for himself, and without heeding what may befall his neighbour. We are more than neighbours ; — we are all one family, which, whether in Heaven, or in earth, whether among the saints who reign in glory, or among the saints who yet sojourn in the valley of temptations and tears, is named by one common name, united by one common interest, washed by one common baptism, purified by the same precious blood, and whose prayers should mount up together in the same sweet savour before our common Father and Lord ! To the performance of outward works of charity, it is not every one who hath power or opportunity. We cannot all give alms ; we cannot all preach the Gospel ; we cannot all, by wisdom and eloquence, warn the sinner of the error of his ways ; but our lips, our hearts, our faith, our love, may all be brought into the common stock

of supplication ; and the weakest of us all may pray for those whose wants he cannot relieve, and whose pride may scorn his reproof or counsel. Nor is it to others only that our prayers may thus be serviceable. Those, for whom we accustom ourselves to pray, we cannot help loving ; and the more we pray for others, the more we shall be disposed to realise that character of BRETHREN, by which our Master's household should be known ; and to give its full effect to that sublime invocation, in which all mankind are taught to address the Maker of all, "OUR FATHER, which art in Heaven !"

But, though we should pray for all men, yet is it plainly our duty, as well as our privilege, to pray more particularly for the spiritual welfare of all those, who have any peculiar claims on our regard or pity, whose wants we know, or in whose happiness we are interested. Can we hope for salvation ourselves — and not, at the same time, be desirous, that our friends should share it with us ? Can we love our children, our parents, our kindred, — and never so much as breathe a single devout wish in their favour to the Throne of Mercy ? Can we really forgive our enemies, — and not sometimes pray, that they may be delivered from the wrath to come, and be brought by grace to know how unjustly they have treated us ? Or, if there can be one time, more proper than another, for the exercise

of such a duty, can there be any moment so acceptable to God, as when we have just before offered up at His Table, all our worldly wants and wishes; and have become, spiritually, one with that Blessed Mediator in whose name only our petitions can be received, and in whose name whatsoever we ask, faithfully, shall, without a doubt, be given us?

Let me then entreat you, my brethren, such as remain with me to celebrate the Sacrament of Christ's death (I would to God that more would remain!), let me entreat you, after having received it, to take an opportunity, either in your pews, or immediately after your return home, to recommend by name your principal friends, and your enemies, if such you have, to God, that He may have mercy on them and on you; and let me entreat all those who are as yet strangers to God's altar, to reflect, how great a privilege they lose by their absence, and to resolve, that, by His Grace, the next opportunity, which shall occur of receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, shall find them neither unprepared nor unwilling to partake in their benefits. And that the ordinance which we are now to begin, and the prayers which we are now to offer, may be the means of blessing to ourselves and to the whole Church of Christ, may He grant, who is mighty to save: who, with the Son, and the Holy Spirit, liveth and reigneth for ever!

SERMON XLIX.

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

EZEKIEL, xiv. 3.

These men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face; should I be inquired of at all by them?

THIS was the answer of the Holy Ghost to the prophet Ezekiel, when certain of the elders, that is, of the nobles, and principal magistrates, of Israel had paid him a solemn visit to ask counsel of the Lord, concerning the dangers which threatened Jerusalem.

The manner, in which the guidance and direction of the Most High were, in those days, sought after, was, that the person inquiring went to the Chief Priest, or to one of those prophets whom God raised up to instruct and govern His people; when, after proposing his question, accompanied with a prayer that God would be pleased to answer it, he sat on the ground, in an humble posture, and covered with sackcloth, in expectation of the reply, which, either by lots solemnly thrown, or by words put

into the mouth of His servant, the Almighty might see fit to send him. It is therefore that we read, in the present chapter, that “certain of the elders of Israel came and sate before Ezekiel;” and, therefore, that Jehovah thus spake of them, in His reply, as coming “to enquire of Him.”

When thus, in a time of public distress, they had recourse to God for comfort and counsel, the elders of Israel, it is necessary to observe, were doing no more than was strictly their duty; they were acting in the manner which, in such cases, the Lord Himself had ordained, who, when He thought fit to set aside, for Himself, and as His own peculiar people, the tribes of Israel and Judah, expressly promised to raise up a succession of prophets among them, as messengers of His will, and guides in difficulty and danger. And we read accordingly in the books of Scripture, not only that all the best and greatest men of their nation, — that Joshua, Barak, David, Solomon, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah, — were anxious and diligent in enquiring of the Lord, under all circumstances of doubt and difficulty; but that others, such as Amaziah and Asa, were reprov'd by God for neglect of this appointed way of obtaining grace and wisdom. It appears, therefore, that in thus asking counsel of the Lord, the elders, of whom I have now been speaking, were doing no more than

the Lord had Himself encouraged them to do ; and that their behaviour would, under any other circumstances, have been perfectly pious and reasonable.

But these rulers, as well as the greater part of the noblemen and magistrates of Israel, had, in their hearts, and in their general behaviour, grievously revolted from God. They were worshippers of idols, and fondly given up to all those follies and superstitions which, from the earliest times, their nation had been too much inclined to learn from their corrupt and blinded neighbours, the Caananites, the Egyptians, and the Assyrians. Not that they denied altogether that their own Jehovah, the God of their fathers, was a great and mighty God ; not that they even denied that He was greater and more powerful by far than these new and foreign favourites. This, the neighbouring nations themselves confessed when they cried out as the Philistines did, “ Who shall deliver us out of the hand of these mighty Gods? These are the Gods that smote the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness.”¹ But these nations were readily led by their priests to believe, and from them the Israelites caught the opinion, that, however great and powerful Jehovah might be, the Gods of the heathen might have some power also over the things of this world ; that

¹ 1 Sam. iv. 8.

it might still be wise to ask their help, and pray to them not to hurt us ; and, more particularly, that the spirits, who governed, as they believed, the sun, the moon, and the stars, though by the appointment of the One Great God, and with inferior sway to Him, were worthy to be honoured for the good, which men received by their means, and for the power, which they were disposed to exert, over men's lives and dispositions. There are still some persons, even in Christian countries, and who would be much surprized and offended if we were to call them heathens, who believe, as these heathen did, that fortunes may be told by a knowledge of the stars ; so that we may less wonder that many of the Israelites were led into the snare of worshipping the stars as well as Him who made them, and even honouring the creature more, or more constantly, than the glorious and ever blessed Creator. And since idolatry of this kind was the common and fashionable sin of all the nations around, the bond of all their treaties, the occasion and sanction of all their public ceremonies and public amusements ; — since the devil had enlisted in the service of these foul and foolish superstitions every thing which was most gay, most striking, most pompous, and most tempting to the carnal mind ; and since the kings and rulers of Israel were naturally anxious to comply, as far as possible, with the customs

and ceremonies of those princes whose help and friendship they desired, we shall not wonder, that many, who had no sense of religion at all, and many who preferred pleasure or politics to all religious considerations, were led to serve Baal as well as JEHOVAH; and, without expressly renouncing the latter, that they only prayed to Him, and only thought of Him, in such times of real danger and difficulty, as made them know and feel that He only could hear and help them.

Such, however, being the case with the elders, who now came to ask counsel of the Most High, it will not, I think, greatly surprise you to find, that Jehovah, who had so often and so expressly declared that He was GOD alone, and that He would not share His honour with any creature; that all the gods of the heathen were vanities; and that the worship paid to them was an abomination and an insult to Him, should not now accept the late and hollow services of men who had, for so long a time, been neglectful of His altars, and disobedient to His commandments.

“Son of Man,” are the words of God’s Spirit to Ezekiel, “these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and the stumbling-block of their iniquity before their face; shall I be enquired of at all by them? Therefore speak unto them, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God,

Every man that setteth up his idols in his heart, and the stumbling-block of his iniquity before his face, and cometh to the prophet, I, the Lord, will answer him that cometh, according to the multitude of his idols; and I will set My face against that man, and will make him a sign and a proverb; and I will cut him off from the midst of My people, and ye shall know that I am the Lord. And, if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I, the Lord have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand against him, and will destroy him from the midst of My people Israel. And they shall bear the punishment of their iniquity, the punishment of the prophet shall be even as the punishment of him that seeketh unto him. That the house of Israel may go no more astray from Me, neither be polluted any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be My people, and I may be their God, saith the Lord God.”

As if He had said,—“these men are in the daily habit of breaking My most solemn laws, and of giving to graven images that worship which I claim for Myself alone; and shall they,—shall these idolaters draw near Me, fresh as they come from their abominable sacrifices on the mountains, and in the tombs, to Moloch, to Thammuz and to Ashtaroth: and ask from My prophets the saving counsel which a prophet of

God alone can supply? No answer of peace shall they obtain from Me. If any prophet of Mine dares to offer up their petitions, or, on their behalf, to consult My oracle, let him look but for such a lying spirit as I sent of old into the mouths of Ahab's prophets¹, to lull the sinner into a ruinous security, and to involve the presumptuous enquirer, and the no less presumptuous prophet, like Balak, and like Balaam, in one sweeping ruin. So shall the House of Israel learn to cleave wholly unto Me, when they know that I will not share My honour with another; and that, if they continue to serve the Gods of the nations, it is but in vain that they, from time to time, pretend a zeal for the altars of Jehovah."

In the passage, which I have thus attempted to explain, there are many circumstances of awful warning, both to the Israelites themselves, and to us, for whose instruction their history is written. We find, in the first place, that, though the nobles of Israel were, usually, and in the time of peace and prosperity, forgetful of God's honour, and disobedient to His will,—yet, when the hour of distress arrived, they were ready enough to seek help and comfort at His altar, and from His prophets.

And is there none here, whose heart might reprove him for behaviour, in all things, like theirs?

¹ 1 Kings, xxii. 23.

Is there none, whose whole care and thoughts are, in general, given up to lawful business, or to unlawful pleasure ; but who, in a fit of sickness, in a storm at sea, in a severe worldly affliction, and when death or ruin stared him in the face, grew godly on a sudden, as he began to feel his need of God's help, and fell on his knees, and smote his breast, and vowed amendment, if God would, but that once, forgive and preserve him. And is there none, who has prayed, and thus vowed, over and over again ; and, as fast as the danger passed away, and the temptations of worldly care and of carnal pleasure returned, has thought no more of his prayers, or of his promises ? Is there none, who, less unmindful of God, but still more inconsistent in his behaviour towards Him, worships God once a week, it may be, and in his graver talk, and in his more serious moments, professes, and intends, to serve God only, who yet, all the while is cherishing some idol in his heart, and honouring it in his daily actions, — pursuing some unfair profit, or indulging in some forbidden pleasure, — against his conscience, to the dishonour of his religion, and to the ruin of his miserable soul ?

We are surprised, we are shocked, at the blindness and folly of those Israelites, who, though they believed in the Lord Jehovah, continued to worship other Gods besides Him, and more than Him. But, let us suit the case

to our own times, and to our own consciences ; and the difference is little more than in name. Let us, for Baalim and Ashtaroth, take some fashionable amusement, some worldly interest, some guilty pleasure ; and let us ask our own hearts, whether it be not very possible, and, unhappily, very common, for men who believe in God, when they think of Him at all, to have many rivals to Him in their hearts, whom, in the common course of life they desire more, and for whom they labour more, than they ever do to please God, or to obtain the blessings which He holds out to them ? And is there not good cause to fear, in our own case, as well as in that of these Israelitish rulers, that the Lord will utterly and terribly refuse to receive the prayers, or grant the requests, of men who so seldom worship Him, and who so often displease Him ?

Let us not deceive ourselves ; we cannot serve two masters ! God will have our whole heart, or He will have none of us : and there is no truth more frequently, or more awefully, repeated in Scripture, than that the very prayers of the wicked are an abomination unto the Lord ; — that their oblations are in vain ; and that, if men only seek Him when they are in immediate danger, and when all other help is taken away, for the sake of present escape, and with no settled purpose of future repentance, He will mock when their fear cometh : and

sometimes even (may God, in His mercy, keep such a judgement from me, and from my hearers!) make their tardy and inconsistent piety itself a snare to their souls!

It is a dreadful thing when a man is in danger or misery, and begins to cry to God for help and mercy; and the Spirit of God makes answer in the heart;—“How long is it since thou hast called on Me, before? How lately is it that thou hast broken My laws?” But it is more dreadful still, when the Spirit of God departs from a man entirely; when his prayers no longer proceed from any gracious feeling, but from a natural terror of evils which his sins have drawn on him; when his heart is far from God, though his lips draw nigh to Him; and the world and the devil have his love, though he knows they will be his ruin. Of such, the very prayers are, sometimes, turned into sin. The elders of Israel were punished for paying that outward reverence to God through His prophet, which it was the duty of every Israelite to pay; and there have been those who, having received the Sacrament of the Holy Communion, without any real repentance, have been so given up, that the devil has entered into them, as he did into Judas, and has filled them full of all iniquity, and brought them to destruction both of body and soul!

What shall we say then? Is not the sinner to pray at all? Is no man to approach God's altar, or partake in His Sacraments, whose conscience reproaches him for inconsistent behaviour, or for frequent failings in his course of duty? Alas! who then could be saved! Nay more,—in proportion as a man feels the burthen and weight of his sins, so much the more reason has he for crying, mightily and with strong tears, to Him who is able to deliver; and with the sure and certain hope, however great those sins may be, that, if he be truly sorry for them, and seriously desire to forsake them, the pardon of God may yet be obtained, and the power may be granted him of becoming one of the number of God's children.

But if, instead of seeking really, sincerely, and before all other things, the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, he is anxious for life,—that he may return to his former habits of sin; anxious for deliverance from danger or disgrace,—that he may pursue his old plans of pride and covetousness; if he comes to the Holy Table of the Lord without leaving, or desiring to leave a single carnal lust, a single worldly feeling behind, I bear him record that his prayers and his sacrifices will do nothing more than add the sin of presumption to all his former offences.

This is the misery to which every case of death-bed repentance is liable; this, the horror which every one must feel, who, having been through life careless of pleasing God, is, by the sudden pressure of calamity or danger, compelled to fly to God for succour, namely, that it is impossible for him to know whether he is really and acceptably penitent; or whether he is only filled with terror at the prospect before him, and with grief at the pleasures and enjoyments which he is obliged to leave behind him. And for this it is hard to find a remedy. All which remains for a man so circumstanced, is to pray that God would look on his misery, and show him, for Christ's sake, that mercy to which he has no claim; that He would send down His grace to melt his stoney heart, and help his confused understanding, and raise his soul to that necessary pitch of repentance, and resignation, and faith, and love, which, whosoever hath, shall never ask in vain for pardon and redemption.

Blessed are they, however great their former wanderings, whom the Spirit of God, even in the eleventh hour, thus calls to His vineyard. But blessed, far more, are they who have already, before the evil days came, begun to think on their Creator; who, having loved Him in the season of health and prosperity, are as-

sured of His love in the time of darkness, distress, and danger; and who, having sought of old the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, have reason to hope, that all other things of which they stand in need, shall, so far as is expedient for them, be added unto them.

SERMON L.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

[FOR THE COMMUNION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.]

ST. MATTHEW, xxii. 2, 3.

The kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding : and they would not come.

THE parable of the marriage supper, from which these words are taken, and which you have heard read in the second lesson for this morning, as it is full of most useful instruction and most blessed comfort, so it is happily expressed with so much plainness, and the moral which it conveys is so eminently practical and simple, that few of our Saviour's parables need less the commentator's aid. And my present discourse will, therefore, be confined to what is a constant cause of sorrow to every preacher of the Gospel; — I mean the careless and unworthy manner in which the most solemn truths, and the most serious warnings are received by worldly minds.

Our Saviour has, in this parable, described a message sent by the ruler of a country, a king

who had power to save or to destroy, to those who were his subjects, and whose life and property depended on his will. It was a message of no light importance ; for it enjoined a mark of respect which, in those little kingdoms of Syria was very usual, to partake of their sovereign's bounty, and to pay their dutiful homage to his son. It related to no future occasion, of which, from its distance, it might be uncertain, whether it would happen at all, or which gave them time to loiter by the way ; for the banquet was already prepared, the oxen and fatlings were killed, and their monarch was waiting their arrival. They had already once been guilty of an open act of unthankfulness, disrespect, and disobedience, in refusing to attend so kind a master ; and they could have had no reason to expect that he would have vouchsafed a second message. A second time, however, the invitation is sent in still kinder language, and a still more urgent manner ; but what sort of answer is returned ? Some, indeed, are open and sturdy rebels, who beat and slay his messengers, and renounce at once their allegiance and loyalty. — But the greater part, without either questioning his authority to command, or doubting his power to punish, consider both the one and the other as absolutely unworthy their notice, and make light of the message of an angry and insulted king. They consider it as

of no consequence whatever ; or, at least, as what may be deferred to a more convenient season, and as a far less serious or urgent concern than the common business of the day, than their farms and merchandize ; though, in the anger of this neglected monarch, their goods, their farms, their very lives themselves were in danger. Strange and foolish as this conduct must appear, even if the history were understood of a mere earthly prince, how should our surprise be changed into shame and horror, when we consider that we ourselves are the careless subjects, and that the Lord of Heaven and earth is the long-suffering king !

We are called by the ministers of Christ, and by the words of His Gospel, to receive a kingdom prepared for us by the Father from the beginning of the world ; to enter into the joy of our Lord ; to sit down at the marriage supper of the Son of God ; we are warned that if we despise this summons, we are rebels in His sight ; and that, on our choice one way or other, our happiness or misery must, to all eternity, depend ; and do we linger ? do we hesitate ? God be merciful to us ! do we “ make light ” of truths so awful ? How many there are, alas ! among those who hear me, and how many more among those who do not attend this Holy Place, who hear the joyful tidings of salvation without gratitude ; and listen to the threats of the Gospel

without concern, who drive them from their minds and memories as troublesome and useless intruders, and return with eagerness to the pursuits and pleasures of this life, to get rid, amid the bustle of their farms and merchandize, of meditations so unpleasant! — How many, when a religious thought occurs to their mind, or a religious expression is used in their hearing, drown all good words or good thoughts, with a laugh, a jest, or a song, as what is no concern of theirs, and fit only for the church, or the death-bed! How many too, more reasonable in their language, but in their practice equally absurd, admit the propriety, nay the necessity of such considerations, without ever acting in conformity with them. It is all very proper, they say, and very necessary, to repent and amend; but as for themselves, though not so good as they might be, they see no necessity to be over religious; they do not think themselves much worse than the rest of the world, and have no desire to be better than their neighbours. Or, if they are sensible that their practice is not such as to satisfy even their own partial consciences, or to come up even to the lowest pitch of morality, they still have some means of quieting their doubts and shutting their eyes to their danger. They fully purpose, they will tell you, to lead more regular lives, some time or other; they will give up the society of their

drunken companions ; but not just now, when their absence would be so much ridiculed. They will give alms to the poor ; but they can see no immediate hurry. They will go regularly to church ; but not this Sunday, when they have so much to settle, or are so much wearied with the business of the week. Urge them when you may, you have the same answer still ; every day adds to the number of their sins, and to the difficulty of their repentance ; and something is always found, — some business, some pleasure, some engagement, — which they feel of more consequence, than the care of their immortal souls. They have bought a yoke of oxen, and they go to prove them ; — they have married a wife, or they have some pretence of even less importance ; and with one consent, they entreat their Maker to hold them excused from obeying His commandments. And thus they dream away their time in half-made purposes of future amendment, in resolutions which are never to take effect, and in plans of life which never begin till the talents committed to their charge are wasted and gone ; till the Lord returns, and demands an account of their stewardship ; and they find themselves shut out from His Kingdom, and sealed up, for ages of years, in darkness, and amid weeping and gnashing of teeth. What can their excuses then avail them ? can they beg for further time ? can they answer,

“they are not ready,” when thus called on to return to God? and dare they thus despise or neglect His offers now? How different is their behaviour, when their worldly interests are at stake?

How wild and shameful does the conduct seem of the guests, in the parable, who slighted an earthly monarch! Yet, by these the Lord of Heaven and earth is despised; His salvation, trodden under foot; and the blood of Christ, esteemed an unholy thing. If a rich inheritance, an advantageous bargain, nay, some favourite indulgence or luxury, were held out to these men who are so careless of eternal life, how anxious would they be not to lose a moment in seizing it! how careful to enquire into every circumstance, which might facilitate the obtaining it, or confirm its possession! how little would they scruple pains, or labour, or hardship, where their hearts were really in the cause! O miserable blindness of human nature, whose attention, whose care, whose labour is bestowed so readily on the meanest trifles and humblest pleasures! which will run after a toy, a feather, or a shadow; and shut its eyes and ears to inevitable, perhaps instant ruin; and make light of everlasting torment.

Even now—while we are telling you of righteousness, and judgement, and of God’s terrors to come, while your attention is called to a

subject of more consequence than all which this world can bestow,—how few of you seem really attentive! how many are there whose thoughts are wandering from the Holy Church of God, in which you are assembled, and from the solemn truths which are ringing in your ears, and from the Holy Table to which you are shortly to be called, to some idle recollection, some ill-timed scheme of business, or of pleasure! nay, is there any so idle but it may serve to direct your attention from more serious subjects?—And is this wise—is it decent? Can it be well pleasing to Him, who seeth the heart of man?—Surely, my friends, if we have the common hopes, the common fears, of Christians, nay, (putting religion out of the question) if we have the common feelings of men, such awful subjects, as eternal happiness or misery, whether we believe them or not, are, at least, worth serious enquiry, are, at least, too important to be made light of!

The causes of this unhappy disposition to trifle with religion, may be, first an utter ignorance of the nature of Christianity, and of the greatness of the benefits conferred by God in the Gospel. This I apprehend to be a much more common case than may, at first, be easily imagined. I do not mean an ignorance of religious truths in general; but of religion, as far as we are concerned in it, as it is applied to our own particular case. There are few of us,

who have sufficient feeling, or knowledge, of our own weakness and wickedness, of the necessity which we are under of obtaining God's grace and pardon, and of the fact that these threats of eternal misery, to which we listen so coolly, are a faint description of what may befall ourselves before many days are over. Could we be really brought to view ourselves as condemned creatures, to whom a merciful judge had afforded this one opportunity for escape and amendment, — did we consider that we are struggling for life and soul, and that on the manner in which we pass the next few hours, the fate of eternity, may, perhaps, depend, if such were our feelings, — far from listening to religious truths with sleepy indifference, we ought to catch at the sound of the Gospel, as to the music of angels, as to the proclamation of pardon for our past offences, and as direction and guidance on our journey to unspeakable happiness. Instead of viewing private prayer and public worship, and the other ordinances of religion, as burdensome duties, wearisome from their length, and oppressive from their frequent recurrence, we should be glad when men said, "let us go into the House of the Lord;" we should view these prayers and Sacraments as preservers from evil, and sin, and misery; as means of grace, and strength, and salvation; hither we should make our escape from the storms of passion, and the

snares of the tempter ; we should flee for safety to the sanctuary of the Lord, and cling to the mercy-seat of His Altar.

Nor, if such a conviction had a firm hold on our mind, should we suffer the cares, or riches, or pleasures of this world, like an insignificant screen held before our eyes, to obstruct the view of the boundless inheritance which God hath appointed in Heaven to them who love Him. Who, that was escaping from a house in flames, or flying before a destroying enemy, would loiter by the way, to pick up straws or flowers? Who, that was hastening to receive a kingdom, would risk it for some paltry gain by the road? It is, and ever must be, the case with the human heart; where that is really interested, where some great and overruling object occupies the attention, no other, or trifling cares can interfere; the conduct cannot but be consistent.

To attain, therefore, consistency of conduct, to make us act and think and pray, and communicate like Christians, it is necessary to have a serious and constant impression of our duties, our hopes, and our fears. If I am required to lay down rules by which this seriousness may be obtained, it is, perhaps, sufficient to refer you to a principle which I have often laid down, namely, that it is by long-continued practice, by a steady perseverance in attempts to please God through Jesus Christ, that

we become really Christians ; — that to enable us to pray well, it is necessary to pray often ; that to teach us to live virtuously, it is necessary, by patient continuance in well doing, to acquire habits of virtue.

But there is another means of improvement, which, though recommended in every part of the Scriptures, and enforced by the example of Christ Himself, and laid down as a rule by holy men in every age of the Church, is now much disused. I mean the practice of religious retirement and meditation. It fares with religion, as with every other serious concern, — it must be often thought of ; for without some hours spent in thought and self-examination, — without some plans of life matured and grounded in this manner by long reflection, without often considering over our own weakness and wickedness, and the power and mercies of God ; often figuring to ourselves the images, which the Scripture offers, of Heaven, hell, death and judgement, it is idle to expect either consistency of life, or firmness of principle. It would be, therefore, wise in all of us to set apart, for this purpose, some hours, a single hour would be enough for a beginning, of the days on which we receive the sacrament. At that time, let no trifling amusements, no worldly business interfere ; but let us commune with our own hearts, and in our own chamber, and be still.

Begin with an examination of your hearts, a confession of your offences to God, not generally, but, as far as you can recollect, by name, and by each particular instance. But do not stop there, nor even content yourself with resolutions of amendment ; but, to confirm these resolutions, encourage your fancy to range into those wide regions of pain and torture without end, or of rewards and pleasures and glories without bound ; and raise your views on the eagle wing of contemplation, above this earthly barrier which now confines them. Read the allegorical description, which the prophets give you, of the majesty of God, the terrors of judgement, and the glories of the Heavenly Kingdom. Figure to yourself the scenes of torture and horror, the black darkness or tormenting flame, the howls of pain, and blasphemy of despair, the hideous shapes, and sights, and sounds, the everlasting burnings, which await the people who forget their God,—sorrows which you cannot escape, and to which you are on the high road even now, and of which a few moments may make you partake. And if your reason turns, or your spirit fails, with such a spectacle, then turn your eyes and your hopes to the New Jerusalem, to those wide and glorious regions which repentance opens to the soul ; behold, with Isaiah, the Lord sitting on His throne, and the cherubs veiling their eyes from the brightness of

His glory; behold, with Ezekiel, the burning wheels, and the winged chariot which he beheld at Chebar¹, or the fiery stream which Daniel saw before the Ancient of Days.² And to add a closer and dearer interest to the scene, call to remembrance the names and persons of your friends departed in the hope of Christ, and those with whom you hope to share eternity. Figure them “standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands³ :” — and pray to the Almighty, that your lot may be cast with them, that with them you may be permitted to stand, “serving God day and night in His Temple, where you shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on you, nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed you; and shall lead you unto living fountains of water: and God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes.”⁴

¹ Ezek. 1.

² Dan. vii. 9, 10.

³ Rev. vii. 9.

⁴ Rev. vii. 15, 16, 17.

SERMON LI.

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

FIRST PART.

ST. MATTHEW, ix. 2.

Jesus, seeing their faith, saith unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee.

THERE are several points, in the miracle here related, which may give occasion to much curious discussion and useful instruction; and which will appear more plainly to you, if you attend to the history once more. “They,” that is, certain of the Jews, “bring to Jesus a man sick of the palsy.” Our Saviour, “seeing their faith, saith unto the sick of the palsy, Son, be of good cheer; thy sins are forgiven thee. And behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, this man blasphemeth; And Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? for whether is easier to say, thy sins be forgiven thee, or to say, arise and walk? but that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power

on earth to forgive sins, then saith He unto the sick of the palsy, Arise, take up thy bed and go unto thine house."

The first, then, of the considerations, which arise from the perusal of this history, is the reason, or motive, which inclined our Saviour to perform the miracle, and relieve the paralytic man; it is said to be, because He saw their faith. — Whose faith? not the faith of the single sufferer, but *their* faith, as speaking of many; and to be understood, therefore, of the friends, who brought Him there; as well as of the penitent himself; who, it may be, indeed, was neither able to ask relief from Christ, nor sufficiently in his senses to desire it. And it will follow hence, that the faith and prayers of a friend, a relation, nay of any person, who is sufficiently interested for another to ask his welfare at the hands of Christ, may often avail to the forgiveness of those sins, of which that third person has not yet repented, and to the relief of those sufferings, against the continuance of which the sufferer himself has not the means, or the grace, to pray.

The next is, the manner in which Christ gives comfort, and promise of relief, to the sick of the palsy, "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee." It would, indeed, be a sufficient consolation to any man, and under any circumstances, to be assured by a mes-

senger from Heaven, that his sins were blotted out of the remembrance of God; but the particular application to the paralytic patient should seem, I think, to show very plainly, that the sins here mentioned are, in some degree, connected with the sufferings to which he was then exposed; that many of our bodily and worldly visitations are, in truth, intended as punishments, or correctives, of our sins; and that, if the sin were forgiven, or cured, the punishment would be also withdrawn. The first of these is already inferred from the history of the paralytic man, whose own faith is not specified; while it is to the faith of his friends that Jesus, in pardoning him, was pleased to look: and it is confirmed in many other passages of Scripture, where we are directed to join earnestly in prayer and intercession for those, who, at the time, can in no wise join with us in prayer for themselves; — namely, for the absent, the heathen, the impenitent, the sick, and the lunatic.

This duty of intercession, or prayer for each other, is recommended, indeed, both by the reasonableness of the practice itself, and by the clearest admonitions of Holy Scripture. Judging from the general agreement, which we witness in every part of nature, it would be natural to expect, that, as the use and intention of worldly society is, that men should, in bodily comforts,

be helpful to one another ; so the use and nature of a spiritual communion is, that, by an interchange of prayers, and comfort, and advice, its members should all be, in turn, indebted to each other ; and that each should owe his salvation, — under Christ, — to the prayer and example of his fellows. Nor is this all ; for, in the express words of Scripture, we are commanded to make prayers for all, more especially for such as are of the household of faith ; to intercede for kings, and for all who are in authority ; for our enemies, that it would please God to forgive them, and to turn their hearts ; for the afflicted in body, — with the assurance given by St. James, that the prayer of faith shall heal the sick ; and, lastly, for those who, themselves, think not of God, where St. John declares, in substance, that, if a man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall pray for him.¹

It may be asked, indeed, with some plausibility, how can that acceptance, which is the fruit of faith in the individual himself, be accorded in answer to the faith of any other ? or how shall we dare to acknowledge any other mediator for the sins, or misfortunes, of man, than Christ alone ? To this, however, it may be replied, that, though no mediation, but the mediation of Christ, possess any efficacy or

¹ 1 St. John, v. 16.

merit with God ; yet, as prayer is one of the appointed means, whereby it is Christ's good pleasure, that His mediation should be obtained ; and as natural merits are no more belonging to one petition than to another, there is no absurdity, where Scripture bears us out, in supposing, that the prayers of good men may be available, not only for themselves, but for others ; and that as Christ is the mediator between God and man, so the prayers of the Church, or of any individual Christian, may be, in certain instances, a means of intercession between man and Christ.

In point of fact, indeed, we find in Scripture repeated instances, where such intercessions, notwithstanding the weakness and unworthiness of the interceder, have been, as they ever will be, accepted and complied with. Abraham was a man of like passions with ourselves ; yet he is not blamed for interfering with importunate entreaty in behalf of a wicked and condemned nation. So far otherwise, that all, which he asked for, was granted ; and had there been so many as ten righteous men in Sodom, the remaining wicked multitude would have escaped by his prayers.¹ How often did the intercession of Moses stay the arm of the Lord, from destroying the whole race of Israel ? and how, for the sake of His servant David,

¹ Genesis, xviii. 32.

did God leave two tribes under the government of His sinful descendants? But how often are we told by Christ and His apostles, to pray for our enemies and persecutors; who, it may be thought, are not at all likely to have faith or prayer themselves; — for the lunatics and possessed with devils, who are incapable of either; — for sinners, who have forfeited the privileges of Christianity; — and for heathen, who never possessed them? God, we may rely on it, would not enjoin us to do any thing in vain; and we may, therefore, trust Him, that He, who hath said, that, whatever we ask in prayer, believing, we shall receive it, will not reject, or consider as presumptuous, those prayers, which bear in themselves the evidence, not only of faith, but of love; and which approach, of all others, nearest to the pattern which He Himself has left. It is our duty then, or to speak more properly, it is our blessed and glorious privilege, to imitate, in our own conduct, the faith and affection of the friends of this paralytic sufferer; and, in holy hope, and thorough confidence, to lay out, not only our own wants, but the wants, both ghostly and bodily, of other men, before the feet and the mercy-seat of Christ. There are some, indeed, who, from the peculiar dangers or importance of their situation, are particularly named by the apostle, as proper objects of

prayer and supplication; those, I mean, who have the government of our souls, or of our bodies, the ministers of our church, or the rulers of our people. Others, too, from nearness of blood, or closeness of connexion, have a right, even in the constant opinion of the world, to a mention in our common devotions. The parent ought to pray for his child; and the child, for his parent; the servant, for his master; and the master, for his servants; — the priest, for his congregation; and the congregation, for their spiritual pastor. Friends, too, if they are friends in any thing but name, will think of one another in their prayers; but, besides all these, if any case of sin or misery falls within our knowledge, it is as much our duty to pray to God in behalf of the wretched object, as it is to relieve, where we are able, its bodily wants and maladies. How, if we believe in good earnest, that God is faithful, who hath promised to hear our prayers, — how, if we call ourselves Christians, can we deny so cheap and easy and effectual a succour to our miserable perishing brother? How, if we never pray for any but ourselves, can we hope that Christ will pray for us? How can we pretend to charity, if the very warmth of our feelings does not itself constrain us to breathe a wish, a sigh, an ejaculation in behalf of them in whose wants we profess

to sympathize? It is alas! a very different feeling from humility, or diffidence in our own merits, which keeps us from such intercession; it is a lazy indifference to all but our own immediate fears; a desire to get to Heaven at as cheap a rate as we can; and a sordid grudging of every additional moment, which we spare to God, that shortens thus our addresses to Him; and makes us content to mutter over, with all possible expedition, those prayers alone which relate immediately to ourselves.

It is, then, the bounden duty of every Christian, not only to join in those public prayers for all conditions of men, which our Holy Church appoints,—not only in his private applications to the throne of Grace, to pray for those, who are joined with him in kindred, or common interest; but it is his duty, also, to call down the Divine mercy on every abandoned sinner, in whose safety he is interested; every unfortunate sufferer, in mind, or in body, whom chance, or neighbourhood, may bring under his notice; and he may do this in the perfect assurance, that the task, which Christ has recommended, will not be exercised in vain. We cannot, indeed, imitate the zeal of those good men, who brought on their shoulders their sick friend to the feet of a visible Saviour; who, when the crowd prevented

their access, broke through the roof of the dwelling, and let him down by cords before the eyes of his Redeemer : but our prayers, unworthy as we are, have power, we are assured, to obtain a hearing from Him who hath commanded us to use them : and, if that relief which we ask, be really for his, and our, advantage, we shall as surely receive it at the hands of God, and in His own good time, as if we heard the voice of our Redeemer answering, “ Arise and walk.”

It is the same with sin, as it is with sickness : we cannot, indeed, expect, that our faith, or our prayers, should avail us so far, as to obtain Heaven for a sinner who dies in unbelief, or in impenitence ; but we may hope, that our intercession will so far avail, as to procure for him, as they often have done, a renewal of gracious influence, a fresh visit from the Holy Ghost, a fresh and latest opportunity of repentance, or a little time to recover his spiritual strength, before he goes hence, and is no more seen. Nor need we fear, that, while we are thus anxious for others, we shall be, in any degree, neglecting ourselves. It is not the characteristic of spiritual, any more than of worldly, pride, to be anxious for other men’s happiness ; — and, if our eyes are open to the wants and dangers of our brethren, that very contemplation will tend to make us humble and distrustful of our

own.—And be sure, that he, who is really anxious for his fellow creatures, will have a friend in Christ, who will never cease to care for him. With the same measure he metes, it shall be measured to him again ; and the mercy and the spiritual help, which he entreats God to bestow on his brother, shall, with a larger and more plenteous hand, be returned into his own bosom. Not a cup of cold water, which is given for Christ's sake, shall pass unrewarded ; not a prayer, which is prompted by the spirit of love, be unaccepted, or unprofitable before God. What we do for others in Christ's name, are, in truth the most efficacious services which we can render to ourselves.

It is then the duty and interest of us all as Christians to make mention of our friends and our brethren in our private and public prayers to God ; and as there is no doubt, that the prayer of a righteous man is, of all others, the most availing in His sight¹ ; so it will follow, that, if we really love our friends, or our country, so much as we profess to do, we ought to frame in such manner our own lives and conduct, as to make our prayers and good wishes more effectual to do them service. And, on the other hand, since the faith and prayers of a good man have, as we have seen, so great reflected virtue ; since so many have been snatched

¹ St. James, v. 16.

from destruction, both of body, and of soul while, the intercession of some virtuous connection, or relation, or friend, how exceedingly does it concern us to cultivate friendships with such characters, as may supply, by their stronger prayers, the weakness and imperfections of our own ;—who may keep us from falling, not only by outward advice and example, but by the mightier shield of secret prayer ; who, like our guardian angels, may plead our cause, and watch over our safety ; whose efficacious tears may lighten the load of sickness, and smooth the passage of death ; and whose conversation and affection, as it has been, on earth, our safeguard, may be, in Heaven, a portion of our reward !

It still remains, that I should treat of the second part of my subject, namely, the occasion and the remedy for afflictions ; but, as I have already detained you as long as the present occasion will allow, I shall reserve this for another discourse, commending, in the mean time, the observations, which you have now heard, to your memory, and myself, and my ministry, to your prayers. To mine, unworthy as they are, my parish has an undoubted title : and may we all be heard in our intercession for each other,—for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord !

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163 TRINITY

ON LII.

SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

SECOND PART.

ST. MATTHEW, ix. 2.

Jesus, seeing their faith, saith unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee.

IN my last sermon, it was my wish to explain to you the former of the two main truths to be inferred from the present text; namely, that our Lord was moved to perform the cure of the paralytic man, not by *his* faith, but by that of his friends and supporters; to which it followed as a necessary consequence that it is the duty, or, to speak more properly, the glorious privilege of every Christian to assist his sinful or afflicted brethren, not by advice alone, or the outward acts of money, food, or physic, but by a frequent mention of their names in prayer, and interceding in their behalf at the throne of grace. And it also followed, that the greatest treasure, which this world could offer, the surest earthly defence against all the evils of life, was the

prayer of faithful and religious friends : while, on the other hand, those who really wish well to their connections, or neighbours, are called upon, by every possible motive of affection, and of reason, to make their love effectual, and their prayers acceptable at the hands of God, by a devout and holy life.

From the means, by which our Saviour's promise of mercy was obtained, I now pass on to the terms in which it was given, which, according to my promise, I shall now explain as clearly as I can. "Son," said our Saviour to the man who was sick of the palsy ; " Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee."

It may seem, at first, that this assurance, however mercifully spoken, and however comfortable to that, or to any other sinner, was yet by no means an answer to the immediate wants of the sufferer, or to the request first made by his friends. They brought him to the feet of Christ, for the relief of his bodily pains ; and it was no answer to their prayer, to absolve him from the diseases of the soul.— The pardon of his sins was, indeed, a greater act of mercy than the giving ease to his body ; but this pardon was, still, not the thing desired ; and it is even as if we should give new clothes, or expensive physic, to a man perishing with hunger, and who asked us for a morsel of bread. Nor is it enough to say, that he, who grants the greater

of two favours, we may be sure, will not refuse to grant us the less ; for, though this is a very natural and Christian ground of hope,—to those who reflect, that, as Christ gave Himself for the sins of the world, so He certainly will not disdain to care for our bodily wants,—yet, in the present case, we are reduced, I think, from the connection and circumstances of the story, to suppose, that the sins of the paralytic man were, in some way, connected with his palsy : and that, the cause, or occasion, of such chastisement being removed, it would follow, that their bitter consequences might also pass away. That is, if we apply the case of this particular man to the general sins and misfortunes of the world,—sickness and affliction of every sort, are, if not always, at least very often, the consequence of sin, and, in part, its punishment.

That all our sorrows and misfortunes are the consequence of sin, is, to a certain extent, deducible from the doctrine of the fall of Adam ; and the bitter train of death and sufferings, which that fatal disobedience introduced on earth. And, as the sin of Adam brought death and disease, so have the sins of every particular man a plain and direct tendency to increase and aggravate the misfortunes incident to our nature, and the evils which we inherit from our first parent. Poverty, ill-will, bad fare, and disappointment, are the natural and unavoidable

fruits of certain particular sins; and, among diseases, how many are there which God has sent, as guards and executioners in the gate of indulgence; to drive, with their hideous and pallid aspect, unwary and unpractised sinners from the forbidden path; and to execute some portion of His righteous vengeance on those, whom the example of their suffering fellow creatures has not been able to deter from like offences.

But, besides all these, which bear in their very nature the mark of the sin which gave them birth, there are doubtless many other instances, — how many is known to God only who sends them, — wherein the patient himself, if his eyes were open to his spiritual state; may read the anger of God, written in characters of sorrow and of pain, against some darling sin, which is, in some distant way, connected with his present suffering. That this was often the case, under the Jewish dispensation, is plain from a host of passages in Scripture, — out of which it will be sufficient to name two. “When Thou” said the Psalmist to Jehovah, “when Thou with rebukes doth chasten man for sin, Thou makest his beauty to consume away, like as it were a moth fretting a garment.”¹ “Foolish men” he asserts in like manner, “are plagued for their offence, and because of their wickedness. Their soul

¹ Psalm xxxix. 12. Common Prayer.

abhorred all manner of meat ; and they were even hard at death's door." ¹

Nor is this the language of the Old Testament alone ; or is it applicable to those only who, like the Jews, were under the visible government of God as an earthly and temporal sovereign. Our Saviour, too, exhorts him, whom He had healed, to "sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto him ²:" and St. Paul, in addressing the Christian society at Corinth, declares, that, in punishment for their disrespect to the Lord's Table, many were weak and sickly among them ³ : or, in the language of our Church, that they were plagued with divers diseases and sundry kinds of death. That all diseases are sent from God is plain from reason itself ; — that many of them are brought upon us on account of our sins, is no less plain from the express words of Scripture ; but that all diseases are thus brought upon us, will not therefore necessarily follow ; and it is very important to attend to these distinctions, because the neglect of them may lead us into very uncharitable and very groundless opinions, as to the spiritual state of our neighbours ; or sometimes into a very foolish and fatal confidence in our own health and prosperity : — or, under circumstances of suffering and distress, into a despair and abjectness of spirit altogether as

¹ Psalm cvii. 17, 18. ² John, v. 14. ³ 1 Cor. xi. 30.

deplorable. This manner of forming our opinion, the Son of God, on two several occasions, thought proper to reprove. First, in the case of the man who was blind from his birth ; and, secondly, in that of the eighteen persons who were crushed by the fall of a tower in Siloam. And it is necessary, therefore, to observe, that, though sickness and calamity be the punishment of sin, yet it is not every sinner who meets with punishment in this life ; while, on the other hand, many of the children of light and grace, are, for their own advantage, chastened and purified by sorrow and pain in this life, — in order that their secret sins, and those weaknesses of mortality, which hang about and defile the best of men, may be corrected and amended by the wholesome and fatherly discipline of Him, who knows what is in them, and designs whatever is best for their salvation. In an earthly father, we are told, it is love which makes him scourge his son ; and the God and Father of all has shown to men and angels, how blessed in the eyes of Eternal Wisdom are the sorrows, with which he visits the sincere believer, in that, designing to bring many sons to glory, He made the First-born and Captain of all — “ perfect through suffering.”

Of these blessed and salutary afflictions there are four kinds. First, when disease, or misfortune, is sent to be a warning to ourselves, and to

awaken our attention to the things which belong to our peace ; — by reminding us of our mortality, and by breaking that delightful but dangerous slumber of the soul, which worldly happiness too often produces. Secondly, afflictions and diseases are not infrequently sent for the purpose of strengthening the soul, of weakening the hold of the flesh and the world, and of making our thoughts and wishes sit looser to life and its enjoyments ; so that our soul, so far from fearing the summons of the Almighty, shall sit in patient expectation of the hour of its deliverance, even as a captive watches for the moment when the gates of his dungeon shall be unbarred, and the blessed light of Heaven break in upon his darkness. Thirdly, they may be intended as an exercise and display of our faith and patience, which may redound to the advantage of other men from our good example ; and may, and doubtless, will, be richly recompensed to us by a bountiful Master, — perhaps in this world, and most certainly in the world to come. Fourthly, they may be intended by God as preventatives of some future evil which He foresees, — of some coming temptation, under the force of which, unless thus disciplined, we might, otherwise, have probably fallen, — of some besetting sin, which God, by these restraints, disables us from following ; even as a wise parent will confine his child within the

house, when the streets are crowded and dangerous.

There being, then, so many sweet and holy uses of adversity, so many reasons, besides a punishment for sin, which may bring it on the heads of God's children, it is most absurd and dangerous to be hasty to construe the afflictions of our neighbours into judgements; or to suppose, that they, to whom such things happen, are greater sinners than all others that dwell in Jerusalem. By judging thus of other men, we incur, indeed, the guilt of the three mistaken friends of Job, who were glad, at length, to accept the prayers and sacrifices of him, whom, in overhasty zeal, they had accused of secret crimes as the cause of his unparalleled misfortunes.

All, indeed, are sinners; and all, or nearly all, it may be reasonably supposed, are visited with affliction of some kind or other as correction, or prevention, or example: but the different degrees of suffering, and the different manners of applying it, must be suited, not to the sins alone, but to the tempers, and characters, and circumstances, of the offender; even as a milder remedy might suit the case of this sick man, while the knife, and the red hot iron may be called for by the disorders of another. But the extent of the evil, or the danger of

either, is only known to the Great Physician of our souls.

Leaving, then, all idle or uncharitable reasonings as to the state of other men, it is wiser and better to apply the tests, which I have mentioned, to ourselves; and to be convinced, that, as sin is the hidden root of all our affliction, — the poison, which turns to our destruction the wholesome elements of nature, and the food, and sleep, and clothing, which should else have been for our welfare, — that, as it is sin which forces God to punish us in this life, in order that He may snatch us forth, even in spite of ourselves, from the far worse sufferings of the life to come; — we should regard a virtuous life, as the only means of securing our happiness, either in this world, or in the next; — and, being healthy and prosperous, we should so use the gifts of God, as not to induce Him to take them away from us; — and, being sick and in misery, we should consider a true repentance of our former sins, as the first step towards getting rid of our present calamity. In sickness, indeed, when the temptations of the world have lost their hold, and the desires of the flesh are brought low, and when the nearer grave is gaping wide before us, and there remains no more of our guilty pleasures but their bitter recollection, we are apt, from the very circumstances of our case, to feel low and melancholy;

and to fancy *that* to be a sorrow for sin, *which* is, in truth, merely dread of its consequences. And, thus, if we are restored to health again, this wholesome fear is too apt to pass away and be forgotten, and we return to the mire and filth of our former indulgences, as readily as if we had never resolved to forsake them.

And, as it is so plain, that this sort of repentance must be altogether powerless towards our salvation, it will be useful to point out the errors which distinguish it from a real sorrow for sin, — that inward conviction of its folly and wickedness, which can make us rejoice in the assurance, that, whatever becomes of our body, our sins, at least, are forgiven. If all our prayers in sickness are directed to obtaining, not so much pardon for our sins, as the lengthening our days; — if we are more anxious for life than for salvation; if we never allow ourselves to look forward with an even eye on the dark passage of the grave, and the unknown world beyond it, it is plain that we have but little assurance that we ourselves are truly penitent; but little trust in our Redeemer's mercy and love. And this is, perhaps, one of the greatest dangers of a death-bed repentance, that we are, in fact, praying for relief, rather from our present suffering, than from the sins of which they are the consequence. To avoid this error, and to make our repentance, whenever begun, or by

whatever visitation God calls us to it, effectual to the amendment of our lives if we recover, and to our acceptance at God's hands if we depart, it is first particularly necessary to convince ourselves, that our present pains are no more than the very least part of that punishment, which, for our sins, we justly deserve. And thus regarding sin alone as the cause and root of the evil, to direct all our prayers to God to purify our soul from that inward taint, and to dispose of our bodies as seemeth best to His wisdom and mercy. And, if we firmly and fervently persevere in prayer for the obtaining of this one thing, forgiveness of sins,—we shall soon find all our immoderate desires of life abate, and our wishes completely satisfied by that single assurance,—“Son, thy sins are forgiven thee!” For wherefore should the pardoned offender desire a longer life,—why should the soul, that is escaped, desire a return to her cage and her abode of trial? Are not the merits of Christ enough for us, or the pardon which He so freely pronounces? Why then linger in the suburbs of the world, and cast those wistful looks behind us on those dangers from which we are delivered?—O, my friends, let it be, first of all, the object of your prayers, your constant and healthy prayers, that, when disease and danger overtake you, you may so

have lived, as that they shall be accounted nothing dangerous !

But, in the second place, when the thing which you have feared, is come upon you ; and the arrows of the Lord stick fast in your soul ; then pray to Him, not for long life, but for genuine repentance ; — not for strength of body, but of faith : and pray Him, above all, that His Holy Spirit would descend upon you, that His comfortable whispers may say to your soul ; “ I am thy salvation ; ” — and that the Holy Ghost may bear witness in your heart, as He now spake to the paralytic sufferer, “ Son, be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee !

SERMON LIII.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

[FOR THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER.]

MICAH, vi. 8.

He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.

THESE words are taken from the affectionate remonstrance of the Almighty with his people Israel, as delivered to them by the prophet Micah ; wherein God, to reprove their ingratitude and disobedience, first, gently reminds them of the mercies which they had received at His hands ; and urges, in the second place, the easiness of that service, which only He requires from them in return. “ O my people,” are the words of the Most High, “ O my people, what have I done unto thee, or wherein have I wearied thee ? Testify against me ! For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants ; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab consulted ; and what Balaam, the son of Beor, answered him from

Shittim unto Gilgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord. Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

These two last sentences have been strangely considered, by some learned men, as part of a discourse, which passed, as they suppose, between Balak and Balaam, on the best manner of propitiating God; and to contain the question proposed by the king, and answered in these words by the prophet. But of such a question and such an answer not the slightest mention can be found, in the books of Moses; nor is it easy to say, by what other authentic writer, or by what continuance of tradition, the memory of such a fact, if true, was likely to be handed down, so as to be familiar to the recollection of the Israelites, so late as the time of Micah, who lived under king Hezekiah. It is better, therefore, surely, and more natural, to understand the mention here made of Balak and Balaam, as

referring merely to the disappointment of their hostile designs against Israel, as among God's most remarkable mercies to the chosen race; and to regard the question which follows, on the best means of pleasing God, as a natural demand of those to whom Micah bore the message of the Lord; when their souls were astonished with the greatness of His mercies; and they felt their own insufficiency by any human power to render Him any worthy service. "What have I done," the spirit of Jehovah's words may seem to run, "what have I done, O my people, that ye are weary of following my laws; that ye have turned away from having the Lord for your God? Testify against me! what greater claims can possibly be offered, than those which I possess on your love? What more could have been done, than I have done for my vineyard? Have I not brought your nation out of slavery? Have I not revealed to you My name, and the knowledge of My name, by Moses, Aaron, and Miriam? If you would know, how tenderly, how righteously I have acted towards you, recollect how I disappointed the malice of Balak, king of Moab; and how I turned into a blessing those curses, which the prophet Balaam meditated against you: why then do you refuse to render in return the only recompense of love and duty, to which your Maker, your Preserver, your Deliverer, so justly lays a claim?" "But alas," the Jews are made to

reply, “ what worthy offering is it in our power to make to God ? Who are we, — the sons of a day, whose strength consumeth like the flower of the field ; and whose utmost means of expressing our affection are confined within so narrow limits ; — who are we, that we should be able to render to God any real service ? What sacrifice can we pay Him, of which he will deign to accept ? Suppose we were to consume our whole substance in burnt offerings ; suppose we brought to His Temple a thousand rams, and ten thousand rivers of oil ; suppose, more precious still, we offered up the beloved of our souls upon His altars ; and, like Abraham, took the knife in hand to slay our sons ; yet how feeble, how useless, would be all such expressions of thankfulness to Him, whom the songs of angels celebrate, and who sitteth on the circle of the Heavens ? ”

This objection to rendering any service to God is not, perhaps, uncommon. It has been made, in every age, by such as desired to shelter their own idleness and indifference, under the pretext of the weakness of man, and the infinite distance which there is between him and his Maker : and it has been felt, in every age, by many of the devoutest servants of God ; who have acknowledged, like David, the painful inability of our nature to confer any favour on the Most High ; who, “ when they have considered the

Heavens, the works of God's fingers, the moon and the stars, which He hath ordained," have thought within themselves, "what is man, that God so regardeth him¹;" and have felt their hearts throb with conscious weakness, when they enquired of them, "what shall we render unto the Lord for all the benefits, which He hath done unto us?"² Against such doubts and such objections we have, in the words of the text, a sufficient answer afforded. The Almighty there assures us, that He will require no impossibility, at our hands; and that He hath not left us to explore, in darkness and alarm, the proper means of pleasing Him. "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

In these few words, the whole of our duty, towards our neighbour and towards the Almighty, is laid down with admirable clearness; inasmuch as all, which can be required in our society with men, may be reduced to the simple principles of wronging no one, and loving to show mercy where it is in our power: and since, in the single resolution to walk humbly with our God, the discharge of all due honour to Him by prayer, by praise, by reverence, by obedience, is shortly, but plainly comprehended.

¹ Psalm viii. 3, 4.

² Psalm cxvi. 11.

And of this I am the more anxious to convince you, because I have sometimes heard this passage urged by those, who were extremely careless in the performance of every religious duty, as if the rule of life, which is here laid down, were more indulgent, to the frailty or indifference of mankind, than that measure of duty which some serious persons enjoin. But surely, my friends, as your natural reason will teach you, that the servant, who never appears in his master's presence at all, or, being there, conducts himself disrespectfully; who never thanks him for favours received, nor ever pays obedience to his express and acknowledged commands; cannot, with common sense, pretend, that he conducts himself in an humble or becoming manner to his earthly master; so is it also plain, that, in every sin, whereby the power or majesty of God is slighted, whether it be profane conversation, or neglect of prayer, [by both of which His greatness is, in effect, denied] whether it be uncleanness, or drunkenness, whereby His image is defaced and defiled; whether it be pride, which is worshipping ourselves rather than God; or covetousness, which is, in Scripture, expressly called idolatry; by whatever action, in short, we show a presumptuous negligence of our Maker, we do, in fact, fall under the guilt of not treating Him with the honour due unto His name, or, in

other words, of not walking humbly before Him.

The services, then, which, in the words of my text, the Almighty is said to require from our hands, amount, in fact, to a general statement of our duty both to God and to our neighbour : and having thus explained them, it shall be my business, on the present occasion, to enforce those truths, which seem most obviously to follow from them. And these are, first, that the principal motive, whereby God excites us to His service, is by engaging our love towards Him. Secondly, that the only method, whereby we can exhibit our love to God, is by doing such things as please Him. Thirdly, that the service, which God thus requires of us, is infinitely gracious and reasonable. And, fourthly, I shall endeavour to explain, by what means we may best hope for ability to satisfy our Maker in these particulars.

That God has called us to righteousness, by motives addressed to our love and gratitude, is plain from every part of the history of His dealings with mankind ; from every thing which we behold around us in the world, and by every thing which we read in Scripture. By His benefits, by His mercies, by His express and positive words, He points Himself out as a tender and merciful Father. And His power is never shown, but His love is, at the same time visible

And wherefore is love displayed, but that love may, by this means, be excited in return? Ask your own hearts, if you delight in showing kindness to those who are dear to you: is it not in the hope of their affections being returned? Is not our love, in fact, the only return which we can possibly offer to God, for the benefits received from Him? And even among men, are not affection and gratitude received as a sufficient payment, from those, whose best services would, without it, be worthless? The weakest being, a child, a dog, a bird, may delight us with its fondness: and those actions, which would be, in themselves, indifferent or wearisome, can, when prompted by real regard for its master, communicate pleasure to his heart. Nor need we wonder, that God desires our services to proceed from love, since it is the nature of every being to be pleased with what resembles itself; and since, of all existing things, God is the most beneficent and merciful. Accordingly, we find, in the preface to the commandments delivered by God on Mount Sinai, that the Almighty does not disdain to urge the people to obedience by the recollection, that He had brought them out of the house of bondage. In the 5th chapter of Isaiah, He reproves their unthankfulness, by asking them, what more could have been done, than He had done for His vineyard? And, in the words of

my text, we find Him urging on the Jews the greatness of His former mercies, as the principal and sufficient reason why they should turn in repentance to the Lord. And thus is that doctrine true, which points out faith as the root of every virtue ; and thus is love the golden chain, whereby faith and works are eternally joined together ; since it is impossible to love Him, on whom we have not believed ; and since our weak and imperfect services, which cannot, of themselves, either merit Heaven, or contribute anything to the happiness and glory of our Maker, are, though worthless in themselves, accepted and rewarded by Him for the sake of the faithful love which prompts them.

But, as no works can please God, which do not proceed from faith and love ; so will not God admit of any other proof of our faith in Him, and of our love for Him, except our best endeavours to serve and please Him ; and for His sake to do good to our fellow-creatures. Is not this, saith God, “ the fast (the religious service), that I have chosen ? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burthens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke ? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house ?”¹ It is the same with every part of our duty. “ If a man,” saith St. John,

¹ Isaiah, lviii. 6, 7.

“ love not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen ?”¹
 “ Wilt thou know O vain man,” saith St. James, “ that faith without works is dead ?”² “ Why call ye me Lord, Lord,” saith the blessed Jesus Himself, “ and do not the things which I say.”³
 “ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven.”⁴

Nor, thirdly, can even the worst and blindest of men deny, that the demand, which God thus makes on our affection and obedience, is infinitely gracious. When He has done so much for His creatures, when life, and all which it offers, is His gift ; when the earth, notwithstanding all the sins and follies of its inhabitants, is full of the goodness of the Lord ; is it much, that he should claim at our hands some portion of that, which He has so largely bestowed ? But why do I talk of worldly benefits ; when the Kingdom of Heaven is opened for our reception ? why do I talk of mercy extended to sinners in this world ; when everlasting pardon is offered to those, who seek for it by the appointed means ? why do I speak of pardon, when God hath sent down His well-beloved Son, not only to forgive our sins but, in our behalf, to suffer their righteous and

¹ 1 St. John, iv. 20.

² St. James, ii. 20.

³ St. Luke, vi. 46.

⁴ St. Matthew, vii. 21.

dreadful punishment? This is an argument of love, which might defy the hymns of angels to speak of with fitting thankfulness; this is a claim on ourselves, our affection, and our service, which the active virtue of an eternal being would be altogether insufficient to repay. Would all, which man or angels could accomplish to the glory of God and His Son, be worth one drop of that most precious blood, which was freely shed for our salvation? Whatever God might have thought fit to require from us in return, would, doubtless, have been infinitely short of our stupendous debt of gratitude. Had He laid on us the same burdens of sacrifice and ceremony which He imposed on the Jewish nation, had He commanded us to offer on His altars “ten thousand rams, and ten thousands of rivers of oil;” if He had called us to sacrifice those, in whom our souls delighted, the sons and daughters of our love, in token of our thankfulness and reverence; yet still, however bare He left us of earthly happiness, the greatness of the bounty, which we have received, would shut out all occasion for murmur, and we could only say with righteous Job, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away! Blessed be the name of the Lord!”

But to sacrifices of this sort our Father lays no claim. He calls on us for nothing, which might surpass our abilities to obtain; nothing,

which it might break our hearts to offer. To do justice, and to abstain from wronging our neighbour is, at least, in the power of us all. It is not to any definite acts of bounty, which might be beneath the ambition of some, and above the power of others, but to the love of mercy that He calls us: and where this love is cherished, opportunities will never be wanting, in a greater or lesser degree, to show it forth; nor will the least display of love, the cup of cold water given for His sake, go without its exceeding reward. It is not by any acts of painful penance, but by the general temper of humility and reverence for His name, that we shall hereafter be proved as His children: and where such a temper rules the inner man, the mouth will as naturally speak from the abundance of the heart, as the hand obeys the will. And if, from the weakness of the flesh, and from the long disuse of serious thoughts, we find the formation of those inward habits of just and merciful and reverential feeling, either difficult, or, as may well be, to our unassisted strength, impossible, His grace, He hath taught us, will not be wanting to those, who seek it by the appointed means; and for the sake, and through the merits, of His blessed and most mighty Son!

If, then, we desire to please God, we know what God requires of us: and if we further seek

for ability to please Him, let us seek that heavenly strength, whereby our weakness shall be, at length, made perfect; and let us seek it, where only it is to be found, in prayer to God, in the study of His Word, and in the celebration of His appointed Sacraments. Neither by God or man is weakness, in itself, accounted a crime; but where the means of cure are mercifully provided, our blood,—if we wilfully neglect them, our blood is on our own heads; and if we perish, we perish in our folly. And that God may bless that ordinance, which I am about to administer, to the healing the broken-hearted, the giving sight to those who are blind, and the setting at liberty such as are tied and bound by the chain of their transgressions, may He grant, who was slain for our sins, and who liveth, and reigneth, for our final deliverance, Jesus, the Son of God Most High.

SERMON LIV.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

ST. JOHN, iv. 49.

Sir, come down ere my child die.

THESE are the words of the nobleman — recorded in the Gospel of to-day, — whose history will be found, if attentively considered, to contain instruction or comfort for every situation in life; and, by one and the same argument, namely, our total dependance on God, may teach humility to the happy, and hope to the miserable.

The first of these two lessons is by much the hardest. There is such a power in the human mind, of flinging off the load of burdensome and unpleasant thoughts, that seldom will the happy listen to even the voice of worldly prudence. When we feel ourselves in the present possession of so rare a thing as enjoyment, we shrink with disgust from the discovery of how weak our foundations are; and resent the intrusion of those, who would rouse us from this pleasing dream, and would call

us back from our fancied security to the cares and fears of real life.

But this is not the worst; it is indeed a great sin, when, in our prosperity we say we shall "never be moved;" but it is a far greater, when we forget to add, "Thou, Lord, of thy goodness hast made my hill so strong."¹

But the sense of dependance is, to a worldly mind, connected always with the idea of danger; and such a mind, while eager to grasp at benefits, is anxious always to drive the benefactor from his memory. And strange as it may seem, more particularly when our Benefactor is the Almighty, the greater are His favours, and the stronger claims He possesses on our gratitude, the more negligent we often become; and the greater our forgetfulness of the Fountain of all the blessings, which we enjoy. From the time of Solomon to the present hour, this is the peculiar snare of those who are rich in this world; and it is the principal reason why the conversion of a rich man was declared impossible, without the particular assistance of the Holy Ghost.

The poor, whose dependance on God is displayed in every event of life, who are maintained in hourly difficulties and dangers, by His visible help and hand, — the poor are not so liable to forget the Lord. It is the rich,

¹ Psalm xxx. 6. Common Prayer Book Version.

who receive as a matter of custom the nourishment and comforts of life; who know not want, except as they hear of it from others;—it is their more peculiar and besetting sin to be careless of benefits, the value of which they scarcely feel; and to be forgetful of that God, with whose judgements they are so little acquainted.

Such was perhaps the life, such were, at least, the probable temptations of the nobleman of Capernaum. His rank was high; he had power and riches; and the good things of this world were poured into his lap without measure. Who can wonder, then, if he, [like those angels, who, with Satan at their head, grew proud of the dignities with which God had adorned them,]—if he were lifted up against his Maker, and forgot that all this greatness and wealth were the evidence of his own weakness, and of his Heavenly Father's mercy. Do you envy this great and luxurious man? or do you forget, that there are some visitations from which neither riches nor power can save? In the midst of his prosperity, his son falls sick.

Alas, where is now his happiness! In death and disease, all human kind are on a level; and all alike are ground to the dust by the heavy hand of affliction. When those, whom we love, are about to be taken from our eyes; when they are in anguish and sorrow; when we

watch their sleepless nights; and sit silent by their uneasy bed; when the house is darkened, and our feet tread softly; and enquiries are troublesome; and the comforts of friends, a burden; when we mark their failing strength, and the fever of their parched hands; when those eyes, which before met ours, sparkling with happiness and affection, are turned on us in the agony of pain, or in the gaze of insensibility; it is then we feel how poor we really are; and how dependant are all of us alike, on the hand of Him, by whom we are pierced. How would this unhappy father reproach himself for his former trust in riches; how gladly would he now give all his wealth to purchase one hour's repose for his child; how would he recollect all his own offences; and sink into despair at the thoughts, that for his sins his son was stricken. And as hope grew fainter, how deeply would he mourn the unfitness of his child to die; — how would he lament that indulgence which had increased his faults; and that he had seldom instructed him to remember his Creator in the days of his youth, before the evil days came, and the years in which he had no pleasure!¹

Every aid and comfort, which wealth could procure, would, no doubt, be lavished in profusion; but where God will not heal, we have

¹ Eccles. xii. 1.

recourse to physicians in vain. One only hope remained to him ; he had heard the fame of the prophet, who had arisen in Galilee ; and of so many mighty works, some, b eyond all question, had fallen under his own observation. Yet we may reasonably doubt, whether this citizen of Capernaum,—that proud Capernaum which, in the opinion of its inhabitants, was raised up to heaven, and which, as Christ threatened, God had determined to bring down to hell¹,—had, before, really believed that Jesus was the Messiah. With the rest of his haughty townsmen, he had, perhaps, attributed to magic the wonderful works which he had seen ; and had laughed to scorn the ignorant fishermen and easy credulous women who attended the wanderings of so young a teacher ; so poor a sovereign, as our Lord.

But now that all other hope had failed him, this last resource occurs ; and we behold this proud and powerful man humbly following His steps whose miracles he had so long disbelieved ; bearing with patience a rebuke from one so poor as Jesus ; and obtaining mercy, at last, by his urgent and repeated entreaty. Our Lord, we find, reproaches him for not believing, unless he saw signs and wonders. Even at last, when softened by his lowliness, the Son of God determines to grant him his desire, He does not comply

¹ St. Matt. xi. 23.

with the invitation to this rich man's house ; He does not go down there Himself to lay His hands on the sick person ; but dismisses the father, with a promise that his son should recover. But when the heart is really softened by affliction, a little hope is as a light in darkness : he did hope, and was not deceived : his son was restored to him ; and he himself believed, and all his family.

Do you not already perceive, in this affecting story, the argument, which I would draw from his example ? do you not observe, that this man had taken the sure and only course to find relief and comfort in his misery ? Let us then, ourselves, in imitation of him, when we are in sorrow, or in sickness, when our own sufferings, or those of our friends, press hard on us, —let us have recourse to Christ ; and, through Christ, to God. Is the arm of Omnipotence waxed feeble ? have we now less reason, than this inhabitant of Capernaum, to address our Saviour, with confidence ? His prayers were uttered to an humble Prophet, despised and rejected, “the very scorn of men and the outcast of the people.” Ours are directed to the same Divine Person, no longer suffering on earth, but triumphant to eternity in Heaven. His wonders were then confined to the narrow bounds of Canaan, and only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel : now, the heathen are His people ; and the uttermost ends of the earth, His country. Is His

authority diminished by His absence from men? He is not absent; He is with us always, even unto the end of the world; "He is about our bed, and about our path; and spieth out all our ways:" and here, in this Holy House, where we are assembled in His name, He is present, though we have not known Him; He standeth in the midst, though our sinful eyes are not able to behold His glory. But is His authority diminished? — diminished! God forbid! yea rather is it increased and established. "All power," He hath Himself declared, "all power is given unto Me in Heaven and in earth."¹

Why, then, when you are in trouble and heaviness, why do you not call on the name of the Lord? Instead of praying to Him for relief, why do you seek comfort in what you know to be vain? It is God Himself who afflicts us: and shall we think to fly from His face, like Adam in Paradise; and hide ourselves from His warning voice, in the shades of vice or forgetfulness? Adam, indeed, might reasonably fly; for to Adam there, as yet, was no Redeemer: but if we are afflicted, we have, with God, an all-prevailing Advocate. And put the question to yourselves, as a business between man and man: had you some great and powerful friend, able to grant your every request, loving you more than life, and who had offered, actually, his life for

¹ St. Matt. xxviii. 18.

yours, would you not in your distress apply to him? would you not, knowing that he only could help you, open to him your heart and your sorrows, and entreat him to take pity on yourself, your wife, and your children?

Is it said, that the kingdom of Christ is no longer of this world; that He, indeed, is earnest for our eternal happiness; but that the care of this life is beneath His notice, and we cannot expect Him any longer to heal the sick, or spread a table for the hungry? Banish from your minds such groundless suspicions! We no longer, it is true, behold Him with our eyes, healing the diseased with a word, or with His own hands dispensing the miraculous bread to thousands; but though His Providence is not visibly exerted, yet is it no less sure and constant. He knoweth our wants, for He has felt them: He will hear the mourner's voice, for He Himself hath been a mourner. In the height of power and glory, worshipped by angels and archangels, at the right hand of His Father's majesty, God of God, and Light of light, Jesus Christ is still the same man, who hungered in the wilderness, and wept over the grave of His friend.

Is there any who can still maintain, that experience is against our supposition; that, after all, to speak plainly, our prayers are of no avail to the supply of our wants in life? Let him

call to mind the many mercies shown to him, the deliverances, which he has met with, [for, from sickness and danger, we all of us have met with many, in answer to prayers which we have, perhaps, long since forgotten]; and let him be sure, that he is grateful for mercies already received, before he venture to complain that he receives no more.

But are you deterred from prayer, because you have so often offended God; because you have shown such ingratitude, that you are ashamed and afraid to petition Him again? If this were true, who, then, alas! could be saved? If the prodigal son had been ashamed, and afraid, to return to the father whom he had used so unnaturally; he must have lingered out his life in famine and in misery. What would have become of the father and son in the history, which I am this day bringing before your consideration, — if the former had remembered his own hardness of heart, and had feared to encounter the reproaches of that Christ whom he had so long despised? So far, indeed, the objection is well founded, that the prayers of an impenitent sinner are always offered in vain. *They are*, it is most true, an abomination to God. And this is one main reason why so many prayers are offered up, which He never attends to. Prayer, to be effectual, must be always accompanied with a desire and an

effort to amend our lives. He, who knows the heart, can never be deceived with a mere lip service; or moved, by the power of some particular form of words, to grant that favourable hearing, which is promised to the penitent only. Our actions must correspond with our prayers; and our lives, as well as our lips, be holy; if we hope, that either the one, or the other, will be accepted in the sight of God.

For how can God, — consider with yourselves, — how can God be reasonably expected to attend to any prayer, but such as I have now described? Had this Jewish nobleman, while he was humbly entreating the Messiah — to heal his sick child, been, in his heart, meditating new schemes of wickedness, new plots to entrap our Saviour, or to persecute His disciples; if he had pretended reformation at the moment, and when he had received a promise of mercy, had gone back to his house, blaspheming; could he reasonably expect, under such circumstances, that the promise of mercy would be fulfilled?

There is, indeed, in the very use and intention of all afflictions, a sufficient reason, why prayers like these are ineffectual. These afflictions are the means, used by the Almighty, to move us to amendment of life; and till this amendment takes place, the end, for which they

are sent, is not answered. Even if religion were out of the question, we might know, by all which reason tells us of God, that, in all His dispensations [whether our cup overflows with mercy, or that we taste some portion of that bitterness which the Son of God drank up to the dregs,] still every thing is intended for our good; and that His judgements are nothing more than the chastisements of a wise and tender parent. But in Scripture, where the veil of mortality is withdrawn, and we are admitted, in part, to a view of all the ways and secret things of Providence, we behold in every recorded affliction the gracious meaning of our Almighty Father. Is Miriam, the prophetess, smitten with a loathsome disease: or St. Paul, buffeted by the ministers of Satan? it is only to mortify the swelling pride of their hearts, and to teach them a juster estimation of their weakness and dependance. Is the prodigal reduced to poverty, and famishing with hunger? it serves to force him to return again to the comforts and plenty of his Father's house. Or, lastly, is the darling son of the Galilean nobleman afflicted with a grievous sickness? it is the means of calling to the knowledge of Christ, himself, his father, and his family. Well might this young man, in after life, look back upon his fears, with sentiments of joy and gratitude; well might he acknowledge, that it was

good for him that he was stricken, and that God had, in very faithfulness, afflicted him.

We may suppose, indeed, that the happy spirits of just men made perfect, when the ways of God are opened before their eyes, will find a delightful subject of recollection in the miseries of the world, through which they have passed; and will trace in every misfortune the hand of God, guiding them to glory. "This or that providential sickness," (they may say in recurring to what has passed in their earthly life,) "this providential sickness first changed my heart, and disposed it to seriousness and religion. This failure in my property, or this unkindness of the world, taught me to trust no longer in uncertain riches, and to put my confidence in no child of man. By the death-bed of such or such dear friends, the anguish, which I felt, induced me to imitate their virtues, in hopes of one day meeting them again. And all these sufferings, and sufferings like these, served to wean my affections from the world, and to place my heart and my only treasure in heaven." Such we may conceive to be the meditation of many a happy being now in Paradise, whose earthly life we have accounted misery, and his end without honour. Why then do we, whose afflictions are thus mercifully meant, resist, like froward children, the medicines intended to heal us; or envy those,

whom God has thought proper to treat after a different manner? Milder remedies may suffice for some, while for others more painful means of cure are required. But all must have their share of bitterness; and this bitterness is more equally distributed, than some of you, perhaps, will readily imagine. But whether mild or severe, the Heavenly Physician of our souls best knows what remedy will suit us: and we should be cautious how we murmur at His judgements, lest He withdraw His remedies, and leave us to the perverseness of our own incurable hearts.

But, if His hand is grievous, why do we make it necessary? Why do we persist in the sinful habits, which these judgements are intended to cure? Get rid of the disease; and you will no longer need the bitter remedy. Pray, then, whenever afflictions overtake you, pray not only to be delivered from their immediate weight, but from the sins which originally brought them on your head. And pray, too, that, whatever misfortunes God may please to send you, He may send, at the same time, patience to support them, grace to learn from them a knowledge of yourself and of God, and hope to cheer your passage to that eternal happiness, where you will be made to understand how much the Lord loveth whom He chasteneth, and how good it hath been for you to suffer here.

If ye draw this lesson from your present calamity; if, though ye lose this whole world, ye preserve, at last, your promise of the world to come, “Blessed are ye that mourn, for ye shall be comforted!”

SERMON LV.

TWENTY-SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

ST. MATTHEW, xviii. 35.

So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

THE occasion, on which these words were spoken, you have heard in the Gospel of the day; when Peter inquires of his Master, how far and how frequently he was bound to forgive a sinner, who promised amendment.—“How often,” are his words, “shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? until seven times? I say not unto thee, until seven times,” was our Lord’s reply, “but, until seventy times seven!”

The feeling, which prompted Peter’s question, is very natural to the mind of man, even of the best and most forgiving man: for there is not, among the circumstances, which make up our notion of an injury, any one more aggravating or more difficult to pardon, than the recollection, that this is not the first time that amendment

has been promised, or our long-suffering abused. And mankind, even the wicked and injurious part of mankind, are so sensible of this, that they are restrained, for the most part, by shame from asking or expecting forgiveness, in cases of such black and repeated ingratitude.—When the Apostle therefore put the case of an offence seven times repeated and forgiven, he meant it doubtless as a very extreme one, and altogether unlikely at any time to happen. And, as the Jewish doctors have, in one of their most famous books, expressed an opinion, that, after the third repetition of a fault, the injured person was not called upon to pardon; St. Peter might well suppose, that he, in doubling this number of times, was quite liberal enough in his allowance, till our Saviour's answer corrected him. In truth, however, neither the question nor the answer must be understood as gauging the degrees of long-suffering, or applying a fancied measure to the injuries and mercies of mankind. Seven and seventy and seventy times seven were all common ways with the Jews—of expressing any great and uncertain number; and, taken according to language now in use, St. Peter's demand will be, “whether there be not some possible degree of offences, beyond which the doctrine of forgiveness cannot be carried;” and our Lord's reply will only amount to the general assurance, “that no such case

can be named ; but that, how great and how numerous soever the offences against a Christian may be, he is bound to forgive them all.”

And this, as His manner was, He illustrated by the following parable, wherein he compares God's dealings with men in the Gospel dispensation, to a king, who pardons a great public defaulter ; but afterwards recalls his gracious intentions, on finding that the man, to whom he had shown this mercy, was himself unforgiving and inhuman.

This is the outline of the parable ; and in this you will observe, that there are four main truths laid down, each of which I shall, in its turn, consider.

First,—That mankind, that is, all and each of us, are in the eyes of God, and when He reckons up our trespasses and sins, debtors to Him, (for our sins are considered as a debt), to an extent, beyond all that we have any means of discharging ; and that we are, each of us, therefore, justly liable to the severities which the Law of God denounces against us.

Secondly,—That in pity of this our wretched and helpless condition, God has, by Jesus Christ, His sufferings and His Gospel proclaimed a general pardon to us all : and by the regeneration of the waters of Baptism, forgiven us our debt, and taken us again into His favour.

Thirdly,—That the benefit thus bestowed upon us is so great and undeserved, our sins are so hateful, our debts so enormous in the eyes of God, that the greatest injury which we can possibly receive from our neighbour, is no more, in comparison, than a hundred pence are to a debt of ten thousand talents;—that is, than a few shillings, to above a million of pounds, in our English money.

Fourthly,—That if we are so ungrateful to God, and so unjust to our neighbour, as to persecute him to the utmost for the little sins in which he offends *us*, we must expect, that the same measure will be dealt to ourselves, as we deal to our fellow servants; and that God will withdraw the pardon, which He has promised, for the far greater crimes in which we have offended him.

To prove the first of these propositions, namely, that we are all of us, in the sight of God, insolvent debtors; and that we, of ourselves, are utterly unable to satisfy the justice of our Maker, is but to go to school again and learn our Catechism anew. We all of us have heard, or read, how Adam, by his disobedience, first lost the love of God; and we must, (if we are acquainted with our heart), we must be sensible, how utterly unequal even the best of our endeavours must be, to recover that Paradise which he lost. — And in the history of this

servant, we see a wonderful and striking correspondence with that of Adam and his offspring. — This servant had been raised, it should seem, by his royal master to a very great pitch of trust and power; since the very circumstance of his owing so vast a treasure implies, that such had been confided to him.—And so was Adam lifted from the dust and made to dwell in Paradise; and so did both Adam and the servant lay waste and dissipate the goodly treasure committed to their care; and both alike incurred the high displeasure of their Lord; — and as, according to the custom of those days, the debtor, his wife, and even his children, were sold as slaves, to satisfy the demands of his creditor; so do all the descendants of the first man partake in his curse, and become liable to the punishment of death.

And secondly, that this debt of ours was beyond all our means to discharge, is plain to every man, who considers the immensity of God's blessings to us, and our inability to merit, by our services, even the least of them. What can we do for God? wherein can we oblige Him? yea; rather, how do we not, by our daily provocations, add to the weight of that debt of death, to which we were subject, even at our birth, and in consequence of our father's offence? But God, eternal glory be to His name, has, for Christ's sake, forgiven us the debt; —

we are by His death redeemed from our former sins ; and, by His resurrection, brought back to life, from the prison of the grave.

Thirdly, the greatness of the debt thus pardoned may be understood, from the purity of God's nature, and from the heavy ransom, which His justice required. He would not pardon men, till He was moved by the eloquent sufferings of His own beloved Son. And if we reckon up in our hearts not only the sin of Adam, which alone was a sufficient reason for God's hiding the tree of life from us all ; but our own personal and habitual sins, we may wonder, surely, that God hath not often repented that He had made man to dwell on the earth ; and that He suffered a single sprout or sapling of so foul a tree to survive, either when Adam and Eve first fell under their righteous sentence, or when all the world, save only a single family, were destroyed in the waters of the flood. We, therefore, that is the whole race of mankind, are debtors to God, both collectively as the offspring of Adam, and singly and individually, as in our own persons, having done many things to offend him ; and in all these collected sins of our race and species, when they are united in one view, and regarded at the same moment, when all the murders, all the adulteries, all the thefts, all the impieties which have been committed since the world begun, are at once laid before the eye of

Him, who beholdeth at the same moment, the past, the present, and that which is to come ; the load of sin is enough, we may be assured, to sink the world in flames. This, then, is the load, and this the curse, from which the death of Christ delivers us : and what, in comparison with this, are the insults, the wrongs, the little causes of offence, which we receive at the hands of men ? What but an hundred pence in comparison with ten thousand talents ?

If, therefore, in the fourth place, we are so far forgetful of the example of mercy shown us by God, and of the benefits which we have ourselves received, as, while we hope for so great indulgence ourselves, not to show any indulgence towards our own fellow servants, when they have done anything to offend us, or when they are, in the literal sense of the word, indebted to us ; — if, in short, we treat our brethren as this ungrateful servant treated his, we must expect, nay, our own feelings and our natural sense of right and wrong will lead us to expect, that our great King and Master will, in the Day of Judgement, deliver us to the tormentors. For observe, when the pardoned debtor, had, by his cruelty, again provoked the anger of his Lord ; when, having been once ransomed, he slights the mercy shown him, and neglects the salvation which was in his hands ; — a far heavier punishment overtakes him, than that from which he

was at first delivered. Before, he was to be sold; but now, the tormentors seize him. It is dangerous indeed, and unreasonable, to carry too far the parallel between the parable and the reality; but a difference here seems to be made, between the curse of the Law and the punishment of the Gospel Covenant:—inasmuch as a simple death is inferior to protracted suffering; and as the reward of eternal happiness is greater than a prosperous abode on earth. Surely, however, as to the Christian much has been given, of him much will be required; and he, who knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, shall be punished with many stripes.

The conclusion, then, and moral, of the whole is this; that, if we are thankful for the pardon promised us through Jesus Christ, in baptism; if we hope that it shall be confirmed to us in the great Day of final account,—we are obliged, by every tie of gratitude and interest, by every recollection of past, or hope of future, mercies, to have compassion on our fellow servants, even as God has had pity on us; to forgive the trespasses and debts of others, as we hope that our debts and trespasses may be forgiven; and to show to them that favour which we hope ourselves to find, in the time of our utmost need and most tremendous danger, in the hour of death, and in the Day of Judgement.

This is the plain unequivocal doctrine of

Scripture on this subject, so plainly expressed, that one would think that no room was left for cavil or difficulty. As however such difficulties have been sometimes raised, I will take this opportunity of considering the principal of them; and of taking away every possible pretence for neglecting so positive a duty as that of forgiveness.

The first objection, which is usually made, is that, if absolute forgiveness of all injuries is commanded, all civil government, and all security of property, must fall to the ground; since we can neither punish criminals, nor resist evil, nor enter into actions at law. To this I answer, that, though revenge is forbidden, self-defence is not so:—and God, who gave his servants permission, nay, commandment, to provide themselves with weapons, certainly could not mean to forbid their use in a just cause. But there is a wide difference between resistance and revenge,—it is lawful, and it is my duty, that, if a man assaults me, I should beat off his blows—yea, if I strike him down in saving myself, his blood is on his own head. The famous passage in the Gospel, which seems to forbid this, will be found, if compared with Christ's command to St. Peter, to relate only to the time of His abode on earth; and while His disciples were sent forth, as sheep indeed among wolves, but not without the special and present protec-

tion of their Shepherd. But, though self-defence be allowed, the case is altered, if, when the injury is over, and I have no more to fear, I seek occasion to do mine enemy some mischief, in return. This is revenge, and revenge of the blackest nature; and all hidden and protracted ill will, all spite, and long remembrance of a former offence, partake of its detestable character.

It is the same with the defence of our property, as of our persons; if a man be in wrongful possession of any goods or money of mine, — I may, and, in some instances ought, to endeavour, by all fair and lawful means, to oblige him to give it back. But, if in real truth he have not wherewithal to pay; if restitution be indeed impossible, and I, knowing this, condemn him to lie and rot in jail, I may be sure, that, as I imitate even to the letter the conduct of the wicked servant in the parable — so the day will also come, which is to doom me, like him, to the tormentors. But it is said, that the punishment of criminals by kings and magistrates will be, on this principle, forbidden. To this I answer, that their case is widely distinct from other men:—they are the guardians of civil society; the protectors of the peaceable and many, against the violent few: they are for this very thing the ministers of that God, to whom vengeance belongeth; and they must not bear the

sword in vain. Nay, more; when God pronounces sentence of death against certain crimes, the magistrate in inflicting this punishment on those who do so offend, is nothing more than an instrument in God's hand:—it is the law which sentences; the magistrate only gives the blow. And in cases where the public peace, and the property of our neighbours, is threatened, as well as our own, it is the privilege, and the duty, of all of us to assist the magistrate in bringing the offenders to justice. When, however, it is ourselves alone who are concerned; when we alone are injured, or in danger; and when the question lies not between the offender and the public, but between him and us, (and this is a point, on which we should be very cautious not to flatter our pride and passion), I do not say, that we are always called upon to forgive; but of this I am very sure, that forgiveness is the safer side. And in every doubtful question, and wherever you are not sure that your eagerness to right yourselves is not, in some degree, mingled with revengeful feelings;—consider, for God's sake, consider, the risk which you run, if you are wrong. Ask yourself, whether you had not rather bear a trifling loss in this world, than hazard by an over-eager pursuit of justice, your expectations in the world to come? And if your tempter should urge you with the fear, that forgiveness now will only provoke your

adversary to future injuries, let this be your answer and your rule of life :—“ What my enemy may hereafter do, I know not ; sure I am, that my forbearance is the likeliest way to mend him ; and if his heart be not altered by my present mercies, they will one day be as coals of fire upon his head. But whatever he may attempt against me, this I know, that I am in God’s hand, not in his ;—and, under the protection of God, I have no need to fear his villany. It is in compliance with God’s will that I spare him now ; and God is the guarantee of my future safety. At all events, if I must choose between this world and the world to come, my determination is already made ; and I will not, for an hundred pence, hazard my ten thousand talents. Welcome loss, welcome suffering, welcome contempt in this world ;— a crown of glory is laid up for me for evermore ; and my ways shall be hereafter justified, even by those fools, who account the life of a Christian to be madness, and his end, without honour.” May feelings like these be ever present in our hearts ; and may our lives be such, as that we may say, with confidence, in our prayers, every day : Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us !

SERMON LVI.

TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

ST. MATTHEW, xxii. 21.

*Render therefore unto Cesar the things which are Cesar's ;
and unto God the things which are God's.*

IN the Gospel for this day, there are contained two very important subjects of consideration. First, the wisdom and dexterity, with which the Son of God eluded the snare of His enemies ; and, secondly, the practical instruction to be drawn from His reply. The first of these may increase our reverence and devotion for Him who was the Wisdom and the Word of God ; in whom dwelt the glory of the Godhead bodily : and the second will be found a safe and necessary guide for our behaviour both to God and man. To understand, then, the wisdom displayed by Christ, and the answer by which He escaped His enemies' malice, it will be necessary to look a little back into the former history of the Jews, and into their political state at the time of our Saviour's preaching.

I need not tell you that, in ancient times, and

for the space of many hundred years, the Jews had been governed by kings of their own appointment, and of the family and lineage of David ; till God, being provoked by the sins of the nation, and having long and vainly called them to repentance by His prophets, — Isaiah, and Jeremiah, — gave them up at length into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon ; who burnt their city and the temple built by Solomon ; put out the eyes of their king, Zedekiah ; and carried all their priests and nobles into captivity. Under this yoke, and servants in a foreign land, they remained, as you may learn in the books of Daniel and Ezra, upwards of seventy years ; till Cyrus, king of Persia, whom Isaiah had foretold by name, restored them once more to their native country, and permitted them to build and dedicate another temple, though far less glorious than the former.

From that time, under the government of their high priests, and amidst various changes of fortune, sometimes paying tribute to the Persians, sometimes to the Greeks, sometimes defended by the wisdom and bravery of Judas Maccabeus and his brethren, and sometimes a prey to the most cruel discord and violence of foreign tyrants and domestic parties, they maintained, however, for above four hundred years, a sort of doubtful liberty ; till the Romans, whose character and situation in those times

very much resembled the French in our day¹, in a very cruel and treacherous manner, and pretending, at first, that they were their friends, and desirous of restoring them to liberty, took Jerusalem by surprise, and secured it by a very numerous garrison. This took place about thirty years before Christ was born; and sixty-two, or sixty-three, before the conversation took place which is related in the present Gospel. At that time the country was divided into various governments and districts; partly subject to two brothers of the name of Herod, the sons of that wicked old Herod, who murdered the children at Bethlehem: and partly, to a governor sent from Rome, of whose soldiers and their centurions frequent mention is made in Scripture; while, within the walls of Jerusalem, and under the awe of a Roman garrison, the high priest and elders of the people retained about the same authority as the mayor and corporation of an English town.

The power, which the Romans thus possessed, [for the Herod family were only their tools, and supported by their authority,] had been as cruelly exercised as it was unjustly obtained: and Pontius Pilate, in particular, who was then governor, was one of the greatest tyrants, of whom mention is made in history. Under these circumstances, it may be well supposed, that the

¹ France, Republican and Imperial: 1792—1815.

nation was desirous of change, and ready to rise in rebellion : and there were no men so forward in the many riots and disturbances, which took place, as the powerful religious party who were called Pharisees, a name, which answers in its meaning to our word, dissenter, or separated.

Of the particular points of faith and practice, which distinguished this people from the other Jews, I have spoken on a former occasion. All that I need now repeat is, that, by their solemn manner, by their high pretensions to godliness, by their affected particularity of dress and behaviour, and by the number of scribes, that is, preachers and schoolmasters, who had joined their party, they had acquired great power among the women and the common people ; and, though in truth there were among them many pious and well meaning men, they had in many instances abused this power and popularity, to the most dangerous purposes of pride, covetousness, and sedition.

For these sins, both John the Baptist and our Saviour had often severely reproved them ; and they were therefore among the bitterest enemies both of our Lord and of His forerunner. And, in the present instance, in order to bring destruction upon Christ, they had the meanness, as well as wickedness, to join themselves to a set of men, whom, of all others, they most hated and despised. The Herodians, or friends and

followers of the Herod family, were zealous in the cause of the Roman emperor; and were, therefore, looked upon by the Pharisees, as traitors to their country and their religion. Most of them, besides, were Sadducees, as Herod himself was: and a Sadducee was despised and hated by the opposite party, as being little better than a heathen. Both Pharisees, however, and Herodians were enemies to Jesus; and the two parties, therefore, forgot for a while their own ancient quarrel; and joined their cunning to destroy Him, whom they both hated alike and feared. Their plan for ensnaring Him was the following.

The Roman emperor (Cesar was his family name and title) had lately laid a tax upon the Jews, which produced great tumult and murmuring: the Herodians, being zealous for obedience to the court; — the hot and fiery Pharisees moving the people to immediate rebellion; and the wiser and more moderate recommending patience, and the waiting for a better opportunity of getting rid of their foreign masters. In the seventeenth chapter of Deuteronomy, God had commanded, saying, “One from among thy brethren shalt thou set king over thee; thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother.”¹ And, therefore, the Pharisees maintained, that to

¹ Ver. 15.

show obedience and pay tribute to a heathen and a foreigner, was not only base and slavish, but in itself wicked and forbidden by God's laws. On the other hand, it was said, with better reason, that, in former times, the Jews had paid tribute to the heathen kings of Babylon and Persia; and that far from blaming such obedience, the prophet Jeremiah had forbidden them to rebel against Nebuchadnezzar; while Moses also had commanded them to seek the peace of those countries whither they should be led into captivity. All agreed, however, that, whenever the Messiah should appear, all authority would rest on Him; that the government would be on His shoulders; and that He, and He only, would be the rightful Lord of Israel. The question thus proposed to Christ was, whether the Roman emperor were properly their governor? and whether a Jew might, with a safe conscience, pay tribute to him? And this question, [answer it which way He might] could not fail, they thought, to bring our Saviour into trouble. — If He answered, No, the Herodians were at hand to drag Him before Pilate, for a traitor against the emperor. If he answered, Yes, the Pharisees would have exclaimed — “ If you were really the Messiah, you yourself would be rightful king of the Jews; but, as you allow tribute to be paid to another, it is plain, that you give up all title to be that

person whom you have pretended to be. If you are the Christ, the King of Israel, why are we to pay tribute to Cesar? If you are not, why thus continue to deceive the people?" And they probably would have ended, by persuading the multitude to stone Him as an enemy to God's law, and a traitor to his country's freedom. Christ, however, by the wisdom of His answers, disappointed the malice of them all. He tells them, in the first place, how He read their inmost thoughts, and pierced through the dark disguise of their pretended zeal in His cause, and their hollow flattery of His person. "Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? show me the tribute money; and they showed Him a penny." He does not offend the zeal of the people, by at once reminding them that resistance was hopeless; that their own sins had brought this foreign yoke upon them; nor does he at all enter into the question — what right the Romans had to reduce Jerusalem to bondage. But He does remind them, by the head of Cesar on their money, that, however his power was gained, their nation had for sixty years submitted to it quietly; and that his money passing among them, as lawful coin, was a sufficient evidence against themselves, that they owned him for their lawful sovereign. Among the Jews, indeed, and other eastern people, this argument holds more strongly by

far than it would do among ourselves. Here, owing to our great commerce, foreign coin or private tokens may by chance appear in circulation; and be taken, and paid, without any idea of acknowledging a foreign king's authority; — but those people show a very great jealousy in this respect; and the Turkish nations, whom the Russians have conquered, steadily refuse, at this day, to take any Russian money, lest they should, by so doing, acknowledge the Russian emperor to be their lawful sovereign. The answer, then, of Christ will be as follows; — and it is necessary to understand it so, to avoid the dilemma of his either offending the Romans, or giving up His title of Messiah:—‘Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? What has the Messiah to do with the dispute between you and Cesar? Is My head on your money? is My kingdom of this world? Choose whom you will for your worldly ruler; pay tribute, as you may, to your worldly conquerors. My Father hath not made Me in such earthly matters, to be judge or a divider over you: but while Cesar demands your tribute, as emperor, I myself lay a far more extensive claim to your faith, your love, and your reverence. The stamp of Cesar is on your money; his image and his titles are there; but you, and he and all mankind were created in My image and likeness; when in the image of God, My power

created man. To Cesar, tribute and your earthly allegiance may be due ; but know, O man, thy body and thy soul are mine ; and while thou renderest to Cesar the things which are Cesar's, forget not to render to God the things which are God's.'

Our Saviour, then, in these words, first, establishes the entire separation between His spiritual kingdom and the government of this world ; and declares, that they are so distant that their claims can, in no respect, clash or interfere. We must not make the name of God a pretence for wronging Cesar ; nor must we, in the service of Cesar, forget our still more solemn obligations to God : and if this had been duly considered ; if it had been always remembered, that Christ's kingdom was not of this world ; much blood and misery might have been saved to mankind ; and many wars prevented, which ambitious men have undertaken under the cloak of religion. While, on the other hand, if the great and mighty of this world, and those who serve them, had always borne in mind, that God, as well as Cesar, claims some part of their care ; that religion was to be attended to, as well as politics ; if their duty to their Maker were but half as well considered, as their worldly hopes, and their schemes of worldly utility ; how much peace of mind would they themselves reap in the

adversities, and at the close, of life ; how much happiness, and prosperity would follow to the nations under their care.

But the instruction to be drawn from these words is not to be limited to the public affairs of nations ; or to the relative obligations of religion and government. In this world, there are many Cesars : and our king, our country, our wives, our children, our friends, our business, and our worldly interests, — all with whom we acknowledge a connection, or which, in this world call for our exertions, or our care, — are all implied in the one command of rendering to Cesar the things which are Cesar's. Not only as prudent men, not only as endued with natural affection, are we bound to be active and diligent in the performing of our worldly duties ; and in rendering honour, tribute, obedience, fatherly care, love, and charity, to our sovereign, to our superiors, to our families, to our kindred, to the poor ; but as Christians, we may not, and must not, neglect them ; since, though these are called worldly duties, yet is our duty to our neighbour commanded in the same breath, and upbuilt on the same divine authority, as the duty, which we owe to God. When, therefore, you meet men with high pretensions to faith and holiness, in whose lives this faith and holiness do not shine forth, to warm and cherish their brethren ; — if you meet a zealot in

religious matters, who is careless of his duty to his king and country, unkind to his friends, and idle in his worldly business; be sure that this man's religion is far too imperfect to be acceptable to God. God will not split and separate his commandments; He will not suffer us to obey any two or three which we chuse, and leave the rest unattended to. He, who bids us render to God the faith and honour due to Him, requires also at our hands, that the ties and duties of the world should, in no case, be overlooked, or forgotten. Away then with those, who pretend that a faith alone in the merits of the Son of God has power to lead us into Heaven! Neither our faith, nor our prayers, nor our miracles, had we the power of working them, could set us free from a single duty of those which we owe to our neighbours. "If any man bridle not his tongue, that man's religion is vain¹;" if any man do not labour to provide for his own, that Christian is worse than an infidel.²

It is, then, a fatal error to suppose that our strictness in rendering unto God the things which are God's, can justify us in neglecting those things which belong to Cesar. But it is an equally deplorable, and still more common mistake to fancy that, by leading mere harmless and useful lives in this world, by being industrious, civil and sober in our dealings with men,

¹ St. James, i. 26.

² 1 Tim. v. 8.

we may be excused from the faith, the holiness, and the prayers, which properly belong to God the Almighty. For, how, my friends, can we in common sense expect that God will suffer us to make any such compromise; or that He will allow us to neglect Him, because we are upright in our dealings with mankind?

What should we ourselves say to a favourite son, who was always undutiful to his parents, yet well-behaved to every one besides? Should we excuse him for his ingratitude to ourselves, because he made himself useful to others? or should we not rather say, that the unkindness, which he showed to those who most strongly claimed his affection, was aggravated and made worse by the general good character which he supported in other things? "To others," might the wretched parent exclaim, "to others, my son is kind; — to me alone, hard and undutiful; and every good action which he does to his neighbours, only serves to increase the bitterness of the conduct which he maintains towards me!" Exactly such are those who boast themselves in the kindness of their hearts, and in the accuracy of their dealings among their brethren of earth; while God alone, the Great Parent and Benefactor of all, receives no share whatever of their love, their honour, and their thankfulness.

My friends, while you are careful and troubled

about many things, forget not the one thing needful. While you are zealous for your king and country, forget not Him, by whose Almighty blessing that country and that king must stand. While you are labouring hard for the support of your families, cease not to pray, that God would make your labour prosperous! While you are anxious to pass honestly through the world, and to render to every man his lawful due; recollect, that you yourselves, your hearts, your affections, your faith, and your prayers, are the purchased property of Christ. Our bodies bear the stamp of His image; our souls are redeemed by His blood; our hearts are prepared temples, wherein the Holy Ghost should dwell; and our best love, our warmest gratitude, our purest and most ardent services, are all too little, when we seek to pay the debt of a Christian to his Creator and Redeemer; and to render unto God the things, which are God's.

That we may so love Him, and so strive to keep His commandments, as that we, who now bear His earthly image, may be superscribed with the promises of the Gospel, and bear, at length, in our immortal bodies, the image of God eternal in the Heavens, may He grant, whose purchased flock we are, and who shall claim us as His own in the great day of final reckoning.

SERMON LVII.

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

ST. JOHN, xiii. 34.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

THESE words were, as you have heard this morning¹, spoken by our Saviour, the Lord Jesus, when the time was at hand for His leaving the world and returning unto God the Father; and when, in His last solemn meal, and melancholy discourse with His disciples, He prepared their minds for the loss which they were soon to undergo; and communicated to them those truths, which, as of the greatest importance, He had reserved for that awful occasion which was most likely to fix them in their hearts the most deeply. The words of dying men almost always are long remembered. When the friend, whom we have loved, and who has loved us, is taken away; when we miss, at every moment, that company, which was so delightful to us; that counsel, which was so profitable;

¹ The 24th Sunday after Trinity falling on Nov. 21.

that power, which yielded us defence ; and that friendship, which administered to our comfort ; we naturally look back, with eager and fond recollection, to the time, when we last enjoyed these blessings ; and bring back, by our daily regrets, the memory of each look, each word, each expression of kindness, each counsel of wisdom, which fell, at that time, from one so dear to us. It is, therefore, that all parents desire to give advice and warning, on their death-beds, to their children ; and we may well understand, not only that the apostles must have treasured up in their minds, with more than common regard, whatever commandment was given at such a time by their Divine Master ; but that our Lord Himself would not have chosen such a time to discourse with them on unnecessary or trifling matters : and that the commandment, which He now gave, must needs have been one, on the performance of which He Himself set the highest value.

Accordingly, we find, in fact, that this rule of loving one another was the one particular, of all others, on which the apostles who, best of all men, knew their Master's mind, and, more than all other men in the world, were guided by their Master's spirit, — it was, I say, the particular duty, — on which the apostles, in their epistles, lay the greatest stress ; as that, which not only contained in itself all the different

duties which men owe to each other, and different men to different persons,—but as that, which was the proof and outward sign,—the only sign, which God would accept of, or by which we might ourselves judge of our own condition before Him,—of the faith, the love, the honour, and the obedience, which God Almighty expects from His creatures. Thus, we are told by St. Paul that “Love fulleth the law.” “For,” says he, all these commandments, “thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness, thou shalt not covet, and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”¹ In the same way, and with the like high commendations, he speaks of charity; which, in its proper meaning, is only another name for love; preferring it, not only to the power of prophesying, and of speaking with tongues, and of working the greatest miracles, but to faith itself, as that which, without it, is nothing. “I show unto you,” says he, after having reckoned up, and compared with each other the remarkable and distinguishing gifts and graces, which the Holy Ghost had, at that time, bestowed on the church, — I show unto you, he goes on, a more

¹ Romans, xiii. 9, 10.

excellent way than any of these. “ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal :” * * “ And though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing ; and though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”¹ And then, after giving a description of charity, which shows, as I have already observed, that charity is only another word for love or brotherly regard, he expressly gives the preference to charity over both faith and hope, as well in this world, as in the world to come.

Nor is this all ; for, as St. Paul even places our love for each other at the head of all duties, and even in a higher rank than those duties, such as faith, which we immediately owe to God Himself ; so St. John makes it a necessary proof of our having a proper feeling towards God, that we should have in our hearts, and should show forth in our behaviour, a proper feeling towards each other. “ If a man say I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar ; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen ?”² But it is needless to multiply examples of that, which is the leading and the

¹ 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

² 1 St. John, iv. 20.

plainest lesson of every part of the New Testament. The religion of Christ is, throughout, a religion of love; even as the life of Christ was, throughout, a pattern of it. "Peace and goodwill," the fruits and signs of love, were proclaimed by the angels when He was born. To show what manner of persons He would have His disciples to be, the two first, whom He called to follow His steps on earth, were, literally, and by the course of nature, brethren. Love to mankind, love wide and free as the dews and the sunshine of Heaven, was the lesson which He taught in His parables of the lost sheep, of the good Samaritan, and in His awful description of the last judgement. Love for each other was the mark and token, whereby He desired that His disciples should be distinguished from all the people in the world: and of the doctrine, which He thus taught, He was Himself the brightest example, which ever beamed on earthly eyes. It was love for mankind, which brought Him down, from the bosom of His Father, to take the likeness of a man and the form of a servant: it was love for mankind, which led Him during three years of affliction, to bear with the neglect, the scoffs, the persecution of His unthankful and blinded countrymen: it was love for mankind, which made Him pour out His soul in a death of torments: and it is love for mankind, which causes Him, at the

right hand of glory, still to watch over His people ; still to plead with His Father, in our behalf, His own merits and His own sufferings ; and still to offer up, as from Himself, the prayers, which we send to the Throne of Grace, and which, without His mediation, would be fruitless.

This is, however, no matter of controversy among Christians. On the necessity of a holy and brotherly love for each other, we are, as a general principle, all agreed : and it is a principle, in respect to which, as every man desires to meet with it in others, so every man is anxious, at least, to have the appearance of it in himself ; while, in truth, it is in itself so agreeable to the best and strongest feelings of our nature, that even those men, who possess it least, would be sorry, though it were only on their own account, and though no one but themselves were acquainted with the deficiency, to think that, in their hearts, they really wanted it. Yet, as it is not enough for us to confess the necessity of this most excellent principle, without really possessing it, and showing forth its fruits in every part of our lives, and in every circumstance, in which we are linked together with our fellow creatures ;— and as, also, there are many counterfeits of it, whereby men deceive most fatally their neighbours, and their own souls ; it is my wish to hold up to you such a true picture of that love of each other, which Christ requires in His

disciples ; as that you may be enabled to compare with His Divine measure, your own hearts and behaviour ; that you may perceive where you are wanting ; and may judge yourselves, lest God should judge you : and that you may take home with you from this holy place, hearts sensible of your imperfections, and desirous of amending them ; hearts softened towards those, whom you have injured, or who have injured you ; — hearts warmed in their favour, to whom you have, as yet, been cold ; and inclined to bear with those, against whom you have been hitherto impatient. And this I shall attempt to do, by calling your attention, in the first place, to that temper of mind, which deserves the name of love ; and the consequences, which such a temper will naturally produce, on the general course of our behaviour.

“ Love,” said the Apostle, “ is the fulfilling of the law : ” and beyond all question, where there is not love, the law of God cannot be fulfilled. But the contrary is also true ; and it may also be said, that, where the law of God is not fulfilled to the best of our power, there can be no true love in our hearts, either of God, or of our brethren. For, when we say that we love any persons, we must mean, if we have any meaning at all, that we desire to serve them, and to do them good ; — that we rejoice in their happiness, and are grieved in their grief

and suffering ; and when this is the case, it is as plainly impossible that we should willingly do them an injury, or knowingly pass by any practicable occasion of doing them a pleasure, as that we should put ourselves to unnecessary pain, or deny ourselves any comfort, to which we are fairly entitled ; and from our indulgence in which no harm is likely to happen. Nor can we pretend to a general love for all mankind, on any easier terms than that of our being free from all desire of working evil against any particular person whatever, — and our being ready and desirous to do good to every particular person, whom we know, or who is in need of our services. The desire must be shown by the deeds ; because the desire will naturally, more or less, bring forth the deeds : and therefore, where no deeds of love are, we are sure that no real love can exist. And we are, all of us, ready to reject with scorn and indignation, whatever pretences of kindness and good-will are made by others to ourselves, unaccompanied by some outward proofs of the inward desire to serve us ; — far more, when the outward behaviour of the person, who pretends this regard, is visibly and plainly of a kind to cause us pain and inconvenience. And, if this rule be applied, in its full length, to measure the straightness or crookedness of our actions ; and if our professions of a love for mankind are weighed in this impartial

balance, it will appear that many men, who are little inclined to doubt their own kindness of heart, are, in truth, very far indeed from feeling a genuine love for their fellow creatures; — and that not only the murderer, not only the thief, not only the false witness, not only the covetous, and churlish, and violent man, not only the dishonest waster of his neighbour's goods, or the slanderer of his neighbour's character, — but the fornicator, and adulterer, the drunkard, and Sabbath breaker, the spendthrift, and the idle, the lover of pleasure, and the hater of control, the discontented and envious, the unclean and sensual person, are all as much sinners against their neighbours, as they are against their God; — as much transgressors of the law of charity and good-will, as they are of the law of godliness and piety.

To begin with those, who, of all others, most profane the sacred name of love; who have it most in their mouths; and even use it as an excuse for their contempt of the laws of God, and man — the fornicator, or adulterer — how dwelleth the love of their neighbour in them? Let those answer, whose beds they have defiled; whose trust they have deceived; whose peace they have destroyed; — whom they have led from innocence and happiness to shame and sin, to disgrace and grief unspeakable, perhaps to murder, certainly to danger of everlasting fire:

or let themselves point out, if they can, any case, in which the indulgence of unlawful passion is not likely to lead to such consequences, as I have now reckoned up; — and let them ask their own hearts, what claim they have to the praise of having truly loved their neighbour? I do not wish to aggravate their guilt, — I do not wish to confound the great difference, which there is, between different cases; and the excuse which may be made for extreme youth, and for a want of knowledge and consideration; but I am sure, that there is no sin, against which youth have so much need to be warned; or which, take the world throughout, is the cause of so much misery in it:—and it is, therefore, that I am anxious to paint to you the man, who goes on in a practice of adultery or of fornication, in the way that he deserves to be painted, — as wanting in all true love of God, or of his fellow creatures; — as selfish, deceitful, and cruel.

I now come to the drunkard, or spendthrift; a sort of men, to whom not only they themselves, but the rest of the thoughtless world, are too apt to give the name of being kind-hearted and loving; inasmuch as their vices seem to arise from their taking pleasure in the company of their neighbours; and since, being pleased themselves, they often, in their social moments, show a desire to make themselves

pleasing to others. Are these offenders against the law of love and brotherly kindness? I answer — look at home! and when you have seen the wretchedness, which every drunkard, whether rich or poor, every spendthrift, for no spendthrift can be long rich, every idle and profligate member of society, however kind and good natured in his outward manner, inflicts on those, who ought to be dearest to him, or whose happiness is most in his hands, — his wife, his children, his servants, his employers, and his creditors, — then say, if you can, that such a person is no one's enemy but his own; or that his transgressions are against God only (alas! that this should ever be pleaded as a ground of excuse), and not also against his neighbour!

I will suppose a man, however, so remarkably situated in the world, as that he has no wife, no family; that he has no need to labour to support himself; and has nothing to support, but his own vile person; which he therefore indulges to the extent of his power, in gluttony, in drunkenness, in what is called good fellowship, regardless of all the duties which he owes to God; a Sabbath breaker, a mere lover of pleasure. Against whom, besides God, has this man offended? I answer, against those friends and companions, whom his example leads to neglect their business, their families, and their

souls ; against those families and creditors, who suffer by their extravagance and folly ; against his country and his fellow Christians, who have a right to his good example ; against the poor, who have a right to expect from him a part, at least, of those superfluities, which he spends on himself in selfish folly and wickedness. Is such a man as this kind-hearted ? Is he even honest ? Disguise it as we may, there is nothing in this world so unfeeling, so insensible, to a pure and generous love, as the man who lives only for his appetites.

Are these examples sufficient ? Or is it necessary for me to go further ; and prove to you, that the tale-bearer, the whisperer, and idle gossiper, are among the enemies of their neighbours : that the discontented and envious person cannot be said to love those in whose prosperity he does not rejoice ; and that all, who dishonour the character of their Christian profession, are sinners, thereby, against the best and greatest of benefactors, who laid down His life for those who thus ill-treat Him : — Him I mean, who is not only God, but Man ; — the Lord Jesus Christ ? O Lord, faithful and true, Thou whose life, whether in earth or Heaven, has been throughout one course of love, unchanged, unequalled, how little love hast Thou received, in return, from those whom Thou didst not disdain to call Thy friends and brethren !

But if, in all these ways which I have mentioned, we transgress the law of God commanding us to love one another, where, it will be said, can love be found on earth? Or how shall we make that principle spring up in a soil so corrupted? For this the rules which I shall give you, are only three; but they are sufficient for the purpose; and they are such, as if duly, and universally followed on earth, would make earth itself a paradise.

In the first place, be considerate. Do nothing without thinking with yourself, whether by thus acting you are likely to injure any body; or to give to any one just cause of complaint, or a likely occasion of sinning. This will alone keep you back from many hurtful indulgences; and, by making you thoughtful of your neighbours, make you the more inclined to love them. Secondly, be not wearied in well doing; and do not distrust your own power of doing good. Some men have more opportunities of showing kindness; some fewer;—but all have some. A cup of cold water, when we have nothing else to give, will not be given in vain: and not only do we, by this means, lay up for ourselves, in a greater or less degree, a store of blessedness hereafter; but we increase, at the present moment, our charitable and friendly feelings by our charitable and friendly behaviour.

Lastly, however, and above all, I am ready

to allow, that, in our present fallen state and corrupted nature, no true, no lively, no active and self denying love can take rest, except it be derived to us from above, **God is love**: **God is the fountain and spring**, from whence all those streams descend, which refresh with comfort and loving kindness our passage through this earthly wilderness. **God is Himself that living flame**, from which is kindled whatever glow of friendship, of pity, or of charity we find in our own breasts, or perceive by its fruits to be in the breasts of our brethren.

To **God**, therefore, let us make our prayer, that, with all other gifts and graces of His Holy Spirit, He would bestow on us this, the greatest and most blessed of them all, — the gift of kindness and brotherly love; which can reprove the faults of our neighbours, without insulting them; can rejoice in their prosperity, without envying them; can restrain ourselves, in the fear of hurting them; and deny ourselves even just and lawful comforts, in the hope of being better able to help them; which sanctifies our daily prayers, our daily conversation, our daily and honest industry, and leads us, out of thankfulness to that Son of God, — to endeavour, all we can, in every action of our lives, to do good to those, whom that Blessed Son has called His brethren. To Him, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, praise, and glory!

SERMON LVIII.

TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

JEREMIAH, xxiii. 6.

*And this is His name, whereby he shall be called, THE LORD
OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.*

THESE words, and the whole of the passage, from which they are taken, are, by both Christians and Jews, and by Christians of every sect and party, acknowledged to relate to that great Deliverer, whom, under the name of Christ, or Messiah,—the anointed, that is, of God,—the Christians, on their side, believe to have already come; and the Jews, on the contrary, continue still to look for. By an attentive examination, therefore, of the meaning, which they convey, we may be enabled to form a tolerable judgement of the character and actions of that Person, whom, it is allowed on all hands, the Holy Ghost here promises and describes; and we may determine for ourselves to what religious system they are suited best, whether to that of the Jew, the Unitarian, or the usual confession of Christian. And that you may be

enabled more impartially to determine this question, I will first set before you the doctrines of these three several parties, as we find them laid down by themselves, and in their own published writings.

The Christ, or Messiah, whom the Jew continues to expect, is a person of the following description. They believe, that, in the latter days of the world, a man of admirable wisdom shall be born ; descended from the Royal family of David ; who shall go round to all the nations of the world, where the Israelites are now in banishment ; and shall, like Moses, persuade, or compel, the Rulers of the Gentiles to let his people go, that they may return to their ancient land. They there, as they suppose, having rebuilt their Temple, and established anew their ancient form of worship, are to be exposed to many dangers from the envy of different nations, who are to make war on them and invade their country ; but they are at last to be delivered from all their troubles, by their own courage and discipline, under the generalship of the same anointed Prince, who had, at first, brought them back from the north country and all countries whither they had been driven. At length, all the world are to become Jews like themselves ; and to send every year gifts and sacrifices to the Temple of Jerusalem.

The faith of the Unitarians is, that the Mes-

siah is already come ; and that Jesus of Nazareth was, indeed, the Saviour, whom the prophets of ancient times foretold. But they believe, that, when Christ did come, He was nothing more than a man, like other men ; that he was born, [they, many of them, would persuade us,] not of a virgin, but of Joseph and his wife Mary : and that He was sent by God to preach to mankind the necessity of a holy life, and the fact that all men shall hereafter be raised from the dead, and be rewarded according to their works, whether those works have been good or evil.

The difference between these opinions and that, which, on this subject, by far the greater number of Christians hold, I hardly need explain to you. We believe, that not only the character of the Messiah was fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth ; but that this Jesus, though formed in fashion as a man, and though truly man — so far as His body and His reasonable soul were concerned,—was, in other respects, far more, and more exalted. We believe Him to have been God Himself, proceeding eternally from the Father ; and, in some mysterious manner, eternally one with him ; by whom the Father had at first created all things ; and Who now, for the fulfilment of the Father's merciful counsels, came down from Heaven ; and became a man among men, of the substance, and from the womb, of a most pure virgin. We believe, indeed, no

less than the Unitarians, that our Lord was a preacher of righteousness, and of the resurrection; but we believe, that these were not the principal ends of His coming; which was,—by His obedience, and by His merits, and by the atonement, which, through His blood, He made for sin,—to take off from the world that curse, under which, from the time of Adam, the world had been.

These are the several opinions, which have been entertained, respecting the person and office of that Messiah, who was to be born into the world: and of whose coming, Jeremiah is, in the present passage, by all persons and parties, allowed to testify. Let us now examine the meaning of that language, in which Jeremiah has described Him.

“Behold the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch; and a king shall reign, and prosper; and shall execute judgement and justice in the earth. In His days, Judah shall be saved; and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name, whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

Now here we may first observe, that the Jews, indeed, who expect in their Christ an earthly monarch; and we, who believe that Christ is a Divine and Heavenly Monarch, may both maintain, that, according to both our systems of belief, the words and purport of the prophecy

are, though in different ways, fulfilled. They suppose, that Christ will be a man, like ourselves ; and a prophet, like unto Moses : but that, still more than Moses, He will be a mighty conqueror and king. We suppose, that Christ has from all eternity been, together with God the Father, and the Holy Ghost, the Creator and Governor of the world ; and that He now sitteth in His human form, at the right hand of His Father's Glory ; awaiting that day, when He is to return again to earth to judge the universal world, with all the nations which inhabit it. But as to the Unitarian, who believes that Christ was nothing more than a prophet sent from God ; who admits in the present condition of Christ, and wherever He resides, no power to rule the world, no privilege of doing good to His church, no reason for His being the object of prayer for future, or of thanksgiving for present, benefit ; in what manner can he suppose this prophecy to have been fulfilled in Christ ? On earth, and in His human nature, He certainly was very unlike a king ; and if they allow Him no other nature than that of mere manhood, it is apparent that the words of Jeremiah will not apply. So that either Jeremiah, whom they themselves allow to have spoken by the Holy Ghost, is wrong ; or their system of religious belief must, of necessity, be mistaken.

But further, "in his days, saith the Lord,

Judah shall be saved." Now here, again, both the Jews and ourselves, have good reasons, though of a different kind, for applying the prophecy to the Messiah. They suppose, that He will save them from their worldly troubles. We believe, that He has saved all such as believe on His name, whether they be of the tribe of Judah or no, from the burthen of their sins, and from the intolerable wrath of God Most High. But what salvation, according to the Unitarian notion, can Christ, — supposing Him to have been a man like other men, a prophet, and no more than a prophet, — what salvation has He wrought, for the Jews, or for any other people? It has been said, that, by bringing us a more perfect law of morals, He taught us to avoid sin; and therefore saved us from it: — that, by teaching the resurrection of the dead, and by Himself rising again the third day, He saved us from that fear of death, which we should, otherwise, have naturally lived under: — that, lastly, having abolished the law of Moses, He saved us from a troublesome load of ceremonies, which incumbered the Jews before. But, though the purity, which Christ required of His followers, was greater, indeed, than the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees; yet neither does He Himself declare, nor will an accurate comparison of His doctrines with the moral parts of the Law of Moses, induce us to believe, that the former

covenant was, in these respects, either in itself deficient, or excelled by the Gospel of Christ. There is, indeed, so far as I have observed, no single commandment, or direction for the conduct of life, given in the New Testament, which is not also contained in the Old: and though many of these are laid down by Christ with greater clearness, and with a beauty and touching eloquence, which no other prophet has equalled, yet is not this enough to entitle Him to the lofty name of Saviour and Redeemer.

In like manner, it is certain, indeed, that, by the resurrection of our Lord, we are more absolutely convinced of the truth of His doctrine — that all mankind, shall, in like manner, be raised,—than we could have been from the mere dictates of reason, or from the hints contained in the Jewish law. Yet is it certain, that the resurrection of the dead was not, in our Saviour's time, a new discovery. Of his countrymen the Jews, by far the greater part believed it, as thoroughly as we do; and even the Heathens, though they were ignorant, that the bodies of men were to rise again, yet were they also persuaded of a life after this; wherein the souls of all men were rewarded, according to their deeds in the body. And these lights, imperfect as they were, have been, and are, sufficient with men of virtuous lives to overcome the fear of death; and to produce, even without

a belief in the Christian revelation, the same, or nearly the same, effects, which, as the Unitarians pretend, it was the exclusive errand of Jesus to accomplish. The superior clearness, therefore, and certainty, which the preaching and resurrection of our Lord have communicated to the duties and hopes of mankind, though sufficient to establish Him as the greatest of prophets sent by God, are not sufficient to make good His title as the Saviour of Judah, and of the world.

With still less reason, however, are we told, that our Lord obtained the title of Saviour, by removing the burthens of the Jewish Law. For, in the first place, this will not entitle Him to the name of a Saviour; so far as we Gentiles are concerned; since neither we, nor our fathers, were ever under that burthen; and no one can be saved from an evil, to which he was never subject. But secondly, at what time, and in what manner, does the Unitarian suppose that Christ abolished the Jewish Law? Certainly not by His preaching; for I need not tell you, that there is no single expression of our Lord, while on earth, wherein He commands, or authorises, mankind to throw off their obedience to the ceremonies enjoined by Moses. Certainly it was not by His example; since we read, in every page of our Gospel, sufficient proofs of His own undeviating attention to all the commandments given on Mount Sinai; and

even to the smallest circumstances, which Eternal Wisdom had given to His chosen people. It must, then, have been by His death. But how can the death of Christ have released mankind from the obligation of those laws, which God Himself had given, unless that death were,—what we must surely believe it to have been, but which the Unitarians will not allow,—a sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of all mankind; by which all other sacrifices for sin, (and the ceremonial Law of Moses was a system of sacrifices only,) were superseded and rendered unnecessary?

Again, however, the Prophet goes on to inform us, that the Saviour, who was to come, should bear the title of “THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” Now here both the Jews and Unitarians must needs be exceedingly perplexed; inasmuch as neither of them allow, that the Saviour foretold by the Prophet was to be any other than a mortal man, a prophet like Elias, or Moses. But the Hebrew word, which is, in our English Bible, rendered, “THE LORD,” is in the Hebrew, no other than the High and Holy name of GOD Himself, the most solemn of all words—JEHOVAH. You may take it indeed, as a general rule throughout the Old Testament, that, wheresoever the word “LORD” is printed in capital letters, you would always find on looking into the Hebrew Bible,

that the word there written was JEHOVAH. And for this difference, between the translation and the original work, the following reason is given. The later Jews have a fancy, that this name of JEHOVAH is so sacred and awful, that it could never be spoken, excepting by the High Priest once a year, without the sin of taking God's name in vain. And, accordingly when, at this day, they read the Scripture in their Synagogues, wherever the word JEHOVAH is used, they say ADONAI, or LORD, in its place. But the learned men, by whom our English Bible was translated, had been instructed in Hebrew by the Jews; and were so far moved by their example, as to feel the same anxiety, with their teachers, to prevent this name from being commonly spoken. Instead, therefore, of writing "JEHOVAH," they have written for the most part "THE LORD:" but they have written it in capital letters that the Lord of Heaven and Earth might be distinguished from all His creatures.

Accordingly, we regard the present verse of Jeremiah as proving, to the confusion not only of Jews, but of those pretended Christians who deny the Divinity of Christ, that the Messiah, who was to come into the world, must be not only man, but God. Nor can it be urged with reason, in reply, as some have attempted, that this awful name is not in the present passage,

given to the Saviour, whose coming Jeremiah foretells; but to that Judah who was to be sacred: and that the same name is here given to the people of God, which is, in the thirty-third chapter of the same prophecy, here given to the city of Jerusalem. For, first, the 16th verse of the 33d chapter is, as Bishop Pearson has shown, more properly to be rendered not “Jerusalem shall be called the Lord our Righteousness,” but “He, who calleth Jerusalem, is the Lord our Righteousness.” And, secondly, it is not only said, in the present verse; that Judah shall be saved, but that Israel shall dwell safely. So then there are two nations, who were to enjoy the protection and help of the Messiah. But if Judah be meant by this title—the Lord our Righteousness,—then must Israel be intended likewise. And if so, it would not have been “this is the name whereby he shall be called:” but “this is the name whereby *they*, both Judah and Israel, shall be called.” Turn it as we may, the present passage must always remain unconquerable by those who deny that Jesus is GOD and LORD: inasmuch, as it is allowed, on the one hand, that He is the Messiah; and since the Messiah, on the other, is here evidently called JEHOVAH.

But, further, not only is Christ called in the words of my text,—the LORD, or JEHOVAH; he

is also called "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." Now here is another circumstance, which as neither Jews nor Heretics can easily explain it away, must entirely overturn their opinions; inasmuch as they deny, that the blood of Christ is a sacrifice, or satisfaction, for the sins of the world. They deny that we are justified by His death. Yet here the words of Jeremiah do most plainly assure us, that, by some means or other, the same Man, the Messiah, whom he calls "the LORD," and who is thereby proved to be also GOD, shall, in His own person, be our Righteousness. But by what possible means can either man or GOD become the righteousness of other and sinful creatures, unless He suffer, in their stead, the punishment, which is to discharge the wrath of the Almighty; or, in their stead, obey and fulfil the law, which the Almighty has given? But what possible way is there, in which one being, whether human or divine, can make another being righteous, that is free from sin, unless it be, either by proving him innocent of the faults, which had been laid to his charge; or by obeying the laws, on the behalf of the offending person; by taking his faults on himself; and by suffering, in the sinner's stead, his punishment? But to prove mankind not guilty before the judgement seat of GOD is, on the very face of it, a vain attempt: it, therefore, follows, that

it is, by the imputed merits and obedience, and death of Christ, that we are cleansed from sin, and made righteous in the sight of God.

We conclude, accordingly, against all opposers of the Faith, that, if these words of the prophet Jeremiah be true, we are called upon to acknowledge in Christ a mighty God, and a most merciful Saviour ; a blessed Advocate, who hath pleaded, in our behalf, His own infinite merits and perfect obedience before His Father ; a pure High Priest, who hath offered up his own life to undergo the just punishment of sin, on our behalf ; a spotless Lamb, on whom the Lord hath laid the iniquities of us all ; by whose stripes we are healed ; whose blood hath washed us clean from the deep stain of our offences ; in whose grave our sins are hidden from the eyes of God ; and by whose resurrection we shall be also quickened to everlasting life and happiness. Wherefore, having this holy hope, that Christ is become our righteousness, let us, by every action of our hearts, our souls, and bodies, by every grateful word, and every affectionate feeling, every deed of duty, show forth our faith, our love, our thankfulness. And, above all, while to the utmost of our power, we never cease to serve and praise Him, let us remember, that, after all, it is Christ, who is our righteousness only ; that the best of our services possess no merit of their own ; and that, be it

when it may, that we go before the throne of God, we must go there as helpless guilty creatures, unless we can plead, with His mercy, the blood of His beloved Son; and unless that blessed Son Himself shall be our friend in the hour of trial.

Pray, then, to Him, and in His name to God the Father, that our souls may in that hour be found washed in the Blood of the Lamb, and guests not unfit for that Heavenly marriage feast, at which the faithful of every land and age shall find their places ready!

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