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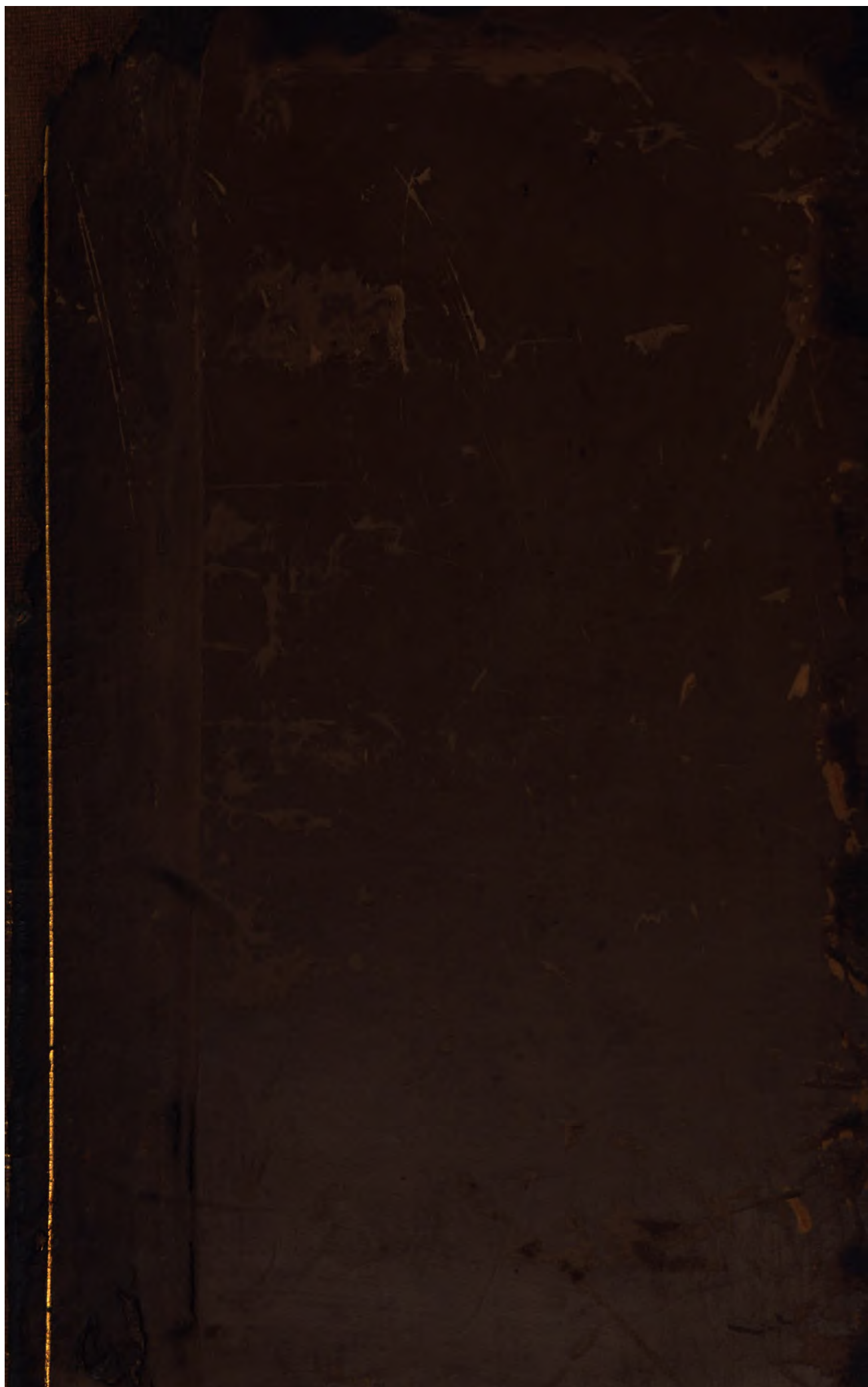
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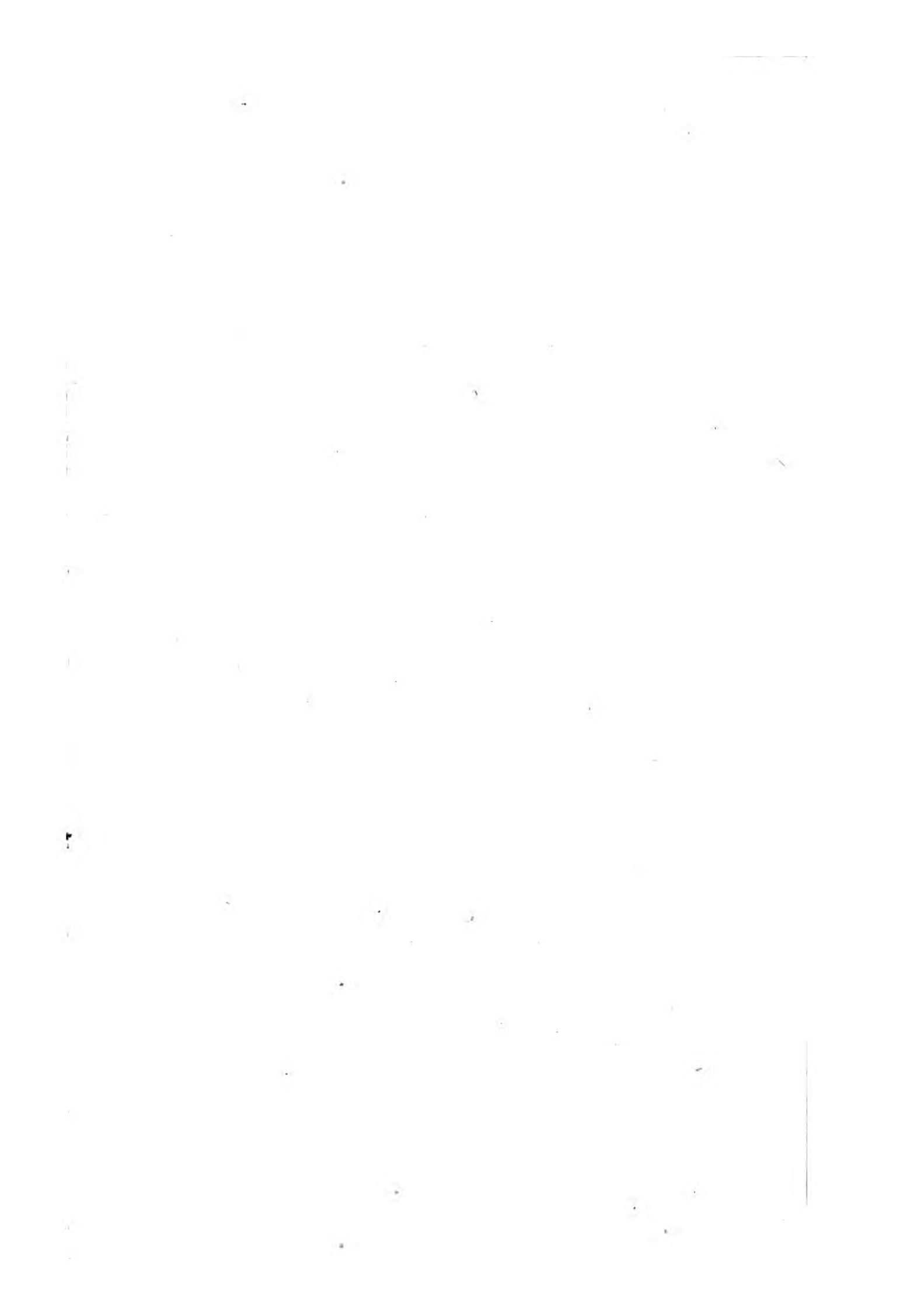


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37.

740.



SERMONS

ON

THE LESSONS, THE GOSPEL, OR THE EPISTLE,

FOR

WEEK-DAY FESTIVALS;

AND ON OTHER OCCASIONS;

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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SERMON I.

CHRISTMAS DAY.

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God, who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.

THERE is a consideration which may have, perhaps, occurred to many of you, and which has been often used as an excuse for unbelief by the Jews, by the Heathens, and even by some who, having been suckled at the breasts of Christianity, have turned against that bountiful instructress, the liberty and reasoning powers which derive their strength from her. By such scoffers as these it has been sometimes objected that “it seems strange, that, if the coming of Christ were necessary to the salvation of the world, His birth should be delayed so long; and when, at length, the day of salvation came, that its benefits should be spread so partially. Why,” say they, “was man created in need of such help? or why, when he needed it, was not the succour as immediate, as the necessity was urgent? Why did not Christ bring salvation

into the world as soon as ever Adam had fallen? Why were four thousand long years of sin and misery and ignorance allowed to cover the race of mankind? or why was a twilight of revelation made to the Jews, and to the Jews only, while the rich and renowned and learned countries of Greece, and Persia, and Rome, were doomed to sit in darkness, and to languish under their Creator's displeasure? That small and stubborn nation of Israel, — why were they favoured above all their fellow men? and when the Sun of Righteousness at length arose, when, after ages of expectation, the promise of a Redeemer was performed, why was the light confined to so small a portion of the world, as that which now professes Christianity? Why were not truths, more precious than the light of day, diffused like the daylight universally? Why has not Christianity dispelled the darkness of the Indian nations, or pierced the wild deserts of Africa and America? If the faith be necessary, why is it offered to so few? If it may be dispensed with, why is it offered at all?" Such are the questions, which many unbelievers have brought against the faith of Christ. I will examine them in order; and it is my hope, — by the help of His grace, and by the Holy Scriptures, and by that reason which He has dispensed to mankind as a natural witness of His power, "the candle," as Solomon calls it, "of the Lord," — by these helps,

I trust to make it evident, that the conduct of Providence, which they blindly condemn, has been perfectly agreeable to the rules of human justice, and is a degree of mercy beyond the utmost point to which human love could attain.

When Adam had once transgressed the covenant which entitled him to a happy and immortal life in Paradise, on no principle, either of reason or justice, could he claim from God a deliverance from those evils which clung to his nature, and which by his own fault he had incurred. "But," the objector will answer, "his fault itself might have been prevented; God might have made him a more perfect being." And what then? If God had made him an angel, have not the angels also fallen? It is vain and idle to speculate on what might have been: every state of existence must have its temptations and its dangers. Mount as high as fancy can dare, we must stop short of perfection; and, unless God had taken away the freedom of choice, and had reduced men and angels to the level of plants or of machines, his rational creatures, being free in their will, and imperfect in their faculties, must have been liable to error, to sin, and to suffering.

"But, granted that Adam might fall without blame to the Divine mercy or justice," the unbeliever will reply, "it was cruelty on the part of Providence to delay the remedy of his fall so

long ; Christ," says he, " ought to have been made man, and,—as His death was quite as necessary to our salvation as His birth,—to have been sacrificed, immediately after Adam's transgression." What, immediately, when none were in the world but Adam and Eve, or perhaps their infant children? For whose instruction would he then have lived or suffered? How, in the infancy of the world, without some subsequent revelation, was the memory of such important truths to be preserved? How would those nations, [who, without the inspired help of Moses, would have lost all traces of their origin, or of their creation]—how would they have been informed of the history of their redemption, or the ground-work of the faith which was to save them? Instead of this, the birth of Christ was deferred by infinite wisdom to a period when every thing favoured the introduction and perpetuation of a new religion ; a period of learning and civilised manners, when a profound peace, the longest and most general ever known, had left more leisure for inquiry ; when one language, the Greek, was understood in most countries ; and when one and the same form of government, the same spirit of intercourse and curiosity, animated and united the whole of the human race. Above all, the attention of mankind had been raised by the events foretold by the prophets ; and their faith was confirmed by

finding these events accomplished in the person of their great Redeemer; who now, in the fulness of time, appeared in the world, adorned and made ready as an altar, to display the virtues, the power, and the sacrifice of the Lamb of God who was to take away the sins of mankind.

And, as to those generations, who are said by this delay of the Messiah's coming to have been given up to darkness and spiritual barrenness, let it be remembered, that this darkness and barrenness were the fruits, the bitter fruits, of their own crimes and follies. With sufficient reason to prove the existence of a God, with sufficient tradition handed down from father to son, to prove His unity, His goodness, and His justice; with the blessings and beauties of creation to move their love, and with the examples of the fall and of the flood to excite their fears, if still they could turn from the truth, and multiply vanities to themselves, and load their consciences with foul and fruitless superstitions; was God, in justice or even in mercy, to be expected to interpose still further? Whom had they to thank but themselves, if, when they knew God, they glorified Him not as God, but transformed their glory into the image of corruptible man, and of four-footed beasts, and of creeping things? And on whom but themselves could the accusation rest, if God turned his face in anger away from such abominations, and abandoned them to their

own perverted and corrupted hearts, their vile abuses, and their detestable superstitions?

Enough of mercy for mankind, if the way to salvation, however late, was opened; free and undeserved enough the Grace of God, at whatever time and with whatever limitations given. But it must be observed that this objection of the infidel is without sufficient foundation not only in reason and justice, but in mere matter of fact. The ancient ages of the world were not so entirely deserted by God as to be without some knowledge of His name, some participation of the benefits of redemption. For the same God, who in these last days hath spoken unto us by His Son, did, in former times, besides the dictates of natural religion, the evidence of creation, and the ordinary blessings of rain and sunshine and fertility—also, visit mankind by the ministry of angels; and at divers times, and in sundry manners, spake unto our fathers by the prophets.

We shall find, indeed, on an attentive consideration of the Scriptures, that, wicked and rebellious as the inhabitants of the earth have been, impious to God, and unnatural and unkind to each other, yet God has never ceased to love them; nor ever entirely withdrawn from them the light of His countenance. His voice has still been heard, calling mankind to repentance; and, in various manners, either by dreams or visions,

or by the ministry of angels, He has instructed holy men in His will, and sent them forth to reform and enlighten their brethren. Such was Enoch, the seventh from Adam ; such a preacher of repentance was Noah ; and, in after times, Abraham, and Melchisedech. Job was a prophet dwelling in the farthest parts of Arabia : the Sybils are believed to have been inspired women, in these western parts of the world : Balaam, the Assyrian, though a wicked man, was still a prophet of the Lord ; and Moses was the first of a long line of servants of God, who warned the Israelites of sin, and foretold the time and manner of the promised Messiah's coming. For we are not to suppose, that all those wonderful displays of power,—those miracles, those prophecies, the peculiar interest, which the Almighty took in the establishment and preservation of the commonwealth of Israel,—were all intended for the benefit of that small and stubborn nation only. He wrought, as He Himself tells us, for His own name's sake ; He made use of them as a means of instructing, in His own good time, every nation on the earth. For this it was He founded them in miracles ; for this, He selected them from the world, and revealed His name to them ; and fenced them off from pollution, and from the contagion of idolatry, by signs and wonders, by singular and unsocial rites, and by His own immediate government and superintendence. That the Jew

was more favoured, did not make the Gentile unregarded: the abundance of the Jew made not his neighbours poor: far otherwise, he was a witness of God's power, a register of His prophecies, and a depository of His gracious intention to redeem, at some future period, the whole human race. For this, he was preserved; for this, instructed; and by these exclusive privileges, these extraordinary laws, and these still more wonderful exertions of Almighty favour, the flame of truth was preserved on its Israelitish altars; hidden, indeed, but safe, unpolluted by earthly fire, and unextinguished by earthly violence; till, at the appointed moment, its rays burst forth in victorious splendour, a light to lighten the Gentiles, as well as the glory of God's people Israel.

For all the ceremonies of the Jews, their religious writings, their history and their government, had a prophetic reference to the coming of our Lord. The rock from which the water flowed, the brazen serpent, the ceremony of sacrifice, their religious hymns, the declarations of their holy men, were all vain and unintelligible, except as they related to Him. Till He came, they were involved in mystery; till the real High Priest appeared, the ornaments of the Tabernacle appeared arbitrary marks; and the words of the prophets, only obscure poetry. He it was, who explained the meaning of the whole; who removed the veil from the face of Moses; who showed

Himself the heir, by fulfilling the conditions of the testament; by proving that the law was only His forerunner; and that “in the volume of the book it was written of *Him*.”¹

And while this former establishment of the Jews was thus the surest mark and confirmation, that Jesus was the destined Messiah; so, in all those points where the light of reason or that of Moses fell short, it was He who supplied their deficiency. He brought to light eternal life; He freed mankind from vain fears, and from troublesome ceremonies; and taught us to place our hope in a patient continuance in well doing, sanctified by an earnest faith. He did more (to cut off all objection of the infidel)—by His one oblation of Himself once offered, He atoned for all the repeated sins and involuntary failings of mankind; by His merits, He embraced all past and future generations; and from Abel to the Maccabees, and from the first martyr, Stephen, to the Christian who died but yesterday, the just have lived, and shall live, by Him.

If it be objected, which is the last argument of the unbeliever, that the revelation is imperfect; that many nations of the world are ignorant of it; I answer, that, in the ordinary progress of nature, the means are given to man, and he himself is to use them. The seed, the iron, and the bodily strength, are, indeed, the gifts of Provi-

¹ Psalm xl. 7.

dence ; but we are to employ them ourselves ; we are ourselves to turn up the ground ; to construct the tools, and to sow the grain ; and it is only by our well-directed labour that the blessing of a harvest is bestowed. And thus it is with religion ; planted on the earth by God, it is by human exertions it is to be diffused. We are commanded to contribute our endeavours, every man in his station, to convert the heathen ; and, if we are slothful or indifferent, on us, and on us only, be the blame ; and not on that God who hath sent us forth into the world to preach the Gospel to every creature.

But here, again, if the case be fairly examined, the statement of the unbeliever is unfounded ; the progress of Christianity has been more rapid and more triumphant, than any religion could have attained without Divine protection. When we consider its Divine Founder as, on this day, cradled in a manger, and housed in the common stable of an inn ; when we reflect on His humble rank — on His want of means or followers, and on the poverty and simplicity of those twelve poor fishermen, by whom He was to convert the world — when we consider this poor and weak beginning, are we not filled with wonder and reverence on knowing and feeling that we ourselves are Christians ; that, at a distance of three thousand miles from the place of Christ's birth, and of eighteen hundred years after that birth

had taken place, we have still heard the tidings, and preserved the memory, of salvation. When all Europe and America, all the civilization and power and wisdom of the world are Christian, can we doubt, because the corrupt and ignorant nations of Asia, or savages elsewhere, have either not yet heard, or, having heard, have rejected, the Word of Life? or do we despair that even on these the light may shortly shine; and that God, by whom all prophecies have been brought to pass, may fulfil this also; and hasten, perhaps, the blessed time when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea?

Having thus vindicated the time and manner of the revelation made by Christ at His coming, I must conclude by entreating you to consider how important those truths are; and how deep they ought to sink into our hearts. If, as appears, the attention of mankind, from the first beginning of the world, were directed to the Messiah; if prophets foretold Him; and holy men, in every age, desired to see His day; how thankful ought we to be, that God has been made manifest to us? and how careful to keep the sayings of so wise and wonderful a counsellor? Other ages of the world received their laws by prophets or by angels. Christians have for a master the Most Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. If every word,

which was spoken by angels, failed not, how much less “shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which, at the first, began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and gifts of the Holy Ghost?”¹ Hear Him, ye poor, for He will make you more than rich. Hear His voice, ye rich, for He was made poor for your sakes. And if ye will hear His voice, hear Him to-day! while yet He calls you by His ministers, by His Holy Word, by His blessed body and blood, and by the yearly celebration of His coming in great humility to the world. And, at His second coming, in might and majesty and terror, may we stand accepted in His sight, through His power who alone can save, God the Almighty Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

¹ Hebrews, ii. 3, 4.

SERMON II.

ST. JOHN THE EVANGELIST'S DAY.

ST. JOHN, xxi. 22.

If I will, that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.

ON one of the numerous occasions, recorded in Scripture, of conversations which the Disciples of Christ enjoyed during forty days with their Master after His resurrection, the words of my text were, as you have this day heard, addressed by our Lord to Peter.

To him, indeed, in consideration of the deep repentance and sorrow which involved him in consequence of his denial of Christ, our Lord was, after death, graciously pleased to give a more than common encouragement; and to address, more particularly to him than to the rest of the Apostles, his words of comfort and exhortation.

He now, after encouraging him to a diligent performance of his duties as an Apostle, had prepared him for a speedy release from the cares of this world, and foretells, that his death would be violent and painful. St. Peter was, in fact, not

many years after, crucified in a cruel and unusual manner, with his head downwards.

While our Lord was foretelling this painful death of one of His dearest earthly friends and most constant attendants, it happened, we are told, that St. John, the disciple who was, of all others, the most attached to our Saviour, and whom, for his mild and amiable qualities, the Son of God loved most tenderly, was standing near* to Peter. With him, there is reason to believe, he maintained a warm and intimate friendship. So much, at least, is certain, that during the latter part of the history of our Lord, the names of these two disciples are almost always mentioned together.

When St. Peter, for instance, is desirous, at the Last Supper, to learn the history of him who was to betray his Master, it is to St. John only he applies to ask the question. When he follows Christ to the judgement of Caiaphas, St. John, alone of all the disciples, follows close behind him ; and, by his acquaintance with the High Priest, being, probably, a richer man than Peter, he introduces him into the house and into the Hall of Council. When the joyful news of Christ's resurrection is brought by the holy women to the amazed Apostles, it is John and Peter who run together to examine the tomb. When Peter returns to his employment as a fisherman on the Lake of Tiberias, John, too,

accompanies him : and when Peter had received the prophecy of his own unjust and painful death, though resigned to his own fate, he still is anxious for his friend ; and eagerly demands of our Saviour, what will be the end of John :— “ what shall this man do ? ”

The answer of our Lord is remarkable, and has given rise to many questions in the Church ; He replies, as it were reproving Peter for his curiosity, “ If I will, that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee ? Follow thou me.”

The early Christians, so early indeed as St. John's own time, supposed that these words contained a promise that the beloved disciple should never die, till the return of Jesus Christ to the world. And so firmly was this opinion rooted, that, long after the decease of John and his burial at Ephesus, the elders watched his tomb with a religious care ; and were tempted, as we are told, to believe him only in a trance for a season.

St. John himself in his Gospel alludes to, and contradicts, this fruitless expectation. He says (and he was surely the best judge) that he never understood Christ as promising so extravagant and, to a good man, so unfortunate a privilege. For, surely, to a man like St. John, such a lingering and protracted existence could never be called a blessing ; to one who could expect on earth nothing but tribulation and torture, it was,

certainly, better to depart and to be with Christ. It was, surely, far better to leave a world of labour, of sin, and of sorrow; and to enjoy that rest which the Spirit revealed to him in his banishment at Patmos, in the presence of his Friend, his Master, and his God.

St. John, then, it is certain, never expected, from the words of Jesus, that he was to remain on earth, till the period of the Day of Judgement. But most have thought, that Christ by these words intended only to convey to John, that his life should be prolonged till he should see with his own eyes the vengeance of God; till all the judgements, which our Saviour had foretold, should be brought upon the people of the Jews. For, though Christ did not return in person, yet did He certainly return in power; yet was it certainly His Providence which took so dreadful a revenge on that rebellious nation, and which destroyed those murderers and burnt their city with fire. And therefore is it, that, when He had been relating all the miseries which were to come on Jerusalem, He saith, “This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away; but my words shall not pass away.” And in another place, “There be some standing here,” He saith, “that shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God come with power.”

For sure it is, that many persons were living then, who survived when the anger of God began to be poured out upon Jerusalem. St. John, in particular, who was then but young, and lived to an exceeding great age, survived these troubles : and by relating these prophecies to the Christians in the country, persuaded those in Judea to flee unto the mountains ; and, by this hasty departure, to save themselves from the judgement which was about to overwhelm the land. And who could doubt, when such destruction came to pass as the world had never known before,—when all circumstances joined together to produce misfortune and punishment to the Jews,—when their cities were overthrown by earthquakes ; their fields, wasted by famine, and their flocks, by pestilence,—when nation rose against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and their fears and terrors served only to make them more desperate and cruel,—when the sun was darkened, and the moon gave no longer her kindly light,—when crimes unheard-of-before became common and familiar to man,—when the eye of the tender and delicate woman was evil against her first-born ; and mothers, for very famine, devoured their children's flesh ;—when, lastly, their walls, their city, and their temple, were all laid a heap of ruins,—who can doubt that the hand of God was in judgements like these ; and that the King of heaven and earth was returned again to destroy

His enemies, who would not that He should reign over them? He it was, and no one else, of whom it was foretold in Isaiah the prophet, that He should tread the winepress alone, and stain His garment with the blood of the people.¹ On earth He had looked, but there was none to help; and He marvelled, but there was none to uphold; therefore, when the day of vengeance was in His heart, and the year of His redeemed was come, His own arm brought salvation, and His fury it upheld Him. Then it was that He trod down the people in His anger, and made them drunk in His fury, and brought down their strength to the ground.

True it is, He did not visibly appear; His right hand was not openly displayed in vengeance; but who can doubt that this was the Lord's doing, and that all these judgements were from Him?

When the heaven is covered with clouds and blackness of storm; when the earth trembles, and lightnings rush abroad; when hail stones and thunder and consuming flame bow down and affright the hearts of men, who then can doubt that these are all His ministers? Who then can doubt, that the darkness and clouds are beneath His feet, and that it is the God of glory who thundereth; the Lord, who is upon many waters?

And when, in like manner, He sends out war

¹ Isaiah, lxiii. 3.

and cruelty upon the world; when He rouses up nation against nation; and binds the wickedness, the malice, and the folly of mankind to the execution of His own wise and secret counsels, who then can doubt that the storm and the battle are alike His messengers; that it is He who killeth, and He who saveth from death?

It might be, then, in full conformity with our own observation of the ways of Providence, and in the usual course of the fulfilment of the ancient prophecies of God, that nothing more was meant by these remarkable words, than a promise that St. John should live to see the day when Christ should, in this world, take His revenge of His adversaries:—and that St. John should thereby be convinced of the truth of those many prophecies, of which he had been a near and surviving witness. This prophecy, if such (as I believe to be the case) were its meaning, was therefore fully and exactly fulfilled. St. John *did* live till Christ returned in clouds and terror to destroy the city of His murderers.

But, besides the promise which may seem to be here made to John, it is plain, that the words of Christ include a reproof to Peter's curiosity: and I am anxious to explain this to you, as it contains a practical lesson of the greatest importance to the government of our hearts and our conduct of every day. "However I may purpose to dispose of John," saith our Lord,

“ whatever may be my intentions respecting the manner in which he is to glorify God, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me. Thy own salvation is enough to engage thy whole attention; it is enough for thee to repent of thine own faults; to master, by my help, thine own evil passions; to perform the duties, which my orders have laid on thee; and to advance patiently to thy rest in the Lord, through the many and severe temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil.”

Are there none, who hear me, to whom this caution may be well applied? Are there none, who are more curious to examine into the conduct of others, than careful to keep their own in order? Are there none, whose anxiety is wholly bent to pry out every action of their neighbour, forgetting that they have their own lives to govern, and to render an account of to God? Let such be warned, in time, to give attention to their own immediate danger; lest, while they gaze on the conduct, or the fate of others, they may too late hear the reproof, “What is that to thee? follow thou Me.” And, let me ask, are their motives for such a conduct so reasonable — are they so innocent, or so amiable, — as those which prompted St. Peter’s question? He asked, not only from curiosity but from attachment; and, as St. John and he had in their lives been lovely, it was natural to inquire, whether in their deaths they must be divided. Yet Christ reproved his

curiosity, and told him to confine his attention to the course which he must himself pursue. How much more then will they merit a rebuke, who are anxious to discover their neighbour's faults; who neglect their own sins, while they aggravate those of others; and find comfort, perhaps, in their own neglect of duty, by supposing that their neighbour is more neglectful than they are themselves.

Believe me, my friends, it will be a very scanty comfort at the day of judgement, that we ourselves are not so wicked as those around us. When our portion is assigned to the lake that burneth with fire, it will be small alleviation to know that others are more rebellious, or more wretched, than ourselves. When we ourselves are guilty, the guilt or the innocence of others can in nowise affect our sentence; and we can no more hope to be saved by the sins of our neighbours, than we need fear to be punished for their virtues; to us, both alike are nothing. "What is that to thee?" are the words of Christ to every man in the world—"Follow thou Me."

Are, then, the actions of others of no consequence at all to us? Are we to proceed on our own path, without regarding in the least what becomes of them? Are we not to advise, to entreat, to direct, to influence, to employ all our talents to turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just? Undoubtedly, this is

our duty; undoubtedly, this is that love which worketh by charity; that anxiety for the salvation of others which leads us to tell them of those faults which we lament to witness; to open their eyes by good counsel to those things which belong to their peace. "Let the righteous smite me," saith the Prophet David, "it shall be a kindness, and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil which shall not break my head."¹ Far different is that idle and vicious curiosity, which searches with malignant zeal into the faults, the follies, and the miseries of other men; and neglects its own salvation, while it exults in the failings of its fellow-servants in Christ.

It would be well, however, if the fault stopt here; so prone is the nature of man to evil, that we are seldom contented without publishing to others the faults or misfortunes which we have discovered. It is thus, that an idle curiosity which would seem, at first, a very little fault, if any fault at all, will lead the way to slander, to hatred, and to lying; as surely as the brook (however small its beginning, however distant its source) will find its way at length to the mighty waters of the ocean.

I know but one way of correcting, at its birth, a vice so odious and so dangerous. It is, by accustoming ourselves to consider mankind as our fellow-servants — our brethren engaged in the

¹ Psalm, cxli. 5.

same voyage with ourselves. If this be rightly considered ; if we view them as those for whom Christ died ; and with whom we hope, through His merits, to pass a blessed eternity:—if we think on this, surely, far from prying into their faults or secrets, we shall bear all things, hope all things, and pray every night and morning for the blessing of the Almighty on their efforts as well as on our own.

And these considerations are still more powerfully seconded, if we constantly recollect those awful words of Christ;—“What is that to thee? follow thou Me.” It is not only to the apostle Peter ; it is not only to a few saints and holy men of ancient times that a call like this is directed. We all are ordered to follow Christ ; we are to follow Him in the steps which He has trod before ;—in that love, that meekness, that hope and faith, of which He affords us an example ; we are to pass with Him through the temptations and the dangers of our painful pilgrimage ; and to walk with Him through the valley of the shadow of death, before we can attain the borders of everlasting life.

And are not these sufficient occupations? Is not a journey like this sufficient to engage our undivided cares and attention? Have we time to spare to attend to the concerns of other men, or to stand idle ourselves, while we behold the progress of our neighbours? Alas, my friends, it

was doubtless the voice of everlasting wisdom which answered to the curiosity of Peter, "What hast thou to do with the progress or destiny of another? Follow thou Me." For whether we will or no, in one respect we must follow Him. We may not, perhaps, be treading the paths which He has ordained ; and the final termination of our journey may be, perhaps, very different : but there is one stage where we must all meet — there is one dismal voyage which must be made by all : and, when our earthly pilgrimage is drawing to an end, when our day of life is sinking, and the long black shadows of approaching death grow every moment nearer and darker, we shall wish, perhaps, too late, that our cares had been given to our own salvation ; our attention directed to the examination of our own hearts and condition !

For yourselves, my brethren, I intreat you to defer no longer an examination so necessary to your present hopes, and to your future safety. Amuse yourselves no longer by observing the conduct of others ; but search your own hearts, whether they be at peace with God or no. Dream not, that you will be pardoned, because others are greater sinners than yourselves ; nor judge your neighbours, lest you yourselves be judged of the Lord.

For this examination of our hearts, there is no time more proper than the stillness of the lonely and silent night ; no place more proper than that

accustomed bed, where we every night go through a temporary death ; and every morning enjoy a foretaste of resurrection. Can we dare to commit ourselves so entirely to God's hands, before we know whether we are at peace with him, and with mankind? Can we dare, without preparation, to entrust ourselves to a sleep, which may perhaps, be our last? Consider this, ye that forget God ; nor ever close your eyes without a prayer to Him through the merits of Jesus Christ. Thus, whether at midnight, or at cock-crowing, you are called to follow Him, He may find you prepared for your journey ; and may conduct you to eternal joy ; that joy which we hope for, through His merits and mediation, who liveth and reigneth with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God world without end. Amen !

SERMON III.

CIRCUMCISION.

PSALM xxxii. 2.

Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.

THESE words are taken from a very touching description given by David of the happiness enjoyed by God's elect, and of the means by which that happiness is attainable. They are applied, (as you have heard in the Epistle of this morning's service,¹) by St. Paul, to the controversy between himself and those Jews who placed their hopes of salvation in the Law of Moses: but we shall be the better able to judge of the force of such an application, and may derive also the knowledge of several other, and very important practical truths, by examining these words, not as they stand by themselves amid the powerful reasoning of the apostle, but as a connected part of that divine poem to which they, in the first instance, belong. — The thirty-second Psalm, then, may be regarded as a short

¹ Romans, iv. 8—14.

conversation between a penitent sinner and his God; in the first seven verses of which, the transgressor sets forth the extent of his hopes, and the manner in which he has sought and obtained the object of his desire. In the concluding four, we have, from the Almighty Himself, a gracious promise of help, and a solemn admonition to obedience in the time to come.

The prophet, accordingly, begins the Psalm with a description of the blessedness of the truly penitent. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven; and whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity; and in whose spirit there is no guile." He next goes on to paint the difference of his own condition, while unrepented sin was yet harboured in his heart, and his soul was not yet at peace with Him to whom every thought is known. "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For, day and night, thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer." Then follows the wise and successful method which he adopted to escape from this state of agony; and the blessed effects which, in due time, followed, and which will always follow to every one who tries the experiment as David did, and seeks God in an acceptable time. "I acknowledged my sin unto

thee ; and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD ; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. For this," he continues, " shall every one, that is godly, pray unto thee, in a time when thou mayest be found ; surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. — Thou art my hiding place ; thou shalt preserve me from trouble ; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance." To this the Lord himself replies, in the following verses, by a promise of future grace and help, and by a warning to future obedience. " I will instruct thee," are His words, " and teach thee the way which thou shalt go : I will guide thee with mine eye." But, " Be ye not as the horse, nor as the mule which have no understanding ; whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee." For, " Many sorrows shall be to the wicked : but he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about. Be glad, therefore, and rejoice in the Lord, all ye righteous ; and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart ! "

In this divine poem there are very many circumstances and expressions well worthy a Christian's notice ; and any one of which would, separately taken, afford an ample scope for our Sunday's meditation. Three, however, there

are, more important and more obvious than all the rest ; and those are, first, that the utmost and strongest title which David supposes any man to be able to plead to blessedness either here or hereafter, — is the character of a pardoned sinner. — Secondly, that to obtain this pardon no method is so effectual as a full and free confession of our faults, and a deep humiliation before God. — Thirdly, that, notwithstanding the greatness of the pardon thus given, and the deliverance thus obtained, neither the one, nor the other can free us from the strictest obligation to a holy life in time to come : and that, to produce this holiness, as God will give His grace and Heavenly guidance, so is attention and a rational subjection of ourselves most righteously expected from us ; that we obey the Almighty, not grudgingly and by force as an obstinate mule obeys his rider ; but that we submit ourselves with cheerfulness to His wise and gracious pleasure, rejoicing in the Lord, whose mercy compasseth us round.

These awful truths it shall be my endeavour to explain : and, first, I will elucidate what I have noticed to you ; — namely, that the strongest claim to blessedness which it is possible for any man to advance, the strongest reason which any man can have for calling himself blessed, and the strongest plea which he can

urge for obtaining a blessing from God, is the character of a pardoned sinner.

And this will appear very strongly, both from the natural meaning of the two first verses of the Psalm, and from the meaning, in which we know from this morning's Epistle these verses were applied by St. Paul. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven; whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity!" The prophet David does not say, — blessed is the man who never transgressed at all: blessed is the man who needs no forgiveness; who has no sins to cover: blessed is the man with whose conduct God hath no fault to find. On the contrary, it is plain that the person, whom he thus pronounces blessed, is the very opposite to innocent or righteous. — For, it is said, his transgression is forgiven and his sin covered. — But these very words imply that he must have some transgression which God was to pardon; some sin which God was to conceal; and hence, I think the very important conclusion will naturally follow, that this is all the claim to blessedness which even the best of us can offer. For in describing a case of blessedness, and in extolling the happy condition of those whom God favoured, it is possible, nay it is almost certain, that David would produce the strongest case of happiness and favour: and

that, if there had been such a thing as innocence, or righteousness, or acceptable obedience among the human race, he would have instanced the unconquered saint, and not the pardoned sinner, as the peculiar object of God's love, and the triumphant and pre-eminent instance of mortal happiness. — We may therefore conclude, that there is no man who can plead a perfect sinless integrity before his Maker ; and that the same dreadful judge who “chargeth even his angels with folly,” cannot possibly be thought to regard even the best and wisest among men in any milder light than as sinful and undone creatures, whom His mercy only can save from that destruction of which they have incurred the danger.

This was unquestionably the manner in which St. Paul understood the passage, when he quoted it against the Jews, as a proof that man could not look for salvation through the merit of any works which he had done ;—and this is the sense in which our hearts, if we examine them properly, will, in spite of themselves, acknowledge the truth of the assertion. For who is there among us, however honourable his life may have been before men, and however anxious he may be to stand upright in the judgement of his Maker, — who can flatter himself, after a moment's serious descent into himself, that his hands and heart are clean ; and

that neither in thought, nor word, nor deed, he has offended his Maker's majesty? — “ They are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become abominable ; — there is none that doeth good, no not one ! ”

Secondly, No way can be conceived so likely or so certain to obtain the mercy of God on this our destitute condition, as a deep and painful sense, and a mournful and humble expression, of our sins and unworthiness before Him. Our reason itself would teach us that this method is the most likely to conciliate Him ; since there is none whereby we are ourselves so soon, or so easily induced to pardon those who have offended us. If the criminal wraps himself up in obstinate denial of the charge, or in sullen disregard of its consequences, we are never inclined, and it is not reasonable that we should be inclined, to show any favour towards him. An apology is a part, and very often the most essential and necessary part, of the amends which we expect from a reconciled enemy ; — and we have without this, neither satisfaction for injuries received, nor pledge for future security. Our reputation in the world, which every open violation of our rights has a tendency to diminish, can only be restored in its former state, by the submission and acknowledgement of him who has invaded them ; and without such submission on his part we can

have no security that he will not renew his injury with the first occasion which offers. — Well, then, may God demand confession of sin at our hands as a necessary condition of pardon ; — and wisely did David act, when, by this means, he sought and found forgiveness. “ When he kept silence, his bones waxed old, through his roaring all the day long : ” the sense of his danger was intolerable to him : he knew not which way to turn to hide himself from the wrath of God ; he took at length the better part of throwing himself altogether on God’s mercy : “ I acknowledge my sin unto thee ; and mine iniquities have I not hid : I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord : ” — and, mark what follows : — “ Thou, Lord, forgavest the iniquity of my sin ! ”

It may be observed, however, first, that this confession which is thus available with God to obtain forgiveness, must be express, and under certain cases, public. By its being express, I mean that it should be something more than a general and formal avowal of the corruption of our nature, of our human unworthiness, and of those imperfections which clog and detract from our best and purest services. We may talk thus ; and many persons do thus express themselves, without being a single step the nearer to any true humility. No man really thinks the worse, or more lowly of himself for

those general infirmities, with regard to which all men are on a level, any more than he despises himself for the want of wings, or for not being twenty feet high:—and thus a man may generally own, that he is sinful; while in his heart, he fully believes himself to be less sinful than all his neighbours; and even takes to himself very considerable merit in the sight of God, for those actions whereby he has, in part emancipated himself from this natural depravity. But it is by a meditation on the particular instances of our guilt; by a reckoning up of each single action, [in which, contrary to our conscience, and in spite of God's grace, and having full power by His help to follow the way of holiness, — we have wilfully sinned against our Maker and Redeemer,] that we are truly humbled in our own eyes, and seriously disposed to cry for mercy and grace to our offended God. The sinfulness, of which we profess to complain, is made up of many sinful actions; we cannot either feel it, or confess it, properly, without reckoning up these several actions before God; and the more pain we feel in this examination the more reason we have to suppose it effectual.

Our confession of sins, then, must be particular; but it must in certain cases be public also. Thus, when we have injured our neighbour, every principle of reason and religion compels

us, if we hope for God's pardon, to seek first by due submission, the pardon of him whom we have wronged ; and when we have openly transgressed the Laws of God, it is equally reasonable that our sorrow should be as notorious as our sin. I do not mean that we are necessarily to confess ourselves to a Priest, though I consider it as far from unreasonable to seek counsel in many cases which might be named ; and to open our hearts to those who have the care of our souls. Far less do I consider public penance as necessary, — though its revival, as I conceive, in the more flagrant instances of guilt, is now only not desirable because the temper of the times forbids it. But to undeceive those, if such there are, whom our example or influence has led into sin ; to humble ourselves before those, if such there are, whose piety we have ridiculed, or discountenanced ; to exhibit, as we may do, in every circumstance of manner and habit, the change which has taken place in our opinions ; and to take up, with a ready mind, whatever of illwill or contempt, is apt to be thrown on those who suddenly and at once desert their pursuits and intimacies, and seek to glorify God by the open avowal of their new principles, as it is a tacit but very intelligible confession of our former folly and wickedness, so it is the duty of every penitent, and the best proof that his penitence

is sincere. There are those who have attempted to correct their lives in secret ; and, in their closet, to live to God alone, while in public they were contented to wear the livery of the world ; to converse with the same persons, and in the same manner, as before their conversion to holiness ; and to shrink from the suspicion of being, in truth, more godly than they were formerly. Those, who have tried this experiment, will have found, I am well convinced, that this half repentance was no more than enough to make this world joyless, without giving them the hopes of a better in its room ; that religion concealed, like the stolen fox of the Spartan, would gnaw its way through to light, to the destruction of its wretched possessor ; that motives unconfessed would lead them into continual inconsistency and apparent weakness ; and that, like David, “ while they held their peace, their bones consumed away by their secret complaining.” If, however, we really and sincerely reckon in our daily prayers, — by name and separately, every transgression of which we have been guilty, since our last confession to God, — it will be a task of such agony, that we shall be very unwilling to persist in adding to the number of those sores the cure of which is so painful : and an outward amendment, as well as an inward contrition, will be an almost unavoidable consequence of acknowledging our sins to the Most High.

And this repentance and amendment, we should be careful not to forget, both as it is the third great lesson which may be learned from the 32nd Psalm ; and as it is the natural end, to which confession of our sins should lead ; and without which the most humble confession can be no more than an offence to our Maker. To own our transgressions, without a sincere purpose of amendment, is little else, however qualified by hypocritical grief, than a sturdy defiance of God's wrath. It is to say, in effect, " We know, O Lord, our behaviour is offensive " to Thee : but bear it, as Thou mayest ; we will " not and cannot alter it. We know we are " rebels to Thy will ; but rebels we like to " be. We know that our feet are treading the " road to Hell ; but we will not turn back, " however mercifully Thou mayest call us." And therefore we cannot wonder that the Almighty, even in the act of pronouncing David's pardon, accompanies His mercy with a caution against a future relapse into brutish carelessness ; and that he requires, as the only convincing proof of the sincerity of his confession, that he should be like " the horse and the mule " no longer.

The duties, then, of God's servants, as expressed in the present Psalm, will resolve themselves into these three, — humility, confession, conversion. The first, we learn from that

natural weakness, which, far from meriting reward, can only escape the severest punishment by having its sins put away by God: the second, by the example of David, who thus, in the extremity of his distress, obtained peace and hope and pardon: the third, by the merciful warning of God Himself, that His forgiveness is only extended to those who by improvement of the grace vouchsafed to them, proceed thenceforward in the paths of holiness.

One truth, however, yet remains unexpressed in this beautiful poem — a truth it is indeed, which was to the prophet himself in repentance imperfectly known, and was manifested afar off through the veil of mystery and sacrifice. *We* know what David only desired to behold more thoroughly — that our sins are blotted out, and our confession received, and our repentance inspired, and forwarded; and everlastingly rewarded, hereafter, — through His merits and sacrifice and grace alone, Who for our sake assumed the flesh of sinful man, and the seed and lineage of David; — who, in His own body bore those sins which must else have sunk us in perdition; whose sufferings conciliated for us that mercy which had else been closed against mankind; — and whose Holy Ghost both teaches us our duty, and enables our weakness to fulfil the task, which would be without such aid impossible!

SERMON IV.

CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL.

ACTS, ix. 5.

And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

THE conversion of St. Paul has been regarded by many wise and learned men as one of the strongest proofs which the Christian religion can offer of its proceeding from the Almighty. No stronger proof of the kind, indeed, can possibly be required by man, since the testimony which He thenceforth gave of the change that had taken place within himself, and the circumstances which had produced it, was the testimony of one who, not only, had no interest in telling a lie in favour of the Christian religion, but had every possible worldly interest to lead him the contrary way. It was the testimony of one who, from his situation in life, and from his former education, was unlikely to fall into any mistake in favour of Christianity : and it was a testimony which related to facts on which no man could possibly be mistaken.

There have been few men, if any, since the world began, certainly no man whose birth was so humble, and his nation so obscure, of whose preaching, life and general history we have so many and so satisfactory accounts as we have of St. Paul. We have a journal of some of the most interesting years of his life, written by one of his disciples. We have his own letters to the different communities who acknowledged his spiritual authority; letters filled with allusions to his own history, to his private circumstances, and to his daily habits; we have, lastly, passages concerning him in the writings of the Jews and Jewish Christians, from which we may fairly expect to learn something of his character and situation, and to form a judgement as to the degree of credit which may be given to the miraculous part of his story, that part, I mean, which rests on his own authority and that of St. Luke, and which relates to the call from Heaven, which, according to their account, determined him to embrace Christianity.

- Now all these accounts are, in essential points, agreeable to each other. St. Luke, in the Acts of the Apostles, informs us that Saul, or Paul, before his conversion, was a young man of fierce and fiery zeal, who consented to the death of Stephen, the first martyr of Christ; that he had, afterwards, proceeded to use a considerable degree of authority and influence, of which he

plainly seems to have been possessed, in persecuting the Christians with unrelenting cruelty; and that, in pursuit of this unholy purpose, he was sent to Damascus by the High Priest and Elders, who would not have employed a person of doubtful character on such an errand, with letters and authority to the Jewish synagogues of that city.

St. Paul himself, in various parts of his epistles, further teaches us that he was brought up in the strictest sect of the Jewish faith, and under the most celebrated teacher of their law; and there are many passages which prove him to have been also acquainted with the best writers of Heathen antiquity, and to have had a degree of general learning by no means common in that age and country. The same facts of his having studied under Gamaliel, and having held a high reputation among the rigid Jews before his conversion, are allowed both by those Jews who rejected Christ entirely, and by those who, though they believed in Him, retained the law of Moses, and who held St. Paul in little less detestation, than the downright Jews did, on account of the liberty, which he preached to the Gentiles, from the yoke of the circumcision.

It is agreed, then, on all hands, by St. Paul's enemies as well as by his friends, that he was in his youth a zealous persecutor of the Christians; and that he afterwards became the warmest sup-

porter of their cause. But the question is what could be the cause of this alteration. The manner, in which he himself answers the question, is one which decidedly proves the truth of Christianity. He was converted in the bitterest purpose of his wrath against the truth, by a miracle; by a miracle of the most extraordinary kind; by a series of miracles, beginning with a light and a voice from Heaven, continued by a miraculous blindness and by as miraculous a cure, and concluding with such a succession of visions and revelations, and such a power communicated to himself of speaking with tongues and of working miracles, as since the world began no other mortal man has been possessed of.

Now, if all these wonderful occurrences really took place, there can be little doubt or, to speak more properly, there can be no doubt at all, of the truth of that religion which they were intended to enforce, and of which St. Paul was the faithful preacher. If they did not take place, we must suppose one of three things; either that St. Paul was deceived by the craft and artifices of the Christians; or that he deluded himself by the enthusiasm of an ardent mind, and by the strength of superstitious fancy; or lastly, that he wished to deceive other men, and to lay claim to an inspiration and intercourse with the Deity, which he never really

experienced. Let these notions be duly examined; and I am convinced, that we shall find any of them harder to believe, than the most extraordinary of all those circumstances.

Is it, in the first place, supposed that St. Paul was deceived by the false miracles and artful delusions of the Christians? The facts, which he relates, are such as no human art could produce or imitate. How were the Christians to counterfeit a voice from Heaven, and a light above the brightness of noon-day, which should induce a company of travellers to fall to the ground as in the visible presence of the Almighty? How were the Christians to afflict a man with blindness which should come on suddenly, and pass away as suddenly again, when one of their number laid his hands on the patient? How were the Christians to persuade Paul not only that they had visions and spake with tongues, and healed the sick, and brought the dead to life again, but that he himself, after his conversion, obtained such powers, and exercised them in the presence of hundreds? And were they to practise all this deceit on a man of good education, a man, as we see by his works, of considerable learning, of great strength of mind, of a philosophical and reasoning disposition; and by the whole course of his former habits and studies, most violently prejudiced against them? Is this likely? Is it possible?

“But St. Paul deceived himself, and fell a victim to his own enthusiasm; he fancied the voice from Heaven; he fancied himself blind for a season; he fancied that he had visions and revelations.”—Let us consider how far this is possible. He had, first, no previous inclination to think well of the Christian cause; no ardent desire that it might be true, which could lead his mind to fancy that miraculous confirmation of its truth which he wished to receive. The vision did not happen to one who was a Christian already; but to one who was the bitterest enemy of the Christian name. The glory of God met the persecutor on his way;—it tamed him; it turned him from a servant of Satan into the soldier of the crucified Christ; and was this enthusiasm? But, further, if a false impression had been made on his fancy; if he had only thought that he heard God’s voice, and saw His glory, this thought would have been confined to himself alone. But the travellers, who journeyed with him, likewise heard the voice. Ananias, a stranger to him, and resident in Damascus, had a vision about the same time to declare his conversion; many hundred people afterwards witnessed the exercise of those miraculous powers, which Paul, according to this supposition, fancied himself to have received from Heaven. This surely must be something more than fancy or enthusiasm!

If it be asked on what authority we believe that this was the case, and that the facts really happened, which I have just brought forwards ; -- I answer, on the authority of St. Paul himself, on his own writings, of which the genuineness has never been doubted by friend or foe during the more than 1700 years that they have been regularly read in the Christian churches ; on the authority of Paul's companion St. Luke, who wrote under his direction, and who was, therefore, in all ages considered as speaking his words and expressing his opinions. If Paul, then, spoke the truth, that religion must be true, which he taught to our forefathers ; and whether he were likely to have spoken false is what now remains to be examined.

In making up our minds as to the truth or falsehood of any man's testimony, the first question which will naturally occur, is, — whether he have any interest in deceiving us. Is any wealth, any power, any renown, or any worldly object whatever to be acquired by the deception which he is supposed to practise ? And if we find that the part, which he thus supported, offered no probability, no possibility, of private advantage, we naturally conclude that he has told us the truth, because he had no reason, no visible motive, for telling us a falsehood. Apply this rule to the case of St. Paul ; and

judge for yourselves, what advantage he could gain by inventing a miracle for the interest of the Christian religion. He felt no original good will to the cause ; he was on the contrary, one of its bitterest enemies. And what did he gain, what was he likely to gain, by changing his prospects of comfort and renown and popularity among his own countrymen, and among those with whom he had been brought up, and with whom he had hitherto acted, for the doubtful success, the certain toil, and danger, and necessity of a preacher of the new religion ? We know, from his own account of his succeeding life, that it was passed in want and peril and continued journeyings ; we know from history, that he, at last, laid down his life in the same cause which he now embraced ; we know, that, when he changed sides from the Jews to the Christians, he would reasonably have expected, among the latter, no better worldly fortune than he found : — and can we suppose that any man would have been guilty of an imposture, by which he was to ruin himself, if an imposture it were, both in this world, and in the world to come ? And this a man of talent ; and this a man of learning ; and this a man of high reputation, and whose whole worldly credit and consistency were committed on the other side of the controversy ? It cannot be ; St. Paul must have spoken the truth,

— he must have met the glory of God, on his way to Damascus; he must have heard the Lord Jesus speaking to him from the cloud and the fire; those other marvellous events must have happened, to which he himself ascribes his conversion; and if these things be true, then must the Christian religion be true also!

It would here be easy to enlarge on the apparent goodness and warmth of St. Paul's heart as proved to us by many slight and incidental expressions in his history and writings; — on his disinterestedness, which led him to refuse even the usual maintenance, which the Christians gave to their ministers, content to labour with his hands for his support, rather than to become burthensome to the churches, in that time of distress and general calamity; I might urge the excellence and purity of the doctrine which he has delivered to us, and ask of you, whether the author of such writings can be reasonably suspected of so black and unprofitable an imposture? But I feel that it is needless; and that I am justified in laying down, as proved on the clearest evidence of which the case is capable, that St. Paul really had those revelations of the Divine Will, to which he laid claim; and, therefore, that the religion, which he taught, proceeded from God only. It yet remains that I should call your attention

to some practical truths which the yearly return of this festival should convey to your minds; and by the constant recollection of which you may best hope, through the mercy and grace of our Saviour, to follow, at humble distance, the example of St. Paul on earth; and to enter, at length, with him into that kingdom, which has been purchased for us by the blood of his Lord and ours!

In the first place, the history of St. Paul's conversion can hardly be noticed, even by the least attentive hearer or reader, without very solemn reflections on the freedom and riches of God's grace, which could turn so quickly and so completely the persecutor into an apostle, and bend his hard heart and stubborn will to do and suffer all things for a cause to which he had so long done all the injury in his power. But while we thus wonder at the secrets of the Divine Mercy, and acknowledge the absolute necessity of God's Spirit to turn man from the error of his ways, and to open his eyes that he may see the things belonging to his peace, shall we not do wisely to ask ourselves if we have never felt the same Spirit by which Paul was sanctified, working with like blessedness, though not in a manner equally miraculous, to amend our hearts, and save our souls from the destroyer. Have we felt no rising sense of guilt, no strange perception of the

happiness which God's people inherit, — no inward wish that we might partake with them in the blessings which Christ's blood bestows, no weak and struggling inclination to amend our ways, and to give ourselves up to His service? O! as you would have mercy shown to your souls in the day of wrath, harden not your hearts, nor stop your ears against these gracious feelings! They are the voice of the same God who spake to Paul in his way to Damascus: and he, who despiseth that voice, despiseth the Lord who died for him.

Secondly, we find, from the circumstances of this history, in what manner it was that St. Paul improved the grace first communicated to him. He continued for three days in fasting and in prayer; prayer, no doubt, for further light and knowledge of his duty; for pardon of his past and grievous sins; and for the guidance and support, in time to come, of that God whose saints he had persecuted. And he did not pray in vain. A holy man, Ananias, was sent to him by a heavenly vision to restore his bodily sight; to instruct his perplexed mind; and, by the waters of baptism, to admit him into the fellowship of saints, in this valley of our pilgrimage. Let us, in like manner, so soon as we are convinced of our sin, betake ourselves earnestly to prayer for help and guidance;—let us seek the company of holy men; let us attend the

ordinances of religion, and be sure that this course of duty, persevered in, will as certainly bring comfort and strength to the meanest of God's children, as it did to that chosen vessel whose history has this day been read to you.

Thirdly, we may learn — from the conversion of St. Paul, and from the manner in which Ananias addressed him — an useful lesson as to our conduct with those who differ from us in opinion, as well as with those, who of malice hate and persecute us. Who would have thought that Saul, the accomplice in Stephen's murder; the hater of Christ's name, and the bitterest pursuer of His scattered flock, could have ever become the patient, humble preacher of righteousness, the servant of servants to those who loved the testimony of Jesus; or who could have expected that he, who came to Damascus to seek the life of the very Ananias whom God sent to him, should, by that very Ananias, be saluted under the affectionate name of "brother!" This should teach us not to despair of the final condition even of those who are the greatest enemies to God. Their day of grace may not yet be come; but come it will; and it may be, that they, who last enter Christ's vineyard, shall be the first in their labours there. It should teach us, moreover, so to treat our worst enemies as those with whom we may be one day friends, — and, like good Ananias, to

lose not a moment in giving the name of brother, and the right hand of fellowship, to a repentant sinner, or a reconciled adversary.

Lastly, when we recollect the zeal and activity displayed by St. Paul in Christ's service, from the moment of his conversion to the time of his being set free by martyrdom from this world of sin and sorrow, let us consider, that we are all of us, in like manner, called by Christ's Spirit, and redeemed by His blood; that we may be purified to Him a peculiar people, zealous of good works, and to do the will of His Heavenly Father; let us remember that our pardoned sins, our nature renewed, our means of present grace, and our hope of future glory, make up for us a debt of gratitude as great as that, under which St. Paul himself lay; and that the only effectual way, by which this gratitude can be expressed, is by giving ourselves up to God's service, and by offering to Him as a holy and reasonable sacrifice, every wish of our hearts, every labour of our lives, our selves, our souls, and our bodies!

SERMON V.

GOOD FRIDAY.

ST. LUKE, xxiv. 26.

Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory ?

IN my sermon * for last Sunday, I endeavoured to explain to you the necessity of a Redeemer ; and that, in all ages of the world, such a person, as our Saviour, had been expected and foretold. — In every age, it was promised, by God, through the prophets, that a Messiah should come—to deliver mankind from the bondage of sin, and death, and misery. I now proceed to state the means, whereby this great victory was to be obtained ; namely, that He was to conquer by suffering : that, by being Himself rejected of men, He was to make men acceptable to God ; that, by dying Himself, He was to deliver us from the curse of death.

This is a mystery so wonderful, that, till it really happened, no created being, either in

* Vol. I. Sermon xx. p. 233

heaven, or in earth, understood it perfectly. The angels of God themselves desired in vain to look into it. It is, however, now laid open to the meditations and the faith of men; and it is a miracle of love, of justice, and of wisdom; which nothing can excel, or equal. But, though the ways of God are not as our ways, though His thoughts are far above our thoughts, yet has He given to all mankind such light and instruction, as, if we use our reason, in duly and humbly examining these sacred means of learning, which He has given us, we may discover plainly the mercy and the righteousness of God, through the clouds and darkness which surround Him, and are under His feet.

I call, then, upon you, who are delivered from darkness and from death; whose eyes are saved from tears, and whose feet from falling,—to listen, while I unfold, relying on the help of God, and on the testimony of His Holy Scriptures, the gracious means, whereby, from children of wrath and disobedience, we are made the adopted sons of the Almighty, and joint-heirs, with Christ, of life and happiness without end.

In my last discourse, I explained to you, how, by the sentence of God, Adam and Eve lost their place in Paradise; and became liable to all the infirmities, which human nature must

necessarily contract and endure. I must here again remind you, that immortality, thus lost, it was impossible for man to acquire anew. What was at first a free gift, could never be merited, or earned, by any services, which we, that is mankind, could be able to perform. For what, after all, are the best of our services? do all that is required,—we are still unprofitable; what need has God of our prayers—what advantage is it to Him, that we are grave, or sober, or orderly? These restraints He lays on us, for our own advantage; these rules He gives us, as a necessary discipline to improve us in this world; and to fit us for that immortality, which His mercy, and His mercy only, has promised us hereafter, as a gracious recompense for our humble endeavours. I say His mercy only; because as far as His justice is concerned, the most perfect services of man could never claim so high a recompense. A single day of sun-shine, and of health; a few hours' enjoyment of the fresh air, of the light, and of the other noble appearances of nature, a single moment's conception of the ways and wisdom of our Creator, would be more and greater blessings than our greatest labours could repay.

But this is not all. Not only are we unable—of ourselves—to deserve immortality; but our constant practices and actions have been

deserving of many deaths. Our sins—the personal sins of every man—have, from the beginning of the world, cried out for vengeance on our heads; and God has more than once repented Him, that He had made man to dwell upon the earth. I speak not here of those natural imperfections, which cling to our substance; and defile in some sort our most anxious services: I speak not of that weakness of the flesh, which we are destined still to strive against; which clogs and encumbers the most willing spirit; (this is a consequence of the laws of our creation,—the laws of that merciful and wise God, who made man weak, in order that he might be humble):—but I speak of those wilful transgressions, those sins against grace and knowledge, which, in every age, have made the earth loath her inhabitants.

When there were as yet only three men in the world, one of them became a murderer. And when their multitude was somewhat increased; though as yet the memory of their creation, and of their fall, was fresh;—though the punishment of Cain was before their eyes, and the fiery sword still waved in their sight, over the guarded frontier of Paradise; even then did violence abound in the earth, till the flood came at length, and swallowed them all. Of those eight persons, too, who, on that occasion, survived by God's particular favour, one

was an unnatural scoffer of his aged parent. And the descendants of all, in a short time, forsook the simple and reasonable worship, with which God was pleased: and, though they knew God by the light of reason, yet they glorified him not as God, but became the worshippers of creeping things, and of stocks and stones; and leaving God, abandoned themselves to vile affections, and to vices, which it is a horror to name.

But why should I trace any further a picture so hideous? We all of us, if we examine our own hearts, — we all of us know, how often we have gone astray from the laws of God; how often we have grieved the Holy Spirit with our hardness of heart; and have defied, to the very face, alike His justice, and His mercy. Such sins, and provocations as these, God's wisdom would not, His justice could not, pass over unpunished: it is not here a dispute, in which man only is concerned; we are not the only subjects, who acknowledge and tremble under God's authority. The earth is but as one little city in the mighty empire of the universe; many other worlds, and many millions of spiritual creatures, equally bless His goodness; and partake His care, and Fatherly protection, in equal measure with ourselves. As an example, then, to this, and possibly to every other world, it was necessary that God should lay on

sin some great and dreadful mark of His displeasure. And what claim had we to favour, in sight of that impartial justice, which spared not the angels that sinned?

But, where punishment was thus necessary, could we obtain none to suffer for us, none who, by his perfect love, might take on Himself the destruction which threatened the world? Among men, [I may add, among created beings,] such a Redeemer would be sought in vain. The angels themselves are imperfect in the sight of God,—and a sacrifice, which was to produce effects so great, must needs be perfect in every thing. Therefore did the Second Person in the Trinity, the Everlasting Word, by whose agency all things were created, who would not that men should perish;—therefore did His exceeding love endure for us the wrath of God His Father; and did veil His Almighty power under the weakness, the poverty, and the sufferings of the man Jesus. By this one exertion of love towards us, of obedience towards God, and of patient suffering of that penance, which would else have crushed the world, the justice of God was satisfied; and His wrath was changed into mercy. And as this sacrifice of Christ for mankind was determined of God in the beginning, so did He, in various manners, and at various times, reveal so much of His intention as might comfort those early ages of the world, and might afford a con-

firmation to the faith of those who should come after.

First of all, by the institution of sacrifice, where the blood of an innocent creature was shed for the sins of men, He signified to all how great was His abhorrence of sin ; since he did in no case forgive it, except it were washed out in blood. And so necessary was blood-shedding to the nature of a sacrifice, that, when Cain, from pride, or from negligence, or, as some think, from want of faith in the appointed Redeemer, refused to comply with this rule ; when, instead of the lamb, which God required, he offered up the fruits of the earth,—his sacrifice, we know, was rejected with particular marks of displeasure. These bloody sacrifices, indeed, as St. Paul well observes, had no possible value, except as images and representations of the intended death of Christ. The blood of bulls and of goats had no value in itself : but it had a value so far as it referred to Christ ; and, like a Sacrament, made the penitents of those ages partakers of His great sacrifice and atonement. It would take up too much time to run through the long list of ceremonies and actions, which were designed by God as types, that is, as similitudes, or representations, of the death of our Saviour. Almost every ceremony of the Jewish religion had, in some sort or other, such a relation to Him. The

Law, in almost every part, was a shadow of good things to come.

But it is not only in the language of allegory, or of signs and ceremonies, that the future suffering Messiah was revealed. The prophets describe Him always as a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. One of the earliest of them, from whom Christ himself was, according to the flesh, descended, — David, describes, as if he were an eye witness, the sufferings, which you have heard this day. He describes the scornful words of his enemies, and the painful manner of his death. “They shoot out the lip,” saith he, speaking in the person of Christ; “They shake the head, saying, he trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him; let Him deliver him, seeing He delighteth in Him.”¹ “The assembly of the wicked,” saith he again, “have enclosed me, they pierced my hands and my feet.”² In this description the smallest circumstances are not forgotten; the gall, and the vinegar; the parting His garments, and the casting lots; are all mentioned with an exactness, which, I repeat it, more resembles an eye witness than a prophet.

In the 53d chapter of Isaiah, we also see the Messiah described as despised and rejected of men. “We did esteem Him,” saith he, “smitten of God; despised and afflicted; He

¹ Psalm xxii. 7, 8.

² Verse 16.

was stricken ; He bare stripes ; He was wounded, and bruised ; He was taken from prison and from judgement ; He was numbered among the transgressors ; He poured out His soul unto death ; He was cut out of the land of the living."

I do not repeat these passages in the exact order in which they follow each other ; there are many other points, which are described with equal accuracy ; but these are, perhaps, the most striking. And all these sufferings are declared to be appointed, and inflicted, by Divine Providence, for our sake, and in our stead, and for an atonement for our sins. " His soul," saith Isaiah, " was made an offering for sin ; He was wounded for our transgressions ; He was bruised for our iniquities ; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him ; and with His stripes we are healed. Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows ; for the transgression of my people He was stricken ; and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

These sufferings, likewise, He was to bear with patience and meekness : " He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter ; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb ; so he openeth not His mouth." Last of all, He was to die praying for His murderers :—He was to make " intercession for the transgressors "

And to prevent all possibility of objection, that any person, but the Messiah, is here spoken of, there are other parts of the same prophecy, which connect—with a bond impossible to be broken—these striking pictures of sorrow and pain with those lofty and majestic titles of power and divinity, which I repeated last Sunday. “By His knowledge,” it is said, “shall my righteous servant justify many.”—“I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out His soul unto death.”

After proofs like these, it is scarcely necessary to repeat the prophecy of Zacharias, who told the Jews, that the King of Sion should come, meek and lowly riding on an ass¹: or those words of Daniel, where,—of the Messiah, or *Anointed of God*, for this is the meaning of the word,—it is foretold, that He should be cut off; but not for Himself.² And of these prophecies be it remembered, the latest was written 400 years before Christ really came: so that the plain mention of His person and character could only proceed from the Spirit of God. The evidences, then, of Christianity, will stand nearly thus. The history and experience of all the nations of the world show that a Redeemer was necessary, both as a Teacher from God, and as a sacrifice for sin. Many holy men have given

¹ Zach. ix. 9.

² Dan. ix. 26.

such marks, such particular descriptions of the Messiah who was to come ;—have painted so exactly his person, His conduct, His power, and doctrines, His poverty, and His painful death, that no doubt could exist, or any room, one should think, for mistake. And 400 years after these prophecies, Jesus Christ is born, who fulfils all that was written of the Messiah ; and suffers, like Him, a painful and unjust death. Who can doubt any longer, on surveying this array of witnesses ? who can hesitate to answer in his heart, Verily, this is the Son of God. Verily, it behoved Christ to suffer such things ; and, after that, to enter into His glory !

And now, my friends, it is my duty to entreat you to consider, if these things be so, what manner of men ought we to be in holiness of life. Remember, that all these sufferings, which you have heard to-day,—all the boundless love, which Christ has shown us, all His grace, and the pardon itself, which He has offered us freely, — will do nothing more than increase our guilt and punishment, unless we use them properly ; and strive to show our love to Christ by walking according to His laws. As long as our deeds are evil, as long as our hearts are impenitent, it is impossible that the Cross of Christ can save us. How can it save us, if we will not accept the offer ? How can it save us, if we neglect the means prescribed ; and, by our evil deeds,

put the Lord Jesus, and the whole society of Christians, to open and continual shame ?

And is there one among you, who has attended to those different parts of Christ's sufferings, — which have been read during this week, — who does not burn with shame, when he reflects, how he himself has slighted such mercy ? Consider and see, if there were any sorrows like unto His sorrows wherewith the Lord afflicted Him. Behold Him, after a night of cries, and tears, and unutterable groaning, — a night of agony, and bloody sweat ; — behold Him betrayed by one friend, denied by a second, and deserted by all ; dragged from one judgement seat to another, scourged, beaten ; and insulted, for the space of half a day ; then fainting with loss of blood, and hunger, and weariness under the load of that Cross, on which He was Himself to suffer ! But this was not all : — it was not enough that He should hang for many hours together by His bleeding hands and feet ; — that His hunger, and feverish thirst, should be mocked by those cruel tender mercies of the wicked, the gall and the vinegar. This was not all ; — His soul within Him was troubled ; His Father hid His face from Him ; He was alone to bear all the miseries of His condition ; and to cry out in the bitterness of distress, — “ My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ? ”

And it was for your sake He suffered ; every groan was for you ; every drop of blood was shed for your salvation. Bitter tears, indeed, must you have wept ; bitter pangs awaited you, if those precious drops had not fallen. And can you, dare you, slight such great salvation ? Dare you provoke to anger such unbounded love, or render vain and fruitless the agonies of your Redeemer ? Beware in time, how you allow the days of grace to pass over ; beware, that you do not exceed the bounds of mercy.

There are those who are now lamenting bitterly those moments which they passed on earth ;—to whom the Cross of Christ is only an increase of torment ; and to whom the merciful Redeemer is become a severe and terrible Judge. Far other may He appear to you, and to me ! Oh let that boundless love move your heart to goodness. Let those agonies plead with you to flee from the sins which caused them. And may God, for His dear Son's sake, give you will and power, and grant you faith and knowledge, and peace, in this world, and in the world to come !

SERMON VI.

ST. MATTHEW'S DAY.

ST. MATTHEW, ix. 9.

And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom, and He said unto him, Follow Me, and he arose and followed Him.

THESE words inform us of the manner in which the great apostle and evangelist, St. Matthew, was joined to the number of Christ's immediate followers. And in this short history many facts are expressed or understood, which may both confirm our faith in the truth of our Saviour's divine authority ; and show forth in lively colours the freedom and riches of His grace ; and enforce on our minds and practice the necessity of a ready and cheerful obedience to every command, which He may lay on us, and to every sacrifice, which He may see fit to require at our hands.

And first, — the manner in which our Saviour called St. Matthew, and the ready obedience and public expressions of joy, with which he, on his part, received the call, must very strongly

confirm our faith in the divine authority and mission of Jesus.

And this will appear from the facts, which we have abundant reason to acknowledge, that St. Matthew was, by no means, a person likely to be led by interest to enter into our Saviour's service, or to be deluded into it by a blind enthusiasm, or by the crafty pretences of a deceiver. He was not likely to be led into Christ's service by interested or hypocritical motives. He Himself has informed us generally of his former condition in life; — that he was a publican, or receiver of the Roman taxes, a situation which was always held by wealthy and responsible men, and, generally, by men of talents and experience in business. It was a situation, indeed, in which wealth was absolutely necessary; since the publicans were bound in very large sums, to the amount, sometimes, of many thousand pounds, for the due discharge of their office; and since the place itself was so gainful, that considerable sums were often laid out in its purchase; and though, for reasons which I will explain hereafter, the publicans were greatly detested by the Jews, the knights and noblemen of Rome were always anxious to obtain the situation. And that St. Matthew himself was rich, we have an additional reason to believe from the information given us by St. Luke, that, on his being thus called, Matthew,

[or as St. Luke names him, Levi the son of Alpheus, it being very common for the Jews to have more names than one,] that Matthew made Jesus and his disciples “a great feast in his own house,” at which a great company of persons of the same profession with himself were assembled.¹

But to a man thus situated, a wealthy man, a man in a place under government which, of itself, gave him, what we should call, the rank of a gentleman, a man of business, and of the world, what inducement could be found but a sincere faith in Christ, to lead him to abandon, at a word, all these worldly advantages, and to enter into the ministry of one who, literally, had not where to lay his head? Let us suppose the event, or an event like it, to take place to-morrow, and a person like Matthew to be thus called, and thus persuaded by a prophet or pretended prophet of God, and could we possibly arrive at any other opinion concerning him, than that, whether he were mistaken or not, he was, at least, sincere in his professions? — St. Matthew, then, can only have acted in the manner described, from a sincere belief that Jesus was the Son of God, the anointed Saviour of his country.

“But though he had no intention to deceive others, may he not have been himself de-

¹ St. Luke, v. 27—29.

“ceived?” Neither is this by any means probable. St. Matthew, we know, was not a weak or a foolish man; we might have guessed this from the very circumstance of finding him in a situation of considerable power and trust, under masters so covetous and crafty as the Roman government. But this is not all; we have the picture of St. Matthew’s mind in the Gospel of his writing; which no one can read without acknowledging, either that its author was a man of considerable talent, or that his natural weakness was assisted by the Holy Ghost. But, since the enemies of Christ’s Gospel will not allow the last, they must admit the truth of the former of these observations; and it will follow, that St. Matthew was not likely to have been imposed on by the vain pretence of a deceiver. But, further, the manner in which St. Matthew was employed, was, of all others, least likely to dispose his mind to acquiesce in the pretence of a religious impostor. He was a man of business and of the world; engaged in active life; in the habit, most probably, of passing much of his time with heathens and unbelievers; unwilling, naturally, to incur from them the censure of rashness and superstition; and more inclined, it may be thought, by his previous habits, to laugh at the hopes entertained by his countrymen of a Messiah to deliver them from their enemies, than either to

wish for, or to expect an event which, according to the opinion entertained by the Jews of Christ's kingdom, was likely, if true, to deprive him of his office, and to expel his heathen masters of their power over the nation of the Jews. But, when we see such a man as this, a man of talent, a man of business, a man experienced in the world, a man whose principles and prejudices naturally led the directly contrary way, embracing, so readily, and so eagerly, the offer made by Christ of admitting him as a preacher of the Gospel, we must come to one of two conclusions; either that Christ, when He called him, wrought, at the same time, a miracle of grace in his understanding and his will, and disposed his head to receive and his heart to obey the command which He thus laid on him; or else, that St. Matthew, who lived in our Lord's own country of Galilee, and who had ample opportunity to inquire into all His proceedings—from the time of His baptism in Jordan, down to the moment when He thus addressed him, had really taken pains to learn the truth of His miracles and the excellence of His doctrine, and had really been convinced (which such a man as this, thus situated, could not have been without sufficient grounds) that the person who now called him, was Christ the Saviour of the world.

We may conclude, therefore, in the first

place, that the manner in which Christ called St. Matthew, and the ready obedience and public expressions of joy with which he, on his part, received the call, must very strongly confirm our faith in Christ, and in the promises which we have through Him received.

Secondly, the present history may set forth, in a striking manner, the freedom, and riches, and saving power of grace; inasmuch as, first, the situation in life and the former habits of Matthew were such as, humanly speaking, no person would expect to derive from them a saint, or an apostle; and secondly, since it is not too much to say that no conviction of the truth of our Saviour's miracles, no admiration of His doctrine, no general assent to the opinion that He was really the person foretold by the ancient prophets, would have been sufficient, without the preventing and furthering grace of the Almighty, to move a man to so great a sacrifice of interest, so great a change in his habits, his views, his cares, and his pleasures, as that which is here recorded by St. Matthew.

He was, by profession, a publican; a race of men exposed to great temptations, and so singularly hated by their countrymen, as that the current of their national affection was likely to be frozen by that unkindness, and by the popular contempt, to render them in truth what they were accused of being. They were the servants

and tax-gatherers of the Romans; a foreign nation, who had, some forty years before, reduced the Jews to slavery, and now kept them under by grievous laws and burthens, and by the presence of many garrisons of soldiers. The publicans, then, by whom these taxes were collected, were looked on as traitors to their country, and as drawing wealth out of the general misery; and as their way of life obliged them very often to be in the company of heathens, they were often in a manner compelled, or at least, were universally supposed, to eat of meats, and to join in conversations, which were expressly contrary to the law of Moses. And, as even an honest and upright publican was likely to be thus reflected on, so there is reason to believe that, by far the greater number, encouraged by the power in their hands, and by the bands of soldiers who were appointed to assist them, while all complaints against them were to be carried over land and sea, for many hundred miles, to the court of the emperor, and prosecuted there at great expense, were often guilty of exceeding oppression in grinding the poor, and exacting, from their countrymen, far more than the just demand. Though, therefore, the office of publican was not, in itself, unlawful, and though we have no reason to believe that St. Matthew, himself, had been a wicked or dishonest man, even before he

met with our Saviour, yet was his profession such as a very pious or conscientious man would hardly have chosen ; and it was one which was so odious to the Jews, and the persons who followed it were so universally accounted sinners, that, if God saw as man seeth, or if God had not designed to show the freedom of His grace, and to give hope that no class of men are shut out from it, and that no circumstances are so unfavourable as to destroy its efficacy, we may be sure that Christ would not have chosen a publican for one of His twelve apostles.— In truth, however, this action is only a single instance of that mercy which is, in every age, set forth by Him. And we daily find the effects of His Holy Spirit shining forth in the conversion of those, from whose habits and circumstances such happiness was least to be expected ; while others, far more favourably situated, are seen to go on in a state of utter blindness to their spiritual advantages ; or contented, at most, with a general decency of conduct, and with that fatal reliance on the praise or countenance of mankind which is the deadliest enemy to true religion. There were many among those whom the Jews regarded as sinners, who heard Christ gladly, and were led forth by Him from darkness into the glorious light of the Gospel ; while the outwardly grave and regular and virtuous, the severe and rigid

Pharisee, the well taught scribe, and the elders of the Jewish nation, shut their eyes against the proofs which His daily miracles offered, and sealed, at length, the condemnation of their incurable pride with the blood of their murdered Saviour. Nor can there be a better comfort offered to the sinner, and to the man surrounded by daily temptation, than the knowledge that, if he be not wanting to himself by failing to embrace the offered mercy, the very conviction, which he feels of his dangerous and lost condition, is the beginning of that wisdom from above which may conduct him to the knowledge of a Saviour, and to the new life which is in Christ ; while, on the other hand, no more solemn warning can be given to those who are more fortunately situated, to embrace, without delay, whatever means and opportunities of grace are offered, as knowing that the Spirit of God will not always strive with man ; and that the advantages which they enjoy, unless improved to the utmost, can do no more than increase their future damnation.

It is not, indeed, necessary to suppose, what some have taught in order to enhance the mercy shown to the publican Matthew, that he had been insensible to the calls of grace till the moment when our Lord thus addressed him ; that his conversion was sudden and miraculous ; and that he was, at the same instant, changed

from a child of sin to a favoured minister of the Gospel. We know that he had enjoyed, for some time, very ample opportunities of hearing Christ, and of satisfying himself as to his claims to the character of Messiah. He might have been, for all we know to the contrary, for some considerable time, a disciple both of our Lord and of John the Baptist. He might have been a sincere and professed believer in Christ for a considerable time before he was thus honoured by Him with a call to the apostleship. His office as publican, though liable to great temptations, and in disrepute with the Jews, was, in itself, both lawful and necessary; nor, though such an office was inconsistent with the duties of a minister of the word, was it at all inconsistent with the character of a private disciple. Like Zaccheus, salvation might have come to his house without his abandoning his trade; and all which John the Baptist, or Christ Himself, under such circumstances, required of him was, that he should exact no more than that which was appointed him.

There is then no reason to suppose, in the present instance, a case of instantaneous or irresistible conversion; but the grace is equally glorious, however the effect may have been gradual; nor is the mercy less which Matthew received, because he might, if he had been so disposed, have shut his eyes and hardened his

heart against it. Nor, on the other hand, when we consider the amount of the sacrifice which was now required of him, can we conceive that the mere speculative persuasion of the truths of Christ's doctrine and pretensions could have so far overcome his worldly interests as to induce him to join the company of our Lord's continual attendants; and engage in all the danger and toil to which that service was liable, unless his heart had been at once subdued and supported by the comfortable whispers of that Spirit which can bring forth strength out of weakness, and whose blessed influences are needful to enable us to profit even by the greatest opportunities of instruction.

But the truth of Christianity, and the freedom and the force of grace, are not the only truths which we may learn from the history of St. Matthew. We may learn, also, the necessity of our immediate and cheerful obedience to the commands of God. When our Saviour called him to arise and follow Him, He called him to give up a gainful profession for a life of hardship and toil and danger; He called him to expose himself to the mockery of his former companions; to the scoffs of the wise and learned among his countrymen; to the persecution of men in power: He called him to enter into a situation for which neither his former habits, nor, as he might plead, his

general education suited him. Should we have wondered if, under such circumstances, St. Matthew had offered an excuse? If, like another person, who was honoured in like manner, he had desired some little time to settle his affairs, to prepare his household for the change in his views and pursuits, and to escape, by some dissembling, the laughter and mockery of his brother publicans? But he did none of these things. He did not answer, "not yet, Lord, while so many persons are looking on; — at night I will come to Thee. Not yet, Lord, while my fortune is beginning to thrive; another year, and I will give up my business." He arose, immediately arose, and followed Him. He followed Him with joy, as having obtained the highest honour which mortal man could obtain: and to prove that joy, and in the natural hope, it may be, of extending the influence of our Lord among those with whom he had himself lived on terms of friendship, he makes a great feast and calls together all his brother publicans; and in defiance of their wonder or their ridicule, brings forward to these rich and worldly men as his Guide, his Teacher, his Prophet, and his King, the poor young man, the reputed son of a carpenter, whom His own townsmen of Nazareth had thought unworthy of their notice. Compare this conduct with your own, my friends: and can your hearts

answer that your behaviour has always been such as to resemble that of Matthew? Is there no instance, which you can recollect, in which your duty was as clearly shown to you as Matthew's duty was to him, — though not by the voice of a present Saviour, yet by His written words, and by the words of his ministers; and in which, all this notwithstanding, you have been afraid or ashamed to follow its dictates? When your conscience has said, "Abandon such a profitable bargain, go not to such a house, arise and leave such or such company;" have you, like Matthew, always obeyed, immediately and with joy, and without concealing your motives for thus acting? And can you hope that a faith in Christ and His promises will profit you, which is not shown forth by works, as well as entertained in the recesses of your heart? Oh then, in time, bethink you who He was that said, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"¹ Bethink you who hath said, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of Man be ashamed when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the Holy Angels²:" and sacrifice without delay, whatever earthly desire or earthly advantage may interfere with your salvation; imploring the grace of that God who did call Matthew from the

¹ St. Luke, vi. 46.

² St. Luke, ix. 26.

SERMON VI.

receipt of custom to be a prophet and evangelist, that you may, in like manner, forsake whatsoever hindereth you in your course to Heaven, and from following Jesus Christ the Son of God : to whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost be all honour and glory.

SERMON VII.

ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS.

REVELATION, xii. 7.

Michael and his angels fought against the dragon.

THIS day, being appointed by the universal Christian Church to invite us to the devout consideration of the invisible world, of its inhabitants, and of their nature and employment, I am unwilling to let it pass without shortly explaining to you whatever is revealed, in Scripture, or may be proved from it, respecting the Holy Angels of God. The word "angel," in the Greek language, means a "messenger." In ancient times, it was commonly applied to any person who bore a message either from God or man, and in the first hundred years after Christ, to the preachers of the Gospel, and, in particular, to the bishops who governed the Church. By degrees, however, it obtained a more appropriate and limited meaning; and has, for more than a thousand years, been only employed to signify those glorious persons, of a

nature superior to man, who are occupied in the service of the Almighty Father in Heaven, or are sent by Him to perform His errands in the world. In a certain sense, indeed, the word "angel" is capable of being applied to the Second and Third Persons of the Trinity; since both the Son and the Holy Ghost were sent into the world by the Father; and since all those miracles which They have wrought in ancient days, and all that blessed influence which They still continue to exercise, has been wrought or exercised in His name, and as messengers of His good and gracious pleasure. And this may explain to you why, in the Old Testament, the same Person is often called both God and God's Angel; why the Ten Commandments are sometimes in the Bible said to have been spoken by the Angel of the Lord, and sometimes by the Lord Himself; and why, in other places, the appearance of an Angel is said to have been the appearance of God; because, in truth, the Divine Power, who spake these things, was the Everlasting Son, who, afterwards, was made flesh for our redemption; who, though partaker of God's nature, and, thus, equal to Him, and One with Him, was, nevertheless, as a Son, inferior to His Father, and employed by Him as His Messenger; and thus was, in the strictest meaning of the words, both "God Himself, and the Angel of God

the Father.” And there are many holy and learned men who suppose, from a comparison of the different passages of Scripture, in which Michael the Archangel, that is “the Prince of Angels” is mentioned, that Michael (which is a Hebrew word meaning “who is like God”) is only another name for the blessed Son of God Himself, who is called, in Daniel’s prophecy, the Great Prince who was to stand up for God’s People¹, whose voice all they, who are in the grave, shall one day hear, whom all the angels of God, as we know from St. Paul’s epistle to the Hebrews, do serve and obey as their Prince and Sovereign, and who is, with great propriety, introduced by St. John, in the words of my text, as the great Captain of the army of the faithful, and fighting, with His angels. To Him with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be the honour due unto His name !

Having thus stated what is the opinion of many, and what I myself believe to be true, respecting Michael the Prince of Angels, I will now speak of angels in general, of those glorious companies who are obedient to God’s will, and who fly swiftly both in Heaven and earth to fulfil His commandments. That such blessed creatures there are, who have, from time to time, communicated His messages to prophets and holy men, and have, in pursuance of His de-

¹ Daniel, xii. 1.

cree, either comforted or delivered His saints in their afflictions and dangers, we cannot, if we believe the Scriptures, disbelieve. We might indeed, have been led to suppose, even if the Scriptures had not revealed the fact to us, that, placed as we are in the scale of created things, and observing, as we must do, the gradual progress of this scale from stones to plants, from plants to animals, and among them from the oyster or the worm to the noblest of the animal creation, and from them to man, we have good reason to suppose that there are other creatures as far superior to the wisest man, as the wisest man is to the beasts which perish. But in Scripture this point is rendered plain, first, by the frequent mention made of angels as the inhabitants of heaven and attendants in the courts of God; secondly, by the no less frequent instances in which angels have actually appeared, or in which they are said to exert an influence on the welfare and behaviour of mankind. At the first beginning of the world, we are told in the book of Job, these sons of God shouted for joy. They sang glory to God and peace to mankind when Christ was born, and salvation came into the world¹; they still, as Christ tells us, continue to love and pity us their younger brethren; “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner

¹ St. Luke, ii. 14.

that repenteth¹ ;” and when the Day of Judgment shall come, and our Lord, on His return, shall deliver His servants, and give up unrepentant sinners to destruction, the holy angels, we are told, shall then attend Him, to partake of His triumph, and increase the terrors of His appearance.²

But these are not their only employments. God, we may be sure, has not such need of the praise of any created being as to have instituted this noble army of Cherubim and Seraphim, for such a purpose. They are, as we have seen, the messengers and warriors of the Almighty. The Roman Centurion³ spoke of them, (and spoke of them without reproof,) as soldiers and servants of Christ, who went where He would, and performed what He commanded. They fight their Lord’s battles, as mentioned in the words of my text, against Satan and the fallen spirits: the stars, the seasons, the clouds and rain may be entrusted, perhaps, to their unseen direction; and we absolutely know, from the New Testament, that they interfere in a manner still more important to the happiness of the world, in the protection and guidance of those who believe in the name of Jesus.⁴ It is not the Son of God, only, whom they were to bear on their wings lest He might dash

¹ St. Luke, xv. 10.

² St. Matt. xxv. 31.

³ Acts, x. 30.

⁴ Heb. i. 14.

His foot against a stone. It is not this or that great saint to whom such privilege and protection are confined. The poorest and most ignorant Christians have the like Heavenly guardians. "Take heed," saith Christ, "that ye offend not one of these little ones which believe in me; for, I say unto you, their angels always behold the face of my Father which is in Heaven!" This is, indeed, their peculiar office and employment; and great and wise and mighty as they are, yet are they all but "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation."

There have been, even, occasions in which they have mingled in man's likeness among men; and in which those, who only supposed that they were relieving the wants of some weary traveller, have received angels, unawares, into their houses and at their tables. Even among ourselves, and in the ordinary course of the world, who knows how often we have been assisted and defended by the care of these invisible friends? They watch over us, perhaps, while we are asleep; they comfort us, when in sickness or sorrow; they correct us for our sins; they rejoice over us in our repentance; they encourage us to trust and hope in God; and when our death-bed struggle is at its end (and who can tell what angelic whispers may comfort us in our pangs?) it is they who bear us on their

wings, as they did the soul of Lazarus, to the harbour of peace and pardon, “where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest !”

Would you know what manner of beings they are, by whom we are thus greatly favoured, and whose eyes so often behold us when we fancy ourselves most secret? Those, who have appeared to men, are described as distinguished by a beauty and majesty far exceeding all that human excellence can equal, or human fancy conceive. The circumstances of their glory are faintly imaged so as to be understood by men, under the name of wings, white robes, and golden crowns; their countenances bright as the lightning or the noonday sun; and their voices loud and terrible as the roar of many waters. Compared with the eternal duration of their youth and beauty, the age of man is but a shadow which passeth away; compared with their strength, the weapons of an army are but vain; compared with their wisdom, who are taught by God Himself, the learning of man is as the babble of a child. And these, and such as these, are witnesses of our actions; these, and such as these, mourn over our faults. And shall we think highly of ourselves, when they are near? — shall we despise our poorer or more ignorant brethren, while they think no scorn to watch over our welfare? — shall we behave ourselves

unseemly in their presence, who are, we hope, one day, to be made our companions for evermore?

Do these thoughts oppress and terrify you? do you feel your own insignificance, and tremble in the presence of those so much your superiors? Give ear to me, and I will tell you, in the words of Christ Himself, how the angels may be made your friends; and how you yourselves may become, one day, like unto them, and superior, perhaps, to some among their number. "Whosoever shall humble himself as a little child," whosoever shall cast away all confidence in himself, his own merits, consequence, and wisdom; whosoever shall rely for instruction on God, as a child seeketh instruction from his parent; whosoever shall believe whatever God reveals in Scripture, and hope in Him only, for protection as a child believeth his father's words, and leaneth on its mother's bosom; that same is one of those little ones whom the angels of God's presence do not disdain to guard; that same shall himself be an angel, and one of the greatest in the Kingdom of God.

Is any man desirous of power? let him humble himself, and he shall be exalted. Does any man long for wealth and glory? let him submit himself as a little child: and a white robe and a golden crown are prepared for him! Does any love knowledge? let him own himself blind,

and ignorant as the new-born babe ; and the secrets of Paradise shall be made known to him ! Does any long for deliverance from the burden of sin ? let him believe in Christ, and hope in His blood ; and his soul will appear, in the world to come, as pure as the Holy Angels !

O Everlasting God, who hast ordained and constituted the service of angels and men in a wonderful order, mercifully grant that, as Thy Holy Angels always do Thee service in Heaven, so, by Thy appointment, they may succour and defend us on earth, through Jesus Christ our Lord !

SERMON VIII.

ST. LUKE'S DAY.

2 TIMOTHY, iv. 10.

Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica ; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me.

A MOVING and remarkable picture is presented to us in this second Epistle to Timothy, of a good and wise and aged servant of God, in much natural agitation of mind under the accumulated burthen of captivity, desertion of friends, and approaching martyrdom ; yet supported by the grace of Him for whom he was about to lay down his life, and by the love and service of a single faithful follower. It was written by St. Paul from Rome, when he was about to take his trial for life and death under the worst and wickedest monarch whom the world ever saw, the Roman emperor Nero. How little reason he had to expect, that, in such a trial, his innocence would be able to preserve him, you will perceive, when I tell you its occasion, and the charge which was brought against him.

Nero had, a short time before the date of this epistle, in a brutish and drunken frolic, kindled a fire by which a great part of the city, and many thousands of its inhabitants had perished. And, in order to remove from himself the suspicion of having caused this calamity, and the deep and dangerous hatred, which such a suspicion would produce in the minds of his subjects, he was guilty of the further wickedness of accusing the Christians then in Rome of having committed that crime, of which he was himself the sole contriver. Many hundred innocent persons were, on this accusation, wrapt in pitched canvass, and burnt to death by his orders, in the public walks and gardens ; and St. Paul, who had, as you may read in the Acts of the Apostles, appealed to the court of Rome against the corrupt judgement of Festus¹, and who had now lived for many years (his innocence having been cleared) at large in that city, was called on, with the rest, to answer this horrid charge ; and, like the rest, was condemned and executed, with this only difference, that, as being a Roman citizen, he was not burnt, but privately beheaded in the prison.

It was in expectation, then, of such a death, that St. Paul appears to have written this epistle, in which he speaks of himself as “ the prisoner of the Lord, and for His testimony,” as “ suffering these things for the sake of our Saviour

¹ Acts, xxv. 11.

Jesus Christ, and as not ashamed of Him," "suffering trouble as an evil doer," "enduring all things for the sake of the elect," "dying with Christ that he might live with Him," as "now ready to be offered;" as conscious that "he had fought a good fight," that he had "finished his course and kept the faith," and that "a crown of righteousness was laid up for him for evermore." But amid these expectations of death, and supported by these hopes of happiness and immortality, there is one circumstance which appears to have given him no small disturbance and disquiet; the absence or backwardness of those friends on whom he had been accustomed to rely for defence and comfort in the hour of distress, whom his preaching had converted to the faith of Christ, and who had been his fellow-labourers in the glorious cause of the Gospel. It is thus that he complains how "all they of Asia were turned away from him:"—how "at his first answer, no man stood with him; but all forsook him:"—how "Alexander the copper-smith had done him much evil:"—and thus it is that he the rather urges Timothy to do his diligence to come unto him, because Demas had forsaken him; and because Titus and Crescens were departed into distant countries.

But, while the apostle thus complains of general unkindness and desertion, there is one friend whom he excepts from the charge; and who

now, as on former occasions, was the partner of all his toils and dangers, Luke, the beloved physician, Luke, the disciple whose praise was in the Gospel, Luke was with him still, his servant, his friend, his counsellor:—from the day, when he first went into Macedonia, he had been with him, in the perils of his journey, in the tumult at Jerusalem, in his bonds, in his shipwreck: and now, in his last fiery trial, Luke was with him: and it will be my business to explain to you who this Luke was, whose courage and constancy so far surpassed that of St. Paul's remaining companions.

Here, however, you must not expect that I should be able to please your curiosity with many facts, or a long and detailed history of his exertions in the cause of Christianity. The first teachers of our faith, while they gladly spent their lives in carrying the fame of the Gospel through the world, and conveying it, by their writings, to generations yet unborn, were, in no instance, anxious for their own renown; or that their names, their labours, and their sufferings should be honoured or remembered. They spake of Christ crucified alone, and of the fulfilment of those promises, which, before His decease, He made to the Church, His family: being content themselves to spread His name among ignorant and barbarous nations, and desirous of no other praise than that which they

will one day receive of, “ Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” It is thus, that out of the chosen Twelve, whom Christ appointed to follow Him on earth, and to sit on twelve thrones in the resurrection, out of these twelve the greater part are only known to us by name: and it is thus that of St. Luke, the Scriptures only tell us that he was a physician, a constant companion of St. Paul, and the author of the Gospel which bears his name, and of the Acts of the Apostles. To these few facts, the diligent inquiry of the ancient Fathers has only been able to add, that he was born at Antioch the chief city of Syria; that he was converted to Christianity by the preaching and miracles of St. Paul; that he remained with St. Paul to the very hour of his martyrdom; that he afterwards preached the Gospel in many different and distant countries; and at last was put to death for his faith in Christ, in the eighty-fourth year of his age. Yet from the little which is known of St. Luke, his situation in life, his talents, his character, and conduct, a very useful lesson may be drawn; which may prove to you how wisely our Church has acted, in thus, at stated seasons, calling to mind the names and works of these worthies of ancient times; and that there is not one of those days which she has dedicated to the memory of the saints, which does not afford to those, who devoutly improve it, an additional confirmation

of their faith, and an additional motive to godliness.

Let me, then, shortly recall to your recollection what has been said of St. Luke, his situation, conduct, and character. He was a physician, a member of a respectable and gainful profession : and from his writings, which have come down to our times, and which all who understand the original Greek, have agreed in admiring for their ability and elegance, it is plain that he was a man of considerable talents and learning. Now if such a person as this did not believe in the truths of the Gospel, what probability was there that he should have become a member of a society so unpopular, so poor, so persecuted, as the Church then was? that he, who was, probably a Greek, should have submitted himself to St. Paul, a Jewish teacher, and therefore disliked and despised by the Greeks in general? that he should have given himself up, thenceforth, entirely to the service of one, who, like St. Paul, had neither wealth nor power to bestow, who was obliged to work for his own support ; whose whole life was past in painful journeyings ; and who, at his death, had no other legacy to leave to his friend but a continuance of the same labours, and an expectation, sooner or later, of the same martyrdom? If St. Luke did not believe the Gospel, he must have been worse than an idiot to join himself to St. Paul. That

he was very far from an idiot, whoever reads his Gospel must acknowledge. It follows, that he must have been sincere ; and that, if deception existed anywhere, he must have been, himself, the deceived person. Let us see, then, how far this latter supposition is a likely one.

Is it supposed, that he was carried away and imposed on by the eloquent and artful discourses of the person whose fortunes he thereafter followed? — That St. Paul, by his crafty persuasions led him astray, and enticed him to embrace the faith of a crucified Saviour? Let it be remembered that St Paul was a Jew ; that the Jews of that age were very little more respected by the heathen than they are, in modern times, by the Christians ; and ask yourselves whether it is likely that a medical man of talents and information, at the present day, could be induced by any eloquence, how great soever, of a Jew, to embrace his religion, or take any other step so directly contrary to his interest and reputation in this world, as that to which the eloquence of St. Paul is supposed to have persuaded Luke, the learned and able physician of Antioch. But further, of St. Paul's power of speaking, we know something by the testimony of those who, in such cases, are most to be attended to, the testimony of his enemies. They objected to St. Paul, as St. Paul has himself told us, that, however powerful his epistles were, he was, in his preach-

ing, so far from being an orator, he was the direct contrary. It is possible, I allow, it is even probable, that there ill-will exaggerated its defects, — but this I must maintain that he, whom his enemies described as “mean in his bodily presence and contemptible in his speech¹,” was not, and could not be, so artful a pleader as, by his powers of preaching alone, to have made many converts to a new religion; and that the converts whom he made, St. Luke among the number, must have been made, as St. Paul himself tells us they were, by a spiritual power, and by the weight of real or imagined miracles.

Let it be, then considered, how little St. Luke was likely to have been imposed upon by any false pretence of this kind, — how little likely to have mistaken a mortal juggle for the finger of God; or enthusiasm, for a prophetic spirit. He was, evidently, from the manner in which his works are written, a person well educated, and familiar with the writings of Grecian philosophy; a course of studies which would by no means dispose a man to be very easy of belief in such a history of Christ's life and resurrection as St. Paul had to communicate. And he was, moreover, a physician. Now, it is generally supposed, whether truly or not, that medical men are, from habit

¹ 2 Cor., x. 10.

and the course of their reading, less inclined, than most other descriptions of men, to believe in stories of religious wonder and revelation. And, be this as it may, it is perfectly plain that a medical man is better able, than any other man that can be named, to find out the trick of a pretended miracle; to know whether such an one, who pretended to have been cured of blindness or lameness, had been really blind or lame, or was really cured; whether such a person, who pretended to speak with tongues, really had this power, or only used a strange and unmeaning jargon; and whether Paul himself were, as the Roman Governor Festus supposed, a crazy though learned enthusiast; or whether he really spake the words of truth and sobriety and sound understanding, when he laid claim to a revelation from Heaven. Supposing that these things were to happen over again in this generation and in this country, supposing that a new religion were taught, confirmed, or said to be confirmed, by unnumbered signs and miracles, what means could be thought of so likely to guide our opinions concerning it, as to employ such a medical man, as St. Luke appears to have been, to inquire into the truth or falsehood of the wonders said to have been performed. Can we then hesitate to believe, when, with every advantage of neighbourhood, and learning, and experience, with no

motive to deceive others, and extremely unlikely to be himself deceived, the physician Luke became a Christian ?

Another lesson, which we may learn from the observation of this day's festival, is the necessity, when we have once made up our minds, of following our principles wherever they lead us ; and under all circumstances, doing that which our religion requires, and to which the hand of Providence points the way.

We know not the extent of those sacrifices of reputation, of extended practice, of wealth and influence, which an able physician, in the chief city of Syria, may have made in becoming a preacher of the Gospel ; but we are sure that in the then situation of the Church, St. Luke could not have gained in a worldly point of view, by joining himself to the wandering and persecuted fortunes of such men as Paul and Barnabas. And when we see him persevering, through a long life of toil and distress, in the course which he had thus begun, we may well blush for our own unsteadiness, who, with no worldly hindrance worth the name, and often with many strong worldly encouragements to continue stedfast in a consistent discharge of our duty, are yet so often led astray from our first love by the merest trifles of convenience, popularity, or amusement. It is a fatal mistake to suppose, that there can be no apostacy from

Christ where we are not absolutely called on to deny His name, or to burn incense to an idol. We deny our Lord, whenever, like that Demas who is named in my text, we, through love of this present world, forsake the course of duty which Christ has plainly pointed out to us. We deny our Lord, whenever we lend the sanction of our countenance, our praise, or even our silence, to measures or opinions which may be popular or fashionable, but which we ourselves believe to be sinful in themselves or tending to sin. We deny our Lord, whenever we forsake a good man in affliction, and refuse to give countenance, encouragement, and support to those who, for God's sake, and for the faithful discharge of their duty, are exposed to persecution or slander. It is not possible, at this time of day, to know the particular reasons which led Demas to forsake St. Paul; but there is no ground for thinking that he openly renounced either his friendship or his religion. He may have found it inconvenient or dangerous to remain in Rome; he may have feared,—since the crime, of which St. Paul was accused, was no less than that of having set fire to the city, he may have feared that his own reputation might suffer from being too intimate with a person thus suspected. He may have pleaded with himself that he thus lessened his own power of doing good as a preacher of the

Gospel, while he could render no effectual service to St. Paul, and that it was, therefore, safer, and equally serviceable to Christianity, if he went to preach the Gospel in some distant country.

Now, let us consider all these pleas. As to the danger, he was in God's hands in Rome no less than in Thessalonica; and it was in God's power to have protected him alike in either place. His plea, that he could be of no essential service to St. Paul, is answered by the bitterness of anguish with which St. Paul complains of the desertion of his friends in the hour of danger; and his over care for his own reputation has produced no other effect than to contrast his conduct with the noble and courageous fidelity of St. Luke; and to hold him up to all future generations, and to every one who reads the volume of Scripture, as the cowardly, time-serving Demas, who forsook his aged teacher on the eve of his martyrdom. As we read this action of his we feel a loathing and abhorrence of his character; but let us recollect that we approach to it ourselves whenever we give up a good man or a good cause to the prejudices of the world; and that as an irreligious man is seldom a good friend, so a wavering and unsteady friend can never be a good Christian. Lastly, however, since Scripture is full of instances in which the best and greatest benefactors

of mankind have met, in the hour of their distress, with little save neglect and desertion ; since the dearest connexions of Job were only busy insulting his forlorn condition on pretence of rendering him comfort, since St. Paul, out of all whom he had led from darkness into light, found Luke alone to comfort him and remain with him in his captivity, and since the Son of God Himself was betrayed by one friend, denied by another, and forsaken by all, how greatly does it concern us to set our hearts, in the first place, on God, the Father, the Friend, the Guide, and Guardian of all those who trust in Him ; with whom is no variableness or shadow of turning ; who will never leave us, nor forsake us ; who will deliver us, when we call on Him in the day of trouble ; who will take us up, when even our father and our mother forsake us ; whose rod and whose staff shall comfort us in the valley of the shadow of death ; and who, in the dreadful day of judgement, shall say to our souls, I am thy Salvation !

SERMON IX.

ALL SAINTS' DAY.

HEBREWS, xii. 1, 2.

Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus.

IN the Epistle and in the Gospel for this morning's service, the Church has set before us a comparison of the condition of the saints of God in the place of their Heavenly home, and in that of their earthly pilgrimage; in the former, describing to us the happiness and glory of those, whom God has gathered into His kingdom; in the latter, those virtues and sufferings, by which, under Christ, and through the help of God's Spirit, these blessed promises are to be obtained.

In the Epistle (for the book of Revelations, out of which that portion of Scripture is taken, can be regarded in no other light than as an epistle to the seven Churches of Asia), in the

Epistle, St. John, after mentioning, what to his countrymen, the Jews, was of most immediate interest, the number of Israelites who should receive the faith of Christ and enter into his kingdom, goes on to describe the far greater multitude of Gentile converts, who, being called to the acceptance of His Gospel, and persevering in His faith and service, should be gathered together in Paradise, in joyful expectation of the last great Judgement, and of that new Heaven and new earth in which their bliss should receive its full completion, and when, in the presence of their Father and their God, they should live and reign for ever. “After this,” says the Apostle, — meaning after the fullness of Israel was come in, and the appointed number of their tribes had received in their foreheads the Divine seal of baptism, — “After this, I beheld, and lo, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!’ And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders, and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their face, and worshipped God, saying, Amen: blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and

thanksgiving, and honour, and might be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen!"¹

Do ye desire to know what manner of men these have been in the present life, who in the other world are so greatly honoured? — these, whose number was to be complete, before the destroying angels had power to harm the earth or the sea — these, who wear white robes, the sign of kingly power in ancient times, and palm branches, the sign of victory; these, whose shouts of joy are heard aloud in the courts of God; who are equal with the angels themselves; and who, with the angels, are counted worthy to worship and join in the praise of Him who sitteth on the throne, and of the Lamb? Do you desire to know what part they acted, what place they held among mankind, whom the Lord of Heaven and earth will honour thus exceedingly? Turn to the Gospel which followed in the service of this day: and the words of our Saviour Christ Himself will answer you that question. These inheritors of Heaven have not been the great, or wise, or mighty on the earth; these servants, in whom God is well pleased, are not they whose deeds have filled the mouths of men, and their names been glorious among the nations; these, who now drink of the river of God's pleasure, and are increased with the riches of His sanctuary, are

¹ Rev. vii. 9, 10, 11, 12.

not they on whom the goods of this world have been most largely bestowed, and whose path through life has been strewed with roses. On the contrary, these inheritors of Christ's fullest blessing have been those whom the world is least disposed to admire or envy, — the poor in spirit, the mourners for sin, the meek, the hungry after righteousness, the merciful, the pure, the peace-makers, the persecuted, the slandered for the sake of the Gospel. These are they, who are, in this life, encouraged by the Son of God, "to rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is their reward in Heaven."¹ These men they are, and men like these, whom St. John saw standing with triumphant palms in the presence of the Almighty. "One of the elders" St. John continues, "answered, saying unto him, 'What are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they?' And I said unto him "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His Temple. And He that sitteth upon the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat. For the Lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living

¹ St. Matt. v. 12.

fountains of water : and God shall wipe away all tears from all eyes.”¹

This difference between the frequent distresses of the saints in this life, and their happiness in the life to come ; between the neglect, or contempt, or slander, which they often receive from sinful men, and the everlasting honour which the praise of God will one day confer on them ; the dreadful mistake of the wicked who despise that condition in this world which is most favourable to holiness, that meek and humble temper which neither does evil nor revenges it, and that heavenly-mindedness which neglects all the pleasures and honours and enjoyments of the world, in comparison with the service of God and the recompence of reward which He holds out to us, is represented in many other parts of the Sacred Volume. In the first Lesson for this morning's service, we read how God hath punished the righteous in the sight of men, and tried them like gold in the furnace² ; and in the second Lesson, we have a lively picture presented to us by St. Paul of the manner in which the faith of the martyrs of old time was triumphant over the malice of their enemies. We there read of the tortures, the cruel mockings and scourgings, the bonds and imprisonments, the many kinds of death, the hunger, cold, and nakedness

¹ Rev. vii. 13 — 17.

² Wisdom, iii.

which, with less hope and less knowledge than the meanest Christian now possesses to encourage him in his duty, the Jews of ancient times underwent, for the God of their fathers ; and we are encouraged by their example to run with patience the race which is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured still greater and more painful suffering, and a cup more bitter than is prepared for any of His brethren.¹

Such being the character and tenor of those Scriptures which are appointed to be read to you, the meaning of this day's festival and the use which we should make of it are plain. In it the Church invites us to celebrate the memory of all those servants of God who are departed hence in His faith and fear ; She invites us to bless God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, for the grace which He hath given, and the power which He hath shown in leading these our fellow-creatures from the darkness of sin to the light of the Gospel ; in putting such a heart within them as enabled them to love Him above all things, and to despise in His cause all the fury of men and devils ; in keeping them, lastly, through the temptations and persecutions of this world, and enabling them, through much tribulation to enter into life eternal. The

¹ Heb. xi.

Church further calls on us to bless God for the example, which He has thus held out to us, of our nature, thus, by His help, made superior to sin, and to pain ; and for the glorious hope, which He has given, of a reward for each of us of the same kind with that which He bestows on His saints in glory. Fourthly, the Church invites us to join in prayer, as in the Collect appointed for this day, “ that God would grant us grace so to follow His blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys which He hath prepared for them that unfeignedly love Him.”

And, in thus recording the praise, and preserving the solemn recollection, of our forerunners in our spiritual race, the Church has done well and wisely, with a perfect knowledge of the natural feelings of men, and with a strict attention to the spirit and letter of Scripture. She does not call on us, according to the practice of some mistaken Christians, to pray to the departed saints, or to desire their intercession with the Almighty. We know not, with sufficient certainty, whether they can hear our prayers or no, and we are certain that they desire no worship at our hands, since we are forbidden thus to honour the angels whom they resemble ; and are commanded to confine our prayers to the Persons of the Trinity alone. Nor are we authorized in Scripture to ask for the saints' in-

tercession. Here, again, we know not whether our prayers can reach their ears; and we are sure, that, by us, who have Jesus Christ for our mediator, no intercession of theirs can be wanted.

But though we do not pray to them, we may well give thanks for them; we may well pray for grace to follow their examples; and we may well and fitly make use of those examples as encouragement to ourselves and others under the temptations and afflictions, which (with far lighter weight than these servants of God supported) are laid on us in our passage through this land of our pilgrimage. It is observed by Solomon that “the memory of the just is blessed.” It is a part of that reward which the Holy Ghost holds forth to the righteous, in Scripture, that “their names shall be held in everlasting remembrance.” And our Saviour Himself did not disdain to give an assurance to the woman who poured ointment on His head, that “wherever His Gospel should be preached, this also that she had done should be told for a memorial of her.”¹ When therefore we do honour to the memory of the faithful dead, we are rendering to them no more than is their due, and than their Master, and ours, hath promised that they should receive from us,—we are testifying, by the only means in our power, a natural and be-

¹ St. Mark, xiv. 9.

coming thankfulness to those who, for the conversion of those heathen nations from which we ourselves are sprung, endured so great tribulation ; and if it be true, which some expressions of Scripture lead us to believe, that the spirits of the departed are not altogether ignorant of that which passeth in the present world, and of the estimation in which their names are held among men, we are, on such occasions as these, accomplishing to a certain extent, the blessedness of the departed saints, and adding, through God's grace, our little offering of praise to that overflowing cup of honour and happiness which is prepared for them by the Almighty.

But, whether the reasonable honour, which we thus pay to the departed saints, be known unto the saints themselves or no, it is certain that the return of these festivals may to us, who are still warring with the temptations of the present life, be abundantly useful and edifying.

In the first place, when we recollect the greatness of their labours and sufferings in the cause of God and goodness,—how much they did, — how much they gave up,—how greatly they persevered : and how marvellously they subdued the world, the flesh, and the devil, we shall be led to think very meanly of ourselves, and of our own exertions ; and, instead of magnifying our own zeal, our own usefulness, our

own sacrifices, and acts of self-denial, to cry out in deep agony of self-abasement:—"O God, who are we, that we should hope to enter into Thy Kingdom? In which of its lowest rooms are we worthy to abide? too happy, surely, too highly honoured, if we may sit at the feet of Thy meanest saints, or gather their crumbs from beneath their table?"

But, secondly, let us recollect, who those were whose virtues we thus despair of imitating; and by what help it was that they have attained to such a height of blessedness. They were men like ourselves, weak, ignorant and sinful men, who felt, as much as we do, their want of power to serve the Lord; and who sought, as we may do, His grace to guide and strengthen them. They, who gave up all worldly riches for the sake of the Gospel, were, by nature, as fond of wealth as we, who grudge to God what He claims from us for His Church and for the poor. They, who resisted all temptations, which the devil and the flesh could hold forth, were endued with the same capacities of enjoyment, the same passions, the same natural weakness of resolution, as we, who talk so much of being unable to withstand the persuasion of wicked friends, or the whispers of wicked appetites. They, who cheerfully bore affliction, bonds, and death, for the Gospel, were as sensible of pain, of hunger, and of cold, and as fond

of life, as we can be, who murmur under every slight disease ; who make the least possible inconvenience a reason for neglecting our duty : — whom a little shower can keep back from Church ; or a little worldly damage seduce to falsehood or desertion of our principles. The more, then, we admire their victory, the more should shame forbid us to give way, under such trifling difficulties as God usually thinks fit to try us with ; and the more earnestly should we seek, by every appointed means, for that grace by which we, like they, shall be made more than conquerors.

And while these meditations are proper for every saint's day, so there are others, which belong to All Saints' day alone, and which may show more strongly the propriety, with which our Church, after running through, in the course of her year, the names of the more eminent soldiers in Christ's army, the apostles and evangelists, has set aside one day to the commemoration of that mighty multitude of believers who have gone before us to their reward, and have left behind them an example that we should follow their steps.

And these are, first, such as arise from the multitude of the saints in glory ; secondly, from the communion or fellowship of all Saints both in Heaven and in earth ; and thirdly, from the nature of that division which will be one day

made between the friends and the enemies of God, and the total absence of any class of beings between these two opposites.

Thus, when, in the first place, we consider that those high honours, which, as you have read in St. John's vision, are the privilege of the saints, are not confined to those few remarkable servants of God whose praise is recorded in the Scripture, and to whom all Christians have since looked back as the pillars of the Everlasting Gospel, but that the goodness of the Almighty has, for His Son's sake, extended these blessings to all, however humble their talents, or limited their means of doing good, who believe in Him, and, to the best of their small ability, serve Him, — great love must naturally arise in our hearts towards the Lord of all bounty and compassion; and great comfort, so far as we are ourselves concerned, as to the condition of those Christian friends who are gone before us to their sleep in the faith and fear of their Redeemer. It is not Paul alone, nor John, nor James, nor Peter who are described in the book of Revelations as clothed in white robes, and with palms in their hands, and made equal with the angels. It is a mighty multitude, which no man can number, of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues, who are to hunger and thirst no more, whom the Lamb is to feed and to lead unto living fountains, and from whose eyes God is to wipe

away every tear. And can we consider this multitude without a comfortable hope, that those, in whom our own souls have delighted during their sojournment below, have, by the mercy of Christ, perhaps attained to the same blessedness? Does not our fancy picture to us in the midst of this glorious assembly, some familiar face, some friend, or parent, or kinsman? Or shall we not bless God, whose promises have so greatly disarmed death of its sting, and made the departure of a pious person the subject of thanksgiving more than of sorrow? "The souls of the righteous are in the hand of the Lord, and there shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise, they seemed to die; and their departure is taken for misery; and their going from us to be utter destruction; yet they are in peace. For though they be punished in the sight of men, yet is their hope full of immortality."¹ Shall we weep then for the dead who die in the Lord? or shall we not rather do our diligence to be found one day in the number of those who are to dwell with Him, and be restored, to part no more, to that society which was on earth our support and happiness?

Secondly, it is a doctrine so essential to Christianity as to be made a part of our daily profession of belief, that there is a communion or fellowship between all the servants of God,

¹ Wisdom, iii. 1—4.

whether they are the saints militant here in Christ's Church below, — or the saints whose labour is done, whose works have followed them, and who now rejoice under the shadow of His wings in Paradise. This communion may, no doubt, be understood of the common hope which cheers, the common Sacrament which binds them, the common prayers and love and reverence which unite them to each other, and to the great King and Saviour of them all. But, I confess, I am inclined to suppose something farther intended, and to believe that the souls of virtuous men in another world do not lose all knowledge of those things which are done by their surviving fellow Christians, — that they rejoice with us in our victories over Satan, and look down, with anxious hopes to the moment, when our toils, like theirs, shall be completed. Thus, St. Paul, after reckoning up the ancient worthies of the Jewish Church, and the triumphs which their faith had achieved, urges us to greater diligence by representing them as witnesses of our battle with hell, and as sharing in the joy of our deliverance. We know, indeed, that “there is joy among the angels of God over every sinner that repenteth”¹; and if the privilege of beholding the things which pass on earth be given to those glorious beings, — it is also *possible*, I might say, it is also *likely*, that

¹ St. Luke, xv. 10.

the departed saints may be allowed to watch over the actions of those from whom, for a little time, they are separated. Nor can I conceive a much stronger argument, with the generality of mankind, to virtue and holiness, than that "seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, we should lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus."¹

And to this we may be still further moved by meditation on the number and the blessedness of the saints in Paradise, when we consider, lastly, that, in that struggle between good and evil which rends and disturbs all created things, we must not, and we cannot, be indifferent spectators only; that we must chuse our side among either the soldiers or the enemies of God; that we must, in the other world, take our place, either among the saints or the devils; and that, if we despise the white robes and the golden crowns of the one, — the fire everlasting, prepared for the other, is ready kindled to receive us.

And can we doubt in such a choice as this? Can we, dare we, linger in taking our side?

O God, we are Thy servants, Thy children sealed in baptism, O claim us, keep us for thine own! Renew in our souls that courage which

¹ Heb. xii. 1, 2.

will enable us to fight Thy battle, that armour of grace, which the darts of hell cannot pierce ; that so, “ though fools account our life madness, and our end without honour,” we may be numbered, at length, among Thy children, and find our lot among Thy holy ones ! Amen, for Jesus Christ’s sake, our Lord.

Almighty God, who hast knit together Thine elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of Thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, grant us grace so to follow Thy blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living, that we may come to those unspeakable joys which thou hast prepared for them that unfeignedly love Thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen !

SERMON X.

ON THE GOVERNMENT OF THE HEART.

PART I.

PROVERBS, iv. 23.

Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

AMONG the many wise counsels given in the book of Proverbs, there is none which deserves more attention than that contained in this text.

Its importance, however, is by the greater part of men too seldom perceived or acted on. Their notions of religion are, too often, confined to the outward behaviour only; and they conceive their duty to be fulfilled, if they preserve a decent character, and set a good example to those around them. What passes, in the mean time, within their minds, they suppose to be of no great consequence either to the world or to their Maker; they regard their heart as an empire which belongs to

themselves alone; and which, even so far as they themselves are concerned, requires very little care or government. You have heard, on the other hand, how earnestly the wisest man, who ever lived, exhorts us to “keep the heart with all diligence;” and you have heard the reason also, for which he is thus earnest in his advice, namely, “for out of it are the issues of life.

What is meant, by “keeping the heart,” I shall shortly endeavour to explain to you;—but it shall, first, be my object to set forth the great necessity of the caution given by Solomon, by showing, in what sense, and to what extent, the “issues of life” are said to be out of the heart.

There are two reasons for which the issues of life are said to be out of the heart;—the one, because the state of the heart is what determines our moral and religious character:—and the other, because on the character thus formed depends our chief happiness, or misery, both in this world, and in the world to come.

First, it is the state of the heart which determines our moral and religious character. The course of the outward actions will be always answerable to the dispositions which prevail within. To whichever side the habitual bias of our thoughts inclines, to that side, whether it be the side of vice or of godliness,

the course of our behaviour will be drawn ; and it is as idle a task to attempt to keep the life pure, while the heart is evil, as it would be, in washing a bottle, to wash the outside only ; while the dregs, which it contains, were seen through the glass which surrounded them. If the fountain be poisoned, what wholesome waters can flow from it ? If the tree be not good, its fruits will be bitter or tasteless. “ Out of the heart ” said our Saviour, “ proceed ” not only “ evil thoughts but murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witnesses, blasphemies.”¹ But “ make the tree good ” and then its fruits will be good also.² But it is not merely from its influence on the outward actions that we are to judge of the great power of the heart in determining our religious and moral characters. Setting the outward action aside, it is, in truth, the state of the heart itself, which forms our character in the sight of God. With our fellow creatures, actions must hold the chief rank, because by these only we can judge of each other ; but in the eye of that Great Judge, to whom the whole of our inward frame is uncovered, dispositions hold the place of actions ; and it is not so much what we perform, as the motive which urges us to perform it, which makes it to be accounted either good or evil in His sight. Even among men,

¹ St. Matt. xv. 19.

² St. Matt. xii. 33.

the morality of actions is valued according to the principle from which they are judged to proceed. If a man gives money out of a love of praise, he is not accounted charitable; but vain. If he labours to serve the public from a desire of rising into power, he is held not public-spirited but ambitious; and if he bestows a benefit, only that he may receive a greater in return, no man would reckon him generous, but selfish and crafty.

If reason thus teaches us to rate the value of all actions, by the dispositions which gave them birth, far more may we conclude, that, according to those dispositions, we are ranked and classed by Him who seeth into every heart. Accordingly the regeneration of the heart is every where represented in the Gospel, as the most necessary part of the Christian character; and in proportion as this change is more or less perfect in our hearts, we are more or less religious.

Secondly, — The state of the heart not only determines our moral and religious character, but forms our principal happiness or misery. A contented mind is great riches; but if the mind is, from any inward cause, disturbed or afflicted, it is in vain to load us with all the honours or riches which the world can bestow. “He” said Solomon “who hath no rule over his spirit, is like a city that is broken down and

without walls.”¹ All is waste, all is in disorder and ruins, within him. He possesses no defence, either against temptation or affliction; he lies open to every rising of ill-humour and every assault of distress. Whereas he, who is employed in regulating his mind, is making provision against all the accidents of life; he is building a castle into which, in the day of danger, he can retreat with safety. And hence, amid those endeavours to secure happiness which perpetually employ the life, the government or neglect of a man’s inward disposition forms the chief distinction between wisdom and folly.

Nor is it against outward afflictions or provocations only, that it becomes us to keep the heart with all diligence. There are other dangers than those of the visible world, other enemies than those whose malice is exhausted in doing harm to the body or the worldly estate of man. Think what your heart now is, and what it must soon become if you cease to watch it carefully. With too much justice is it said in Scripture to be “deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.”² Its natural and inward corruption presses it downwards evermore to vice and disorder. To direct its course towards Heaven requires a constant effort. Experience may convince you that almost every

¹ Proverbs, xxv. 28.

² Jeremiah, xvii. 9.

desire is inclined to follow after folly; that every passion tends to excess; and that around your fancy there perpetually crowds a whole swarm of vain and corrupting thoughts. After all the care which the best men can bestow to rule the heart, it perpetually baffles their endeavours to keep it under proper discipline. Into what universal tumult, then, must it fall, if no watchfulness be employed, no government exercised over it? Inattention and carelessness are all which the great adversary of the soul desires in order to gain a victory over us. While you sleep, he sows tares in the field. The house, which he finds empty and unguarded, he presently garnishes with evil spirits. Keep, then, thy heart with all diligence; for all thy diligence is here no more than necessary. And, though thine own keeping it, is, by itself, insufficient, of this be sure that thou canst expect no help from Heaven, if thou shalt neglect to do thy best in performing the part assigned to thee!

Having now shown the great importance of exercising government over the heart, I shall proceed to consider, more particularly, in what that government consists, as it respects the thoughts, the passions, and the temper.

I begin with the thoughts, which are the prime movers of the human conduct. All which makes a figure in the history of the

world, the employments of the busy, the enterprises of the ambitious, the virtues which form the happiness, and the crimes which occasion the misery of mankind, all begin in that silent and secret place of thought, which is hidden from every mortal eye. The secrecy and silence, which reign there, favour the prejudice entertained by too many that thought is free from all controul. Passions, they perhaps allow, require government and restraint; for passions may disturb the peace and good order of mankind. But with their thoughts, they plead, no one is concerned. By these, so long as they remain in their bosom, no offence can be given, and no injury committed. To enjoy, unrestrained, the full range of imagination, appears to them the native right and privilege of man.

And if they had to do with none but their fellow creatures, such reasoning might have some show of truth. But they ought to remember, that, in sight of the Supreme Being, our thoughts bear the character of good or evil as much as our actions; and that they are, in a special manner, subject to God's notice, because there is no other authority by which they can be restrained. The government of our thoughts is the particular proof and test of our reverence for God. If we restrain our passions from breaking forth into open violence,

while we give up our fancy in secret to corruption and wickedness, we show that it is only from a regard to the world that we restrain ourselves; and that, however we may act a part in public with propriety, there is before our eyes no fear of that God who searcheth the soul, and requireth truth in the inward parts.

But, not only are our thoughts thus important in themselves, they are still more so as directly influencing our outward actions. Actions are, indeed, nothing else than thoughts ripened into consistency and substance; and if we accustom ourselves to think over in imagination any course of actions, those actions, or some actions answerable to them, will certainly follow in our lives. Each of us, by impartially searching into his indulged and favourite thoughts, may discover the whole secret of his real character. This consideration, alone, is sufficient to show how necessary it is for those who desire to keep the *heart* innocent, to govern the *thoughts* with care.

But, taking this necessity for granted, a question may arise, how far it is within our power to govern and direct the thoughts which arise in the minds of every one of us? It is plain that they do not always arise, in the first instance, from choice.

“As the wind bloweth where it listeth”¹ they

¹ St. John, iii. 7.

often start up as of themselves, and we cannot tell whence they come, nor whither they are precisely tending. Hence vain and fantastic imaginations sometimes break in on the most settled attention, and disturb even the prayers of the most serious and best governed mind. Instances of this sort must be set down to the account of mortal weakness and the manifold temptations of Satan ;—and our gracious Creator, who knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust, will not be severe to mark every such error and wandering of the mind. But, after all these allowances, there still remains a great scope for the prudent government of the thoughts ; and there are a multitude of cases in which we are no less answerable for what we *think* than for what we *do*.

This is the case when we call up (as every man knows how) a particular train of thoughts in the mind, by turning our attention to such thoughts, awakening such passions, or engaging in such conversation as we well know will lead us to think on such or such particular subjects. Thus, if a man gazes on an indecent picture, or reads an indecent book, or indulges in indecent conversation, he well knows—nay, he cannot disguise from himself, what thoughts will follow, and what they are which he expects to follow from attention to such things ; and the evil thoughts which thus spring upon his

mind are as much his own creating, as the loading again and drawing the trigger would be his own voluntary action. But, it is also the case when, though an evil thought has been prompted in the first instance, by accident or by the devil, we entertain it in our mind as a welcome guest, and take delight in continuing and encouraging it. To look on a seducing object may be, in the first instance a chance or a temptation,—but if we look on it again and again, so as to strengthen our own lust; and pamper our corrupt fancy, we have, unquestionably, adopted the sin, and made it our own, by greedily embracing it. We may be led into an angry train of thought by chance or strong provocation; we may conceive an impure idea by accidentally beholding an enticing object; but if we brood over our wrath, and imitate with pleasure some possible or impossible revenge over him who hath injured us;—if we gaze repeatedly on the enticing object, and delight ourselves with giving reins to our evil thoughts;—there is no doubt that we are in the one case murderers, and in the second adulterers, in our hearts, and in the sight of Him, who is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things.

Nor, lastly, are we only accountable for thoughts intentionally conjured up, or deliberately indulged within us. We are little less

so for those which find admittance into our hearts from carelessness and want of attention; from suffering our fancy to rove with perfect liberty. "like the eyes of the fool towards the end of the earth." Our minds are, in this case, thrown open to folly and vanity; they are willingly offered to every evil thing, which chuses to take possession; the consequences will all be charged to our account; and it will be in vain to plead infirmity, where the real cause is carelessness.

It is plain, then, that we are all of us, both as reasonable beings, as servants of God, and as the redeemed of Jesus Christ our Lord, very strictly accountable, not only for the works which we do, but for by far the great part of the thoughts, which, whether willingly or by negligence, arise in our hearts, or which, however produced, we entertain and dwell on with pleasure. As reasonable beings it is fit, that, while shrinking (as we most of us do) from the open practice of vice, we should keep the strictest controul on those waking dreams of the soul, from which, if indulged, our actions almost inevitably take their colouring. As servants of the Unseen God, it becomes us to take care that we obey Him in those respects which are known to Him alone, with even more jealous allegiance than in those where men are also our judges. As the redeemed of Christ, we are

bound to purify our hearts, even as the Master who died for us is pure, and to drive every unclean and monstrous thing from those hearts wherein His Holy Ghost desires to dwell!

Of the best means of thus "keeping the heart from evil thoughts" it is my purpose, by the blessing of God, to speak next Sunday. But permit me, in the meantime, to urge on your attention, that, if the Lord doth indeed require this degree of purity of heart from all those who are the heirs of His kingdom, how greatly have we all (if we examine our hearts we shall find it) how greatly have we all offended against His laws, and how little chance have we of rendering Him a more perfect obedience hereafter, unless that help be given from above, without which all human resolutions are vain! Let us, then, now conclude by entreating with earnest prayer the pardon of our Judge, for our transgressions already committed, beseeching Him to keep for us, with His grace, those hearts which we cannot keep for ourselves; and, since He requireth truth in the inward parts, to make us, by the help of His Holy Ghost, to "understand wisdom secretly."¹

¹ Psalm li. 6.

SERMON XI.

ON THE GOVERNMENT OF THE HEART.

PART II.—THE THOUGHTS.

PROVERBS, iv. 23.

Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

IN my discourse of last Sunday, it was my endeavour to prove the obligation which lies on us, both as men, and as Christians, to shut out, as *far* as possible, all evil thoughts from the heart; and to drive out again as *soon* as possible, whatever such thoughts may have accidentally entered there. I am now to point out, as well as I am able, the best means of attaining this desirable object;—one of the most desirable and the most difficult which the courage of man can gain, or his wisdom aim at.

When, indeed, we descend into our own consciences, and examine how little care we have employed, and how little success we have met with, in the diligent keeping of our hearts,

we may well say with the Psalmist, — “ Who can tell how oft he offendeth ? ”¹ In no single article of religion or morals, are men more blameably careless than in the boundless indulgence which, without remorse, they give to fancy. Since the time when our understandings first began to awaken and exert their powers, so long has thought been busily at work, in every breast, without a moment’s peace or interruption. The stream of ideas has been always flowing. The wheels of the spiritual engine have whirled round with perpetual motion. And, let me ask, what has been the fruit of this unceasing activity with the greatest part of mankind ? Of the countless hours which have been spent in thought, how few are marked with any lasting or useful consequence ! How many have either passed away in idle dreams, or have been abandoned to anxious discontented musings ; — to envious and un-social passions ; or to desires which, those who felt them, would have been, themselves, ashamed to utter ! Had I power to lay open that storehouse of iniquity which the hearts of too many conceal ; could I draw out, and read to them, a list of all the imaginations which they have devised, and all the passions which they have indulged in secret, what a picture of men should I present to themselves ! And all these things

¹ Psalm xix. 12.

are now known to God! And all these things will, one day, be known to angels and to men, when our characters shall be unfolded to the world as they really are; and when God, in the great day of His wrath, shall “set all our secret sins in the light of His countenance!”¹

Even when men imagine their thoughts to be most innocently employed, they, too commonly, suffer them to run out into extravagant imaginations, and wild plans of something which they desire to grasp at, — or which they would chuse to be, if they could frame the course of things according to their desires. This man will fancy himself a king; — this other, a man of fortune; this woman will figure to herself the courtship, which she might receive, if she were more wealthy or beautiful; there is hardly any folly, which may not in these gambols of the soul find its parallel. Nor, though such employments of the fancy may not come under the same description with those which are plainly criminal, yet wholly unblameable even these very seldom are. Besides the waste of time, and the misapplication of those powers of thought which were given us for far nobler purposes, such idle speculations, such waking dreams, lead us always into the neighbourhood of things forbidden. They place us on dangerous ground. They are always connected

¹ Psalm xc. 8.

with some one bad passion or other. And whoever is accustomed to amuse himself by thus, as it is called, building castles in the air, is fortunate if he does not fall into envy or covetousness, discontent or pride, lust or luxury, and if he does not act over the sins, as well as the enjoyments, peculiar to those states, of which he thus builds the image.

But, even if these worse consequences do not follow, a habit of this kind will always, assuredly, nourish a giddy and frivolous turn of mind. It unfits the soul for applying with vigour to reasonable pursuits; or for resting contented with sober plans of behaviour and sober expectations of happiness. From that visionary world, in which it allows itself to dwell, the soul returns to the business of the real world, or to the duties of religion, — unbent and unstrung, diseased and tainted, averse from discharging the duties of life, and unfit, sometimes, for relishing its ordinary and attainable pleasures. “O Jerusalem,” said the prophet Jeremiah, “O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved! How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?”¹ Oh may we learn in time to govern our hearts aright; lest the Spirit of God turn away from His defiled shrine, and His voice be heard, as it was in the temple of Jerusalem when the

¹ Jeremiah, iv. 14.

sins of that nation had sealed them for destruction, saying, "Let us depart hence for ever!"

In order to guard against all such corruptions and abuses of thought as I have mentioned, it may be proper and profitable to attend to the following rules.

In the first place, study to gain the habit of attending to objects around you and within you. No study can be of greater consequence than this, for it is the power of taking notice, which, in a great measure, distinguishes the wise man from the fool; the dextrous and handy person from the awkward and slovenly; the frugal and thriving person, from those who waste their means they know not how, extravagant without comfort, and idle without repose; the well regulated and orderly mind, from that which passes its life in a dream, unfulfilled and unremembered. If you were to ask me, what is the reason why, of two men, with naturally the same advantages of eyes and ears and memory, one shall find instruction every where, and draw useful knowledge and amendment from every thing and person he meets, — while another is unable to give any account of the last sermon, the most curious and interesting sight, the most uncommon accident? — If I were asked why, with the same number of hands and feet, one person was dex-

trous in all his labours ; quick in receiving lessons and often improving on them, while all, which another did, was clumsy and disordered ? If I were asked why one family, even in poverty, is always neat and clean, and in the possession of more comfort than its neighbours with far greater advantages, — for all these differences I would give exactly the same reason ; that the former *had*, and the latter *had not* the habit of minding what they are about, and directing their thoughts in the proper channel. Well may it be said, that from the heart are the issues of life ; since, from its due government, both in this world, and in the world to come, so important consequences follow !

In order to gain and preserve this necessary power over your thoughts, your first care should be to watch them diligently, as they arise ; and often to make them the subject of a severe and honest examination. “ To what is my attention at present directed ? Of what am I thinking ? Could I bear, without a blush, to tell it to the world ? Suppose that God should, this moment, call me to Himself, is my mind in a fit state for the change ? Shall I be wiser or better for dwelling on such thoughts as now take up my attention ? Is my innocence, is my future peace, in no danger from them ? Are they connected with any thing which really concerns me ? What business have I to enter-

tain and indulge in them?" By a frequent exercise of this inward authority, we should, by little and little, bring our minds under as much government, as a well broken horse; —and without further trouble, guide them in whatever direction was desirable either for our souls or bodies.

In the second place, in order to the government of thought, it is necessary to guard against idleness. And to this end it is, that education (even setting aside all worldly advantages, and all those benefits, which directly flow from the knowledge of our duty) — it is to this end, that the simple power of reading, is to a child, so invaluable a present. Even with those who work the hardest, and who, by their situation in life, are obliged to do so, there must be always some periods, at which the heart and attention are out of employ. It is sometimes their misfortune, it is at others their duty, to be free from labour. But if, while the body rests, the mind is also left idle, those are the moments which the tempter always seizes to sow his tares therein: and I will venture to say, that there are few of you who cannot recollect many evil thoughts arising from such want of employment. But if, when the ground is baked by frost, or, in the course of a Sabbath evening, the labouring man, or the careful mother of a family, has the power of reading

the Bible, it is strange how much occasion for sin is thus cut off; and how the place of hurtful and often painful thoughts is filled up by those which are pleasant and profitable. To both the young and the old this observation may be valuable. The young it may warn to make the best use of the opportunities of learning now afforded them. The old, who do not themselves possess this privilege, may be taught to make up, as far as possible, their deficiency, by a more regular attendance on that public worship where the words of everlasting life are read and preached to all. He, who employs his Sunday as becomes a Christian, lays up a blessing in store for the labours of the ensuing week; but he, whose Sunday is past away in vice or laziness, is turning into a snare what the Almighty appointed as a means of grace and happiness.

In the third place, when guilty thoughts arise, attend to all the proper methods of getting rid of them. Take example from the unhappy industry, which sinners discover, in banishing good ones, when God's grace, or some remarkable accident forces them on their conscience. How anxiously do they fly from themselves! How studiously do they drown the voice, which upbraids them, in the noise of company or of diversion! What numerous contrivances do they employ, to escape from the uneasiness,

which returns of reflection would produce! Were we to use the like diligence in preventing the entrance of vicious fancies, or in driving them away when they came, why should we not be as successful in the better cause? As soon, then, as you are sensible that any dangerous thought begins to ferment within you, instantly call in other feelings and other thoughts to your help. Hasten to turn your mind to whatever you may have formerly found to be of power to compose and harmonise. Fly to the Scriptures, to church, to business, or to society and innocent conversation, to get rid of yourself, and to extinguish the fatal spark in your bosom. By such means you may generally apply a cure, before the poison has had time to work its full effect. To those who are tormented with evil thoughts, it is by no means "good to be alone."

In the fourth place, it will be particularly useful to impress your mind with a habitual and constant sense of the presence of the Almighty. When we consider how strong a check that presence, if believed in, must be to all indulgence in secret faults, we are tempted to suspect, that "all men have not faith;" and that, even by Christians, this article of our religion is very little received or attended to. For who but must confess, that, if he knew that a parent, a friend, or a neighbour, had the power of looking into his heart, he durst not allow himself the

same range, which he now gives, to his imaginations and desires? Whence, then, does it come to pass, that men, without fear or concern, bring into the presence of the awful Majesty of Heaven, that folly and those lusts, which would make them blush and tremble, if one of their own fellow-creatures could discern them? At the same time, no doctrine is more certain than this, that God beholdeth all things. All religious sects have admitted it; all societies of men, in their oaths and covenants, appeal to it. The King of Heaven and earth cannot but know, what passes in His empire. He, who supports all nature, must needs be every where. “He that planted the ear, shall He not hear? He that formed the eye, shall He not see? He, that teacheth man knowledge, shall not He know” all things?¹

Never let this great article of faith escape from your view. In thinking, as well as in acting, accustom yourselves to look up with reverence to that piercing eye of Divine observation, which never slumbereth or sleepeth. Behold a pen always writing on your head, and making up that great account of your thoughts, words and actions from which you are at last to be judged. Think that you are never less alone than when you are by yourselves; for then is HE still with you, whose witness is of far more importance than that of all mankind together.

¹ Psalm xciv. 9, 10.

Let these awful considerations not only check the wanderings of corrupt fancy, but infuse into your spirits that solemn composure which is the parent of real wisdom. Let them not only expel what is evil, but introduce, in its stead, whatever is pure and holy ; elevating your thoughts to divine and eternal objects, and drawing them the contrary way to those attractions of the world, which would drag your whole attention downwards, to wickedness and folly !

But, lastly, since the conquest, to be thus gained over yourselves, must greatly surpass the unassisted strength of your natural reason and resolution, be careful, above all things, to make your resolves, not in your own might, but in the name and the faith of our blessed Saviour and Mediator ; and to draw continually fresh supplies of grace and power to live well, from the inexhaustible treasure of His mercies, by the appointed means of prayer and of His Holy Table. Where the Holy Ghost is, no evil thing will dare to enter. Let us keep the Lord of Glory in our hearts ; and display His praises in our outward behaviour ; trusting in Him, that He will wash our hearts from their secret faults, and present us pure and blameless, when all things, which do offend, shall be weeded out of His kingdom !

SERMON XII.

ON THE GOVERNMENT OF THE HEART.

PART III. — THE PASSIONS.

PROVERBS, iv. 23.

Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

HAVING treated, in my two last discourses, of the government of the thoughts, I shall now proceed to consider the government of the passions, as the next great duty included in the keeping of the heart.

Passions are, in themselves, no more than strong emotions of the mind, occasioned by the view of apprehended good or evil. They are original and necessary parts of the constitution of our nature ; and to wish to root them out is therefore a mistaken aim. Religion requires of us no more than to moderate and rule them. When our blessed Lord Himself took upon him the nature, without the corruption, of man, He was subject to like passions with us. On many

occasions He was touched with pity; on some others, He was grieved in spirit; He sorrowed and wept; and on one particular occasion, we are told, He looked around him in anger.¹

But though the passions are thus necessary parts of our nature; though when properly directed, they may be found to answer, all of them, the most useful and exalted ends, yet it is the unhappiness of our present fallen condition, that these strong emotions of the mind are, very often, too powerful for the principle which ought to govern them. When man revolted from his Maker, his passions rebelled against himself; and, instead of remaining, as they ought to be, the servants of reason, have become the tyrants of the soul. Hence, in treating of this subject, two things may be assumed as principles; first, that, through the present weakness of the understanding, our passions are often directed towards improper objects; secondly, that; even when their direction is just, and their objects are innocent, they are perpetually inclined to run into excess; and always urge us to gratify them with a blind and dangerous violence. On these two points, then, turns the whole government of our passions; first, to know and be convinced of the proper objects of their pursuit: and next, to keep them back in that pursuit, when they would carry us

¹ St. Mark, iii. 5.

beyond the bounds of reason and conscience. If there be any passion, which thrusts itself forward unseasonably into our mind ; which darkens and troubles our judgement, or frequently discomposes our temper ; which unfits us for properly discharging the duties of life, or for a daily and cheerful meditation on our Maker and our Redeemer and on our own religious state, that passion, whatever it be, we may be sure, either in its object or degree, is dangerous. The great point, at which, we ought to aim, is to acquire a firm and stedfast mind, which the deceits of passion shall not blind, and which shall not be shaken by its violence ; able, at all times, to listen calmly to the voice of reason, or religion ; and ready, without hesitation, to execute whatever they command.

How desirable it is to obtain such an authority over passion, I hardly need explain to you. It is a truth, which the common history of nations, and the daily experience of private life, unite to force on our attention ; a truth written in letters of blood, and proclaimed aloud with the shrieks and groans of suffering human creatures. What have been the causes which have led to those unceasing and dreadful wars, in which the race of man has been engaged since the days of the first murderer Cain, but the passions of pride or malice in the multitude, or in their rulers, which has led one man, or race of

men, to lord it over their fellows, and, in pursuit of vain glory and extended power, to carry slaughter and fire among distant and unoffending nations? What is it, in private life, which ruins the peace and prosperity of families; makes the children undutiful; and the parents, unkind; the wife, an adulteress; and the husband, a drunkard; the prudent person, a miser; and the liberal, a selfish spendthrift? What is it which makes a man's home a hell, and fills his conscience with torments worse than fire? What, but the consequences of some one passion misdirected; or suffered, even in a good cause, to become excessive and habitual? Who is there who knows not, from sad experience, the lamentable effects of such a cause; and who is there who would not desire instruction as to the best means of chaining those wild beasts, which are so dangerous to himself and to all around him?

To this effect, we must, in the first place, endeavour to gain a just view of the value and importance of those objects which are most likely to be desired by us. It is a mistake in these respects, it is our suffering ourselves to be dazzled by false appearances, and our valuing trifles at more than they are worth, which, most frequently, gives rise to the misdirected and dangerous passions which embitter and embroil our existence. The boy in the fable would not have run so fast to catch the rainbow, if he had

known that the cloud, which, at a distance, was painted with such glorious colours, was, when he reached it, nothing more than a shower of rain. And, in like manner, we should scarcely, I think, see men making so much haste to be rich, and undergoing so much misery, and incurring so much guilt, in pursuit of honour or pleasure; or so furious when these hopes are disappointed; or so envious when other men have succeeded better than they, if they would but bear in mind, that — by the testimony of King Solomon and King David, both of whom had made the trial with every possible chance of success,—the wealth and honours and pleasures of this life were all, in reality, nothing else than disappointment and vanity.

We may observe, indeed, that, setting Scripture out of the question, they are usually the young and the ignorant, who are the most violent in the pursuit of the pleasures or prosperity of the present life. Those, who have wearied themselves in the race, and, after all, have found how tasteless and valueless a thing it is, which they ran after so madly, and fought for with so much fury, are apt to complain, that they have lost that relish and eagerness for life, which they felt when they were young: and that nothing more seems worth their hopes or wishes. And, so far as this world is concerned, they are perfectly right. The misfortune is

that, before they made this discovery, they suffered the several joys and hopes of this life to take up their whole attention ; and, now that they are undeceived as to their value, they are too old in vice to acquire a proper relish for the only hopes which are really lasting and unfailling, the hopes which another life supplies. A painted toy and a piece of pure gold were offered to them at the same time. They filled their hands with the trifle ; and now that this is worn out, they cannot find the treasure which they, at first, refused and rejected. But let us, for God's sake, if we *are* reasonable creatures, recollect, in time, how little we have found those worldly objects answer our hope, which we have striven for with the most eagerness ; and how little, even if that hope had been realised, they could compare with the heavenly hopes of a Christian. And this consideration alone, if duly borne in mind, will exceedingly tend to weaken our desires after worldly or sensual objects ; and will, consequently, make us less violent in pursuit, and less furious and less envious under disappointment.

In the second place, in order to acquire a due command over our passions, it is necessary to gain the power of self-denial. We must break them as we would a headstrong horse, by making them feel the rein ; by not feeding them too plentifully, and by such use of the whip or

the spur, as may make them sensible of the power which we have over them. In other words—we must at all times maintain a strict attention to the thoughts and feelings which pass within us; we must avoid, even in lawful pursuits or indulgences, such things as, though harmless, or even advantageous in themselves, may, like corn to a restive colt, raise our passions above our mastery; we must press them forwards in the path of duty, and chastise them every time they swerve from it, by a recollection of those terrors of the Lord, which are declared against all those who do evil.—And we must do all this, not only in matters of actual duty; but sometimes in the case of things lawful or indifferent; that so we may, by practice, be better able to command them, when we are really tempted to withstand some great allurements of the devil.—This is the use of fasting; and this is the object answered by all those actions of mortifying our corrupt inclinations, of which so frequent mention is made in Scripture; since, if we allow ourselves to go as far as we *may*, we shall certainly, when passion tempts, be hurried beyond that boundary.

In the third place, recollect, at all times, that nothing is really such as it appears to be, while we are under the power of passion. When a man is inflamed by the desire of any thing, he

cannot properly judge of its value or importance. When a man is angry at the loss of any thing, how often will he cry out, in his fierceness and rage, “ I had rather have been deprived of any thing than this,—better take my life away than an object so dear to me ! ” But is life really less valuable than what he laments so bitterly ? Go to him the next day ; and he will tell you a very different story. Let every man thus carry his thoughts forward from his moment of passion to his cooler hours ; and many a bitter word, and many a grievous sin, and many a year of long and sorrowful repentance will be prevented, and rendered unnecessary.

In the fourth place, oppose early the beginnings of passion. As soon as you find the tempest rising, have recourse to every proper method either of assuaging its violence, or of escaping to a calmer scene.—Never account any thing small or trifling which is in hazard of introducing disorder into your heart.—Never make light of any desire, which, you feel, begins to get the mastery over you. When any lust has once gained strength by time and custom, it is all too late to say “ thus far shalt thou go and no further ; ”—to such as these the voice of the Almighty only has power to cry, “ Peace, be still.” It is wonderful how pleasant and how plausible the most dangerous passion will appear at its first beginning. Hatred

and malice will bear the mask of a proper spirit and an honest warmth of temper. Lust will call itself a natural admiration of beauty, an innocent merriment, a little harmless trifling, which is intended to go no farther. Covetousness will call itself a just and praiseworthy love of independence, and a desire to provide for our families. "God forbid," a man will say to himself "that my dislike of such a person should lead me to do him any injury.— Surely, if I know mine own heart, I am incapable of seducing her with whom I delight to be.—I cannot believe, that my present care of money will ever lead me to be unjust or uncharitable." This many a man has said; and many a man has found, after a few years or months were over, that, from these small beginnings, the very consequences, which he feared and deprecated, and worse than these, have followed. What Solomon said of strife is generally true of all passions whatever, "their beginning is as when one letteth out water."¹ It flows from a small chink, which once might have been easily stopped; but, being neglected, it is soon widened by the stream, till the bank is at last totally thrown down; and the flood is at liberty to overspread the whole plain, carrying away before it in one common destruction, trees, cattle, crops, and villages.

In the fifth place, the excess of every passion will be moderated by frequent meditation on the

¹ Proverbs, xvi. 14.

vanity of the world, on the short continuance of life, and on the approach of death, of judgement and of eternity. The imaginary degree of importance, which the neglect of such meditation suffers us to bestow on worldly things, is one great cause of our vehemence in desire, and our eagerness in pursuing. We attach ourselves to the objects around us, as if we could enjoy them for ever. Higher and more enlarged prospects of man's destiny would cool this misplaced earnestness. For what can appear so considerable in human affairs as to discompose or agitate him to whose view eternity lies open, and all the greatness of those good things which God hath prepared for those that love Him. All things are great or little by comparison. And how contemptible must the advantages or pleasures of this world appear, when set in opposition to joys which shall never end; and to glories which, when, in the instance of those angels like whom we are to become, they have been offered to the sight of men, have overpowered the strongest gaze, and left on the mind an obscure and mingled impression of admiration and fear. What was Solomon in all his glory, when compared to that clothing which God gives to the flowers of the fields; but what are these flowers — what all the beauties of art or nature, to the white robes and golden crowns, and rainbow canopy, and never ending hymn,

and sea of glass mingled with fire, which are employed by the sacred writers, not as accurate descriptions of what no descriptions can equal, —but as shadowy representatives, to give us some distant idea of their greatness. Let such reflections allay the heat of passion. From trifling cares let them recall our attention to objects of real importance ; to the proper business of man ; to the improvement of our nature ; the discharge of our duties ; the rational and religious conduct of human life !

In the last place, to our own endeavours for regulating our passions, let us join earnest prayer to God. Here, if any where, the help of Divine Grace is necessary. For, such is the present blindness and imperfection of human nature, that even to discover all the disorders of our heart is become difficult ; much more is it beyond our power to govern them and rectify them. To that superior aid, then, which is promised to the pious and earnest Christian, let us look up with humble minds, beseeching the Father of Mercies, that, while we study to act our own part with watchfulness and resolution, He would forgive our returning weakness, — would strengthen our constancy in resisting the assaults of passion, and would enable us, by His grace, so to govern our minds, that, however weakly, yet at least, consistently, seriously, earnestly, and faithfully, we may proceed in a course of piety and virtue.

SERMON XIII.

ON THE GOVERNMENT OF THE HEART.

PART IV. — THE TEMPERS.

PROVERBS, iv. 23.

Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

HAVING thus far spoken of the government of the heart, inasmuch as relates to our thoughts and passions, — it now remains to speak of it, as shown in the due management of our tempers. Passions are strong and fierce emotions, which sink, by degrees, into calm. Temper is the disposition which remains, after those emotions are past, and which makes the general and habitual bent and bias of the soul. The passions are like the air when it is agitated by unusual storms, or inflamed by some violent and unusual cause into a suffocating heat and closeness. The temper is the same air in its ordinary and natural state, by the clearness or fogginess of which the mildness or severity of the seasons, the health of mankind, and the fertility of the earth are

mainly, though imperceptibly, determined. The influence of temper is, indeed, more silent and less conspicuous, than that of passion. It works with less violence ; but, as its operation is always going on, it produces effects no less considerable. It is evident, therefore, that, in a religious point of view, it highly deserves our best attention. — Many, indeed, are unwilling to regard it in this serious light. They place a good temper upon the same footing with a healthy constitution of body. They consider it as a natural advantage which some enjoy ; but for the want of which others are no more morally blameable, nor more accountable to God, than a man born blind for the want of eyes ; or a cripple, for his incapacity of walking : and hence the opinion has sometimes prevailed, that a bad temper might be consistent with a state of grace. If this were true, it would overturn that whole doctrine, of which the Gospel is so full ; that regeneration, or change of nature, is the essential characteristic of a Christian. It would suppose, that grace might dwell amidst malice, bitterness, and cruelty ; and that Heaven might be enjoyed by such as are strangers to that love and charity, without which even Heaven itself would be turned into hell.

It will be readily allowed, indeed, that some, by the original frame of their minds, are more favourably inclined towards certain good dis-

positions and habits than others are. But this affords no justification to those who neglect to oppose the corruptions to which they are prone ; inasmuch as this neglect becomes more criminal, the more obvious the necessity for care has been. Let no man imagine that the human heart is, under any circumstances whatever, a soil incapable of tillage ; or that even the worst temper may not, through the assistance of grace, be reformed by attention and discipline. A settled bad temper is always owing to our own indulgence of it. If we indulge and feed, instead of checking, that feverish impatience of disposition to which we are inclined, all the consequences, which follow, will be placed to our account ; and every excuse from natural constitution be rejected at the judgement seat of Christ.

The proper regulation of temper affects the character of man in every relation, which he bears, either to his Maker, or to his fellow creatures ; and includes the whole circle of religious and moral duties.

This, therefore, is a subject of too great extent to be comprehended in a single sermon ; but it may be useful to take a general view of it ; and, — before we conclude the doctrine of “ keeping the heart,” — to show what the habitual temper of a Christian ought to be, with respect to God, to his neighbour, and to himself.

First, with respect to God, the Christian ought to cultivate a devout temper. By this, more is meant than the mere care of performing the offices of religious worship. This is, indeed, a proof, and a very necessary and indispensable proof, of our genuine inward devotion ; nor let any man flatter himself that his temper is right with God, if he does not find a pleasure in serving Him, and in conversing with Him. But the inward feeling, of which the outward prayers are a sign, consists in that sensibility of heart towards God, which springs from a deep impression of His perfections and His mercies. It stands opposed, not only to the disregard of God which forms the description of the impious, but to that want of religious affection which sometimes prevails among those who are imperfectly good. Such persons, as these, acknowledge, perhaps, the necessity of holiness. They feel some concern to work out their salvation. But they set themselves about the work by mere constraint, and serve God without affection. More generous, more delightful feelings animate the man who is of a really devout temper. God dwells in his thoughts, as a benefactor and father, to whose voice he hearkens with joy. In the various scenes of life, his mind naturally opens to the admiration of His wisdom, His goodness, His power. All nature appears to his view, as if

marked with the seal of God's perfections. Habitual thankfulness to his Maker for mercies past, and cheerful resignation to His will in time to come, have kindled a light in his heart, which cheers him through the difficulties of life; and which, in the valley of the shadow of death, will not forsake him.

To cultivate a temper so delightful in itself, and which so greatly facilitates and forwards the discharge of every duty both to God and man, no way can be pointed out so effectual as, first, a diligent study of all which God has done for us as related in the books of Scripture; and secondly, a regular and frequent practice of those outward ordinances, whether prayers or sacraments, by which He has directed us to seek His face.

I said, that prayer was a necessary proof of a devout temper. I now add, that it is the surest way of making our temper devout. Love between man and God is both kindled and kept up, by nearly the same process with that which produces and maintains love between one creature and another. The more we think of any good man, the more we talk with him, the more we study his character,—the more regard for him we inevitably feel, and the more pleasure we receive from serving or pleasing him. And it is, accordingly, no wonder, that, even setting aside that stream of grace, which, in answer to

every faithful prayer, is supplied more abundantly, the warmth of our devotion should be thus, in the same way, rendered more strong, and our hearts and souls more fully possessed by the peace of God which passeth all understanding.

I proceed, in the second place, to point out the proper state of our temper, in respect to one another. And, here, what first presents itself to be recommended, is a peaceable temper; a disposition unwilling to give offence, and desirous of cultivating harmony and goodwill between man and man. This supposes yielding and condescending manners; unwillingness to quarrel about trifles; and, in disputes which are unavoidable, a proper moderation and meekness. Such a temper is the foundation of all order and happiness amongst mankind. The positive and disputatious, the rude and quarrelsome, are the banes and torments of society. They seem destined to blast the small share of comfort which Providence has, in this world, allotted to man. But they cannot disturb the peace of others, more than they disturb their own. The hurricane rages first in their own bosoms, before it is let loose upon the world. In the tempest, which they raise, they are always tost; and frequently it is their lot to perish.

A peaceable temper should be accompanied

with a candid one, or a disposition to view the behaviour of others with fairness and indulgence. This stands opposed to a jealous and suspicious temper, which supposes every action to proceed from a bad design, and throws a black shade over every character. As you would be happy in yourselves, or in your connections with others, guard against this hateful spirit! Study that charity which “thinketh no evil;” that temper which leads you to account every man virtuous, till experience has shown him otherwise; and which can allow you to observe an error without regarding it as a crime! Thus you will be kept free from that continual vexation, to which a suspicious heart is always exposed, and will walk among men as your brethren, not your enemies.

But to be peaceable and candid is not all which is required of a good man. He should cultivate, moreover, a kind and compassionate temper, which feels for distress wherever he beholds it; which enters, with earnest sympathy, into all the concerns of his friends; and to all with whom he has dealings, is gentle, affectionate and obliging. You are not to imagine, that a temper of this sort finds no place for its exercise; except when the opportunity occurs of rendering some great and important service, of doing some act of uncommon and striking charity, or of exemplary self-denial. Nor is it

sufficient, that you are ready, or fancy yourself ready, to make such sacrifices as these, when called upon ; unless you show forth your kindness and charity and obliging temper, in the little services of every day ; and in the less trifling attentions, which our kindred and our friends expect from us, in the hour of sickness, or weariness, or anxiety, when stretched on a bed of pain, or tired by the labour of the day, or oppressed by sorrow for sin, or care for the dangers of the morrow. I am not very apt to believe, that he, who is cold or selfish on occasions like these, would be really so forward as he pretends, where greater exertions, or greater sacrifices were claimed from him. And if he really were to be so, yet would each unusual display of kindness make but poor amends for the neglect of those duties, which are every day in our power, and which make up far more of the happiness of life than more infrequent circumstances can do. These little services come to us in the troubles of life, like a cup of cold water to the thirsty traveller ; and, like that cold water, when given in the name of Christ, they will obtain for their charitable dispensers, an illustrious reward hereafter.

More particularly do the virtues of temper find an ample range in the private house and family circle of every man, with his wife, his children, his servants. It is very unfortunate,

that, within this circle, men often think themselves at liberty to give unrestrained vent to their passions and selfish humour; whereas, *there*, on the contrary, more than any where, it concerns them to attend to the government of their hearts, to check what is violent in their tempers, and to soften what is harsh in their manners. For there the temper is formed. There the real character displays itself. The forms of the world disguise men when abroad; but, within his own family, every man is known to be what he really is; and what he will one day be shown to be to all mankind, in the Great Judgement. In all our intercourse, then, with others, particularly in that which is closest and most intimate, let us maintain a peaceable, a candid, a gentle, and kindly temper. This is the temper, to which, by repeated instructions, our holy religion seeks to form us: — this *was* the temper of Christ: this *is* the temper of Heaven.

We are now to consider, thirdly, the proper state of temper, as it respects the individual himself. Now, the foundation of all the good dispositions, which belong to this head of my subject, is humility, whereby every man is led, according to the directions of St. Paul, “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly.”¹ Hence will,

¹ Romans, xii. 3.

naturally, arise a contented temper, which is one of the greatest blessings which can be enjoyed by man, and one of the most material requisites to a proper discharge of the duties of every station. For a fretful and discontented temper renders one incapable of performing aright any part in life whatever. It is unthankful and impious towards God; and towards man, unjust and provoking. Subdue pride and vanity; and you will take the most effectual way of rooting out this weed from your heart. You will take in good part the blessings which Providence is pleased to bestow; and the degree of favour which your fellow creatures are disposed to grant you. Viewing yourselves, with all your imperfections and failings, in a just light, you will rather be surprised at your enjoying so many good things, than discontented because any are denied to you.

From an humble and contented temper springs a cheerful one. This, if not in itself a virtue, is, at least, the dress which virtue ought to wear, inasmuch as it naturally springs from a good conscience and the favour of Heaven. He, who knows himself to be in the hands of a good and merciful God, has, in that faith, a support amidst all the storms of life, and a comfort in the hour of death. His shepherd is the living Lord; therefore shall he lack nothing. He grieves not for the morrow, well knowing

that God may make the morrow provide for itself; he is resigned to whatever may befall him; for he is sure that God will make all things “work together for good to those that love Him.” Such a temper as this makes a man happy in himself, and promotes the happiness of all around him. It is the clear and calm sunshine of a mind at ease: it crowns all other good dispositions; and comprehends the general effect which they ought to produce on the heart.

Such, on the whole, ought to be the temper, or customary frame of mind, in a good man. Devout towards God:—towards men, peaceable, candid, affectionate, and kindly:—within himself, humble, contented, cheerful. For the establishment of this happy temper, so far as our duty to God is concerned, I have already given some directions. In relation to our brethren and ourselves, all the rules, which I have before suggested, for the regulation and government of the thoughts and passions will apply; but there is one direction more, which is, perhaps, of more consequence than all the rest: and that is—Be not weary in well-doing! Whatever a man’s actions habitually and long together are, that will his temper become. Even if we do not feel within ourselves that disposition to wish well to our brethren, to judge favourably of them, to act kindly and patiently with them,

and to be, in our own persons, humble, contented and cheerful, (which qualities make up that temper which God and man delight in) we have little more to do than, steadily, and in spite of ourselves, to persevere in acting as if we really were endued with it; and we shall, by degrees, most certainly become, what we seem to be. If we feel ourselves inclined to malice and envy, let us be fixed and determined always to speak well of our neighbours: or, where we cannot speak well, to observe a charitable silence. If we are disposed to be fretful or quarrelsome, let us force ourselves to give way to the wishes of those around us; without too closely examining whether those wishes were reasonable or not. If we are disposed to selfishness, let us be the more busy to do acts of kindness and charity: if to pride, let us resolutely sit down in the lower room; and give way to those, whose pretensions most offend us: if to discontent or gloom, let us exert ourselves, at least, to speak and look cheerfully: and thus by seeming kind, and friendly, and humble, and contented, and happy, we shall soon become in our inmost hearts, happy, contented, humble, friendly, kind.

This it is to keep the heart with all diligence. That we may be enabled thus to keep it, for the sake both of our present comfort, and of our preparation for future and greater happiness, let

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us add earnest prayer to God through the merits of His Son. A greater blessing we cannot beg of the Almighty, than that He, who made the heart and knows its weakness, would assist us to subject it to that government which reason approves, which religion requires, but which His grace can alone enable us to maintain.

SERMON XIV.

THE REWARD OF OBEDIENCE.

ST. MATTHEW, xii. 50.

Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.

THE answer, which our blessed Saviour returned to His Mother and brethren, who stood without desiring to speak with Him, may appear, at first, marked with a degree of harshness very different from His general language, and from that affectionate heart, which He on every other occasion displayed. One might think, that He, who, during His childhood and youth, had been dutifully subject to His poor earthly parents, would not have refused to see them for a moment, or thus, in a manner have disclaimed them. Yet we find, that, on the present occasion, when the multitude said unto Him, “Behold thy mother and brethren without seek for Thee,”¹ — “desiring to speak with Thee;”² He answered them, saying, “Who is my Mother, and who are my brethren?” Then looking

¹ St. Mark, iii. 32.

² St. Matt. xii. 47.

round on the many men and women, who surrounded Him, "He said, behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother." These words are taken from the parallel passage in St. Mark. In the same Gospel, (which was written as a kind of supplement, — to add to that of St. Matthew such material facts as he had omitted,) we have the mystery explained, the seeming harshness done away; and additional reason afforded to admire the goodness and wisdom of Jesus in this answer to His relations, and in His application of it to His faithful hearers.

St. Mark, then, informs us, that His brethren were slow to believe the reality of His claim to Divinity; and were surprized, that one who, during His childhood and youth, had been on the same footing with themselves, should now commence teacher in Israel, and assume the title of the Messiah and the Son of God. And even His Mother, who, though she knew that Holy Thing, which she had brought into the world, to be the Saviour and Redeemer of Israel, yet also knew the stubbornness of the nation, to whom He preached; and felt already, in a sense of her Son's danger, the sword which Simeon had foretold was to pass through her own soul.¹ His Mother, as well as His brethren (for His foster-

¹ St. Luke, ii. 35.

father, Joseph, seems to have been dead before) were filled with uneasiness at the dangerous eminence to which He had risen ; and viewed with more terror than pride the miracles which He wrought, and the thousands of people who followed Him. He was no longer the humble child, whose wisdom excited wonder, without exposing Him to envy ; who grew in favour daily with God and man. He was no longer the lowly peasant, the son and servant of a carpenter, whose family had mingled unnoticed with the herd of mankind. Since John the Baptist, a few months before, had proclaimed Him to all his multitude of hearers, the Lamb of God ;—since God Himself had borne witness by a voice, and the Holy Ghost had descended visibly on His head in baptism ; and since that long and mysterious absence in the wilderness, how changed was the appearance of her child ! He was now Jesus, the Saviour, the King of Israel, the descendant of David, the anointed Son of the Most High ! His hands, exercised before in honest labour, now healed the sick, now cast out devils, now called the very dead to life again ; His voice could calm the roaring of the waves, or the madness of the people ; and the poor young Teacher, whom his rich and grave and learned townsmen would despise, now unravelled all the flimsy arguments, detected all the errors of the Pharisees and Doctors of the

Law, and was heard and worshipped by thousands of willing disciples.

A change so sudden and, probably, so unexpected, may well account for the doubts or fears, which had arisen in the minds of His family. They knew the danger to which He was exposed,—they knew that their rulers already hated and feared Him by turns; that the Romans would unite their strength to crush the King; and the Pharisee, the Reformer; and that Herod, who had lately thrown John into prison, was full as bloody and suspicious as his cruel father; nor could Mary forget, how she had already fled into Egypt, when the elder Herod butchered all the children of Bethlehem, lest this infant Son of David should escape.

Under these impressions, as St. Mark informs us, the mother and brethren of our Lord believed Him to be madly exposing Himself to certain destruction, and determined to confine Him as a lunatic. Forgetting in His supposed danger all the evidence of former prophecies and later miracles, they were now approaching Him with this very intention; and the message, which they sent in, was only to ensnare Him into their hands. Instead, therefore, of imagining, that the expressions of our Lord were harsh, we may rather admire the mildness of the language in which He reproves the officious, not to say, impious fears of His relations; and

reminds them, that though, from nearness of blood as a man, He owed them affection, yet, as Saviour of the world, every human being was of his kindred, and especially those who approached him, not in nearness of blood, but in sincerity of obedience. “ Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in Heaven, the same is my brother and my sister and mother.”

In making the foregoing observations on the occasion and reason of the words of our Lord, we are naturally led to reflect, first, on that easy and graceful manner in which every accidental circumstance was turned by Him into a source of instruction. A question on indifferent subjects, — an ordinary occurrence, — the lilies of the field, — the rich men casting their gifts into the Treasury, — the crowding for places among a company at a feast, — all these afforded Him a subject to enlarge on, and to improve to the salvation of many souls, and to the glory of His Father which is in Heaven.

And, thus, may we ourselves, if we are really desirous to follow His example, — if our hearts are really zealous in the cause of God, and really anxious to seize on every opportunity of confirming ourselves or others in the paths of salvation, may we extract a lesson from every circumstance of life, and study every day some new chapter of the book of nature.

When we see, for instance, men of the world

so busy, so earnest, so consistent in their pursuit of wealth, we may blush, ourselves, that we are so cold, so irresolute, so easily tired in our endeavours after everlasting happiness. The dog, which licks our hands, the cattle, which know our voice, may teach us gratitude, and may cover, too often, our cheeks with shame, that these poor animals should know so well and love so truly the master who feeds them, while we neglect so grievously the love and worship due to our Almighty Master and Benefactor. It is thus that *Park*, the great English traveller, when ready to perish with hunger and thirst in the wild deserts of Africa, when all hope was gone, and he laid himself down unfriended and alone to die, — it is thus, he tells us he was raised to new spirit and new exertions by the sight of a beautiful flower, and felt that God who could raise and feed its slender leaves could also save and nourish those who trusted in Him. It is thus that a man disposed to religious contemplation may derive wisdom and consolation from all around him; — that the lilies of the field may teach us reliance on Him who thus clothed the grass; — that we may find sermons in stones, and God in every thing.

We may, secondly, learn from this reply of our Saviour, that not even our dearest relations are to be preferred to God and His commandments. It may so happen, that those, whose

duty and interest it is to encourage us in the paths of goodness, may be themselves castaways, and endeavour to pervert us also, that, by their example, their influence, or their commands, they may check and hinder us in our duty. If this be your misfortune, remember, whether the tempter be master, or parent, or friend, or dearer than all, yet are they as dust in the balance when compared with the love and the mercy which we have received; and the hope held out to you by your Almighty Friend and Father. "He," saith our Saviour, putting the extremest case which could happen, "he, that loveth father and mother more than me, is not worthy of me."¹ But, in case we are really afflicted with this heavy misfortune of a wicked parent, or master, or friend, — while we are resolute in keeping our innocency, and in withstanding all their bad advice or example, it should be still our care to shew our regard and duty to them in all lawful matters; and to prove, by our conduct, that religion, though it may oblige us to differ from them in certain particulars, yet makes us in every other point, a better child, a better servant, a better kinsman. And we should take care to show our difference with meekness and affection; and even where reproof is necessary, to remember the example of our Saviour, who, irritated as He might well have been, by the

¹ St. Matt. x. 37.

officious and impious interference of His friends, chides them for it in terms of such gentleness that the check is hardly perceivable. Such gentle reproofs of the righteous are really friendly, — they are precious balm which shall heal, not irritate the wounds of the guilty soul.

Lastly, I entreat you my friends, to consider with attention the promise here mercifully made by our Saviour. “Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in Heaven, the same is my brother and sister and mother.” As if He had said, that they, who believe in Him, and show their faith by works, by doing the will of His heavenly Father, shall be dear to Him, so as no claim of blood can call for greater affection; that Christian men and women, who live up to their religion, are considered as one family with Him, and equal sharers in His love, and in the love of their Father and His, the Father that is in Heaven.—He calls us not friends only, — we are His brethren, His sisters, “heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.”¹ And shall not this promise claim our warmest affection and gratitude? shall we be ever weary to show our love and duty to such a Father, such a Brother; — or shall any temptation turn aside our steps from that rich inheritance which they call on us to share, a kindred with the good men of every age and country, with saints, and

¹ Romans, viii. 17.

angels ; — with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost !

Are you warmed with these hopes ? do your hearts burn within you at the thoughts of so glorious a privilege ? Bethink yourselves, then, that it is a privilege enjoyed by those only who do the will of their Heavenly Father. Do you live in the practice of any known and wilful sin ? Are you a drunkard, a blasphemer, a Sabbath-breaker, a fornicator, a cheat, or covetous ? You are not then, the child of God ; you are not one of the brethren of Christ, — you fling away, by your conduct, all the goodly inheritance, which He has given you in Heaven ; you despise His love and His proffered kindred ; and put your Lord, your Master, and your Brother, to open shame. You are the brethren of devils ; and with them you have inheritance in store.

But it is not only necessary to abstain from sin ; we must abound, as far as possible, in active godliness. — If we aspire to the high honour of kindred with Christ, we must remember that all true believers are His brethren and ours ; and that, unless we feel a brotherly affection for all mankind, we cannot pretend to be the brethren and disciples of our Lord. While we have time, “let us do good unto all men ; especially to them who are of the household of faith.”¹ These our Lord peculiarly calls

¹ Gal. vi. 10.

His own : and if we do our best to show our love to them ; — if having much, we assist them plenteously ; — if having little, we give cheerfully of that little ; — and if, however helpless ourselves, we contribute, at least, our prayers, our good wishes, and our comfortable words, we shall find, at length, that no cup of water given in charity will lose its reward, in that day, when Christ shall instance every alms-deed singly ; and shall assure us, that what we did to the least of those His brethren, He will account it as done to Himself.¹

That you my friends, and he, who now addresses you, may share in that lofty title of brethren or sisters of the Lord, may He grant, who only can bestow such grace, whose mercy and merits reconcile us to the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, with whom, one God, He liveth and reigneth!

¹ St. Matt. xxv. 40.

SERMON XV.

ON THE COMPASSION OF GOD.

[FROM THE GOSPEL FOR ST. STEPHEN'S DAY.]

ST. MATTHEW, xliii. 37.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou, that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.

THESE words are part of that awful expostulation of our Lord with the nation of the Jews which has been read to you in the Gospel for this morning, in which, after reprov- ing their wickedness and hardness of heart, and recount- ing the different offers of instruction and mercy which He had made to them, He pronounces, at length, the deserved but dreadful sentence on them, of the total destruction of their city and temple, and the exclusion of their tribes from the favour and protection of God and His Son, till that distant time, when, the ingather- ing of the Gentiles being first accomplished, the Jews also, themselves, shall look on Him whom

they pierced, and shall acknowledge — in the despised Prophet of Galilee — the Son of God, the Messiah that cometh in the name of the Lord. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not. Behold your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

I have often had occasion to explain to you, how wonderfully the former part of this prophetic denunciation of Divine vengeance and justice has been fulfilled on the Jews, by the destruction of their city and temple, and their own dispersion over all the countries of the world; and how good reason we have to hope that the latter part of our Lord's discourse will also, in due time, receive its fulfilment; and that the house, which now lieth desolate, may one day be built up and inhabited again, in that blessed time when Israel shall be saved together with the Gentiles; when Christ's kingdom, for which we daily pray, shall come in might and majesty; and when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea!

But, though the history of the Jewish nation,

and the consideration of God's prophecies which have been fulfilled, or which remain to be accomplished in them, is an inquiry in itself, most valuable, both to confirm our faith in Him, who, by His knowledge of things to come, gave such undoubted proofs of His Divine authority, and also to increase our love for Him who was so long and wonderfully patient with the rebellious house of Judah; who, even when He was Himself experiencing their unbelief and hardness of heart, lamented over them as a parent over his lost child, and, while even now pronouncing the righteous doom of God's wrath upon them, could, still in His judgement, think upon mercy; and could, even, while He shut them out from His grace for a time, provide for their future restoration to His favour, — though these considerations are, in themselves, most delightful and profitable, yet is there another lesson, which I am desirous to enforce from the passage of Scripture which you have heard to day, and which is, perhaps, of yet greater consequence to some, who hear me, than these general views of God's wisdom and power and goodness. — The history of the Jews is given us, in the Bible, for our example, as well as for our instruction; and, while we wonder at their blindness to the truth, and at that hardness of heart, which was proof alike against the miracles, the mercy, and the judge-

ments of God, we should ourselves take good heed, that we do not, in certain respects, resemble them. We too, perhaps, or many of us, at least, have had warnings from God, by which we set no store; mercies, for which we have given no worthy thanks; judgements, which have had no power to terrify us into repentance; and we ourselves may have cause to fear, that, like the Jews, our day of grace may be drawing to an end; and that, forasmuch as we hardened our hearts against those things which belonged to our peace, those things may, henceforth, be hid from our eyes, and the Lord, whom we would not permit to save us, may depart from us, perhaps, for ever! The sin of the Jews, — that sin, at least, for which our Saviour is here chiefly reproofing them, — consisted in an obstinate disregard of their own salvation, a blindness to the means of grace afforded, and an unwillingness to forsake their darling sins, even when called upon by Him who spake as never man spake, in whose person shone all the power and brightness of His Father bodily. And are not we also, my brethren, both called by Christ, and taught by Him? These glorious words of the Gospel, which are read to you every Sabbath-day, and which there are few who, if they were anxious to improve the opportunities which God has given them, might not study in private, — these sermons, which, however little

value they possess in themselves, do yet, if I know my own heart, convey to you faithfully the doctrine of the Scriptures; that Holy Spirit, which you feel within you, which testifies against every act and word displeasing to the God of Heaven,—are not these the means, whereby Christ, even now, instructs the world, whereby He calls us to repentance, and most lovingly promises us pardon? Let us not undervalue the privileges which we enjoy! God who, in sundry manners, spake unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son. Many prophets and kings have desired to understand the mysteries of love and wisdom, which are now, through Jesus Christ, made plain to the simplest believer: and if we blame the Jews, who knew not Christ to be their appointed Saviour, while, as yet, He was obscured by the form of man, and by the lowliness of His worldly condition, of how much severer punishment may we apprehend ourselves to be worthy, with whom not only the blameless life, but the meritorious death and sufferings of the Messiah plead in vain; who professing to believe that Christ is in very truth the Saviour which should come,—that He died for us,—for us is now interceding at the right hand of His Father,—yet neither love Him truly as the friend of man, nor fear Him, as it becomes us to fear the Judge of the

world—who neither follow His example, nor obey His commandments,—who, by our evil lives, disgrace the religion, of which we are outward members, and renew, by our shameful sins, the pain and disgrace of our Heavenly Master's crucifixion? The Jews put Christ to death; we put the Church, which is His mystical body, to shame; we rend it by our violent passions; we defile it by our indecent actions; we make the worthy name, whereby we are called, to be evil spoken of among the heathen; we do every thing in our power to give pain to our Lord, and to make the sufferings useless, which He has, for our sake, endured; and can we, dare we stand in the Temple of God, and wash our hands, like Pilate, and maintain ourselves guiltless of the blood of this just Person, and give thanks to God that we are better than the Jews?

“But the sin of the Jews was greatly aggravated by the circumstance, that they had often abused God's forbearance; often slighted His merciful offices of pardon; often hardened their hearts against His grace and power.” “How often,” says our Lord, in the words of my text, “How often, O Jerusalem, would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.” And, certainly, there is nothing which can more effectually prevent all hope of

mercy to an offender, than the recollection that he has frequently offended thus before ; that he has often, on former occasions, been forgiven, and as often abused our mercy. But, let me ask you seriously, my friends ; and let each of you answer the question for himself, with that fairness and solemnity, which it becomes us to use with our own consciences, in a case of such infinite importance, — let me ask you seriously, how stands, in this respect, your account with God ? How many warnings of the danger of sin, and of the shortness and uncertainty of life, — how many outward calls to repentance and faith and love, — how many gracious motions of God's Holy Spirit in your hearts have you withstood and quenched and slighted ? Have you been never sick, and in danger of death ? Did no perilous accident ever befall you in the midst of your sins ? Can you not recollect some occasion, when death and judgement were, in all outward probability, near you ; and when, if you had perished, it must, to all outward appearance, have gone hard with your miserable soul ? Have you never stood by the death bed of a friend ; never watched his fears on the approach of the king of terrors ; and heard his prayers for mercy, for repentance, for a little longer time to work out his salvation, and to escape from the wrath to come ? Or, if you have been more fortunate in your connexions, and if this dying

friend were one, for whom the grave had nothing terrible; if he were one, whose pardon was already sealed, and to whom the pangs of mortality were the gate of everlasting happiness, — have you not then been led to compare your own condition with his, and to wish, for the time at least, that you also might die the death of the righteous? And did not these occurrences speak to you with a voice of awful power — to forsake your sins, and to employ, while you might, the precious hours of improvement and salvation? Or are these the only warnings, which God has given you; or can I forget that many of those, whom I am addressing, are passed already the middle term of life, and bear about them in their bodies the signs of approaching dissolution? Count, then, the grey hairs on your head, count the wrinkles in your cheeks, reckon up the infirmities, which daily increase upon you, and bethink you, in time, that all these are manifest warnings, whereby your Maker seeks to call you to your duty, and to gather His heedless creatures into His fold, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings!

But, more is yet behind! I have mentioned those calls alone, which are addressed to the outward senses of the natural man; there are others in which the immortal soul is more immediately and more awefully a partaker. How

many sermons have you heard from this holy place? How many times have the Sabbath bells caught your idle ears, or the footsteps of Christians, flocking to the house of prayer, reminded you, that there was another world, in which you were as much concerned as they, and for which you were bound to make the same provision which they did? And be sure, that, whenever you have been thus called to serious thoughts, whether by the voice of God's ministers, by the example and advice of your pious neighbours, or by those usual signals, whereby we are called to prayer and praise, it was God Himself, and Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, who, by these outward means, endeavoured to gather your souls under their protecting wings. Lastly, examine your recollection well, whether God has not, as if by His own voice and immediate influence, many times vouchsafed to call you to repentance. Have you never felt His Holy Spirit, in your heart, bearing testimony against your evil life, reminding you of God's commandments which you had broken, and of God's merciful promises which you had despised? Have you had no dreams by night, or waking thoughts arising, you knew not how, of the pains of hell, the joys of Heaven, the goodness and terrors of God most High, and the salvation which is offered to us through the blood and merits of His Son? Oh! if such

thoughts return again, quench them not, despise them not, disobey them not, neglect not the voice of conscience which bids you flee from the wrath to come: for this voice is the voice of God within your heart; and your Maker and your Redeemer and your Sanctifier are then, if ye do not drive them away, returning to make their abode with you! Yet alas! how often have we grieved them; — how often have we been deaf to their gracious entreaties; — how often have we, for a time, professed obedience, and then again returned to our former uncleanness and carelessness of living? God be merciful unto *us!* wherein are *we* better than the Jews?

And as our stubbornness under correction, our insensibility to mercy, our deafness to advice, and indifference to God's grace, have, in too many instances, been like theirs; so is our danger also as great, and our immediate punishment likely to be, in its nature and character, the same. I say our immediate punishment, — because the quenching of God's Spirit, the striving against the Holy Ghost, is one of those sins, the chastisement of which is not deferred till the time of death and a future judgment, but which is punished, even in this life, by the total departure of that Heavenly Guide, who strove in vain to lead us to Heaven, by the extinguishing in our hearts of all natural and

moral light, which might teach us to distinguish right from wrong, and by the giving us up, thenceforward, to our own corrupt passions and reprobate minds, — the dwelling of all evil spirits, and the cage of every unclean and hateful thought. It is thus, that, when the Jews had neglected the opportunities of instruction afforded to them, those opportunities were taken away, — to return no more ; that since, in their appointed day of Salvation, they would not know the things which belonged to their peace, those things were, afterwards, hidden from their eyes ; that God, in the times before the flood, declared, that “ His spirit should not always strive with man ;” and that we are warned by St. Paul and by David, to hear the voice of God *to-day*, lest our hearts should become hardened. There is a time of mercy and light, during which God visits His people to instruct and amend them ; but there is also a time of wrath, when He says to His Angels, “ Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes ; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and convert, and be healed.”¹ And this is one reason, why we, not unfrequently, behold that most dreadful of all spectacles, a wicked and unrepenting old man, who, with one foot in the grave, and disqualified, by infirmity, from all

¹ Isaiah, vi. 10.

enjoyment of this world, has yet no heart nor hope to think of the world to come; who, with hell before his eyes, and already, in apprehension, feeling its flames, can neither believe, nor repent, nor even cry to God for mercy; who hardens his heart against that misery, from which he cannot escape; and is then only seemingly happy, when he indulges his fancy in recollections of pleasures which can return no more; and, by a feigned and hollow merriment, endeavours to drag the young and ignorant into the same ruin, as that in which he is himself to be howling for ever. It is the common snare of youth, to resolve that they will repent hereafter, and employ their age in godliness and preparation for death; and it is the misery, too often of old age, to find, too late, that men cannot always repent when they wish to do so; that the habits of a long life cannot be broken through in the short time, and with the feeble resolution, which only remains to declining years; and that God will, very often, not be found by those whom in the days of their health He has often sought in vain. It was the punishment of the Jews, that Christ, whom they had scorned when he came to them, should be seen by them no more; and that God should hide His face from them for ever. And many an one, who thinks little of his present advantages, who cares not for the spiritual helps of a christian country,

may live to see the time when those advantages will be taken from him ; when he may earnestly, and yet in vain, desire to pass in prayer, and in hearing of God's word, one of those many Sabbaths, which he now wastes in idleness ; when he will long to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and shall not see it ! We know not what evils are coming on the world, or how near we may be approaching to those awful times of confusion and distress of nations, which shall come to pass before our Lord's return to judgement. We know as little what is likely to befall ourselves ; how short a time is left to us for repentance here, before we are called to take part in a joyful or a sorrowful hereafter. But the present time is, by God's mercy, given us ; the present day may be made, if we are not wanting to ourselves, a day of mercy and salvation ; and it may possibly depend on the manner, in which we spend the present hour, whether, at Christ's second coming, we shall call on the rocks to fall on us, or exclaim in hope, that our redemption is drawing nigh ; and that blessed, yea blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord !

SERMON XVI.

ON DECISION IN RELIGION.

PART I.

JOSHUA, xxiv. 15.

*Chuse you this day whom ye will serve ; * * * but as for me
and my house we will serve the LORD.*

THIS was the resolution of Joshua, the leader of the armies of Israel, by whose valour it pleased God to punish many sinful nations, and to place His chosen people in the land promised to their forefathers. Joshua, we are told in Scripture, was now old and stricken in age ; and the hour of death drew near. Before it came, he desired to speak, for the last time, his mind to the people under his authority ; and he called together “ before God,” that is, before the door of God’s tabernacle, “ all Israel, their elders, their heads, their judges, and their officers.” In this solemn and public manner, he reminded them of the mercies which God had, from time to time, bestowed on their nation ; of the wonders, which he had wrought for their sake ;

and of the strange and punctual manner in which He had brought to pass every promise made to them. He urged, from hence, the return of thankful obedience which God might reasonably expect at their hands ; and the bitter punishments which they would deserve and receive, if they ungratefully turned away from the service of their Maker, their Master, and their Lawgiver. He pointed out to their recollection the assurance given by Moses, that those neighbouring nations, whom they had subdued, would be raised up by God, in case of their wickedness, “to be scourges in their sides, and thorns in their eyes, till they perished from off the good land which the Lord their God had given them :” and then, drawing all his instructions to a single point, he leaves in these words, his testimony recorded on the behalf of himself and his family : “ If it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, chuse you this day whom ye will serve ; whether the gods which your fathers served, that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell ; but, as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

From these words and from this example, there are several very important lessons to be derived, which I shall lay down to you as plainly and shortly as I am able.

First, it is plain, that, in the opinion of the prophet Joshua a choice between good and evil

was, to a certain extent, in the power of his hearers ; and that he neither supposed them, according to some pretended wise men, to be irresistibly influenced and swayed by the impressions which outward objects made on their mind ; nor, as others have also fancied, to be already so absolutely predestinated by God to Heaven or hell, as that their choice must be naturally and necessarily determined by the gift or refusal of an overpowering grace, which as none could resist where it was bestowed, so none could, without it, be quickened to repentance. For if the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, were not in the power of all, — and if all, to whom this grace is given, were saved in consequence of an irresistible decree, it is plain, that the admonition and example of Joshua, and all other admonitions and examples whatever, would be alike needless to the one, and fruitless to the other ; inasmuch as the reprobate could not be quickened, nor the elect, according to such a notion, perish. And as it would be mere madness to exhort the last of these to beware of falling, when God had determined to hold them upright ; so to exhort the former, the reprobates, to forsake those sins to which they are impelled by a fatal and incurable disease of nature, is something worse than fruitless ; and no other than a cruel mockery, of which a wise man would not, and a prophet

like Joshua, speaking by the authority of God, could not, we may rest assured, be guilty.

I do not mean, that the very power of making the choice did not proceed from God ; or that it was not given by Him of His free grace and favour ; much less do I mean that it was possible for any of the Israelites, any more than it is for any of us, to believe and to quicken themselves to a sincere and lasting amendment of life, without the help and comfort of the Most High. All I maintain is, that this help and comfort are given, though not in like proportions, yet, in sufficient degree to all ; and as no man is enabled to chuse well without God's mercy, so is no man so far deprived of that mercy, as that, some time or other in his life, he is not, if he do not neglect the offered grace, sufficiently called to life eternal. That we have the power of standing is of God's grace ; that we fall is by our own carelessness. And from these opposite truths a consideration will arise of a blended nature, and of very great importance : that as on the one hand, unless we are called of God, we cannot hope for salvation ; and, on the other, that whether we obey this call depends on ourselves, on our own choice and will ; so we should be very careful not to pass by or extinguish whatever gracious motions we feel within our hearts, whatever blessed opportunities or warnings we meet with during our lives, lest it may

so happen, that the occasion of making our choice, once past, may be lost for ever ; that the Spirit of God once resisted, may return no more. It is a wretched sight ; and one which in the world we often meet with, the sight of a man, whose heart is altogether abandoned, who has lost, by long continuance in wickedness, the power and the desire to repent ; who runs onward to the grave in the same dull round of joyless iniquity ; in indulgences of which he has long been weary, in pursuits of which, by sad experience, he has long known the emptiness ; and yet, though he hates this world, he has no heart to think of the world to come, no power to turn his attention to the things which belong to his peace. Such a man, nevertheless, if he examine his heart with sufficient attention, will find, I doubt not, that, in the course of his life, there have been moments in which, if he had not neglected them, he might have accepted the offered mercy of God through Jesus Christ ; moments in which the warning voice of the Almighty has sounded through his soul, “ Chuse you this day whom ye will serve ;” moments in which it depended on his own will, whether he would be a child of God, or a child of perdition. But he hoped that other and more favourable opportunities might arrive, of forsaking those sins which he could not yet prevail on himself to part with ; he chose in that instance, ill, and

knew not that he was deciding the lot of eternity; he heeded not, in the day of his visitation, the things which belonged unto his peace, and afterward they were hidden from his eyes.

We cannot tell how often God may call us; — but this we know, that even a single offer of grace and help and life without end is more than we have any right to expect, since it is infinitely more than we deserve; and we know that it is a part not only of Christian duty, but of common prudence, humbly and thankfully to catch at the first offer of salvation which is made; to welcome Christ on His first visit; and not to let Him depart from our soul till He have left a blessing there.

Whether, then, we are called by the voice of the preacher; by the accidents of life; or by the secret whispers of conscience in our hearts; — whichever of these natural means it be, by which the inward grace of God have visited us, — let us consider it as an appeal to our souls, of the same nature as that which Joshua here makes to his countrymen; — and let us prepare ourselves to chuse without delay, without partiality, whether we will be servants of God or no. “Chuse ye this day whom ye will serve.” Servants ye must be to one or other leader — ye must serve a true or a false God, — or if ye deny God altogether, yet ye will be no less, but tenfold more, the

servants of your sinful lusts. Some one leading object of your thoughts and actions, some one pursuit of life there must needs be, on which your hopes, your cares, your labours are bent and fixed ; and this object, whether it be Baal, or Jehovah ; — wealth, or pleasure, or ambition, or anger, or pride, — this object, which ye labour to gratify, and from the power of which ye hope for reward and happiness, what ye love above all things, desire above all things, serve above all things — this must be your God ! If we honour any creature more than the Creator, it matters little whether that creature be a golden image, or a purse of money ; whether it be the devil himself who presides over lust, or drunkenness, or covetousness ; — or those creatures of God, which the devil tempts us to abuse. The sin is nearly the same ; and the punishment can very slightly differ ; and though in a Christian country mankind no longer worship the sun and moon, or mutter their foolish prayers to stocks and stones, yet are the world and its joys still the object of the worldly man's desire and devotion : — the option is still to be made by us all, whether we will be servants of God, or of Mammon ; and we are all of us called upon to chuse this day whom we will worship, whom we will hereafter obey, and from whom we are to hope for our everlasting reward and portion.

Mankind, we cannot help observing, are divided into two great parties, the godly, or the followers of God ; the worldly, or followers of the world and its prince : — and it remains for us to consider, to which side it is wisest and most advantageous to belong. On this question, however, a very little consideration is necessary to decide us ; since no man, whom I have ever met with, above the condition of an idiot, has been blind to the difference between the wages of sin and of righteousness ; between the best reward which it is in the power of the world to offer, and the kingdom and crown of everlasting glory which is held out to the faithful and obedient soldier of Jesus Christ. I have known many men who, with far more means of enjoying the world than myself, or those who now hear me, have taken their full range of its business, its pleasures, its hopes, and its cares ; and I have never met with any who did not own, that all these things very soon became tiresome, and, at last, insufferably nauseous. There is not one who has not confessed that the pursuits and pleasures of the world are vanity ; and when we consider that these painted follies are to be purchased by the loss of our souls, that these short pleasures are to be succeeded by the pains of everlasting fire, it is loss of time to urge, what is evident to the common sense of you all, that he who is wise

will worship the Lord His God, and Him only will he serve.

The truth is, that, of the souls which perish, by far the greater number fall a sacrifice, not to any mistake as to the comparative value of this world and of the world to come, but to a vain and fruitless endeavour to get as much as they can of the first, without endangering the second. They are loth to fall into Hell; and yet are they unwilling to give up those pleasures, of which Hell is the consequence: and they thus flatter themselves that they may serve God — though not in all things — at least sufficiently; — that if they are now followers of the world, they will yet, some time or other, renounce the world and its temptations; that there is no immediate danger or cause for hurry; and that God will not be extreme to mark what is done amiss. How foolish this manner of reasoning is, will appear to all of you from the following short statement of what that service is, which is expected at our hands by God; what are those sacrifices, by which we purchase to ourselves an interest in the blood of our Redeemer. To know this is highly necessary, since, if we embrace a profession, it is fit that we should know the duties which that profession imposes; if we go forth to warfare, it is wise to count the costs, and reckon up the dangers. And the service, which the Lord of Heaven and earth requires

at our hands, may be shortly comprised in a single demand, the sacrifice of our heart and affections. "My son" are His words to all of us, "my son, give me thine heart."¹ "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; this is the first and great commandment."² To love one who has done so much for us, to love the best of parents, the kindest of friends, our Creator, our Saviour, our Helper, this is, surely, no unreasonable service; but in this service, more, far more, is implied than a cold or careless spirit may suppose. If we give up our whole heart to God, it must mean, that we love nothing else in comparison with Him; that we desire nothing so much as to please Him, and to receive His approbation; and that we are ready, above all, to give up, when He requires, all that is dearest to us in this world, for His sake. This is often no light and easy service; and it is expressed by Christ, in terms which show that it is one which requires our whole resolution, and which will be often accompanied with real pain and difficulty. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."³ "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life: and few there be that find it."⁴

¹ Proverbs, xxiii. 26.

² St. Matthew, xxii. 37, 38.

³ St. Luke, ix. 23.

⁴ St. Matthew, vii. 14.

“The kingdom of God is like unto a merchant man seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”¹ “If any man come to me, and hate not,” in comparison, “his father and mother,” — “yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”² These greater sacrifices are not, indeed, often required; but they *may* be required at any time; and the only way by which we can know that such a heart is in us, as will in these greater matters resign itself to God’s will, is by our readiness to please Him in such little things — (if any thing can be called little on which the salvation of a soul depends) in such little things as are in our daily power. It is not the value of the service, which we render to God (for our best services have no power to make him happier), but the good will with which we do them; we are not required to do much, but to do our best; and many a poor and weak and ignorant Christian will be crowned hereafter with unspeakable glory, who has never yet had it in his power to make any conspicuous or visible sacrifice. Instead, therefore, of boasting what we *would* do for God’s sake if it were in our power, let us seriously consider what we *can* do; and take heed, especial heed, lest we neglect what little may be within our reach. And, to come to the

¹ St. Matthew, xiv. 45, 46.

² St. Luke, xiv. 26.

behaviour of every one of us, if we neglect our prayers, or repeat them carelessly and without faith in God ; if we are careless of our children's instruction, and do not correct them when they offend their Master and Maker and our own ; if we take any undue advantage, how small soever, or neglect any little act of kindness, which may be in our power, God sees, and we ourselves may see from these examples, what is the real condition of our hearts ; and that we, who have been thus "unfaithful in a few things," would have been far worse, had more been committed to our care. Let no man, therefore, be careless of his daily conduct ; nor indulge in what are generally called little sins ; since it is by our behaviour under such seemingly slight temptations as these, that our service to God is shown. It would be a strange answer of a servant to his master, were he to say "It is true that I have been drunken and idle ; but these are little things ; and, if I am asked to rob your house, I never will consent to it." It would be stranger still, if, when commanded to go on a short and easy message, he should refuse so slight a duty ; and yet, at the same time, offer to lay down his life for his master. "If ye will not do me so slight a favour," would doubtless be that master's reply, "how can I depend on you for greater services ?"

Be not deceived : — he, that doeth righteous-

ness, is righteous; and he only, be the occasion small or great: ye cannot serve God and mammon; chuse, while the choice is allowed you, which of them you will follow, and in the least, as well as the greatest temptations, be this your constant answer, and, as far as your influence extends, let it be the answer of your children, your servants, and your friends: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

SERMON XVII.

ON DECISION IN RELIGION.

PART II.

JOSHUA, xxiv. 15.

As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

I HAVE, in a former sermon, explained the occasion on which these words were spoken by Joshua, the prophet of God, and, under God, the leader of the armies of Israel; and I have enforced from them the necessity of a decided and resolute choice between the service of God and of the world; and of a determination, when that choice is made, of abiding by all its consequences; and of observing, with diligent consistency, whatever duties, either of action or self-denial, may, thereby, be laid on us.

You will remember, how Joshua declared his intention that, whatever form of religion his countrymen might chuse for themselves; whatever altars they might build, and whatever gods they might follow, his own choice was made,

his own faith decided ; and that he, and his, would continue to serve the same mighty Lord, who had brought them forth from the slavery of Egypt, and had fed them with manna in the wilderness. And you will remember, how I, from this example, urged on you, that neither the prevalence of wicked customs, nor the fear of wicked men in power, nor the entreaties of wicked friends, nor the threats, nor the enticements of a wicked world, should turn us aside from acting up to our own lights, and according to the guidance of our own consciences ; as we would hope, that, in the midst of a perverse generation, our own souls, at least, might be snatched as brands from the burning. All this I then entreated you to consider ; and all this I now shortly repeat : because it is a lesson which we cannot too steadily bear in mind ; well knowing that “ it is a light thing for any of us to be judged by man’s judgement ; seeing that He, who will one day judge us, is the Lord ; ”¹ — well knowing, that our business in this world is not to please the world, nor to be like the men who dwell therein, but to make ourselves clean from the sins of the world ; and to work out, not the praise of mankind, but our own everlasting salvation ; well knowing, lastly, that “ whosoever is ashamed of Christ, and of His words, — of him shall the Son of Man be

¹ 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

ashamed when he shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the Holy Angels!"¹

But to enlarge further on these truths is not my present purpose. I would now call your attention to the terms, in which the resolution of Joshua is declared, and to the persons, in whose names, as well as his own, he promises to serve Jehovah. "As for *me* and *my house*, we will serve the Lord." He does not covenant for himself alone, that, like Daniel in Babylon, he would worship God, while throughout the rest of the city the voice of prayer was silent, or addressed to vanities. He does not even confine his engagements to his sons, his wife, his daughters, his descendants. For all these he engages; and for more than all these:—for all, namely, who ate of his bread and partook of the common shelter of his habitation, his man-servant, his maid-servant, yea, and the stranger within his gates; *he* and *his house*, and all which was therein, were to worship the Lord together:—a circumstance, which naturally leads to the consideration of a duty now too much neglected, but than which no religious observance can be named more strongly recommended by its antiquity, and by its reasonableness, and by the evident advantages which, even in this life, may be expected to arise from its observance; I mean the duty of family worship.

¹ St. Luke, ix. 26.

In the early ages of the world, in those days when angels came often down from Heaven, and when God, in dreams and visions, made Himself often manifest to the sons of men, this method of family prayer was the chief, if not the only, form of worship, which was practised, or practicable. At first, indeed, the earth was peopled but by one single family; and while, round the fire in Adam's cottage, or over the meal which his labour had gathered from the ground, the first-created man gave glory to God, in the midst of his wife and children, within that circle all the world was enclosed: and, under that thatch, or the shadow of those trees, as in the visible Church, all the prayers and praises of human kind were offered up from the common altar.

But, when those children rose to man's estate, and had each, as may be supposed, his own family cluster of wife and little ones, we find that Cain and Abel had each his separate altar, on which he offered up to God a portion of the work of his hands, and from which he begged a blessing on those who were closest and dearest to him. Even when the world was fuller of inhabitants; and when, for the purposes of more extended worship and instruction, the order of priesthood was established; and a few persons, such as Melchisedech, were selected from the bulk of mankind, who should be more peculiarly

occupied in the public service of God, and should perform, at the head and in the behalf of more numerous congregations, what the master of every single family had, till then, performed among his own children and servants, it may be observed, that, though public prayers and sacrifices were *added*, yet was not family worship *done away*; and we still read in Scripture how Abraham and his children “called on the name of the Lord,”¹ and offered sacrifice at Moriah, and at Hai, and in the grove of Beersheba; and when Jacob parted with Laban at the mount of Mispah.²

It is true, that, among the Israelites, under the law of Moses, and when they had been brought by God into the land of their inheritance, those sacrifices, which the patriarchs had offered up, wherever their tents were pitched, were forbidden; and one only altar was allowed to the whole nation, in that place which God had chosen to put his name therein. But though, to prevent schism and idolatry, this rule was wise and necessary, and though something like it has been observed throughout the Christian world, in forbidding, except in cases of real necessity, the administration of the sacraments in a private room, or by any other than a regular minister; yet, neither in the Jewish nor the Christian Church, was the ob-

¹ Genesis, xii. 8.; xiii. 4.

² Genesis, xxxiii. 20.

ligation to family worship removed; nay, there were, in the former dispensation, many ceremonies which were expressly ordered to be done at home by every master or father of a family, in the presence of, and together with, his children and his household. This was the case with the two most important ceremonies of their religion, circumcision and the passover. This was the case with those prayers, with which the approach of every Sabbath-day was celebrated. And every evening, when the day closed and lights were first brought, it was the custom of every Jewish family to assemble together, and address a few short sentences of prayer and praise to that God who divided the light from the darkness. The like custom, and the use of almost the same precise words, passed from the Jewish to the Christian Church, in which, in ancient times, every family was accustomed thus to join in morning and evening devotions. But why should we go back to former days, when, almost in our own memory, this practice was universal with those who led or professed to lead, religious or decent lives; and when, at the present day, in many countries of the Christian world, the evening family prayer comes as uniformly as the supper or the bed?

Well had it been for this nation, had we in this, as in many other respects, been governed by the example of our forefathers! Well had

it been for our worldly as well as our spiritual prosperity, if we had not suffered luxury and pride and irregular hours, and a carelessness for the souls of those with whom we dwell, to turn us away from a practice so wise, so reasonable, so holy, and, to those who are once accustomed to it, so delightful!

For, secondly, even in a worldly point of view, the maintenance of the custom of family prayers is well worthy the attention of every prudent master or parent. However wicked a man's own heart, however irregular his own practices, there are few, indeed, so depraved as not to desire that their children should be blessed by God; there are few so besotted, as not to feel some anxiety that those, with whom they live, should be honest, regular, and trustworthy; that their servants should be such as that property is safe in their hands; and that, in all their doings, they should render something more than that mere "eye service," which men-pleasers are likely to afford. But, setting out of the question any spiritual instruction, or spiritual help which a child or a servant may receive by means of, or in consequence of, the prayers thus read in their presence, is it not plain that the best way of keeping a family sober, regular, and estranged from bad company and dangerous habits, is to call them thus together, and see with our own eyes the con-

dition they are in, the last thing before we dismiss them to their slumbers? or what other method is likely to be so impressive or so effectual? what is there which will, humanly speaking, more compose the mind, more calm the passions, more clearly and forcibly remind them of their duties, or send them to their daily toil or their nightly rest, with so good dispositions towards ourselves and each other, with so steady resolutions to perform their duty, and to resist whatever temptation of idleness, pride, pleasure, or covetousness may meet them during the day, than this daily and nightly resignation of their thoughts and spirits to their Master and our Master, their Father and our Father, their God and our God? Surely, if we are not our own enemies, we shall, at least, whether we are religious ourselves, or not, behold with pleasure our household and family, like that of Joshua, serving the Lord.

But why should I suggest these worldly and selfish motives to a congregation of professing Christians? Why should I speak of the temporal and secondary advantage to be drawn from a practice of which the spiritual fruits are so great and blessed? To a Christian it is enough to urge, that the practice, which I recommend, is one of the greatest conceivable advantage to the souls of those with whom he dwells; and to his own soul: that it is a means whereby

they and he may become sober in this life, and happier for evermore, together, in the life which is to come.

I conclude, that there is none here who does not desire his own salvation! I trust and hope, that there is none who does not wish, when he thinks of the subject at all, that his wife, his children, his servants may be also saved. There is none, surely, who can see a human creature, day after day, ministering to *his* wants, busied in *his* business, obedient to *his* will, eating the same bread, and lodging under the same shelter, without sometimes feeling an anxiety, that this human creature may, together with himself, escape the wrath to come; and, together with himself, be received into everlasting glory. But how, except by prayers, is the person, for whom we are thus interested, to escape the curse of hell, or obtain the blessings of Heaven? It will be said, "He may pray for himself and privately." He may do so; he doubtless ought to do so; — but how can we tell, whether he does so or not? or how, in such a state of doubt, can we be easy concerning him? He may be ignorant of his obligation to prayer; he may be ignorant in what manner he ought to pray; he may be forgetful, or negligent. And shall not we teach him, — and shall not we remind him of his duty? or how can we better do either the one or the other, than by praying

in his presence, and calling on him to join us in that sound form of words which we ourselves address to the Creator and Redeemer? Whereunto serveth the knowledge which God has given us, if we do not teach the ignorant? whereto serveth the grace, which we have received from Him, if we do not let it shine forth in such a manner before men, as that they may see our good works and glorify our Father which is in Heaven?

Surely, surcly if we know how to pray, and if God hath given us, in our own persons, a hearty desire to pray, we shall be anxious not to keep these blessings to ourselves; but to call on those, over whom God hath placed us in authority, to partake with us in the benefits which we expect by these means to obtain.

Nor is this the only advantage, which, in a spiritual view of the subject, is obtained by the regular practice of family devotion. That, which many do together, is better done in itself, and is more powerful in its consequences, than the same action performed by those different persons separately and in solitude. It is, in itself, better done, more earnestly, more fervently, and for the most part with a more fixed attention, and more regularly. In all these respects, mankind are imitative creatures: — we are naturally disposed to do what we see others do; and whatever we are about, we do more steadily and

cheerfully, when others are working together with us. A man who never prays but in private, is master of his own thoughts and time ; and therefore, is apt to be careless both of the one and the other ; he prays seldomer, and his thoughts wander more, than, if he is called to a daily repetition of his duty, by the example and authority of others, and by the necessity of fixing his mind on what another person repeats in his presence. Many a weary and careless believer, who would have slipped to his bed, and from thence, perhaps, to his grave, without a single prayer to God, has been stopped short, and forced to recollect himself, by the sight of others on their knees ; many a wandering and vain and wicked fancy has been checked in its birth, by the necessity of joining in a loud Amen, or by the awful sound of his voice who directs the family devotions. This is one of the principal advantages of all public worship whatever ; and what is public worship, even in its grandest and most awful form, but the worship of a larger family ; what is family prayer, but a lesser number, it may be two or three, collected in like manner, and under the same gracious promises, in the name of the Son of God ?

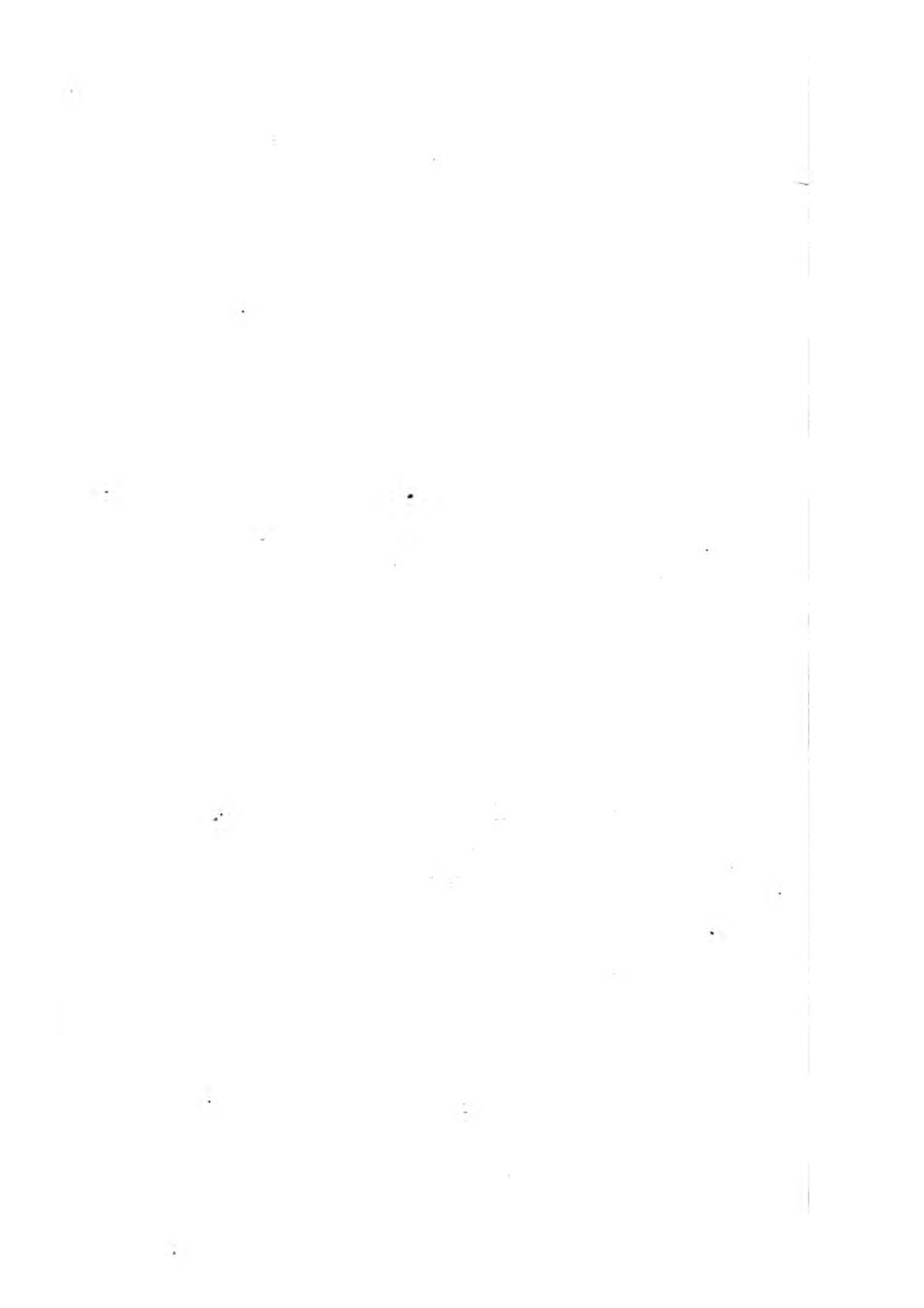
For, yet more, — not only are the prayers of several persons collected together, more awful, more impressive, more regular and fervent, than the prayers of the same persons singly ; — we

know from the word of God Himself, that, thus offered, they are more effectual. I know, that great things are spoken in the Gospel, in behalf of private and secret prayer. I know, that we are commanded on no account to neglect its due observance, and that we are encouraged to that observance, by the gracious promise that for those services, which we offer up in our own closets, our Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward us openly. I know, and who is there who has made the experiment that doth not know, the heavenly peace and consolation which flows in upon our souls, when, smarting under the deprivation of earthly friends, or mourning over past transgressions, we pour out our sorrows in retirement before our Almighty Father. And I would enforce the daily habit of private prayer, with earnestness upon all who hear me. This ought to be done and not to leave the other undone.— But as it is the duty of family worship which I am now anxious to press on your attention, I will endeavour to lay down a few simple rules for its better observance. In the name of all present, the master of the family should, in the first place, return humble and hearty thanks to God the Father, for the innumerable blessings daily conferred on all, for the gifts of life, of health, of daily food, and for the pleasures of social intercourse, with which He hath favoured them.

He should make, in the name of all present, an humble confession of their past sins, and should pray for repentance and strength to amend their future lives. He should beseech the Almighty, that all ill-will and anger and repining may be driven far from his door; and that he and his household may love each other, as becometh brethren. Let him, secondly, shew himself a brother and a parent, by calling on them to unite with him in those sacred offices of religion, by which the whole Christian family is linked together in one common and kindred tie! If, lastly, there is any who loves the Lord Jesus, and would gladly have such a guest to dwell with and defend him, let him, together with his wife, his children, his servants, and the stranger within his gates, call on the name of Christ, beseeching Him to enter into their house and their hearts, and to fill them full of that Presence, where is abundance of joy, and peace and pleasure for evermore.

As a form of family prayer, — though there are many which are excellent, — I know none so good, or so easy to be obtained, as the general confession, the general thanksgiving, the Lord's prayer, and the morning and evening collects for grace, and deliverance from peril and danger, as they stand in our Church service. And would to God that those masters and fathers of families who hear me, would give, at least, one five

minutes, either in the morning or evening of every day, to read them duly and solemnly in their families ! Then would the meanest cottage present a spectacle more glorious in the sight of God's angels, and more acceptable to God Himself, than the proudest palaces, where His faith is unknown, and His fear is slighted. Then would the poor become more content, and the rich be more secure ; then would the fathers and masters of this world become more gentle ; and the children and servants, more dutiful, in proportion as they prayed for grace together ; and then, when every house had become a temple of the Lord, would the Lord God omnipotent return in glory to be Himself the Light and the Temple of His own new Jerusalem ; that we might dwell in Him for evermore, and bathe our bodies and souls, then become immortal and sinless, in the beams of His glorious presence ! To Him, the First and the Last, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three Persons, one blessed God, be ascribed all honour, praise, and glory !



A
FAREWELL SERMON

PREACHED

IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF HODNET,

IN THE COUNTY OF SALOP.

APRIL 20. 1823.

TO THE PARISHIONERS
OF
HODNET AND ITS CHAPELRIES,

THE FOLLOWING

SERMON

IS,

WITH SINCERE RESPECT AND AFFECTION,

DEDICATED,

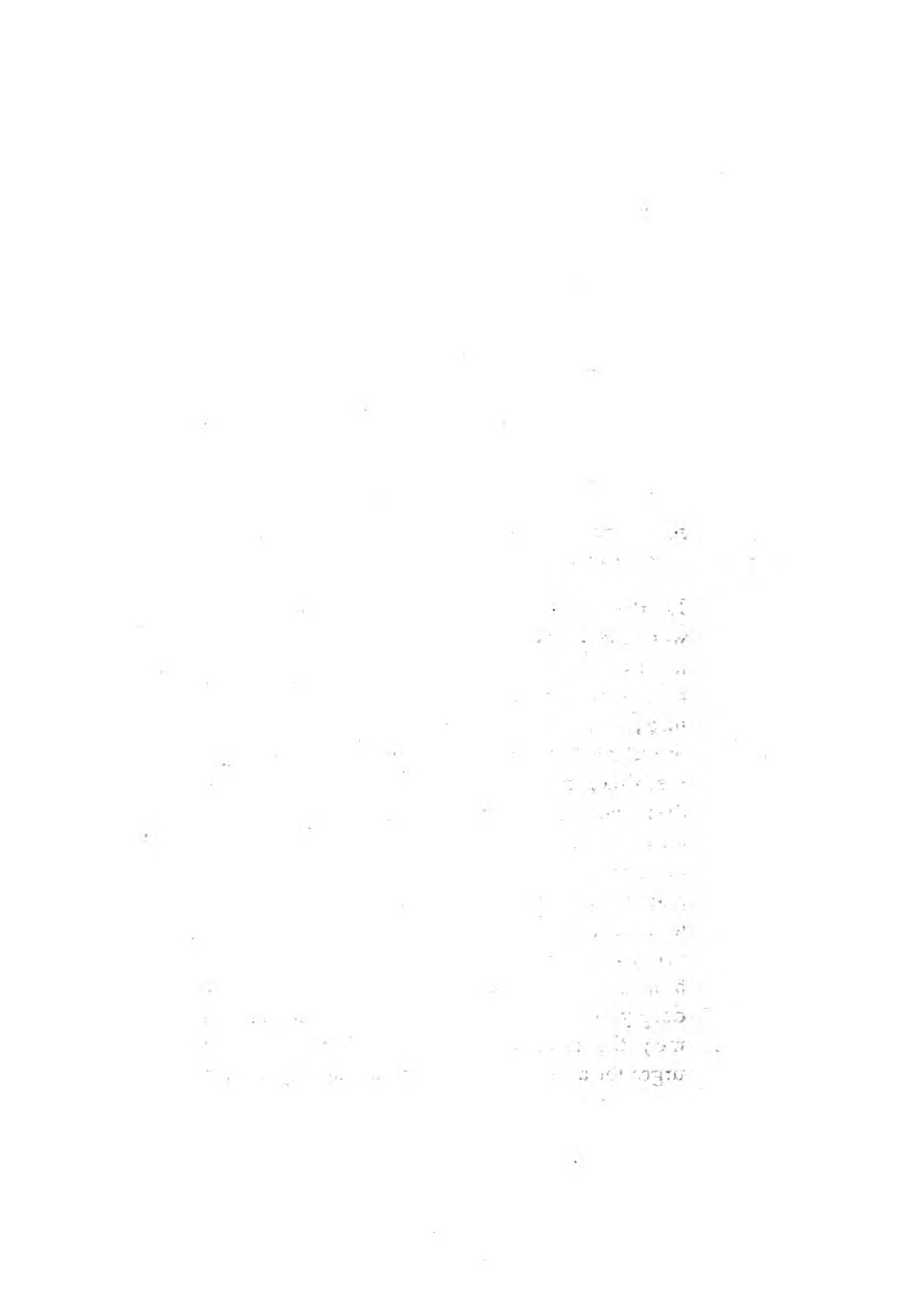
BY THEIR GRATEFULLY OBLIGED

AND FAITHFUL HUMBLE SERVANT,

REGINALD CALCUTTA.

THE following Discourse was prepared under circumstances which left the Author little time and less inclination for a long or elaborate composition ; and it is now given to the world at the request of those to whom, at the moment when that request was made, he could deny nothing.— If any further apology is necessary for its defects and its publication, he has to observe that whatever small profits may arise from its sale will be added to the funds of the National School in Hodnet.

June 2. 1823.



A
FAREWELL SERMON,
&c.

1 ST. PETER, ii. 11.

*Dearly Beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims,
abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.*

IN the counsel itself which St. Peter, in these words, conveys to the Christian world, there is little which requires to be explained, or which is capable of lengthened illustration. That the lusts, of which he speaks, are the worst enemies of our spiritual nature, you are not now, for the first time, to be told; nor have I now, for the first time, occasion to explain to you the best and only effectual manner of purifying the heart, and of conquering its unruly passions.—There is one circumstance, however, in St. Peter's exhortation, which, as it is, at all times and in itself, well worthy of our most serious thoughts, has, I confess, at the present moment, very deeply and peculiarly impressed and affected me; the reason, I mean,—which the Apostle urges for a resolute denial of all unholy desires

and dispositions,—in the shortness and uncertainty of our continuance in the present world; in the swiftness of our passage through it; and in the fleeting nature of those hopes and fears, those sufferings and enjoyments, which fill up and diversify our journey.

“ I beseech you, *as strangers and pilgrims*, abstain from fleshly lusts !” He speaks to us as to men who have here no settlement or abiding stay; who are passing through life, as travellers through a foreign country to their distant home; and in whom, therefore, it is mere madness to heap up possessions which they cannot hope to carry with them, or to set their hearts on objects which they must soon leave behind, which they must, themselves, cast away, or which will, inevitably, be taken from them.

The idea is common to many other passages of Scripture. Good old Jacob, in his conversation with the King of Egypt, spoke of his life (lengthened as it was beyond the later experience of mankind, and prosperous as it may appear to us to have been, in many of the things wherein men are accustomed to place their notions of prosperity,) as of a short and uneasy journey. The author of the hundred and nineteenth Psalm describes himself as a stranger upon earth; and St. Paul not only instances these declarations of the ancient Israelites as sufficient proofs of their faith in a world beyond

the grave, but himself adopts the illustration as the best encouragement to diligence and self-denial, to remind us that the Christian, like the patriarch, is, in this world, in a foreign land; that in the earth, which now is, we have no abiding city; but that one only rest remaineth for the people of God, in that New Jerusalem whose builder is the Most High; within whose walls alone the tyranny of chance and change shall be brought to an end; where all which we are then allowed to keep, we shall keep through endless ages, and such, as we then are found to be, we shall continue everlastingly.¹

Is it necessary for me to prove the fitness of this comparison, or how truly the life of man is, in these passages, described as a pilgrimage? Which of us is there whose experience may not bear abundant witness to the changeable nature of our prospects in the world: the uncertainty of our best laid plans, the insecurity of our firmest possessions? Where shall the man be found, who, for long together, continueth in one stay? Which of us does not behold and feel himself and every thing around him, with various speed, but with equal certainty, hasting on to dissolution and decay, while all, which we endure, and all, which we enjoy, has no more comparative permanence, than our good or bad reception in

¹ Genesis, xlvii. 9. Psalm cxix. 19. Heb. xi. 9. 13.

an inn, or the still briefer accidents of a voyage? Life bears us on like the stream of a mighty river. Our boat, at first, glides gently down the narrow channel, through the playful murmurings of the little brook and the windings of its grassy border. The trees shed their blossoms over our young heads; the flowers on the brink seem to offer themselves to our young hands; we are happy in hope, and we grasp eagerly at the beauties round us; but the stream hurries us on, and still our hands are empty.

Our course in youth and manhood is along a wider and deeper flood, and amid objects more striking and magnificent. We are animated by the moving picture of enjoyment and industry which passes before us; we are excited by some short-lived success; or depressed and rendered miserable by some equally short-lived disappointment. But our energy and our dependence are both in vain. The stream bears us on, and our joys and our griefs alike are left behind us; we may be shipwrecked, but we cannot anchor; our voyage may be hastened, but it cannot be delayed; whether rough or smooth, the river hastens towards its home, till the roaring of the ocean is in our ears, and the tossing of his waves is beneath our keel, and the lands lessen from our eyes, and the floods are lifted up around us, and the shore loses sight of us, and we take our last leave of earth and its inhabitants; and of our

further voyage there is no witness but the Infinite and Eternal!

And do we still take so much anxious thought for the future days, when the days, which are gone by, have so strangely and uniformly deceived us? Can we still so set our hearts on the creatures of God, when we find, by sad experience, that the Creator only is permanent? Or shall we not rather lay aside every weight, and every sin which does most easily beset us; and think of ourselves henceforth as wayfaring persons only, who have no abiding inheritance but in the hope of a better world, and to whom even that world would be worse than hopeless, if it were not for our Lord Jesus Christ and the interest which we have obtained in His mercies?

It is not death alone (it should be always borne in mind), it is not death alone (though death, even in the midst of life, is near to every one of us), which may disappoint our best grounded hopes, and derange our most prudent purposes. Fresh objects, fresh feelings, fresh hopes and fears start up in every fresh stage of our being; and each, as it starts up, drives out some of its predecessors from the hold which they seemed to have so firmly gained on us. We ourselves change continually; and, even where we remain the same, the objects round us alter through the influence of ten thousand accidents, over which we have no controul, and for which, humanly speaking,

we have no remedy. What man has built a house, and can reckon on dwelling in it? what man has planted a vineyard, and may hope to eat the fruits thereof? — It is for others, ordinarily, that we take thought; for others, that we labour: and it is into the labours of other men, that we ourselves enter in, to enjoy them. Surely then, when all is uncertain, and when so much is calamitous; when we cannot be happy without attachment, and where attachment is so closely followed by separation; it is worse than idle to fix our hearts in a world where our treasure cannot be; and to hazard the only real happiness which God holds out, by catching at the shadow of happiness which surrounds us!

But if such are the considerations, which (taken as a general truth, and stated in general language) the uncertainty of mortal life is always calculated to awaken in us, more especially have thoughts of this nature been called up in my mind, by the near approach of that time when my ministerial labours among you must have an end; when I must give over, into other hands, the task of watching over your spiritual welfare; and when many, very many, of those, with whom I have grown up from childhood, in whose society I have passed my happiest days, and to whom it has been, during more than fifteen years, my duty and my delight (with such ability as God has given me) to preach the Gospel of

Christ, must, in all probability, see my face in the flesh no more.

Under such circumstances, and connected with many, who now hear me, by the dearest ties of blood, of friendship, and of gratitude, some mixture of regret is excusable, some degree of sorrow is holy. I cannot, without some anxiety for the future, forsake, for an untried and arduous field of duty, the quiet scenes, where, during so much of my past life, I have enjoyed a more than usual share of earthly comfort and prosperity. I cannot bid adieu to those with whose idea almost every recollection of past happiness is connected, without many earnest wishes for their welfare, and (I will confess it) without some severe self-reproach, that, while it was in my power, I have done so much less, than I ought to have done, to render that welfare eternal.

There are, indeed, those here, who know, and there is One above all who knows better than any of you, how earnestly I have desired the peace and holiness of His Church: how truly I have loved the people of this place; and how warmly I have hoped to be a means in His hand of bringing many among you to glory. But I am at this moment but too painfully sensible that, in many things, yea in all, my performance has fallen short of my principles; that neither privately nor publicly have I taught you with so

much diligence as now seems necessary in my eyes, — nor has my example set forth the doctrines, in which I have, however imperfectly, instructed you. Yet, if my zeal has failed in steadiness, it has never been wanting in sincerity. I have expressed no conviction which I have not deeply felt; have preached no doctrine which I have not steadfastly believed: however inconsistent my life, its leading object has been your welfare; and I have hoped and sorrowed, and studied and prayed for your instruction, and that you might be saved. For my labours, such as they were, I have been, indeed, most richly rewarded, in the uniform affection and respect which I have received from my parishioners; in their regular and increasing attendance in this holy place, and at the Table of the Lord; in the welcome, which I have never failed to meet, in the houses both of rich and of poor; — in the regret (beyond my deserts and beyond my fullest expectations) with which my announced departure has been received by you; in your expressed and repeated wishes for my welfare and my return; in the munificent token of your regard with which I have been this morning honoured¹; in your numerous attendance on the present occasion, and in those marks of emotion

¹ A handsome Piece of Plate had been given to the Author by his Parishioners, in a manner the most impressive and gratifying to his feelings.

which I now witness round me, and in which I am myself well nigh constrained to join.

For all these, accept such thanks as I can pay: accept my best wishes: accept my affectionate regret: accept the continuance of those prayers which I have hitherto offered up for you daily; and in which, whatever and wherever my sphere of duty may hereafter be, my congregation of HODNET shall (believe it!) never be forgotten. But accept, above all, as the best legacy which I can leave behind me, a few plain words of advice, such as are suggested by my text, and by the circumstances under which I now address you; and such as, if duly borne in mind by each of us, will strip our separation of its most painful features, and secure to us, if our faith is true, a more blessed meeting hereafter.

The parting, with those whom we love, for any considerable length of time; the dissolution of ties, which have lasted long, and have been the source of mutual happiness, must, under any imaginable circumstances, be, as I well feel, a heavy trial. Yet how few are there among us who have, during our past lives, sufficiently recollected that a parting of a far more awful character was always certain, and at any time might be immediate; that we were living with our friends and neighbours, as if we and they were alike to remain on earth for ever;

that we were living, all the time, on the crumbling brink of a ready-dug grave, into which, one by one, we were surely and successively to slip down, be mourned, and forgotten! We are a mighty multitude travelling through an intricate wilderness. Our longest friendships and most persevering quarrels are like the intercourse of wayfaring men; a few words of greeting, as we pass each other in our speed, or for a little while walk side by side, till the crowd separates us, or we turn down different roads, and meet again, perhaps, no more.

Now, hence, the lesson, which I would draw, is as follows. If our best earthly ties must be of so short continuance, how earnest should be our diligence to do all the good in our power to those whom we love while they are yet within the reach of our kindness. If our bitterest animosities are so soon to be terminated by death, or by some one of those countless changes, which divide us, even during life, almost as effectually as death itself could do, how anxiously should we endeavour to "agree with our adversary quickly while we are in the way with him¹," before our good resolutions are cut off in darkness, and no more shall remain but the punishment of our neglect and the bitter memory of our past opportunities. Our time is

¹ St. Matt. v. 25.

very short! Shall we then grow weary of well-doing? We must each of us part with our neighbour very soon! Shall we part in anger? In the whole world, there is no other distinction of persons, recognized by the Gospel, but those whom we *love*, and those whom we *ought* to love: and the duty, which we owe to both of these, is the first and most striking lesson, which the uncertainty of life should teach us; and which we may learn even from such a rehearsal of death as is afforded in our own approaching separation.

Would to God, indeed, that I could hope to leave you all as truly at peace with each other; as, I trust and believe, there is peace between myself and you! Yet, if there be any here whom I have at any time offended, let me entreat his forgiveness, and express the hope that he has already forgiven me. If any who thinks he has done me wrong (I know of none), let him be assured that the fault, if it were one, is not only forgiven but forgotten. And, let me earnestly entreat you all, as it may be the last request that I shall ever make, the last advice which I shall ever offer to you — Little children, love one another, and forgive one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath loved and forgiven you!

Nor are they the duties only, which we owe to our enemies and our friends, which are to be

learned from the consideration of our pilgrim state on earth ; and from the uncertainty of all things round us. Pilgrims as we are, in that very name the fact is implied, that “ we seek a country :” and we are encouraged to look forward to a better and more enduring home. Divided as we soon must be, we are taught, that, to those who love the Lord, no parting can be eternal ; and, even in the warmth of our earthly attachments, (when those attachments are allowable and holy,) we have the strongest motive for endeavouring so to pass through the journey of life, as, that, after death, we may meet those, whom we love, in happiness. I do not forbid, I would not, for worlds, even damp or discourage those pure domestic affections, those sacred friendships and harmless and useful predilections of kindred, of country, of neighbourhood, which make up so much of the general happiness of mankind, and without which the world would be, still more than we find it, a vale of tears and misery ! We do well to love our kindred ; we do well to cling to our friends ; we do well (uncertain as the possession may be) to value their love while it yet is spared to us, to fear their loss, and to sorrow over their separation from us. But, let us ask ourselves, how, if we cannot, even for a few years, lose sight, without sorrow, of a relation, a friend, a neighbour ; if we cannot

cover up a kinsman in his grave, without some natural tears ; if I cannot leave you now, for a distant land, without a pang of more than common bitterness ; how shall we endure, hereafter, to see our lots in the Day of Judgement determined in different worlds ; and that great gulph extending itself between us, which is for ever to divide the righteous and the ungodly ? And, reflecting on these things, let us, for God's sake, for our friends' sake, and for our own ; as we love our friends, as we love ourselves, and desire that neither we nor they should sorrow everlastingly, prepare them by advice, and ourselves by repentance, so to part for a time, as that our parting may be for a time only : but that the parent may embrace the glorified form of his child — the husband, of his wife — and the friend, of the sharer of his confidence — in that land where every tear shall be wiped from every eye ; where no unkindness shall wound, no suspicion alienate ; but where those virtuous affections, which were tried and purified here, shall reap their reward of eternal indulgence and enjoyment !

Above all, however, if we fear so much to lose our earthly friends, if we feel the dismalness of a lonely heart, and that so dependant are we on each other's help and kindness, that, even in Paradise, man could not be happy alone ; let us consider how much sorer misery is it to be separated from that Best and Greatest of friends

and benefactors, from whose unseen but unfailing presence alone it comes, that we are either holy or happy ; whose blessing is found in the universal smile of nature ; whose Grace is the source of every amiable and every delightful sensation of the heart ; in whom we live ; through whom we love each other ; and by whom we are loved (unless we wilfully cast His love away) with a tenderness ten thousand fold exceeding all which the best of parents can feel for his offspring ? It is hard to leave our friends, though but for a time ; but it must be harder still, one day, to be driven from the face of God for ever ! But, if we love God in the life which now is, His love will never fail us ; and the love of our virtuous friends will be also, through endless ages, secured to us !

Love, then, one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath loved you ; but, Love Him, above all things, by loving and serving whom, you may, by prayer, by intercession, by example, and by final union, most effectually secure and most lastingly enjoy your earthly attachments also !

So, when some few short years are at an end, and when He, in whose bosom are the appointed days of man, shall have finished the number of His elect, and hastened the wheels of His kingdom ; it may be, that we, who now, in sorrow and anxiety have offered up our prayers and tears together, may together join in that triumphal hymn, which, on the sea of glass and

before the sapphire throne, the soldiers of Him, who was slain for us, shall sing in unison ; that he, who has thus long, in much weakness, been your shepherd, may, through mercy, enter with you into the fold of the great Shepherd of all, and present you blameless and undefiled before that presence which no unclean nor unholy thing may look upon !

To these general observations it was my original design to have added some more particular hints adapted to the circumstances of the Parish ; and which might, perhaps, have fallen with greater weight from me at this hour of parting than on any former occasion. But I fear to weary you, and I feel my own firmness likely to fail, if I proceed much further. Two points, only, I will mention, of those which press on my mind. I would recommend to your continued and increased support the Charity School of this place, and its Benefit Society. The former of these I have had the happiness to see first raised, and since growing up to great and generally acknowledged usefulness. The latter, which had almost fallen to decay, I have seen revived, on a better principle, with an abundant prospect of greater and more enduring prosperity. The advantages of both, to the rising generation, and that which is now sinking into old age, to the poor themselves, and to those higher classes of society who can never be uninterested in the morality, the industry,

and happiness of those beneath them, I have not now time to enumerate as they deserve, nor, to those who hear me, is, I trust, such a recapitulation necessary. All which I will do is to express my earnest hope, that both these establishments may (as well as every other good work) continue to flourish under your protection and encouragement; and that the seed thus sown in the infant mind, and the comforts thus secured for the sick, the aged, and the mourner, may bring forth in every succeeding year, more abundant fruits of intelligence and devotion, of industry and sobriety, of content and gratitude.

Finally, Brethren, farewell! — May the God of Love and Peace and Purity be your guide and guardian through the remnant of your pilgrimage here, and grant you, at length, an entrance into that abiding city of righteousness, whither our desires and our steps are tending; and purify your hearts from every evil thing, and fill you full of all grace and godly hope, in all time of your tribulation, in all time of your wealth, in the hour of death, and in the Day of Judgment!

THE END.

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