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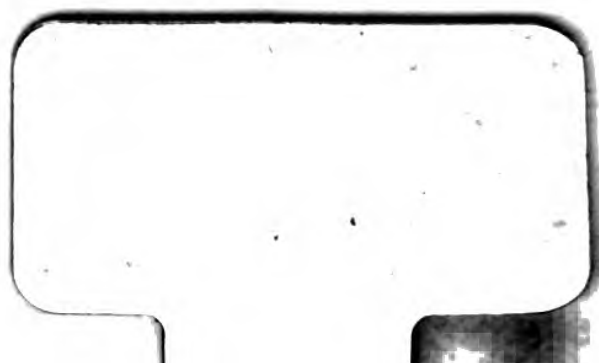




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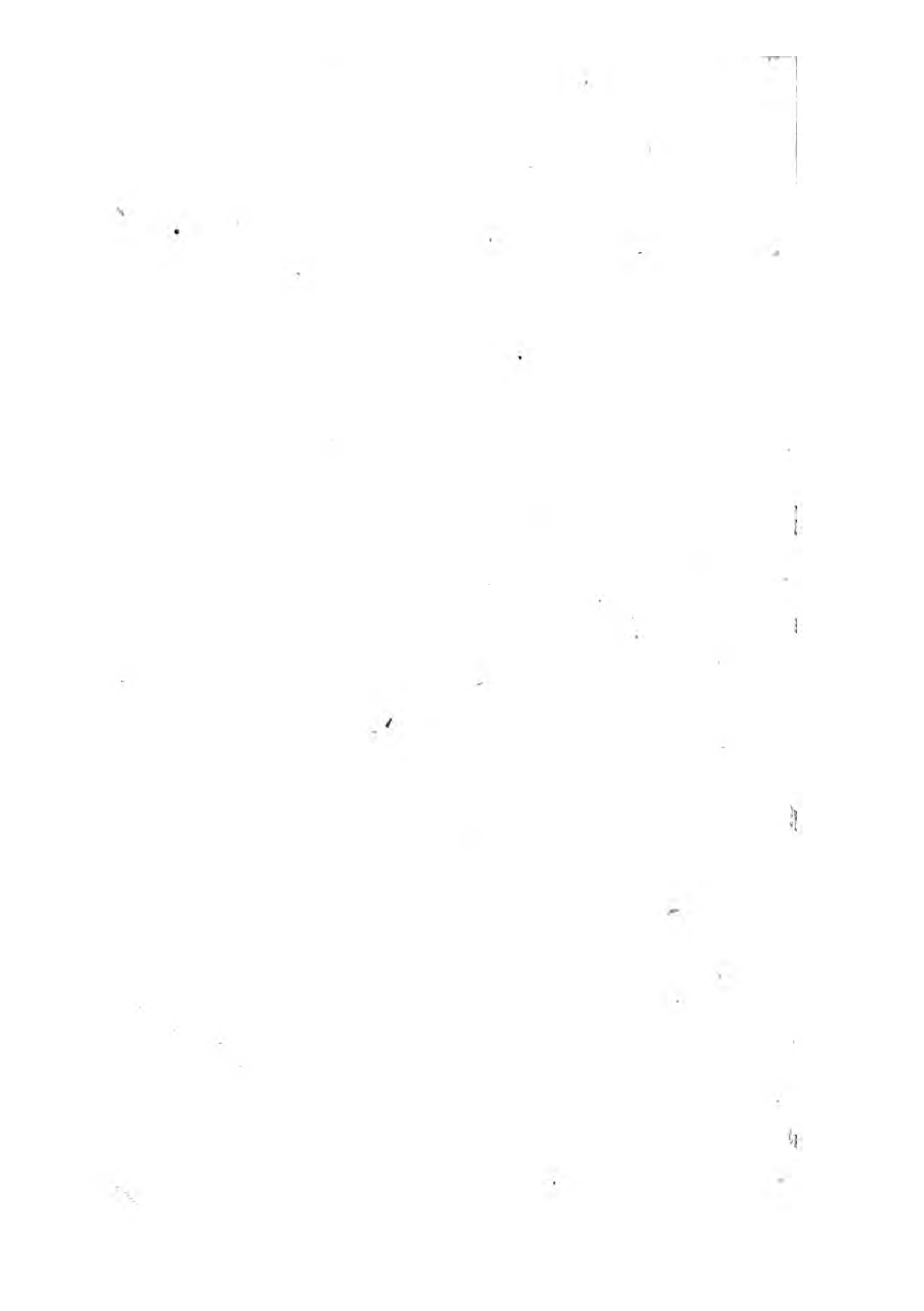
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A
PRACTICAL VIEW
OF THE
PREVAILING RELIGIOUS SYSTEM
OF
PROFESSED CHRISTIANS,
IN THE
HIGHER AND MIDDLE CLASSES IN THIS COUNTRY;
CONTRASTED WITH
REAL CHRISTIANITY.

BY WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, ESQ.

WITH A MEMOIR,
BY THE REV. THOMAS PRICE.



LONDON:

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE "PRACTICAL VIEW" is too well known, and too highly estimated, to require any commendatory introduction. The numerous Editions called for, prove its general acceptance; whilst, benefits which have resulted from its circulation, establish its claim to rank in the highest class of practical divinity. The death of its estimable author has attracted towards it an increased degree of attention. When the living voice has ceased to instruct or gratify, we naturally turn to those productions of the mind which departed genius, or worth, may have bequeathed. "These are the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life."

By means of this volume, Mr. Wilberforce will become the instructor of many generations. Times, far remote from his own, will acknowledge him as their teacher, and receive from his pages the principles of the oracles of God. His influence will thus be extended farther, and become more beneficial, than during his life. So true is it, as Milton observes, "Books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them, to be as active as that soul was, whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve, as in a vial, the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them."

The brief Memoir, accompanying the present edition, will not, it is hoped, prove unacceptable to the public. It is intended to furnish but a sketch, or outline, of the Life and Character of Mr. Wilberforce, and has been prepared from the most authentic sources to which its author had access. He has freely availed himself of the information supplied in the general sermons preached on the occasion of Mr. Wilberforce's death, and desires especially to acknowledge his obligation to that of the Rev. John Scott, preached at Hull, on Wednesday, Aug. 7, 1833.

T. P.

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THE doctrine of Divine providence is strikingly illustrated in the history of our world. Amidst the apparent confusion of its affairs, the controlling agency of infinite wisdom and goodness may be traced. There has been an evident subordination in the course of events to some great issue. Complicated and intricate movements, which at first perplexed the most sagacious observers, have ultimately been seen to lend their influence to the advancement of human happiness. The temporary triumph of infidelity has thus been checked, and the faith and hope of the believer have been increasingly justified. Hence much of the value which attaches to the records of the past. History would lose its importance, were it to be regarded as a chronicle merely of events. Its details might exercise the memory and afford pleasure to the curious, but a mind intent on the acquisition of moral truth would cease to regard its pages with interest, or to derive from them the materials of its most ennobling speculations.

The superintendence of the Deity has been evinced in the preparation of agents for the execution of his purposes. At different periods in the history of mankind, he has raised up, and qualified with all appropriate endowments, the ministers of his pleasure. They have been brought forward at the precise moment when their services were needed, and a

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stage has been prepared on which they might efficiently act their part. Outward circumstances have been so adapted to their mental constitution, as to assist them in extending a salutary influence over the men of their day. God has worked with them, confirming their word with signs following.

There is no important era in the history of mankind which does not afford illustrations of this fact. Luther was formed by Divine providence for the work which he accomplished. Whitfield and Wesley were eminently endowed by the Head of the church, for the revival of religion in their native land; and many of those who, in more recent times, have gone to the land of heathenism, proclaiming the unsearchable riches of Christ, have manifested an adaptation to their work, in which the devout observer cannot fail to recognize the hand of God. A similar observation may be made respecting the subject of this brief memoir. There was a great work, involving the interests of humanity and religion, to be accomplished; and, in the person of Mr. Wilberforce, God furnished an agent eminently fitted for its execution. His integrity commanded the respect of all parties; his talents engaged their attention; and his inflexible determination of purpose won the triumph of his cause. Had not Mr. Wilberforce been a member of the British parliament when the philanthropic Clarkson was endeavouring to stimulate the national conscience; it is not, perhaps, too much to say, that the wrongs of Africa would have been unredressed to this day. Other senators may have raised their voice, but the heart of the nation would not have responded as it did to the appeal of the patriarch of the cause. "To the talent, the sagacity, the discretion, the unwearied perseverance, the mild and conciliatory, though determined tone, the unexceptionable spirit, and the winning irresistible eloquence with which he conducted this great cause, as long as health and strength permitted him thus to lead in it, is, no doubt, under God's blessing, mainly to be attributed the triumphant issue to which, after a contest of forty-three years, the whole is now brought."

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The ancestors of Mr. Wilberforce were for many years successfully engaged in trade at Hull. His great-great-grandfather was a Mr. William Wilberforce, who was one of the governors of Beverley in the year 1670. The grandson of this gentleman married Sarah, the daughter of Mr. John Thornton, about the year 1711; and hence, we believe, originated that intimate connexion with the Thornton family, which continued to the end of Mr. Wilberforce's life. There were two sons and two daughters, the issue of this marriage. William, the elder son, died without issue in the year 1780. Robert, the younger, married Miss Elizabeth Bird; the aunt, as we believe, of the present Bishops of Winchester and Chester. The late Mr Wilberforce was the only son of Mr. Robert Wilberforce. There were two daughters, Elizabeth and Sarah: the former died unmarried; the latter was twice married, first to the Rev. — Clarke, and then to Mr. Stephen, the late master in Chancery.

Mr. Wilberforce was born at Hull, on the 24th of August, 1759, in a house in High-street, and was baptized in Trinity church, of that town, in the following month. His early education was received at the grammar school in Hull, then under the superintendence of the Rev. Joseph Milner, whose preaching appears to have made a deep impression on his youthful mind. What may have been the amount of this impression, it is impossible now to determine. But there is good reason to believe that it was the commencement of that Christian character which subsequently appeared in so mature and lovely a form. In itself it was incomplete, but it contained the germ and promise of future good. The integrity and strength of this early impression was severely tried in after life; but, though exhibiting considerable variations, and sometimes reduced, apparently, to the last degree of weakness, it was never permitted to fade away. At the age of twelve he was removed to a school in the neighbourhood of London, where he resided with a pious uncle and aunt; by the latter of whom he was introduced to the venerable John Newton. There must have been something in his appearance or man-

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ners very striking, even at this early age, for Mr. Scott informs us that, when, nearly fifteen years after, altered views and revived religious impressions led him (Mr. Wilberforce) again to seek the acquaintance of that excellent man, Mr. Newton surprised and affected him much, by telling him that, from the time of the early introduction, just alluded to, he had not failed constantly to pray for him. His residence near London was but temporary. In 1772, he was at a grammar school at Pocklington, Yorkshire, under the care of the Rev. Mr. Baskett. Here he continued till his removal to Cambridge, which took place in 1776 or 1777.

Many serious apprehensions were entertained by his friends, on account of the delicate state of his health. They feared that his frame was too feeble to endure long; more especially, amidst the activity and excitement of a public life. In the year 1788, Dr. Warren, the most eminent physician of his day, declared, "he had not stamina enough to last a fortnight." But the good pleasure of his God had ordered otherwise. There was work for him to do; and his bodily strength was, in consequence, daily renewed. The "puny boy," as Mr. Scott designates him in his funeral sermon, survived to a good old age, and at length retired to rest amid the plaudits of an admiring world. He suffered much through life from his attendance in parliament, yet he continued it from a sense of duty. One who knew him well tells us, that few members attended with more assiduity in their places in parliament. Though his frame was always weak, and his health indifferent, he rarely absented himself from public duty: he had, indeed, a higher motive to its discharge, than most men. Though singularly destitute of self-importance, he was sensible that he had gradually risen to a peculiar responsibility, which there were few, if any, to share with him. He was regarded by the religious world, as the protector, in the Lower House, of public morals and religious rights. He was justly conscious that this was the highest trust confided to his care, and he was vigilant in proportion. He was never to be found sleeping when any question trench-

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ing on public decorum, or the interests of religion, came before the legislature. We believe that this high motive impelled him to a more frequent attendance than consisted with his physical strength. In his later years, he often availed himself of the too frequent opportunity given by a heavy speaker, to indulge himself with an hour's sleep in the back seats under the galleries; and this indulgence was cheerfully and respectfully conceded by the House. To have disturbed the slumber of Mr. Wilberforce would have been, with one consent, scouted as a breach of privilege, for which no ordinary apology could have atoned."

We have already seen that he was the subject of religious impressions in very early life; and the character which resulted from them, though subjected to some variations, assumed more and more of the fixedness and determination of Christian principle. We shall have occasion, in the course of our narrative, to notice the fearlessness with which he avowed, and the ability with which he defended, religion. It is our province, now, to notice the earlier developments of his piety, the first manifestations of the grace which was given him. "I have been favoured," says Mr. Scott, "with the sight of several letters written by him from this place, which, amidst all the vivacity and playfulness belonging to his years and his character, discover a serious and feeling sense of religion, and even a distinct insight into the leading doctrines of Christianity. He alludes repeatedly to the preaching of Mr. Milner, of which he evidently retained a very pleasing recollection, and on which he says he should rejoice again to attend: he takes a lively interest in the success of Mr. Milner's labours, and those of other pious ministers; expresses much aversion to the theatre, and deprecates being compelled to attend its exhibitions: but, on the whole, is well content with all that might befall him, believing that it would work for his good.

"On his removal to Cambridge, or even before that time, he appears to have fallen under the direction of persons who much feared his being too serious, and who were willing even to risk making him dissipated, rather than allow him

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to be more religious than the world approves ; and, under this influence, he made not that use of his time at the University which he would afterwards have wished that he had done.

“ I have the best authority, however, for saying, that his conduct *never was vicious*. That he always possessed and cultivated a literary taste, it would be superfluous to state ; but, after he became decidedly religious, he conscientiously and diligently applied himself to all those studies which became a Christian gentleman and a legislator, that he might consecrate his talents, thus improved to the utmost, to the glory of God, and the good of his fellow-creatures.”

Mr. Wilberforce entered as a fellow-commoner at St. John's College, where he formed an intimacy with Mr. Pitt, which remained unbroken till the close of that statesman's life, in 1806. He did not obtain any academical honours, such being very rarely sought at that time by young men of his standing ; but his attainments were highly respectable, and his classical taste acknowledged. In 1781 he took the degree of Bachelor of Arts, and that of Master in 1788.

In the year 1780, when he had just attained his majority, he was chosen to represent his native town in parliament ; an honour which appears to have been unsolicited on his part, but which could not fail to yield him very high gratification. Thus an appropriate sphere for the exercise of his talents was unexpectedly supplied ; and an opportunity of preparation was given, for the great work of his life. The guidance of divine Providence, in this event, is now recognized by the devout observer with joy and gratitude.

His name first occurs in the Parliamentary Journals in the year 1781, as one of the Commissioners for administering the oaths to members ; but he does not appear to have taken any active part in the business of the house till 1783, when he seconded an address of thanks on the peace, and warmly opposed Mr. Fox's India bill. In the year 1784, on the summary dismissal of the coalition administration, he was re-elected for Hull, in opposition to Mr. David Hartley, an

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eminent partisan of Mr. Fox; but immediately resigned its representation, on being chosen for the county of York, for which he continued to sit in six successive parliaments, till he voluntarily surrendered the honour in 1812, on account of increasing infirmities. In the year 1808, his return was warmly contested; but, such was the admiration in which his character was held, and the value put upon his services, that the expenses of his election, though exceeding £100,000, were far more than met by voluntary subscriptions.

Two years afterwards, in 1786, he succeeded in carrying through the Commons a Bill for the Amendment of our Criminal Code, the principal object of which was, to give certainty to punishment; but, being opposed by Lord Chancellor Loughborough, it was rejected in the upper house without a division. If we may judge from the comments of the chancellor, it reflected more credit on the heart, than on the legal dexterity, of Mr. Wilberforce.

In the early part of his parliamentary career, his style of oratory appears to have partaken of severer and more caustic qualities than at a later period. "It is instructive to observe," remarks a writer well acquainted with Mr. Wilberforce, "the early parliamentary career of this great man. If there ever was a being gifted with more than human kindness, it was Mr. Wilberforce. His tone, his manners, his look, were all conciliatory, even to persuasive tenderness; yet we have already seen him reproved for undue severity by Fox, and we next find him tutored in meekness by Pitt! In 1787, in a debate on the commercial relations with France, Burke had provoked Mr. Wilberforce into some acrimony of retort, when Mr. Pitt checked him for his imprudence, telling him that 'it was as far beyond his powers as his wishes, to contend with such an opponent as Burke, in abuse and personality.'"

It is easily to be believed, that his religious character was severely tried in the earliest period of his parliamentary life. His society was courted by the leading men of his day, and the associations into which he was consequently brought, proved unfriendly to the growth of his Christian principles.

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Being introduced to the political clubs of London, his character was tested, and there is reason to suppose that its religious tone was somewhat lowered. He was surrounded by men of secular ambition, and we need not wonder if the unsuspecting confidence of youth exposed him to serious injury. Political pursuits have ever been pregnant with danger to religious principles. But, at the period to which we now refer, they possessed an absorbing power, which increased a thousand fold their means of evil. Party politics were at their height. The atmosphere of Europe was charged with the elements of disorder and ruin. The most sagacious statesmen were perplexed by the signs of the times; and all men were preparing, in fearful mood, for that mighty struggle which was to shake the fabric of European society, and to give to its character and prospects an entirely different aspect. That the youthful mind of Mr. Wilberforce should so far have been stimulated by the absorbing influences of this period, as to be "drawn away from God, and turned aside to vanity," may excite our regret, but cannot awaken surprise. It needed all the determination of a matured Christian, to withstand the evil influences by which he was surrounded.

But we have reason to adore the Father of mercies, that his gracious interposition arrested the progress of the evil; thus preserving, to the cause of humanity and Christian truth, one of its most consistent and successful advocates. It is interesting to observe the means which were employed for the recovery of such a mind from its spiritual torpor. The tendency of its associations was not only to perpetuate, but to increase the evil. When religious sensibility is impaired,—when the heart ceases to reply with cheerfulness and promptitude to the calls of piety, there is much reason to fear lest, for its own protection from distracting thoughts, it should plunge into the arms of dissipation or infidelity. Thousands have sought refuge from themselves by adopting so fearful an alternative; but the watchful eye of infinite benevolence was upon Mr. Wilberforce, and the intercourse of friendship was speedily sanctified to the religious renovation of his heart.

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“ In the latter part of the year 1784, and again in 1785,” says Mr. Scott, “ Mr. Wilberforce travelled on the continent with a party of friends. The late Dean of Carlisle, Dr. Isaac Milner, was his companion in the same carriage: and here these highly-gifted friends discussed various topics interesting together. Religion was of the number: and, on one occasion, Mr. Wilberforce having expressed respect for a pious clergyman, but added, that he ‘carried things too far,’ his friend pressed him upon this point. ‘What did he mean, by carrying things too far, or being too strict? On what ground did he pronounce this to be the case? When we talked of going *too far*, some *standard* must necessarily be referred to: was the standard of scripture exceeded? or could any other standard be satisfactorily adopted and maintained? Perhaps it would not easily be shewn that, where things were carried, as it was alleged, *too far*, they were carried beyond the rules of scripture, but only beyond what was usually practised and approved among men.’

“ Mr. Wilberforce, when thus pressed by his friend, endeavoured to explain and defend his position as well as he could: but he was dissatisfied himself with what he had to offer: in short, he felt that his own notions on the subject were vague and untenable. A lodgment was thus made in his conscience: matter for serious thinking was suggested: and his thoughts could find no rest till they found it from the word of God, and the adoption of a scriptural standard, by which to form all his judgments, and regulate all his conduct.

“ Another incident in the history of his mind at this period, as related by himself, is not less interesting and instructive than the preceding, ‘As I read,’ said he, ‘the promises of holy scripture, ‘Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you; God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him; Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest; I will take away the heart of stone, and give you the heart of flesh; I will put my laws in your hearts, and write them in your inward parts; I will be merciful unto their unrighteous-

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ness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more :’ As I read these passages, it occurred to me to reflect—If these things be so—if there be any truth in all this—and if I set myself to seek the blessings thus promised—I shall certainly find a sensible effect and change wrought within me, such as is thus described. I will put the matter to the proof: I will try the experiment: I will seek, that I may find the promised blessings.’ He did so: and the result was peace, and liberty, and victory: peace of conscience, and purified affections; deliverance from those sins which had ensnared him, or held him in bondage; ‘the victory that overcometh the world,’ and boldness ‘to confess Christ before men.’ ‘He had the witness in himself;’ a sensible evidence both that the word of God is true, and that he had not in vain sought the fulfilment of its promises to himself.”

Happy would it be for mankind, if they could be induced to make a similar trial. The word of God is the instrument of regeneration. It is the incorruptible seed, by which we are born again; the word of truth, by which God of his own will hath begotten us. Its efficiency has been proved in ten thousand cases; and whenever, in future times, the inquiring and anxious mind shall turn to its pages, and devoutly seek to imbibe its spirit, it will infallibly transmit to his heart an influence, which shall make him a new creature in Jesus Christ. It is admirably adapted to the renovation of man’s moral nature. As an instrument, it is perfect; let it then be employed aright, and the happiest effects must follow.

With the feelings which resulted from these searchings of heart, Mr. Wilberforce once more sought the acquaintance of Mr. Newton, and, in the winter of 1785-6, at his earnest recommendation, began to attend the ministry of the Rev. Thomas Scott, at the Lock Hospital. “This was a period of my life,” says the subject of our memoir, “when it was peculiarly important to me habitually to attend the ministrations of a sound and faithful pastor; and I willingly assented to Mr. Newton’s earnest recommendations of Mr. Scott. I soon found that he fully equalled the strongest expectations that I

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had formed of him, and from that time for many years I attended him regularly, for the most part accompanied by my dear friends—both, alas! now gone to a better world—the Hon. Edward James Eliot and Mr. Henry Thornton. We used to hear him at the Lock in the morning; Mr. Thornton and I often gladly following him for the afternoon service into the city, where he had the lectureship of Bread-street church. All objections arising from an unfavourable manner were at once overruled by the strong sense, the extensive acquaintance with scripture, the accurate knowledge of the human heart, and the vehement and powerful appeals to the conscience, with which all his sermons abounded in a greater degree than those of any other minister I ever attended. Indeed, the substantial solidity of his discourses made those of ordinary clergymen, though good and able men, appear comparatively somewhat superficial and defective in matter.”

Some of his friends now recommended his retirement from public life; but others, with much more wisdom and fidelity to the cause of God, urged him to retain the station which Providence had assigned him. Happily for the interests of humanity, Mr. Wilberforce adopted the advice of the latter. “I feel a sort of self-congratulation, at present,” said the Rev. Thomas Scott, in 1807, “that, above twenty years ago, I withstood, with all my energy, Mr. ——’s counsel, who advised Mr. Wilberforce to retire from public life. Had that counsel been followed, the slave-trade might have continued to future generations.” The views entertained by some religious professors, on this point, cannot be too severely censured. They are founded on a partial view of the facts of the case, and, if consistently acted on, would perpetuate the reign of iniquity, by withdrawing from parliament every salutary and purifying influence. Our hope for the future is founded on the entrance of religious men on the duties of public life. Never will war cease to demoralize and devastate the world, or Christianity be released from its present thralldom, till there is a larger infusion of religious principle into the senators of the land. Every addi-

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tion to the number of such men, is an omen of good; and we trust the day is not far distant, when they will be sufficiently powerful to stamp an enlightened and Christian character on the transactions of the nation. To surrender the guidance of our affairs to infidel or irreligious men, is a practical absurdity, into which no believer can fall who has exercised the faculties with which God has endowed him. Had Mr. Wilberforce listened to those who advised his retirement from parliament, he might have consulted his own tranquillity, and prolonged, it is possible, the vigour of his frame—but, how different the account he must have rendered to his God! Instead of being approved by his Lord and Master, he might have been censured as an unfaithful servant, who, from timidity or mistrust, had abandoned the work to which he was called. How large a portion of human misery would, in such case, have been unredressed! The children of Africa must have continued to weep in the bitterness of their soul, and the crimes of our country might have drawn upon us, ere this, the severest inflictions of Divine wrath. But Mr. Wilberforce remained at his post, and the blessings of them that were ready to perish came upon him.

The time at length arrived, when his services were to be engaged on behalf of the most sacred rights of humanity. Before attempting a narrative of his labours, it is necessary to institute a brief review of the measures which had been previously adopted by enlightened philanthropists, in order to explain the position of the cause when he became its public advocate, and the value of the aid which he rendered it. Our country was implicated in the African slave-trade in the reign of Elizabeth. Sir John Hawkins possesses the unenviable distinction of having been the first Englishman who engaged in it: this occurred in the year 1562. He deceived his royal mistress, by representing the Africans as voluntary labourers. The queen is stated to have expressed her deep concern lest any of the negroes should be forced from their country, declaring, "it would be detestable, and call down the vengeance of Heaven upon the undertakers." A large num-

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ber of vessels annually sailed from this country, taking with them fire-arms, intoxicating liquors, and other articles of trifling value, which they exchanged for slaves. This traffic continued, without exciting much attention from the moral part of the community, till the middle of the last century. The Society of Friends were amongst its earliest opponents; and, by their untiring efforts for its abolition, have entitled themselves to the esteem and gratitude of mankind. So early as the year 1727, they passed a resolution, at their annual meeting, declaring, "that the importing of negroes from their native country and relations, by Friends, is not a commendable nor allowed practice, and is therefore censured by this meeting." In 1758 they proceeded farther, warning all in connexion with them, "that they carefully avoid being in any way concerned in reaping the unrighteous profits arising from it." At length, in 1761, they determined to disown all such as engaged in it; thus furnishing an example to Christendom, which redounds to the honour of our common faith.

But the efforts of the Quakers, though honourable to themselves, and efficient in reference to their own members, failed to make any extensive impression on the nation. This, however, was accomplished by the labours of Mr. Granville Sharp; one of those enlightened philanthropists, who break the continuity of human selfishness and crime, and attach a character of distinguished honour to the age in which they live.

In the early part of the eighteenth century, the planters and merchants were accustomed to bring slaves from the colonies in the capacity of servants, and, subsequently, to return them at their pleasure to the West Indies. A notion became extensively prevalent amongst this class, that the English law did not sanction their masters in returning them to bondage, if they had submitted, during their residence in England, to the Christian rite of baptism. They consequently solicited, with much importunity, the performance of this rite; and, having obtained its administration, they absconded. This state of things involved the planters and merchants in much perplexity, and induced them, in 1729, to solicit the opinion of York and

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Talbot, the attorney and solicitor general. This opinion was unfavourable to the negroes, and they were, in consequence, seized, and openly forced on board the vessels which were destined to convey them to the land of slavery. Public feeling was thus outraged, and the means of deliverance for the oppressed unexpectedly prepared. Mr. Sharp took an active part in the struggles of that period. He first appeared before the public as the friend of the African in the case of Jonathan Strong, who was brought to England in 1765. This slave, having been barbarously used by his master, Mr. David Lisle, became so emaciated by ague, fever, and lameness, as to be utterly useless, and was consequently permitted to go whither he pleased, in order that the expense of his maintenance might be avoided. In this miserable condition, he applied to Mr. William Sharp, brother of Mr. Granville Sharp, for medical advice, under whose benevolent and skilful care he was restored to health. During his recovery, he was supplied with money by Mr. Granville Sharp, who afterwards procured him a situation. Here his master saw him, and determined on repossessing him. For this purpose, he caused him to be seized by some of the city officers, who conveyed him, without a warrant, to the Poultry Compter, where he was sold to John Kerr for thirty pounds. "In this situation," Mr. Clarkson tells us, in his *History of the Abolition*, "Strong sent, as was usual, to his godfathers, John London and Stephen Nail, for their protection. They went, but were refused admittance to him. At length, he sent for Mr. Granville Sharp. The latter went, but they still refused access to the prisoner. He insisted, however, upon seeing him, and charged the keeper of the prison at his peril to deliver him up till he had been carried before a magistrate.

"Mr. Sharp, immediately upon this, waited upon Sir Robert Kite, the then lord-mayor, and entreated him to send for Strong, and to hear his case. A day was accordingly appointed. Mr. Sharp attended, and also William M'Bean, a notary-public, and David Laird, captain of the ship *Thames*, which was to have conveyed Strong to Jamaica, in behalf of

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the purchaser, John Kerr. A long conversation ensued, in which the opinion of York and Talbot was quoted. Mr. Sharp made his observations. Certain lawyers, who were present, seemed to be staggered at the case, but inclined rather to recommit the prisoner. The lord-mayor, however, discharged Strong, as he had been taken up without a warrant.

“As soon as this determination was made known, the parties began to move off. Captain Laird, however, who kept close to Strong, laid hold of him before he had quitted the room, and said aloud, ‘Then I now seize him as my slave.’ Upon this, Mr. Sharp put his hand upon Laird’s shoulder, and pronounced these words: ‘I charge you, in the name of the king, with an assault upon the person of Jonathan Strong; and all these are my witnesses.’ Laird was greatly intimidated by this charge, made in the presence of the lord-mayor and others, and, fearing a prosecution, let his prisoner go, leaving him to be conveyed away by Mr. Sharp.”

Several other cases of a similar nature subsequently occurred, in all of which Mr. Sharp took a prominent part. But the legal question was yet unsettled: no broad principle, to which the future protection of the African might be entrusted, had been admitted, and it was, therefore, determined, in the case of James Somerset, to try the general question, “Whether a slave, by coming into England, became free.” In order that the law might be fully ascertained, the case was argued at three different sittings, in 1772, and the pleadings submitted to the opinion of the judges. The result of the trial is well known. To the honour of the British constitution, it was declared—*That as soon as ever any slave set his foot on English territory, he became free.* This was an important and influential step. It contained the germ of subsequent measures, and gave promise to outraged humanity of more complete vindication.

From this period, public attention was increasingly drawn to the question. It became the topic of general conversation. Its nature was inquired into, and a conviction, per-

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pétually deepening, of its inhuman and diabolical character, was obtained. The public abhorrence was greatly strengthened by a circumstance which occurred in 1783.

“ In this year, certain underwriters desired to be heard against Gregson and others, of Liverpool, in the case of the ship *Zong*, Captain Collingwood, alleging, that the captain and officers of the said vessel threw overboard one hundred and thirty-two slaves alive into the sea, in order to defraud them, by claiming the value of the said slaves, as if they had been lost in a natural way. In the course of the trial, which afterwards came on, it appeared, that the slaves on board the *Zong* were very sickly; that sixty of them had already died; and several were ill and likely to die, when the captain proposed to James Kelsall, the mate, and others, to throw several of them overboard, stating, ‘ that if they died a natural death, the loss would fall upon the owners of the ship, but that, if they were thrown into the sea, it would fall upon the underwriters.’ He selected, accordingly, one hundred and thirty-two of the most sickly of the slaves. Fifty-four of these were immediately thrown overboard, and forty-two were made to be partakers of their fate on the succeeding day. In the course of three days afterwards, the remaining twenty-six were brought upon deck, to complete the number of victims. The first sixteen submitted to be thrown into the sea; but the rest, with a noble resolution, would not suffer the officers to touch them, but leaped after their companions, and shared their fate!

“ The plea, which was set up in behalf of this atrocious and unparalleled act of wickedness, was, that the captain discovered, when he made the proposal, that he had only two hundred gallons of water on board, and that he had missed his port. It was proved, however, in answer to this, that no one had been put upon short allowance; and that, as if Providence had determined to afford an unequivocal proof of the guilt, a shower of rain fell, and continued for three days immediately after the second lot of slaves had been destroyed,

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by means of which they might have filled many of their vessels* with water, and thus have prevented all necessity for the destruction of the third.

“Mr. Sharp was present at this trial, and procured the attendance of a short-hand writer, to take down the facts which should come out in the course of it. These he gave to the public afterwards. He communicated them also, with a copy of the trial, to the Lords of the Admiralty, as the guardians of justice upon the seas, and to the Duke of Portland, as principal minister of state. No notice, however, was taken by any of these, of the information which had been thus sent them.

“But though nothing was done by the persons then in power, in consequence of the murder of so many innocent individuals, yet the publication of an account of it by Mr. Sharp in the newspapers, made such an impression upon others, that new coadjutors rose up.”

Two years after this, in 1785, Mr. Thomas Clarkson directed his attention to the subject, and the result of his inquiries was an entire dedication of himself to the interests of humanity. In that year, Dr. Peckhard, the vice-chancellor of Cambridge, proposed to the senior bachelors in arts, the following question as the subject for a Latin dissertation: “Is it right to make slaves of others against their will?” Mr. Clarkson was, at this time, of the order of senior bachelors, and, having the previous year obtained the prize for the best Latin dissertation, a regard to his own reputation led him to try for it again. He at once perceived that the question had a direct bearing on the African slave-trade, and proceeded to London to obtain information respecting the manner in which this traffic was conducted. Hitherto he had felt no interest in the question itself. His only concern was to maintain and extend his reputation in the university. But in the course of his reading, his mind underwent an entire revolution. The atrocities which were systematically practised on the African coast, harrowed up his soul, and induced a degree of feeling scarcely compatible with the calm discharge of his duties. His own

* It appeared that they filled six.

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account of the state of his mind at this period is eminently beautiful and touching.

“Furnished then in this manner,” he says, “I began my work. But no person can tell the severe trial which the writing of it proved to me. I had expected pleasure from the invention of the arguments, from the arrangement of them, from the putting of them together, and from the thought, in the interim, that I was engaged in an innocent contest for literary honour. But all my pleasure was damped by the facts which were now continually before me. It was but one gloomy subject from morning to night. In the day-time I was uneasy: in the night I had little rest. I sometimes never closed my eye-lids for grief. It became now not so much a trial for academical reputation, as for the production of a work which might be useful to injured Africa. And keeping this idea in my mind ever after the perusal of Benezet, I always slept with a candle in my room, that I might rise out of bed, and put down such thoughts as might occur to me in the night, if I judged them valuable, conceiving that no arguments of any moment should be lost in so great a cause. Having at length finished this painful task, I sent my essay to the vice-chancellor, and soon afterwards found myself honoured, as before, with the first prize.

“As it is usual to read these essays publicly in the senate-house soon after the prize is adjudged, I was called to Cambridge for this purpose. I went, and performed my office. On returning, however, to London, the subject of it almost wholly engrossed my thoughts. I became, at times, very seriously affected while upon the road. I stopped my horse occasionally, and dismounted and walked. I frequently tried to persuade myself, in these intervals, that the contents of my essay could not be true. The more, however, I reflected upon them, or rather upon the authorities on which they were founded, the more I gave them credit. Coming in sight of Wade’s Mill, in Hertfordshire, I sat down disconsolate on the turf by the roadside, and held my horse. Here, a thought came into my mind, that if the contents of the essay

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were true, it was time some person should see these calamities to their end. Agitated in this manner, I reached home. This was in the summer of 1785.

“In the course of the autumn of the same year, I experienced similar impressions. I walked frequently into the woods, that I might think on the subject in solitude, and find relief to my mind there. But there the question still recurred, ‘Are these things true?’ Still the answer followed as instantaneously, ‘They are.’ Still the result accompanied it, ‘Then, surely, some person should interfere.’ I then began to envy those who had seats in parliament, and who had great riches, and widely-extended connexions, which would enable them to take up this cause. Finding scarcely any one at that time who thought of it, I was turned frequently to myself. But here many difficulties arose. It struck me, among others, that a young man of only twenty-four years of age would not have that solid judgment, or knowledge of men, manners, and things, which were requisite to qualify him to undertake a task of such magnitude and importance—and with whom was I to unite? I believed, also, that it looked so much like one of the feigned labours of Hercules, that my understanding would be suspected, if I proposed it. On ruminating, however, on the subject, I found one thing, at least, practicable, and that this, also, was in my power. I could translate my Latin dissertation. I could enlarge it usefully. I could see how the public received it, or how far they were likely to favour any serious measures, which should have a tendency to produce the abolition of the slave-trade. Upon this, then, I determined; and, in the middle of the month of November, 1785, I began my work.”

Mr. Clarkson was now too deeply interested in the subject to return to his ordinary occupations. He determined on the translation of his essay, sought an interview with Mr. G. Sharp, and ultimately resolved on abandoning the Church, in which he had fair prospects of preferment, and of devoting himself entirely to the cause of the Africans. From this period, he occupied himself in calling on the leading members of the

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two houses of parliament, in obtaining additional information, and in circulating such works as were suited to enlighten and arouse the public mind. Amongst other persons, he called on Mr. Wilberforce, then in the morning of his day. Little did Mr. Clarkson imagine that the young senator whom he visited was destined to act so distinguished and praiseworthy a part in the great struggle which was commencing. The designs of Providence were yet unrevealed; but, now that the result is known, and the course of Mr. Wilberforce so honourably closed, it cannot be uninteresting to learn the reception which he gave to this sacred cause, on its being first submitted to his attention.

“On my first interview with him,” says Mr. Clarkson, “he stated frankly, that the subject had often employed his thoughts, and that it was near his heart. He seemed earnest about it, and also very desirous of taking the trouble of inquiring further into it. Having read my book, which I had delivered to him in person, he sent for me. He expressed a wish that I would make him acquainted with some of my authorities for the assertions in it; which I did afterwards, to his satisfaction. He asked me if I could support it by any other evidence? I told him I could: I mentioned Mr. Newton, Mr. Nisbett, and several others to him. He took the trouble of sending for all these. He made memorandums of their conversation, and, sending for me afterwards, shewed them to me. On learning my intention to devote myself to the cause, he paid me many handsome compliments. He then desired me to call on him often, and to acquaint him with my progress from time to time. He expressed, also, his willingness to afford me any assistance in his power in the prosecution of my pursuits.”

In the course of Mr. Clarkson's visits to Mr. Wilberforce, the latter manifested an increasing interest in the subject of their conference. His strong mind readily yielded to the force of evidence, and its convictions were aided by the promptings of a generous heart. Occasional meetings of the friends of abolition were held at his house, and measures were

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there concerted for the accomplishment of their design. At length, on the 22d of May, 1787, a committee was formed for the adoption of such measures as were calculated to effect the abolition of the slave-trade, and Mr. Wilberforce became their parliamentary leader. Those who have witnessed the recent feelings of the nation on this subject, may imagine, that but little moral courage was required for the adoption of the course which Mr. Wilberforce took. But, the state of things was then totally different from what we have lately seen. The atrocities of the system were not known; the moral sensibilities of the nation were blunted; and a numerous, affluent, and unprincipled party was pledged to opposition. It was at this risk of party associations, and of personal friendships, that he determined on his course; and the virulence with which he was assailed, and the foul aspersions which were cast on his unspotted fame, bespoke the fear which his talents and virtues had excited. The nation, though but little informed, and still less interested, in this great question, was yet in advance of the house of commons. The first petition presented to that house was from the Quakers, in 1783; the second was from Bridgewater, in 1785, and its reception was most discouraging. "There did not appear," say the members for Bridgewater, in a joint letter which they addressed to their constituents, "the least disposition to pay any further attention to it. Every one, almost, says that the abolition of the slave-trade must immediately throw the West Indian islands into convulsions, and soon complete their utter ruin."

Under these circumstances, Mr. Wilberforce gave notice, early in 1788, of his intention to bring the subject before the legislature; but being prevented from doing so by indisposition, Mr. Pitt, on the 9th of May, introduced and carried the following resolution—"That this house will, early in the next session of parliament, proceed to take into consideration the circumstance of the slave-trade complained of in the said petition, and what may be fit to be done thereupon." In the course of the discussion on this motion, Mr. Fox complained of the ignorance in which Mr. Pitt had left the house respecting

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his own views, and of the delay which his proposition involved, declaring, that for himself he had no scruple about asserting, at the outset, that the slave-trade ought not to be regulated, but destroyed. To this opinion he said his mind was made up; and he was persuaded that the more the subject was considered, the more his view of it would gain ground; and it would be admitted, that, to consider it in any other manner, or on any other principles than those of humanity and justice, would be idle and absurd. It is interesting to observe these two great men, who divided the admiration and confidence of political parties, and who were usually ranged on opposite sides of the question in debate, concurring, in the future stages of this benevolent measure. Mr. Pitt's official character imposed at first some restraint upon him; but he continued, throughout the prolonged agitation of the question, its consistent and able, though unsuccessful, advocate. Many of his colleagues, it is well known, were violently opposed to his views, nor did they attempt to conceal their opposition. Lord Chancellor Thurlow, Lord Liverpool, and Mr. Dundas, frequently opposed him in parliament, and were supported, there is reason to believe, by a higher and more influential personage than themselves. This state of things prevented Mr. Pitt from making the *Abolition* a cabinet measure, and insured, in consequence, its frequent rejection. His personal influence was unable to triumph over the powerful opposition arrayed against it. Mr. Fox, on the other hand, was unfettered by office, and, therefore, spoke and acted according to the promptings of his generous nature. And when, on the death of Mr. Pitt, he succeeded to the premiership, he proved his own sincerity, and the political rectitude of his party, by making the abolition a ministerial question.

In pursuance of Mr. Pitt's resolution, Mr. Wilberforce, on the 19th of March, 1789, moved, that the house should resolve itself into a committee on the 23d of April. This motion being carried, was a signal to the West India planters, merchants, and others, to commence an unprincipled and furious opposition. The time for the discussion was subsequently

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altered, on the motion of Mr. Pitt, from the 23d of April to the 12th of May, when Mr. Wilberforce brought the whole subject before parliament, in a speech which commanded the admiration of the house, and entitled him to rank with its most distinguished orators.

“As soon as ever I had arrived thus far,” said he, “in my investigation of the slave-trade, I confess to you, sir, so enormous, so dreadful, so irremediable did its wickedness appear, that my own mind was completely made up for the abolition. A trade founded in iniquity, and carried on as this was, must be abolished, let the policy be what it might—let the consequences be what they would, I from this time determined that I would never rest till I had effected its abolition. Such enormities as these having once come within my knowledge, I should not have been faithful to the sight of my eyes, to the use of my senses and my reason, if I had shrunk from attempting the abolition. It is true, indeed, my mind was harassed beyond measure; for, when West India planters and merchants retorted it upon me, that it was the British parliament had authorized this trade, when they said to me, ‘It is your acts of parliament, it is your encouragement, it is faith in your laws, in your protection, that has tempted us into this trade, and has now made it necessary to us;’ it became difficult, indeed, to know what to answer. If the ruin of the West Indies threatened us on the one hand, while this load of wickedness pressed upon us on the other—the alternative, indeed, was awful.

“It naturally suggested itself to me, how strange it was that Providence, however mysterious in its ways, should so have constituted the world, as to make one part of it depend for its existence on the depopulation and devastation of another.

“I could not, therefore, help distrusting the arguments of those who insisted that the plundering of Africa was necessary for the cultivation of the West Indies. I could not believe that the same Being, who forbids rapine and bloodshed, had made rapine and bloodshed necessary to the well-being of

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any part of his universe. I felt confidence in this principle, and took the resolution to act upon it: soon, indeed, the light broke in upon me; the suspicion of my mind was every day confirmed by increasing information; the truth became clear; the evidence I have to offer upon this point is now decisive and complete; and I wish to observe, with submission, but with perfect conviction of heart, what an instance is this, how safely we may trust the rules of justice, the dictates of conscience, and the laws of God, in opposition even to the seeming impolicy of these eternal principles. The principle upon which I found the necessity of abolition is not policy, but justice: but, though justice be the principle of the measure, yet I trust I shall distinctly prove it to be reconcileable with our truest political interest."

At the conclusion of his speech, Mr. Wilberforce laid on the table of the house, as subjects for future discussion, twelve propositions deduced from the Privy Council Report; of which the following is the substance.

"1. That the number of slaves annually carried from the coast of Africa, in British vessels, was about 38,000, of which, on an average, 22,500 were carried to the British islands, and that of the latter only 17,500 were retained there.

"2. That these slaves, according to the evidence on the table, consisted, first, of prisoners of war; secondly, of free persons sold for debt, or on account of real or imputed crimes, particularly adultery and witchcraft; in which cases they were frequently sold with their whole families, and sometimes for the profit of those by whom they were condemned; thirdly, of domestic slaves sold for the profit of their masters, in some places at the will of the masters, and in others, on being condemned by them for real or imputed crimes; fourthly, of persons made slaves by various acts of oppression, violence, or fraud, committed either by the princes and chiefs of those countries on their subjects, or by private individuals on each other; or, lastly, by Europeans engaged in this traffic.

"3. That the trade so carried on had necessarily a tendency to occasion frequent and cruel wars among the natives; to

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produce unjust convictions and punishments for pretended or aggravated crimes; to encourage acts of oppression, violence, and fraud, and to obstruct the natural course of civilization and improvement in those countries.

“4. That Africa in its present state furnished several valuable articles of commerce, which were partly peculiar to itself, but that it was adapted to the production of others, with which we were now either wholly or in great part supplied by foreign nations. That an extensive commerce with Africa might be substituted in these commodities, so as to afford a return for as many articles as had annually been carried thither in British vessels: and, lastly, that such a commerce might reasonably be expected to increase by the progress of civilization there.

“5. That the slave-trade was peculiarly destructive to the seamen employed in it; and that the mortality there had been much greater than in any British vessels employed upon the same coast in any other service or trade.

“6. That the mode of transporting the slaves from Africa to the West Indies necessarily exposed them to many and grievous sufferings, for which no regulations could provide an adequate remedy; and that in consequence thereof a large proportion had annually perished during the voyage.

“7. That a large proportion had also perished in the harbours in the West Indies, from the diseases contracted in the voyage and the treatment of the same, previously to their being sold, and that this loss amounted to four and a half per cent. of the imported slaves.

“8. That the loss of the newly imported slaves, within the three first years after their importation, bore a large proportion to the whole number imported.

“9. That the natural increase of population among the slaves in the islands, appeared to have been impeded principally by the following causes: first, by the inequality of the sexes in the importations from Africa. Secondly, by the general dissoluteness of manners among the slaves, and the want of proper regulations for the encouragement of marriages

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and of rearing children among them. Thirdly, by the particular diseases which were prevalent among them, and which were in some instances to be attributed to too severe labour, or rigorous treatment, and in others to insufficient or improper food. Fourthly, by those diseases which affected a large proportion of negro-children in their infancy, and by those to which the negroes newly imported from Africa had been found to be particularly liable.

“10. That the whole number of the slaves in the island of Jamaica in 1768 was about 167,000, in 1774 about 193,000, and in 1787 about 256,000: that by comparing these numbers with the numbers imported and retained in the said island during all these years, and making proper allowances, the annual excess of deaths above births was in the proportion of about seven-eighths per cent.; that in the first six years of this period it was in the proportion of rather more than one on every hundred; that in the last thirteen years of the same it was in the proportion of about three-fifths on every hundred; and that a number of slaves, amounting to fifteen thousand, perished during the latter period in consequence of repeated hurricanes, and of the want of foreign supplies of provisions.

“11. That the whole number of slaves in the island of Barbadoes was in the year 1764 about 70,706; in 1774 about 74,874; in 1780 about 68,270; in 1781, after the hurricane, about 63,248; and in 1786 about 62,115: that, by comparing these numbers with the number imported into this island, (not allowing for any re-exportation,) the annual excess of deaths above births in the ten years, from 1764 to 1774, was in the proportion of about five on every hundred; that in the seven years from 1774 to 1780, it was in the proportion of about one and one-third on every hundred; that, between the year 1780 and 1781, there had been a decrease in the number of slaves of about five thousand; that, in the six years from 1781 to to 1786, the excess of deaths was in the proportion of rather less than seven-eighths on every hundred; that, in the four years from 1783 to 1786, it was in the proportion of rather less than one-third on every hundred; and that, during

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the whole period, there was no doubt that some had been exported from the island, but considerably more in the first part of this period than in the last.

“ 12. That the accounts from the Leeward Islands, and from Dominica, Grenada, and St. Vincent’s, did not furnish sufficient grounds for comparing the state of population in the said islands at different periods with the number of slaves which had been from time to time imported there and exported therefrom ; but that from the evidence which had been received respecting the present state of these islands, as well as that of Jamaica and Barbadoes, and from a consideration of the means of obviating the causes which had hitherto operated to impede the natural increase of the slaves, and of lessening the demand for manual labour, without diminishing the profit of the planters, no considerable or permanent inconvenience would result from discontinuing the further importation of African slaves.”

The debate was renewed on the 25th, when the further consideration of the subject was deferred till the following session. In 1790 the delusive clamour for further evidence prevailed, and no progress consequently was made. In 1791, Mr. Wilberforce was again at his post ; but his motion, though supported by the eloquence of Fox and Pitt, was lost by a majority of 75. Undaunted by these repeated failures, he renewed his efforts on the 3d of April, 1792 ; and, though opposed by all the rancour and sophistry which the advocates of an inhuman system could display, a motion for the gradual abolition of the traffic was carried through the house. The merit of proposing gradual measures in a case of unparalleled injustice and cruelty, belonged to Mr. Dundas, afterwards Lord Melville. The insincerity of the proposition was soon made apparent ; for, those who were most clamorous in its support, were foremost to oppose its taking effect. They only wanted, as their successors have done in more recent days, to gain time ; to divert, if possible, public attention from the subject, or, at least, to afford an opportunity for its excite-

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ment to subside. Happily, the principles of justice were too deeply seated in the breast of the nation to allow of their success. The triumph of humanity was delayed for a season, but its victory was ultimately more signal.

“ He (Mr. Dundas) was the first person, as we have seen, to propose the gradual abolition of the slave-trade; and he fixed the time for its cessation on the first of January 1800. His sincerity on this occasion was doubted by Mr. Fox at the very outset; for he immediately rose and said, that ‘ something so mischievous had come out, something so like a foundation had been laid for preserving, not only for years to come, but, for any thing he knew, for ever, this detestable traffic, that he felt it his duty immediately to deprecate all such delusions upon the country.’ Mr. Pitt, who spoke soon afterwards, in reply to an argument advanced by Mr. Dundas, maintained, that ‘ at whatever period the house should say that the slave-trade should actually cease, this defence would equally be set up; for it would be just as good an argument in seventy years hence, as it was against the abolition then.’ And these remarks Mr. Dundas verified in a singular manner within this period; for in the year 1796, when his own bill, as amended in the commons, was to take place, he was one of the most strenuous opposers of it; and in the year 1799, when in point of consistency it devolved upon him to propose it to the house, in order that the trade might cease on the first of January 1800, (which was the time of his own original choice, or a time unfettered by parliamentary amendment,) he was the chief instrument of throwing out Mr. Wilberforce’s bill, which proposed even a longer period to its continuance: so that it is obvious, that there was no time, within his own limits, when the abolition would have suited him, notwithstanding his profession, ‘ that he had always been a warm advocate for the measure.’ ”

The speech of Mr. Wilberforce, on this occasion, was every way worthy of his cause. It manifested an intimate acquaintance with the facts of the case, a heart in perfect har-

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mony with the principles of justice, a benevolence as enlightened as it was pure, and an indignation as intense as it was free from acrimony.

“The debate on this occasion,” says the author of “Public Characters,” writing in 1801, “was, perhaps, the most eloquent and interesting that was ever witnessed in the British senate. The want of success hitherto seemed to have awakened all the energies, and to have roused every honourable feeling, of which the human heart is capable.

“Evils,” said Mr. Wilberforce, “were conspicuous every where, in this trade. Never was there indeed a system so replete with wickedness and cruelty. To whatever part of it we turn our eyes, whether to Africa, the Middle Passage, or the West Indies, we can find no comfort, no satisfaction, no relief. It was the gracious ordinance of Providence, both in the natural and moral world, that good should often arise out of evil. Hurricanes cleared the air; and the propagation of truth was promoted by persecution. Pride, vanity, and profusion contributed often, in their remoter consequences, to the happiness of mankind. In common, what was in itself evil and vicious was permitted to carry along with it some circumstances of palliation. The Arab was hospitable; the robber brave. We did not necessarily find cruelty associated with fraud, or meanness with injustice. But here the case was far otherwise. It was the prerogative of this detested traffic to separate from evil its concomitant good, and to reconcile discordant mischiefs. It robbed war of its generosity; it deprived peace of its security; we saw in it the vices of polished society, without its knowledge or its comforts; and the evils of barbarism, without its simplicity. No age, no sex, no rank, no condition, was exempt from the fatal influence of this wide-wasting calamity. Thus it attained to the fullest measure of pure, unmixed, unsophisticated wickedness; and, scorning all competition and comparison, it stood, without a rival, in the secure, undisputed possession of its detestable pre-eminence.”

“Denmark has consented to abolish the slave-trade in ten

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years. Dreadful, indeed, is the idea of tolerating for a moment, much more for so long a term, such a system of wickedness; but let it be said, in excuse for Denmark, that she knew but little of its enormity, in comparison with us, and that she also, with somewhat more colour of reasoning, if the argument can in any case be endured, may allege that the number of slaves she takes off was so small, that her going out of the trade would make no real difference in the number exported from Africa. But can we say this, who carry off almost as many as all the rest of Europe put together? There is, in fact, no nation in the world, by which this argument may not be used with more decency than by ourselves.

“ But, miserable as this pretext is, I am afraid it will be found, on a closer inquiry, that we have no right to avail ourselves of it: let us ask ourselves, honestly, if we act like those who are really influenced by this consideration? If we were sincere in our professions, we should surely labour to convince the nations of Europe of the enormities of the slave-trade, and strive to prevail on them to desist from it; whereas, we do the very reverse; we sanction it by our example, we push it to an unparalleled extent, and furnish them with this very argument, which, if they accept, the slave-trade can never be abolished at all. But there are some persons who adopt a still bolder language, and who declare, without reserve, that religion, and justice, and humanity, command the abolition of the slave-trade, but that they must oppose the measure, because it is inconsistent with the national interest. I trust and believe no such argument will be urged this night: for what is it, but to establish a competition between God and Mammon, and to adjudge the preference to the latter? What, but to dethrone the moral Governor of the universe, and to fall down and worship the idol of interest? What a manifesto were this to the surrounding nations! What a lesson to our own people! Come, then, ye nations of the earth, and learn a new code of morality from the parliament of Great Britain. We have discarded our old prejudices; we have discovered that religion, and justice, and humanity are mere rant and rhapsody.

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Why, sir, those are principles which Epicurus would have rejected for their impiety, and Machiavel and Borgia would have disclaimed as too infamous for avowal, and too injurious to the general happiness of mankind. If God in his anger would punish us for this formal renunciation of his authority, what severer vengeance could he inflict than our successful propagation of these accursed maxims? Consider what effects would follow from their universal prevalence, what scenes should we soon behold around us! in public affairs, breach of faith, and anarchy, and bloodshed; in private life, fraud, and distrust, and perfidy, and whatever can degrade the human character, and poison the comforts of social and domestic intercourse. Man must retire to caves and deserts, and withdraw from a world become too bad to be endured."

An attempt was made, on the 25th of April, to alter the period of the abolition from the 1st of January, 1800, to the 1st of January, 1793. This proposition was negatived by a majority of 47; but, by a compromise, the time was subsequently fixed for the 1st of January, 1796. The bill, however, was lost in the upper house.

In 1794, 1795, 1796, 1798, and 1799, Mr. Wilberforce renewed his efforts, but without success. The house appeared to grow weary of the discussion, and the country at large to have lost somewhat of its former zeal and vigour. The indefatigable Clarkson was compelled, by an enfeebled frame, to remit his exertions. He had laboured, in season and out of season, with the self-devotion of a martyr, but was now, at the eleventh hour, obliged, though very reluctantly, to use his own language, "to be borne out of the field, where he had placed the great honour and glory of his life." Every thing depended, at this crisis, on the decision of Mr. Wilberforce, and he was faithful to the occasion. Considerations were not wanting, to induce an abandonment of the cause. The question had been fairly tried. It had been submitted to the representatives of the nation, and again and again they had given sentence against it. What, then, it might have been asked, remains to be done? One proposition after another

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had been rejected ; and what hope of success could therefore be entertained ? The total abolition of the traffic had been attempted, and then the gradual. The latter had been tried for the year 1793, then for 1795, and then again for 1796 ; but, though decreed to take effect in the latter year, it had not been permitted to do so. An abolition of that part of the trade which British merchants carried on for foreigners, was then proposed ; and when this failed, it was attempted, but without success, to exempt a certain portion of the African coast from the fearful scourge. Every expedient having been devised, every form which the measure could assume having been put before the house, and been rejected, Mr. Wilberforce and his friends did not deem it advisable to bring the subject again into parliament till some new circumstances should favour its introduction.

From 1799 to the year 1804, he contented himself with moving for certain papers, and with assuring the house that he had not grown cool in the cause, but should avail himself of the first favourable opportunity which occurred of presenting it again to their attention. In the latter year, the abolition committee determined on renewed exertions, having increased their number, by electing James Stephen, Zachary Macauley, Henry Brougham, Robert Grant, William Allen, and others, members of its body. The subsequent history of these distinguished men has fully justified the committee in their election. They have been amongst the most consistent, zealous, and talented friends of the negro. When his cause was unpopular, they avowed their adherence to it, and, during every fluctuation of public principle and feeling, they have steadily maintained their course.

The entrance of Irish members into the British parliament, which occurred in 1804, revived the hopes of the abolitionists. Most of them were known to be friendly to the cause, and, as they were generally free from the commercial influence which had perverted the views of many English representatives, the support of all was hoped for. Mr. Wilberforce, accordingly, on the 30th of May, moved, that the

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house resolve itself into committee ; and he prefaced his motion by one of the most impassioned speeches ever made within its walls. We have generally understood it was his noblest effort. After adverting to the necessity of bringing the question to a satisfactory issue, and to the failure of the house in redeeming its own pledges, Mr. Wilberforce proceeded. " So pernicious, indeed, has been our connexion with the unfortunate Africans, that the general progress of civilization has been reversed, and, contrary to former experience, the interior of the country has become the most refined, while those on the coast, who have had the greatest correspondence with us, have become the most profligate, the most ignorant, and the most corrupt. Not only, indeed, is this the case, but even where any sparks of civilization have appeared, our traders have taken care to extinguish them. In the interior of Africa, agriculture and several of the arts are known. They are so far civilized as to assemble in large towns, which is always a concomitant of refinement. They can work in iron, and have several other manufactures, according to the accounts of the best informed travellers. But, if we direct our attention to the coast, we shall find neither arts nor commerce, nor any vestige of civilization ; but, on the contrary, wretchedness, ignorance, and superstition, of the lowest and most degrading kinds. Even their superstition, in order to be consistent in our wickedness, we attempt to encourage, and, notwithstanding our professions of Christianity, endeavour to confirm, and even increase, their absurd ideas of witchcraft, and their other prejudices, which we find subservient to the purposes of our avarice. If there are any corruptions of Christianity, we scruple not to communicate them ; but, whatever can enlighten or improve them, we carefully withhold. These evils are not extended over a small tract of country, or they might, perhaps, be less to be regretted ; but they are extended over a coast of not less than between three and four thousand miles, and to a distance of seven hundred miles up into the interior. It is impossible to reflect on the wretched state of such a vast population, without pity and indignation ;

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and of what baseness may we not accuse ourselves, when we consider that we are in a great measure the cause of many of these evils." He closed a speech of considerable power, in which he had triumphantly refuted the objections of his opponents, by expressing the confidence which he placed in the new members who had been returned at the recent election. "Since last I brought the matter before the house," said Mr. Wilberforce, "there has been a new parliament, and many new members may be amongst those whom I now address. There may also be present several of the members for another part of the united kingdom. It had been said, that no venomous reptile ever found its way into Ireland, and hitherto that country has never been tainted by any connexion with the prosecution of the slave-trade. The Irish were a brave, a generous, a benevolent people. I wish to call on their representatives, on the present occasion, to deliver their opinions on the subject, and I am confident they will not support a system which is the disgrace of this country. Let them now come forward boldly with the declaration of their feelings, and assist in removing a stain which all good men have so long and so earnestly deplored. If," continued Mr. W., "on the one hand, I am accused of pertinacious obstinacy, or, on the other, of lukewarmness, for the last two or three years, I have only to declare, that, on every occasion I have been actuated by the most scrupulous desire of seizing on that moment which seemed to me most favourable for the discussion of the question. If I have delayed the motion which I now submit to the house, it has been from a firm belief, that, on former occasions it could not be urged with equal propriety or probability of success. The cause which I have undertaken I shall never desert, so long as I have a head to understand, a heart to feel, or a tongue to deliver my opinions. It has been my good fortune, in the course of former discussions on this subject, to meet with the support (with few exceptions) of all that is good and great, in the various characters of whom the house is composed; to have enlisted on my side whatever was estimable in talent, in humanity, and in virtue."

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The second reading, on the 7th of June, was carried by a majority of 100 to 42; and, on the 27th of the same month, the bill passed its last stage, by a majority of 69 to 36; but, when forwarded to the upper house, it was postponed, on the motion of Lord Hawkesbury, to the following session.

In 1805 it was again introduced by Mr. Wilberforce, with every prospect of success, but was unhappily lost in the commons by a majority of seven, through the excessive confidence of its friends. "This loss of the question," says Mr. Clarkson, "after it had been carried in the last year by so great a majority, being quite unexpected, was a matter of severe disappointment, and might have discouraged the friends of the cause in this infancy of their renewed efforts, if they had not discovered the reason of its failure. After due consideration, it appeared, that no fewer than nine members, who had never been absent once in sixteen years when it was agitated, gave way to engagements on the day of the motion, from a belief that it was safe. It appeared, also, that out of the great number of Irish members, who supported it in the former year, only nine were in the house when it was lost. It appeared, also, that, previous to this event, a canvass, more importunate than had been heard of on any former occasion, had been made among the latter by those interested in the continuance of the trade. Many of these, unacquainted with the detail of the subject, like the English members, admitted the dismal representations which were then made to them. The desire of doing good on the one hand, and the fear of doing injury on the other, perplexed them; and in this dubious state they absented themselves at the time mentioned."

But the period at length had arrived, when this great question was to be decided. It had experienced many alternations,—its seasons of hope had been followed by days of despondency. The hearts of its leaders were sometimes buoyant, and at other times were sad. But the righteousness of their cause sustained their courage, and ultimately won its triumph. What moral principle failed to achieve, ministerial changes accomplished.

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The death of Mr. Pitt, in January, 1806, made way for the Fox and Grenville administration, and the question was immediately ushered into parliament under their ministerial auspices. In May, of this year, a bill was introduced for the abolition of the foreign, and the limitation of the domestic, slave-trade, which passed both houses of parliament, and received the royal assent. On the 10th of June Mr. Fox introduced the subject, at the special request of Mr. Wilberforce; in doing which, he passed a high eulogium on the latter. "Before, sir, I proceed to state the grounds on which I look with confidence for the almost unanimous countenance of the house in this measure, I feel myself called on to say a few words, by way of apology for being the person to come forward on the present occasion. For the last sixteen or seventeen years of my life, I have been in the habit of uniformly and strenuously supporting the several motions made by a respectable gentleman, Mr. Wilberforce, who has so often, by his meritorious exertions on this subject, attracted the applause of this house, and claimed the admiration of the public. During the long period that I found it in such excellent hands, it was impossible for me to feel the slightest disposition to take it out of them. I am still of the same opinion; and cannot but think it would have been much better, if the same honourable member and his friends had retained it in their own hands, and they might certainly have depended on me, and those with whom I have the honour to act, for the same ardent support which we have uniformly given them. But, sir, the honourable member and many of his friends seemed so strongly to entertain different sentiments on that point, from me, that I submitted my own opinion to theirs, and now assume the task, reluctantly, on that account, but, on every other, most gladly. So fully am I impressed with the vast importance and necessity of attaining what will be the object of my motion this day, that if, during the almost forty years that I have now had the honour of a seat in parliament, I had been so fortunate as to accomplish that, and that only, I should think I had done enough, and

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could retire from public life with comfort, and conscious satisfaction that I had done my duty." He closed his speech, by moving, "that this house, considering the African slave-trade to be contrary to the principles of justice, humanity, and policy, will, with all practical expedition, take effectual measures for the abolition of the said trade, in such a manner, and at such a period, as may be deemed advisable;" which, being carried by a majority of 114 to 15, Mr. Wilberforce immediately moved, "that an humble address be presented to his majesty, beseeching his majesty to take such measures as in his wisdom he shall judge proper, for establishing, by negotiation with foreign powers, a concert and agreement for abolishing the African slave-trade; and for affording assistance, mutually, towards carrying into execution any regulations which may be adopted by any or all of the contracting parties, for accomplishing their common purpose; assuring his majesty that this house, feeling the justice and honour of the British nation to be deeply and peculiarly involved in the great object they have in view, will be ready at all times, cheerfully to concur in giving effect to such measures as his majesty may see fit to adopt for its attainment." This was carried without a division.

From this moment, the great question was considered as triumphant. The seal of parliament was set to the views of the abolitionists, and the nation rejoiced in their success. Some apprehension, indeed, was awakened by the death of Mr. Fox, in October, 1806. He had been amongst the earliest, most consistent, and zealous of the parliamentary advocates of the abolition; and when in office, he nobly redeemed the pledges which he had given in opposition. The sacred cause occupied his thoughts amidst the struggles and pains of dissolution. "Two things," said he, on his death-bed, "I wish earnestly to see accomplished—peace with Europe, and the abolition of the slave-trade; but, of the two, I wish the latter."

The confidence of the abolitionists was restored, by Lord Grenville introducing, on the 2d of January, 1807, a bill for

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the abolition of the slave-trade into the house of lords. It was ultimately carried through both houses, though against much opposition ; Earl Grey, then Lord Howick, distinguishing himself by its eloquent support in the commons. It must be eminently gratifying to this nobleman, distinguished alike by the unblemished virtues of his private and public life, to have been instrumental, not only in the abolition of the African trade, but also in the extinction of slavery itself. The blessing of many ready to perish will descend on the administration over which he so honourably presides ; and the enlightened tribute of a nation's praise will solace and cheer his spirit amid the increasing infirmities of age. It is a singular event, and highly to the honour of his political connexions, that the same party which achieved the former triumph has now the latter also. Had they conferred no other benefit on their nation and species, the abolition of the slave-trade, and the extinction of British colonial slavery, would have secured them the admiration and gratitude of posterity. When the topics which give temporary popularity to a party are forgotten, history will record, in no measured terms, the charity of their deeds, and assign them a distinguished place amongst the best benefactors of their race.

Though the bill which Lord Grenville introduced was pressed forward with the utmost possible expedition, the friends of humanity and religion were far from being free from anxiety. Even after it had passed both houses, its fate was regarded as uncertain ; for the king, being displeased with his ministers, had determined on their dismissal. But the force of public opinion prevailed, and the royal assent was given by commission to the bill. "This event," says Mr. Clarkson, "took place the next day ; for on Wednesday the twenty-fifth, at half past eleven in the morning, His Majesty's message was delivered to the different members of it, that they were then to wait upon him, to deliver up the seals of their offices. It then appeared that a commission for the royal assent to this bill, among others, had been obtained. This commission was instantly opened by the Lord Chan-

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cellor, (Erskine,) who was accompanied by the Lords Holland and Auckland; and as the clock struck twelve, just when the sun was in its meridian splendour to witness this august act, this establishment of a Magna Charta for Africa in Britain, and to sanction it by its most vivid and glorious beams, it was completed. The ceremony being over, the seals of the respective offices were delivered up: so that the execution of this commission was the last act of the administration of Lord Grenville; an administration, which, on account of its virtuous exertions in behalf of the oppressed African race, will pass to posterity, living through successive generations, in the love and gratitude of the most virtuous of mankind."

Thus ended one of the most glorious contests, after a continuance for twenty years, of any ever carried on in any age or country. A contest, not of brutal violence, but of reason. A contest between those who felt deeply for the happiness and the honour of their fellow-creatures, and those who, through vicious custom and the impulse of avarice, had trampled under foot the sacred rights of their nature, and had even attempted to efface all title to the Divine image from their minds."

It is impossible, at the present day, duly to estimate the satisfaction and joy with which Mr. Wilberforce must have witnessed this consummation of his labours. He had borne the burden and the heat of the day; he had watched over the cause with more than parental solicitude; had nurtured its infancy, guided its youth, and won for it a nation's sympathy and support; he had witnessed the desertion of some of its earliest advocates, and had been so frequently defeated as to require far more than ordinary firmness to sustain his vigour and determination of purpose. But he was steadfast and immovable, and the good providence of God ultimately crowned his labours with success. The mere politician may exult at the success of his cause, but the joy of Mr. Wilberforce was that of the philanthropist and Christian. He had succeeded, amidst incredible difficulties, in lessening the amount of human misery, and in averting from his country the displeasure of

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that God who is a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in his distress. In the successful termination of his efforts, he beheld an answer to the prayers of the faithful, and an omen of good to the future generations of men. Hence his piety and his patriotism alike ministered to his joy. The principles on which he had acted were but imperfectly known to the men of his day. They probably imagined him to be altogether such an one as themselves, and had therefore referred his conduct to secular ambition, or to mere benevolence of heart. But his main impulse had been drawn from heaven; and his resort, in every season of perplexity and gloom, had been to the throne of his God and Father. Sustained in his labours by an enlightened conscience, he could not but rejoice in their successful termination. The character of Christianity was thus relieved from reproach, and some promise afforded of yet brighter days to the degraded tribes of Africa.

We cannot read the history of this struggle, without feeling the encouragement which it affords to every virtuous and benevolent deed. Greater difficulties can scarcely be conceived, than those with which the abolitionists had to contend. Their whole project was regarded as chimerical, and every means which wealth, power, and dishonesty could devise, was employed against them. The evil to be remedied was practised at the distance of some thousands of miles, and those who had witnessed its enormities possessed, for the most part, a pecuniary interest in their continuance. It was well known that the highest personage in the state was opposed to their views, and that the revenues of the nation, and the prosperity of its commerce, were extensively regarded as threatened by them. Undeterred, however, by those circumstances, the friends of humanity determined on their course, and the rectitude of their object gave them success. Their labours constituted the seed from which an abundant harvest has been gathered in our day. The principles which they instilled into the public mind have not been inoperative. They have moved a nation's sympathy, and the chain of the negro is in consequence broken, and the rod of the oppressor is taken

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from his hand. Our nation is now free from the guilt of perpetuating a system, as destructive of human happiness, as it is abhorrent from the laws of God, and may consistently appeal, on the high ground of humanity and religion, to the other nations of the earth. Let us not pride ourselves in the consummation we have witnessed. Other men laboured, and we have entered into their labours. The foundation of all which has been achieved was laid by Mr. Wilberforce and his associates. They did not, perhaps, at first anticipate so early an extinction of slavery, but they prepared the way for it, and the madness of our enemies has enabled us to achieve it. That the great patriarch of the cause should have survived to witness the struggle, which was to crown with victory the labours of his life, must be gratifying to every benevolent mind. Amidst the decay of nature, his spirit must have been refreshed by the scene he witnessed, and the language of his heart have been similar to that of Simeon, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

In order to bring the history of the *abolition* to a close, I have omitted some circumstances, which materially affected the happiness, and developed the character, of Mr. Wilberforce. These we now proceed to notice. In 1797 he married Miss Barbara Spooner, the daughter of an opulent banker in Birmingham, who survives him. Of their six children, the four sons are living. Two of them are clergymen of the church of England. The Rev. Samuel Wilberforce holds the living of Brightson, Isle of Wight, presented to him by the Bishop of Winchester; and the Rev. Robert Wilberforce, the third son, that of East Farleigh, near Maidstone, on the presentation of the Lord Chancellor. In the absence of all knowledge of these gentlemen, I cannot but express my hope that they are amongst the most useful ministers of a church, for the vindication of whose doctrines their father laboured so successfully. Their entrance into the ministry must have been a source of satisfaction to their parent, in exact proportion as they possessed his own celestial spirit. May a double

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portion of that spirit rest upon them, that the churches over which they preside may have added to them daily such as shall be saved!

This year was also distinguished in the life of Mr. Wilberforce, by the publication of his "Practical View of the prevailing Religious System of professed Christians." This occurred in the spring of 1797, and, as the present memoir is to be prefixed to a new edition of this work, I shall be excused, if I attempt to furnish a somewhat extended account of its history and character.

It is to the honour of Christianity to have engaged the active service of many of the most distinguished laymen whom our country has produced. Names which are recorded in the brightest pages of our history are associated with the dearest recollections of the Christian church. The most distinguished of our philosophers and poets—men who have enlarged the boundaries of science, or pierced with more than mortal vision into the mysteries of an invisible world—have come forth with the simplicity of childhood, to do homage to our most holy faith. While inferior minds have denied its truth, or cavilled at its sacred doctrines, while they have ventured to challenge the rectitude of its principles, or arrogantly have assumed to amend its laws; their masters in science, the mightiest intellects which have ever ennobled and adorned the human form, have received it as the wisdom of God, and drawn from it their consolation and their hope. The infidel refers, with childish triumph, to Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke, Voltaire and Hume; but the believer in revelation points to Bacon and Locke, to Newton and Boyle, and he feels that the weight of authority is on his side. In more recent times, important aid has been rendered to religious truth by men who possessed no official connexion with its interests. To say nothing of living authors, some of whom have highly distinguished themselves in this service, the names of West, and Lyttleton, and Wilberforce will be remembered with gratitude to a distant age. The works which they have left to posterity occupy an important place in the theology of our

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country, and constitute no mean memorial of their diligence, sagacity, and virtue. The "Observations on the Resurrection," and those on the "Conversion and Apostleship of Saint Paul," have triumphantly vindicated our holy faith, in those very points where her enemies had represented her as most vulnerable. The obstructions which infidelity had placed in her path have been thus removed, and the public mind prepared for the more direct and successful application of her principles. This important service was performed by Mr. Wilberforce, and it constitutes his highest claim on the gratitude and admiration of his country. We have already seen with what unwearied benevolence he advocated the cause of humanity, and we may now ascertain the principles which impelled his philanthropic career. The religious impressions which he experienced in early life, though subject to some serious vicissitudes, never forsook him. They gradually assumed more of the fixedness of habit, and became purified from whatever alloy may at first have mingled with them. At length, his attention was seriously engaged by the general aspect of religion around him. His intercourse with society was sufficiently extensive to afford him ample opportunities of observing its spiritual condition, and he could not fail to perceive that it was cold and formal; unscriptural in its views, and most pernicious in its practical tendency. This aroused his compassion and zeal, and he came forth to expound the character of Christianity, and to claim for her the cordial reception of his countrymen.

The value of the service which he rendered cannot be fully estimated, without some knowledge of the circumstances of England at this period. The rapid decline of religion at the close of the seventeenth, and during the first half of the eighteenth century, had awakened many serious apprehensions in the more thoughtful and pious of all classes, respecting the future fate of our country. There has been much discussion about the causes of this decline, which has exhibited far more of the spleen of party, than of a sober and honest inquiry after truth. The severe and unnatural restraint

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under which vice and irreligion were held, during the time of the Commonwealth, was followed by a ruinous reaction on the return of the Stuarts. The stern morality of the puritans had put vice to shame, and their legislation had succeeded in giving more of the appearance of religion to the nation than it had ever previously borne. But there was much of hypocrisy in this; hypocrisy, be it remembered, on the part of the enemies of the puritans, though commonly charged on them. These high-minded and illustrious men, who protected at once the ark of our liberty and the temple of our God, expected to coerce the public mind, and, attempting this, they failed. They held it under a restraint which was felt to be violent and irksome, and we need not therefore wonder at the eagerness with which vice was followed, when once this yoke was broken. The unhallowed passions which had previously been refused indulgence, immediately sought to compensate themselves for the mortification to which they had reluctantly submitted. The return of Charles proved the greatest moral evil which our country had experienced. Unprincipled and licentious, he violated the common decencies of life, and gave sanction and currency to vice, which has painfully moulded our national character. Religion became, in consequence, a byword of reproach; her most zealous ministers were silenced; her doctrines were made the subjects of profane banter, and her altars were polluted by the approach of men of secular ambition, or of unholy lusts. The light of truth was thus gradually extinguished; and God, incensed at the apostacy of the nation, withdrew the cheering tokens of his presence. "The Gallican church," remarks the late Rev. Robert Hall, and the passage is equally applicable to the case before us, "no doubt, looked upon it as a signal triumph, when she prevailed on Louis the Fourteenth to repeal the edict of Nantes, and to suppress the protestant religion. But what was the consequence? Where shall we look, after this period, for her Fenelons and her Pascals—where for the distinguished monuments of piety and learning, which were the glory of her better days? As for piety, she perceived

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she had no occasion for it, when there was no lustre of Christian holiness surrounding her; nor for learning, when she had no longer any opponents to confute, or any controversies to maintain. She felt herself at liberty to become as ignorant, as secular, as irreligious, as she pleased; and, amidst the silence and darkness she had created around her, she drew the curtains, and retired to rest. The accession of numbers she gained by suppressing her opponents, was like the small extension of length a body acquires by death: the feeble remains of life were extinguished, and she lay a putrid corpse and a public nuisance, filling the air with pestilential exhalations." Such was the state of things when Whitfield and Wesley commenced their labours. The character of those labours, and the degree of success which accompanied them, are matters of history, and need not therefore be dwelt on in this place. Their influence on the hierarchy was, for a time, very limited. But few of the clergy sympathized with their views, or emulated their zeal; whilst the higher and more influential of their number embraced every opportunity of holding up these holy men to the contempt and reprobation of the profane and formalist. It consequently followed, that, while the lower and middle classes of society were materially benefited by these apostolic labourers, the highest grade was wholly unaffected by them. At no period of our history was this order of society more thoroughly irreligious than at the close of the last century. They were utterly destitute of the spirit of Christianity, and had so mistaken its nature as to substitute in its place an unmeaning and pernicious system of external rites. "The fact is, that through the secularity and irreligion of the clergy, evangelical truth was nearly effaced from the minds of the members of the Establishment and in the higher ranks, and that an indolent acquiescence in established formularies had succeeded to the ardour with which the great principles of religion were embraced at the Reformation. Such was the state of the public mind, that in a contest between orthodoxy and heresy, the former proved

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triumphant, merely because it was already established, and had the plea of antiquity and prescription in its favour."

In this lamentable state of things, it was of the highest importance that some religious advocate should step forth, qualified by his rank, character, and talents, to command the respect, and to effect the instruction of the higher orders. "To stem the torrent of infidelity," remarks the Bishop of Calcutta in an introductory essay to the "Practical View," published some years since, "in the higher and middle classes of society; to rouse the national establishment to the holy efforts for which it was so well adapted; to restore the standard of that pure and vital Christianity, on which all subjection to law, and all obedience from motives of conscience, and all real morality and piety, ultimately depend; to sow anew the principles of loyalty, contentment, peace, holiness, deeply and permanently in the minds of men; to rescue, in a word, our country from impending ruin, and render her a blessing to the nations—to these high ends, something more was decidedly wanting.

"The writings of statesmen did not meet the case. They excited, indeed, a just horror of atheism and insubordination; they painted the miseries of revolutionary frenzy in its true colours; they vindicated the national creed in general, and the national clergy; they enforced the importance of Christianity in its morals and its influence on the good order of society: but all this was partial and ineffective. There was too much of personality and acrimony in their strictures—too much of worldly policy; they understood not the full extent of the malady which they treated, nor did they rightly conceive of the nature of that heart-felt Christianity which was alone capable of producing a cure.

"In this state of things—the storm of the French revolution still raging—an open renunciation of Christianity just made in a great nation—Europe rent asunder with war, which, after a duration of four or five years, seemed farther than ever from a close—the church feeble, and full of appre-

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hension—the ministers of the state, and the legislature, overwhelmed with schemes of defence abroad and regulation at home—the minds of thoughtful men portending calamities—untold difficulties thickening around. In this state of things, who could be found to stand in the gap, who could rise with the necessary talent and reputation to calm the distracted people, who could mildly, and yet authoritatively, interpose between the clamours of party, who could recall men, with a bold and friendly voice, to the true source of their salvation, and the adequate remedy for their troubles? One man at length appeared. Our author was the honoured individual. He undertook the task, unconscious to himself of the extent of service he was rendering his country. He possessed all the various natural advantages required for such an emergency; and he was soon acknowledged to be the person who could speak with effect, at such a moment, on the subject of religion; who could best make an open confession of its genuine doctrines before his fellow-statesmen, and appeal effectually to their hearts and consciences as to the necessity of a return to the faith and piety of their fathers.”

The design of Mr. Wilberforce was strictly what his title-page denotes. He does not attempt to establish the truth of Christianity, but, assuming this, he aims to exhibit her true form and features to his countrymen. He does not contend with the sceptic or infidel, but with the nominal Christian. Analyzing the prevalent system of religion, he shews it to be essentially defective, wanting many of the peculiarities of the Christian revelation, and utterly inadequate to the high purpose of man's recovery unto God. He takes the bible as his standard, and, acting on the principle of protestantism, brings the popular faith to this test. “The main object which he has in view,” Mr. Wilberforce states in his introduction, “is, not to convince the sceptic, or to answer the arguments of persons who avowedly oppose the fundamental doctrines of our religion; but to point out the scanty and erroneous system of the bulk of those who belong to the class of orthodox Christians, and to contrast their defective scheme with a

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representation of what the author apprehends to be real Christianity. Often has it filled him with deep concern, to observe in this description of persons, scarcely any distinct knowledge of the real nature and principles of the religion which they profess."

It is accurately remarked by the Bishop of Calcutta, in his introductory essay to the "Practical View," that, "there is nothing more remarkable in the style and manner of the work, than the skill in debate, the parliamentary tact, if we may so speak, which is apparent throughout. You discern in it every where the marked effects of the author's public life. You cannot read three pages without feeling that the writer is in the midst of your very thoughts and feelings: all is business—all is a vivid delineation of actual life—all is directly aimed at the heart. It is a persuasive address to his fellow-statesmen and countrymen, in which he kindles with his great topics, gains upon your judgment and heart as he proceeds, and leaves you at last under the impressions produced by a sincere and affecting orator, rather than of a writer or a controversialist. You see in it the hand of a master, used to state the objections of an opponent, not only fairly, but in the very words that such an opponent would employ; you see the skill of a legislator, compelled to be on the watch, aware that any the least slip would be exposed, and trained to a popular, commanding, and yet measured way of stating things. No adversary is outraged; no personal feelings are wounded; no real difficulties extenuated or denied: but all is open, and manly, and conciliatory. Almost every imaginable concession is made on each topic. The objections are stated at such length, and with so much justice, that you tremble as you are reading them, lest a satisfactory answer should not be given; and yet, after repeated admissions, limitations, cautions, apologies, every one of them most apparently kind and sincere, the blow is at last struck so hard, and with so much truth of aim, as to fall with irresistible force. We are not aware that we ever read any book in which every thing was so fairly, and, at the same time, so

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fully stated. No reader has to complain of any material misrepresentation. The whole habit of the author's public life seems to have been brought to bear in this benevolent and faithful appeal to his country. Seldom, indeed, has such a talent for debate, and such an accurate knowledge of the human heart, been united with such a delicate and friendly attention to the feelings of others, and such a force of persuasion and authority of truth."

"There is, further, a warmth in the style of the work, which adds to its attractions. It bears all the marks of having been composed after years of deliberate preparation, indeed, as to the main topics, and a thorough faculty of discussion, acquired in the best school of eloquence, in just that sort of pressure and hurry from the demands of public duties, which lend it a naturalness, and warmth, and generous urgency, which are best adapted to gain its end. It is a book which was poured out, if we may so speak, between two sessions of parliament. It is the lively and urgent *exposé* of his views of Christianity, made by a statesman on a sudden impulse, to the vast influential body of legislators and men of the world, amongst whom he was acting his part, and whom he had neither the opportunity nor the leisure of acquainting, by any other means, with the true character of those religious principles by which he wished to govern all his own conduct, and to which he would reduce the wandering and unsettled notions of those with whom he habitually conversed.

Accordingly, the reasonings of the book are precisely adapted to the persons whom the author wished to persuade. They are not abstract, scholastic, intricate; but plain, tangible, popular. They are not of that high class of intellectual discussions, which meet the very first order of minds, but are lost to all others—the world wanted not such arguments,—but they are reasonings of that gentle, intelligible class, which suit the far larger number of persons both in the senate and in the community generally; reasonings, which, without disappointing the most exalted intellect, meet and convince the candid, the practical, the thoughtful, the well-disposed; in

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short, the whole mass of considerate, and impressible, and amiable readers in the higher and middle orders of society.

And yet the courage apparent in this work is far from being inconsiderable. The manner is mild, indeed, but the undertaking is bold and hazardous. The author, in attempting it, risked every thing dear to a public man and a politician as such—consideration, weight, ambition, reputation. He exposed himself to all the misapprehension and hostility which attach to so noble an avowal of the humiliating doctrines of vital Christianity in a corrupt age. But he writes as one who did this deliberately and advisedly. He shrinks not from any consequences that may follow. The unaffected fortitude and courage which real religion inspires, a consideration of its infinite moment to the nation, and to each individual, a firm persuasion of the truth of the statements which he made, and an unshaken reliance on the blessing of God to accompany his vindication of it, all manifestly unite to sustain his mind, and carry him with calmness and dignity through the effort.”

The success which the volume obtained will scarcely be credited at the present day. The author had long been known as an influential and talented member of the lower house. His loyalty was beyond suspicion; his efforts in the cause of humanity had widely extended his fame, and the transparent integrity of his character had commanded the respect even of those who detested his religious principles. “It was a thing quite unprecedented for a leading parliamentary speaker to publish any considerable work—much less a work on religion. The moment it appeared, therefore, every one stood astonished. The rank in life, and generosity of the author, naturally led him to place an early copy in the hands of his very extensive circle of acquaintance and friends. It was thus, at the same moment, read by all the leading persons of the nation. An electric shock could not be felt more vividly and instantaneously. Every one talked of it, every one was attracted by its eloquence, every one admitted the benevolence, and talents, and sincerity of the writer. It

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was acknowledged, that, whether good or bad on a few peculiar topics, such an important work had not appeared for a century. The great elevation of its views and principles, stamped upon it a noble singularity, which did not fail to strike the experienced observer. It was the author's first publication. It derived, therefore, an additional charm from the curiosity of his countrymen, as well as from its own intrinsic excellencies."

"Opposition, indeed, arose against it, as the first admiration a little subsided. This was to be expected. No valuable end could have been accomplished in a great and free country like this, if opposition had not called the work into further notice, and interested men most deeply in the subjects discussed in it. If it had been an unresisted remonstrance, it would soon have been a forgotten one. An edition or two would have carried it down to the gulf of oblivion. But opposition put it precisely in the position most of all to be desired for such a work. It made it more and more the subject of conversation, of argument, of direct and lively interest. It gave it an additional circulation and currency. Men were surprised at what Christianity was described to be: they were offended at the picture given of spiritual religion: they were dismayed at the representation of the distance to which modern Christianity had receded from its ancient limits: they knew not what to say of such an open and bold confession of those peculiarities of the Christian faith, which they had been accustomed to hear classed with sectarianism and folly. Nothing could be alleged against the writer. He was not an ecclesiastic. He was not a weak or harsh dogmatist. He was not ignorant. He could not be charged with want of benevolence and talent. He was confessedly one of the most able legislators of the day. He had not only been long in parliament, but had been mixed up with every great public question. He was the private friend of one of the greatest and most skilful prime ministers, according to general opinion—certainly one of the most popular—which this country ever saw; and had long been a leading supporter

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of his measures in parliament.* He represented the most important county of England. He was not only not in office, but known to be independent, and above suspicion in his political conduct. He had also been actively engaged as the distinguished leader in the great question of the abolition of the slave trade. His private morals, his liberality, his benevolence of character, his social talents, the combination of attractive qualities, which added a charm to his conversation, and gained almost every one whom he approached—all conspired to give the work a reception the most intensely eager and interesting—and all conspired to stimulate the opposition which was made to many of his statements. The book was too true, too carefully guarded in all its parts, too mild and affectionate, too scriptural, too forcible and alarming, to be overlooked or despised. Every one allowed that the author had much to say—that he deserved a hearing—that he was sincere—that in many things he was right—that he ought, in short, to be read; and would, and must, be attended to.”

Three or four large editions were exhausted in a few months. The book was in every one's hand. It circulated rapidly amongst the class for whose benefit it was more especially intended; and, so permanent has been the demand for it, that about twenty editions have been given to the public. Translations, also, have been made into most of the European languages, and the reprints in America have been considerably more numerous than the editions in this country.

Such a work could not but meet with acrimonious and violent opposition. The prejudices, errors, and practices of too many were attacked, to allow of general silence. Various pamphlets were published in opposition to his views; some of the leading periodicals of the day controverted his positions; and, on more than one occasion, the sarcasm of a political opponent was the medium of expressing hostility to his religious creed. The general tone of the “Practical View,” and

* Mr. Pitt.

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the direct bearing of some of its parts, were so adverse to the Socinian system as to induce the most violent opposition on the part of its disciples. Mr. Belsham published a review of the work, in letters to a lady, which displays all the arrogance and bitterness for which his works are so remarkable. These were the palmy days of Socinianism. Its advocates had been buoyed up with false hopes, and their assumptions were most extravagant and ludicrous. They modestly styled themselves *rational* Christians, and affected contempt for the understanding and logic of their opponents. Discarding the most important and distinctive features of the Christian economy, it was difficult to discern the line which separated them from the more moderate infidels of their day. Christians in name, but unbelievers in reality, they united the dogmatism of the sciolist with the intemperate zeal of the partizan. The temporary success which the talents and zeal of Priestley had given to their creed was mistaken for complete and permanent triumph, as though a system of negations, destitute of the elements of vigour or of life, could long retain an influence over the public mind.

Mr. Wilberforce did not reply to any of his opponents, neither did the nature of his work render it necessary or advisable that he should do so. His hands were full of other employment. Every post, during his parliamentary career, brought him upwards of thirty letters or petitions; and numerous engagements, of a charitable or religious kind, served to occupy whatever brief intervals of time his political duties left at his disposal. He was not a man to loiter out his days, and he would have been unwise and faithless, had he neglected the important duties of his station, to act the part of a religious polemic. He had fully discharged his conscience, in laying his most mature views of Christianity before his countrymen, and now he wisely left the result with God. Had personal reputation been his object, he would have vindicated his character, as an author, by shewing the consistency of his creed with the only standard of religious

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faith. But he was influenced by higher considerations, and he therefore waited in full confidence of its success.

The opposition which his work encountered, attracted towards it an increased degree of public attention. Instead of frustrating, it aided his design, by inducing inquiry and examination. Truth is omnipotent, when fairly dealt with. The acrimony of a controversialist frequently counteracts the practical tendencies of the doctrines he establishes. His readers are offended by his pride and bitterness, the vinegar and gall he infuses into his composition. But, in the "Practical View," truth is seen in its holiest, most attractive, and appropriate associations. The temper of the author is mild, persuasive, and benignant. He reasons, persuades, and warns, as an attached and deeply anxious friend: his own sincerity is transparent throughout the work, and the benevolence of his intention must be felt, whatever may be thought of the correctness of his opinions. It was, therefore, wise in Mr. Wilberforce to leave his work to justify itself by the revolution it should effect in the faith and practice of his countrymen. Controversy would only have increased the bitterness of spirit, for which its appearance furnished an occasion, while his silence allowed this bitterness to cool, or, at least, prevented its extension.

Never was a work hailed with more delight by the truly pious, than was this volume. The evangelical party in the Establishment was yet in its infancy. Its numbers were few, their principles but little understood, and their characters perpetually maligned. That they should rejoice in the appearance of such an advocate was but natural, for his creed and purpose were the same as their own: but their joy was no selfish feeling: they felt that scriptural truth was now vindicated, where they had never gained access; and they hoped that the voice of so faithful and benevolent a preacher would not be heard in vain.

"It is a most noble and manly stand for the gospel," said the Rev. Thomas Scott, in 1797; "full of good sense, and

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most useful observations on subjects quite out of our line ; and in all respects fitted for usefulness : and, coming from such a man, it will probably be read by many thousands, who can by no means be brought to attend either to our preaching or writings. Taken in all its probable effects, I do sincerely think such a bold stand for vital Christianity has not been made in my memory. He has come out beyond all my expectations. He testifies of the noble, and amiable, and honourable, that their works are evil ; and he proves his testimony beyond all denial. He gives exactly the practical view of the tendency of evangelical principles, for which I contend ; only he seems afraid of Calvinism, and is not very systematical ; perhaps it is so much the better. It seems, likewise, a book suited to reprove and correct some timid friends, who are at least half afraid of the gospel, being far more *prudent* than the apostles were ; or we should never have been able to *spell* out Christian truths from their writings. But it is especially calculated to shew those their mistake, who preach evangelical doctrines without a due exhibition of their practical effects. I pray God to do much good by it ! and I cannot but hope that I shall get much good from it, both as a preacher and a Christian."

We shall not attempt to delineate the practical effects of this work. No uninspired volume, probably, ever produced a more powerful, extensive, and permanent impression. It may be said to have done more towards changing the religious character of the age than any other cause. The whole consequences of its publication will not be known until the records of this world are opened at the bar of God. One instance of its usefulness is too interesting to be omitted. It is recorded, in the Life of the Rev. Legh Richmond, that, shortly after he had entered on his ministerial charge in the Isle of Wight, one of his college friends, to whom a near relative had sent the "Practical View," forwarded the work to Mr. Richmond, requesting him to examine it, and to report his opinion of its contents. The work thus incidently introduced was the means of effecting an entire change in the

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views and habits of Mr. Richmond. It had been sent to him by a thoughtless friend, in order to relieve himself from the irksome task of its perusal, but it proved mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strong holds. Speaking of his son Wilberforce, Mr. Richmond remarks, "He was baptized by the name of Wilberforce, in consequence of my personal friendship with that individual, whose name long has been, and ever will be, allied to all that is able, amiable, and truly Christian. That gentleman had already accepted the office of sponsor to one of my daughters; but the subsequent birth of this boy afforded me the additional satisfaction of more familiarly associating his name with that of my family. But it was not the tie of ordinary friendship, nor the veneration which, in common with multitudes, I felt for the name of Wilberforce, which induced me to give that name to my child: there had, for many years past, subsisted a tie between myself and that much-loved friend, of a higher and more sacred character than any other which earth can afford. I feel it to be a debt of gratitude, which I owe to God and to man, to take this affecting opportunity of stating, that to the unsought and unexpected introduction of Mr. Wilberforce's book on 'Practical Christianity,' I owe, through God's mercy, the first sacred impression which I ever received, as to the spiritual nature of the gospel system, the vital character of personal religion, the corruption of the human heart, and the way of salvation by Jesus Christ. As a young minister, recently ordained, and just entrusted with the charge of two parishes in the Isle of Wight, I had commenced my labours too much in the spirit of the world, and founded my public instructions on the erroneous notions which prevailed amongst my academical and literary associates. The scriptural principles stated in the 'Practical View,' convinced me of my error; led me to the study of the Scriptures with an earnestness to which I had hitherto been a stranger; humbled my heart, and brought me to seek the love and blessing of that Saviour, who alone can afford a peace which the world cannot give. Through the study of this book, I was induced to

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examine the writings of the British and foreign reformers. I saw the coincidence of their doctrines with those of the scriptures, and those which the word of God taught me to be essential to the welfare of myself and my flock. I know too well what has passed within my heart, for now a long period of time, not to feel and to confess, that to this incident I was indebted, originally, for those solid views of Christianity, on which I rest my hope for time and eternity. May I not, then, call the honoured author of that book my spiritual father? And if my spiritual father, therefore my best earthly friend? The wish to connect his name with my own, was natural and justifiable. It was a lasting memorial of the most important transaction of my life: it still lives amidst the tenderness of present emotions, as a signal of endearment and gratitude; and I trust its character is imperishable."

Mr. Wilberforce continued to represent the county of York until 1812, from which period to the close of his parliamentary life, about 1825, he was returned by Lord Calthorpe for the borough of Bramber. He was a frequent speaker in the house, but did not take that prominent part in its business which he had formerly done. In 1813, on the renewal of the East India Company's charter, he gave his most strenuous support to the cause of Christian missions, then represented as inconsistent with the preservation of our Eastern territories, and happily succeeded in throwing open these vast dependencies of the empire to the free entrance of Christian truth. In 1816 he introduced and carried his "Registry Bill," the object of which was to render the abolition of the slave-trade effectual, by preventing an illicit importation of Africans. This was violently opposed by the colonists and their partisans in this country, but was ably defended by Mr. Wilberforce in parliament, and by Mr. Stephen from the press. It was evident that some such measure was absolutely necessary, to prevent a systematic and extensive violation of the law.

A few years afterwards, Mr. Wilberforce published "An Appeal to the Religion, Justice, and Humanity of the Inha-

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bitants of the British Empire, in behalf of the Negro Slaves in the West Indies." His undiminished interest in the welfare of this unhappy class, the strong conviction of duty which impelled him to act on their behalf, and the consistency of his present views with his former professions, are shewn throughout this pamphlet in a strain of mild and persuasive eloquence. It is particularly important, as shewing that the abolitionists had from the first contemplated the extinction of slavery, as the ultimate reward of their labours, and will be read with interest in future years, as the last public effort of an aged philanthropist to arouse the conscience and benevolent sympathies of a nation.

On the arrival of the late Queen Caroline, he laboured to avert those revolting discussions, by which such outrage was done to public morals. For this purpose, he moved in parliament an address to her majesty, praying her to return to France. His proposition was adopted by the house in a manner most flattering to himself; but, as is well known, it proved unsuccessful.

During his last moments, he was supported by the consolations of religion. The principles which had guided his public conduct, sustained him throughout a protracted illness, and shed a mild and Christian lustre over the closing scenes of his life. Amidst his increasing infirmities, the "inward man" was renewed day by day. So abundant were his consolations, that he himself remarked, "The last year has been the happiest of my life." A short time before his decease, a friend having said, on his recovery from a severe attack, "I hope, sir, you will feel better soon." He replied, "I am quite prepared for the worst." He then asked for "Baxter's Dying Thoughts," and read them. In the course of the last month of his life, a friend was speaking to him of his prospect of heaven, when he observed, "As for me, I have nothing to say but the publican's plea, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'" On the Friday preceding his death, hopes were entertained by his sorrowing relatives, that he might yet be spared a little longer; but more threatening symptoms

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appeared on Saturday, and, on the Monday following, July the 29th, this inestimable man departed from the scene of his labours, to enter into the joy of his Lord.

His funeral was intended to be strictly private; but the following requisition, equally honourable to Mr. Wilberforce and to the age in which he lived, induced his family to alter their arrangements:—"We, the undersigned Members of both Houses of Parliament, being anxious, upon public grounds, to shew respect for the memory of the late William Wilberforce, and being also satisfied that public honours can never be more fitly bestowed than upon such benefactors of mankind, earnestly request that he may be buried in Westminster Abbey, and that we, and those who agree with us in sentiments, may have permission to attend his funeral." To this requisition were affixed the signatures—William Frederick, (Duke of Gloucester,) Brougham, Eldon, Lansdowne, Wellesley, Grey, W. Cantuar, (Archbishop of Canterbury,) Ripon, Wellington, Harroby, and of twenty-seven other peers; and those of upwards of ninety members of the house of commons; and this on a short notice, and at so late a period of the session.

The funeral took place in the manner thus proposed, on Saturday, August 3d. "The peers, amounting to a considerable number, all dressed in deep black, having put on scarves and hat-bands, proceeded from the Jerusalem chamber of the house of lords into the Abbey, entering at the Poets' Corner, while the members of the house of commons, numbering between one and two hundred, in full mourning, proceeded two abreast to the west door of the Abbey, by which they entered. It was a proud sight to see the royalty, the high station, the rank and greatest talent of the country, become the pall-bearers of a virtuous citizen; which was at once a compliment to the memory of the man, a credit to their own hearts and understandings, and an honour of which the people of this great country may proudly boast to other nations. The grave was formed close to the tombs of Canning, Fox, and Pitt: and, while the most solemn part of the funeral service

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was read, their Royal Highnesses the Dukes of Sussex and Gloucester, the Duke of Wellington, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Bishop of Chichester, and the various other Bishops, the Lord Chancellor, the Speaker of the House of Commons, and the other pall-bearers, the Marquis of Lansdowne, Lord Rosslyn, Lord Althorp, Lord Auckland, &c. formed a circle round the grave."

The general bias of his politics was towards the tories, but he was perfectly free from that servile attachment to party which is one of the characteristics of a weak or unprincipled mind. It is probable that his early acquaintance with William Pitt influenced his political career. The partiality of friendship induces even the most liberal and independent to regard with a favourable eye the opinions and the course of an early associate. Though the intimate friend of the minister, he never solicited or accepted place or honour; and the only personal favour he ever asked, is said to have been for the *entrée* through the park, in driving to the house; which he declined, on finding that importance was attached to the boon.

The private character of Mr. Wilberforce was as amiable as his public course was upright. He partook of the pleasures of domestic life with a zest of which most politicians are destitute. "He was extremely fond," says a relative, "of children, and would enter into their gambols with the gaiety of a school-boy. We need scarcely add, that he was the idol of his own. Their veneration, their filial attachment, bordered on enthusiasm; their hourly attendance on his wants, resembled the maternal anxiety of a widowed parent for an only child. Mr. Wilberforce was particularly happy in conversation; his memory was richly stored with classical allusions; a natural poetry of mind constantly displayed itself; a melodious cadence marked every thought and every expression of the thought. He was seldom impassioned; not often energetic; but his tones were mellifluous and persuasive, exactly according with the sentiment they conveyed."

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His attachment to the established church was well known, and greatly contributed to the favourable reception of his "Practical View" in the higher classes of society. Sometimes, however, he attended at dissenting places of worship; and, on one occasion, partook of the Lord's Supper with this class of religionists. A gentleman having expressed some doubt of this circumstance, and Mr. Wilberforce being asked if the report was correct, replied, in a tone which indicated surprise, "Yes, my dear; is it not the church of God?" So completely free was he from the narrowness and intolerance of the partisan.

He was eminently a man of prayer. His intercourse with God was habitual, and hence resulted the consistency of his life. "Persons of the highest distinction," says the Rev. Joseph Brown, in his funeral sermon, "were frequently at his breakfast-table, but he never made his appearance till he had concluded his own meditations, reading his bible, and prayer; always securing, as it were, to God, or rather to his own soul, I believe, the first hour of the morning. Whoever surrounded his breakfast-table, however distinguished the individuals, they were invited to join the family circle in family prayer. In reference to his own soul, I am informed, he set apart days, or a part of them, on which he had received particular mercies, for especial prayer. 'Now,' would he sometimes say to those attending him, 'I shall not want you for some time.' Those who were accustomed to his habits knew that he devoted those hours to meditation, and reading, and prayer. When a clergyman, who had been visiting, was about to leave, 'Stop,' said Mr. Wilberforce, 'I must assemble my children.' He did so. 'Now,' said he, 'before you go, you must pray with them.'

"One beautiful point of his character I must just notice: not only did he pray in his closet, and with his family; but if his domestics were ill, at their bed-side—*there* was their valued master praying with them—praying for them."

Mr. Scott also, in his funeral sermon, bears a similar testimony to the religious character Mr. Wilberforce maintained

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in his family. "The following incident," he says, "came almost within my own knowledge. A minister of state called upon him on some public business on a Sunday: he at once excused himself, saying, he would wait upon his lordship at any hour he would fix the next day, but he was then going to church! And this was after he had already attended the morning service. It was his maxim, that every man should be the priest of his own household: and this character he would never resign, though he might from time to time delegate it to others. Hence, even when he had clergymen present, of whose assistance he would at other times gladly avail himself, yet he would frequently conduct the daily religious services in person. And here we are assured, 'the fulness and richness of his expositions of scripture, and the fervour of his supplications, were such as none can forget who ever were present at them.' And then the full effect would be given to all this among the members of his household, by the tenderness and consideration which he ever shewed for them. 'If any of his domestics,' said one frequently resident under his roof, and on the most familiar terms, 'If any of his domestics shew a ruffled temper, or fall into misconduct, the case is met rather with pity than with resentment, and anxiety is shewn to restore the offender, like a sick member, in the spirit of meekness.' This was the rule of his family. Though much conversant with the world, he entered into no compromise with it as to the way of spending his time, or countenancing its vain amusements. He had no leisure, and, what is the great thing to be aimed at, he had no heart, for such frivolities; but quite the contrary. Indeed, I have observed, however others may plead for such indulgences, that those who have been previously most acquainted with them, and best know their effects, on becoming decidedly religious, most strictly renounce them, and protest most strongly against them. Finally, the spirituality of his mind under the press of public business, and amid the succession of persons who crowded upon him, was truly surprising. He seemed always ready for devotional exercises, and for religious

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conversation, in which *the heart* evidently bore as large a share as the understanding. And at church he ever appeared to be one of the most devout and fervent of worshippers."

His devotional engagements gave energy to his public life. He came forth from his closet strengthened with might in his inner man, and was thereby enabled to achieve what would have overwhelmed many other minds. It was his own conviction, that he never could have sustained the labour and stretch of intellect required in his early political life, if it had not been for the rest of his sabbath; and, that he could name several of his contemporaries who had experienced a premature death, or fallen into the more dreadful catastrophe of insanity and suicide, in consequence of its neglect.

Such was the man whom princes, nobles, and senators have delighted to honour. His memory will long be embalmed in the grateful recollection of his species, and the value of the services he has rendered to the cause of humanity will be seen in the future freedom, intelligence, and virtue of the black population.

INTRODUCTION.

IT has been, for several years, the earnest wish of the writer of the following pages to address his countrymen on the important subject of Religion ; but the various duties of his public station, and a constitution incapable of much labour, have obstructed the execution of his purpose. Long has he been looking forward to some vacant season, in which he might devote his whole time and attention to this interesting service, free from the interruption of all other concerns ; and he has rather wished for this opportunity of undistracted reflection, from a desire that what he might send into the world might thus be rendered less undeserving of the public eye. Meanwhile life is wearing away, and he daily becomes more and more convinced that he might wait in vain for this season of complete vacancy. He must be content, therefore, to improve such occasional intervals of leisure as may occur to him in the course of an active and busy life, and to throw himself on the reader's indulgence for the pardon of such imperfections, as the opportunity of undiverted attention and maturer reflections might have enabled him to discover and correct.

But the plea here suggested is by no means intended as an excuse for the opinions which he shall express, if they be found mistaken. Here, if he be in an error, he freely acknowledges it to be a deliberate error. He would indeed account himself unpardonable were he to obtrude upon the public his first crude thoughts on a subject of such vast importance; and he can truly declare, that what he shall offer is the result of close observation, serious inquiry, much reading, and long and repeated consideration.

It is not improbable that he may be accused of deviating from his proper line, and of impertinently interfering in the concerns of a profession to which he does not belong. If it were necessary, however, to defend himself against this charge, he might shelter himself under the authority of many most respectable examples. But to such an accusation surely it may be sufficient to reply, that it is the duty of every man to promote the happiness of his fellow-creatures to the utmost of his power; and that he who thinks he sees many around him, whom he esteems and loves, labouring under a fatal error, must have a cold heart, or a most confined notion of benevolence, if he could withhold his endeavours to set them right, from an apprehension of incurring the imputation of officiousness.

But he might also allege, as a full justification, not only that Religion is the business of every one, but that its advancement or decline in any country

is so intimately connected with the temporal interests of society, as to render it the peculiar concern of a political man; and that what he may presume to offer on the subject of Religion may, perhaps, be perused with less jealousy and more candour, from the very circumstance of its having been written by a layman, which must at least exclude the idea (an idea sometimes illiberally suggested, to take off the effect of the works of ecclesiastics) that it is prompted by motives of self-interest, or of professional prejudice.

But if the writer's apology should not be found in the work itself, and in his avowed motive for undertaking it; in vain would he endeavour to satisfy his readers by any excuses which he might allege: he will therefore proceed, without further preamble, to lay before them a general statement of his design.

The main object which he has in view is, not to convince the sceptic, or to answer the arguments of persons who avowedly oppose the fundamental doctrines of our Religion; but to point out the scanty and erroneous system of the bulk of those who belong to the class of orthodox Christians, and to contrast their defective scheme with a representation of what the author apprehends to be real Christianity. Often has it filled him with deep concern, to observe—in this description of persons, scarcely any distinct knowledge of the real nature and principles of the Religion which they profess.

The subject is of infinite importance ; let it not be driven out of our minds by the bustle or dissipations of life. This present scene, with all its cares and all its gaieties, will soon be rolled away, and "we must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." This awful consideration will prompt the writer to express himself with greater freedom than he should otherwise be disposed to use. And he trusts that this consideration, while it justifies its frankness, will secure to him a serious and patient perusal.

But it would be trespassing on the indulgence of the reader to detain him with introductory remarks. Let it only be further premised, that if what shall be stated should to any appear needlessly austere and rigid, the writer must lay in his claim not to be condemned, without a fair inquiry whether his statements do or do not accord with the language of the sacred writings. To that test he refers with confidence. And it must be conceded by those who admit the authority of Scripture, that from the decision of the word of God there can be no appeal.

PRACTICAL VIEW,

&c.

CHAPTER I.

INADEQUATE CONCEPTIONS OF THE IMPORTANCE OF CHRISTIANITY.

Popular notions.—Scripture account.—Ignorance in this case criminal
—Two false maxims exposed.

BEFORE we proceed to the consideration of any particular defects in the religious system of the bulk of professed Christians, it may be proper to point out the very inadequate conception which they entertain of the importance of Christianity in general, of its peculiar nature, and superior excellence. If we listen to their conversation, virtue is praised, and vice is censured; piety is perhaps applauded, and profaneness condemned. So far all is well. But let any one, who would not be deceived by these “barren generalities,” examine a little more closely, and he will find, that not to Christianity in particular, but at best to religion in general, perhaps to mere morality, their homage is intended to be paid. With Christianity, as distinct from these, they are little acquainted; their

views of it have been so cursory and superficial, that, far from discerning its peculiar characteristics, they have little more than perceived those exterior circumstances which distinguish it from other forms of religion. There are some few facts, and perhaps some leading doctrines and principles, of which they cannot be wholly ignorant; but of the consequences, and relations, and practical uses of these, they have few ideas, or none at all.

Does this language seem too strong? View their plan of life, and their ordinary conduct; and let us ask, wherein can we discern the points of discrimination between them and professed unbelievers? In an age wherein it is confessed and lamented that infidelity abounds, do we observe in them any remarkable care to instruct their children in the principles of the faith which they profess, and to furnish them with arguments for the defence of it? They would blush, on their child's coming out into the world, to think him defective in any branch of that knowledge, or of those accomplishments, which belong to his station in life; and accordingly these are cultivated with becoming assiduity. But he is left to collect his religion as he may: the study of Christianity has formed no part of his education; and his attachment to it (where any attachment to it exists at all) is, too often, not the preference of sober reason and conviction, but merely the result of early and groundless prepossession. He was born in a Christian country; of course, he is a Christian: his father was a member of the Church of England; so is he. When such is the religion handed down among us by hereditary succession, it cannot surprise us to observe young men of sense and spirit beginning

to doubt altogether of the truth of the system in which they have been brought up, and ready to abandon a station which they are unable to defend. Knowing Christianity chiefly in the difficulties which it contains, and in the impossibilities which are falsely imputed to it, they fall perhaps into the company of infidels; where they are shaken by frivolous objections and profane cavils, which, had their religious persuasion been grounded in reason and argument, would have passed by them "as the idle wind."

Let us beware, before it be too late. No one can say into what discredit Christianity may hereby grow, at a time when the unrestrained intercourse, subsisting among the several ranks and classes of society, so much favours the general diffusion of the sentiments of the higher orders. To a similar ignorance may perhaps be ascribed, in no small degree, the success with which, in a neighbouring country, Christianity has of late years been attacked. Had she not been wholly unarmed for the contest, however she might have been forced from her untenable posts, and compelled to disembarass herself from her load of incumbrances, she never could have been driven altogether out of the field by her puny assailants, with all their cavils, and gibes, and sarcasms; for in these consisted the main strength of their petty artillery. Let us beware, lest we also suffer from a like cause; nor let it be our crime and our reproach, that in schools, perhaps even in colleges, Christianity is almost, if not altogether, neglected.

It cannot be expected, that they who are so little attentive to this great object in the education of their children, should be more so in other parts

of their conduct, where less strongly stimulated by affection, and less obviously loaded with responsibility. They are of course, therefore, little regardful of the state of Christianity in their own country, and still more indifferent about communicating the light of divine truth to the nations which still "sit in darkness."

But religion, it may be replied, is not noisy and ostentatious; it is modest and private in its nature; it resides in a man's own bosom, and shuns the observation of the multitude. Be it so.

From the transient and distant view, then, which we have been taking of these unassuming Christians, let us approach a little nearer, and listen to the unreserved conversation of their confidential hours. Here, if any where, the interior of the heart is laid open, and we may ascertain the true principles of their regards and aversions; the scale by which they measure the good and evil of life. Here, however, you will discover few or no traces of Christianity. She scarcely finds herself a place amidst the many objects of their hopes, and fears, and joys, and sorrows. Grateful, perhaps, (as well indeed they may be grateful,) for health, and talents, and affluence, and other temporal possessions, they scarcely reckon in the number of their blessings this grand distinguishing mark of the bounty of Providence. Or if they mention it at all, it is noticed coldly and formally, like one of those obsolete claims, to which, though but of small account in the estimate of our wealth or power, we think it as well to put in our title, from considerations of family decorum or of national usage.

But what more than all the rest establishes the

point in question—Let their conversation take a graver turn : here at length their religion, modest and retired as it is, must be expected to disclose itself ; here, however, you will look in vain for the religion of Jesus. Their standard of right and wrong is not the standard of the gospel ; they approve and condemn by a different rule : they advance principles, and maintain opinions, altogether opposite to the genius and character of Christianity. You would fancy yourself rather among the followers of the old schools of philosophy : nor is it easy to guess how any one could satisfy himself to the contrary, unless, by mentioning the name of some acknowledged heretic, he should afford them an occasion of demonstrating their zeal for the religion of their country.

The truth is, their opinions on the subject of religion are not formed from the perusal of the word of God. The bible lies on the shelf unopened ; and they would be wholly ignorant of its contents, except for what they hear occasionally at church, or for the faint traces which their memories may still retain of the lessons of their earliest infancy.

How different, nay, in many respects, how contradictory, would be the two systems of mere morals, of which the one should be formed from the commonly received maxims of the Christian world, and the other from the study of the holy scriptures ! It would be curious to remark in any one, who had hitherto satisfied himself with the former, the astonishment which would be excited on his first introduction to the latter. We are not left here to bare conjecture. This was, in fact, the effect produced on the mind of a late ingenious

writer,* of whose little work, though it bears some marks of his customary love of paradox, we must at least confess that it exposes, in a strong point of view, the *poverty* of that superficial religion which prevails in our day; and that it throughout displays that happy perspicuity and grace which so eminently characterizes the compositions of its author. But after this willing tribute of commendation, we are reluctantly compelled to remark, that the work in question discredits the cause which it was meant to serve, by many crude and extravagant positions; a defect from which no one can be secure who forms a hasty judgment of a deep and comprehensive subject, the several relations of which have been imperfectly surveyed; and, above all, it must be lamented that it treats the great question which it professes to discuss, rather as a matter of mere speculation, than as one wherein our everlasting interests are involved. Surely, the writer's object should have been to convince his readers of their guilt still more than of their ignorance, and to leave them impressed rather with a sense of their danger than of their folly.

It were needless to multiply arguments in order to prove how criminal the voluntary ignorance, of which we have been speaking, must appear in the sight of God. It must be confessed by all who believe that we are accountable creatures, and to such only the writer is addressing himself, that we shall have to answer hereafter to the Almighty for all the means we have here enjoyed of improving ourselves, or of promoting the happiness of others. If, when summoned to give an

* It is almost superfluous to name Mr. Soame Jenyns.

account of our stewardship, we shall be called upon to answer for the use which we have made of our bodily organs, and of our means of relieving the wants of our fellow-creatures; how much more for the exercise of the nobler faculties of our nature, of invention, memory, judgment, and opportunity for our employment of every instrument of diligent application, and serious reflection, and honest decision. And to what subject might we in all reason be expected to apply more earnestly, than to that wherein our own eternal interests are at issue? When God of his goodness hath vouchsafed to grant us such abundant means of instruction in that which we are most concerned to know, how great must be the guilt, and how awful the punishment, of voluntary ignorance!

And why are we in this pursuit alone to expect knowledge without inquiry, and success without endeavour? The whole analogy of nature inculcates a different lesson, and our own judgments in matters of temporal interest and worldly policy confirm the truth of her suggestions. Bountiful as is the hand of Providence, its gifts are not so bestowed as to seduce us into indolence, but to rouse us to exertion; and no one expects to attain to the height of learning, or arts, or power, or wealth, or military glory, without vigorous resolution, and strenuous diligence, and steady perseverance. Yet we expect to be Christians without labour, study, or inquiry. This is the more preposterous, because Christianity, being a revelation from God, and not the invention of man, discovering to us new relations, with their correspondent duties; containing also doctrines, motives, and precepts peculiar to itself; we cannot rea-

sonably expect to become proficient in it by the accidental intercourses of life, as one might learn insensibly the maxims of worldly policy, or a scheme of mere morals.

Scripture
account.

The diligent perusal of the holy scriptures would discover to us our past ignorance. We should cease to be deceived by superficial appearances, and to confound the gospel of Christ with the systems of philosophers; we should become impressed with the weighty truth, so much forgotten in the present day, that Christianity calls on us, as we value our immortal souls, not merely, in *general*, to be *religious* and *moral*, but *specially* to believe the doctrines, imbibe the principles, and practise the precepts of Christ. It might be to run into too great length to confirm this position beyond dispute by express quotations from the word of God. And (not to anticipate what belongs more properly to a subsequent part of the work) it may be sufficient here to remark in general, that Christianity is always represented in scripture as the grand, the unparalleled instance of God's bounty to mankind. This unspeakable gift was graciously held forth in the original promise to our first parents; it was predicted by a long-continued series of prophets; the subject of their prayers, inquiries, and longing expectations. In a world which opposed and persecuted them, it was their source of peace, and hope, and consolation. At length it approached—the desire of all nations—the long-expected star announced its presence—a multitude of the heavenly host hailed its introduction, and proclaimed its character; “Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good-will towards men.” The gospel

is every where represented in scripture by such figures as are most strongly calculated to impress on our minds a sense of its value ; it is spoken of as light from darkness, as release from prison, as deliverance from captivity, as life from death. " Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation," was the exclamation with which it was welcomed by the pious Simeon ; and it was universally received among the early converts with thankfulness and joy. At one time, the communication of it is promised as a reward ; at another, the loss of it is threatened as a punishment. And, short as is the form of prayer taught us by our blessed Saviour, the more general extension of the kingdom of Christ constitutes one of its leading petitions.

With what exalted conceptions of the importance of Christianity ought we to be filled by such descriptions as these ? Yet, in vain have we " line upon line, and precept upon precept."— Thus predicted, thus prayed and longed for, thus announced, characterized, and rejoiced in, this heavenly treasure, poured into our lap in rich abundance, we scarce accept. We turn from it coldly, or at best possess it negligently, as a thing of no estimation. But a due sense of its value would assuredly be impressed upon us by the diligent study of the word of God, that blessed repository of heavenly truth and consolation. Thence it is that we are to learn what we ought to believe and what to practise. And, surely, one would think that much importunity would not be requisite to induce men to a perusal of the sacred volume. Reason dictates, revelation com-

mands, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." "Search the scriptures," "Be ready to give to every one a reason of the hope that is in you." Such are the declarations and injunctions of the inspired writers; injunctions confirmed by commendations of those who obey the admonition. Yet, is it not undeniable that, with the bible in our houses, we are ignorant of its contents; and that hence, in a great measure, it arises, that the bulk of the Christian world know so little, and mistake so greatly in what regards the religion which they profess?

This is not the place for inquiring at large, whence it is that those who assent to the position, that the bible is the word of God, and who profess to rest their hopes on the Christian basis, contentedly acquiesce in a state of such lamentable ignorance. But it may not be improper here to touch on two kindred opinions; from which, in the minds of the more thoughtful and serious, this acquiescence appears to derive much secret support. The one is, that *it signifies little what a man believes; look to his practice.* The other (of the same family) *that sincerity is all in all.* Let a man's opinions and conduct be what they may, yet, provided he be sincerely convinced that they are right, however the exigencies of civil society may require him to be dealt with among men, in the sight of God he cannot be criminal.

It would detain us too long fully to set forth the various merits of these favourite positions, of which it is surely not the smallest excellence, that they are of unbounded application, comprehending within their capacious limits all the errors which

Two false
maxims
exposed.

have been believed, and many of the most desperate crimes which have been perpetrated among men. Of the former of these maxims, we may remark, that it proceeds on the monstrous supposition, already noticed, that although accountable creatures, we shall not be called to account for the exercise of our intellectual and mental powers. Moreover, it is founded on that grossly fallacious assumption, that a man's opinions will not influence his practice. The advocates of this fashionable principle require to be reminded, that the judgment often receives a corrupt bias from the heart and the affections; that vice is the fruitful mother of prejudice and error. Forgetful of these acknowledged truths, and confounding the most important moral distinctions, they place on the same level those who, carefully weeding from their hearts every false principle, occupy themselves in a sincere and warm pursuit of truth, and those who yield themselves implicitly to the opinions, whatever they may be, which early prepossession may have infused, or which passion or interest, or even acquiescing indolence, may have imposed upon their minds.

The latter of the foregoing maxims, that sincerity is all in all, proceeds on this groundless supposition, that the Supreme Being has not afforded us sufficient means of discriminating truth from falsehood, right from wrong: and it implies, that, be a man's opinions or conduct ever so wild and extravagant, we are to presume that they are as much the result of impartial inquiry and honest conviction, as if his sentiments and actions had been strictly conformable to the rules of reason and sobriety. Never, indeed, was there a principle

more general in its use, more sovereign in its potency. How does its beautiful simplicity, also, and compendious brevity, give it rank before the laborious subtleties of Bellarmin! Clement and Ravailac, and other worthies of a similar stamp, from whose purity of intention the world has hitherto withheld its due tribute of applause, would here have found a ready plea; and their injured innocence shall now at length receive its full though tardy vindication. "These, however," it may be replied, "are excepted cases." Certainly, they are cases of which, because they clearly expose the unsoundness of his principle, any one who maintains the opinion in question would be glad to disencumber himself. But it will be incumbent on such an one first to explain with precision why they are to be exempted from its operation, and this he will find an impossible task; for *sincerity*, in its popular sense, cannot be made the criterion of guilt and innocence on any ground which will not equally serve to justify the assassins who have been instanced. The conclusion cannot be eluded; no man was ever more fully persuaded of the innocence of any action, than those men were convinced that the horrid deed they were about to perpetrate was not merely lawful, but highly meritorious. Thus Clement and Ravailac being unquestionably sincere, they were therefore indubitably innocent. Nay, the absurd and pernicious tendency of this principle might be shewn to be even greater than what has yet been stated. It would scarcely be going too far to assert, that whilst it scorns the defence of petty villains, of those who still retain the sense of good and evil, it holds forth, like some well-frequented sanctuary,

a secure asylum to those more finished criminals, who, from long habits of wickedness, are lost alike to the perception as to the practice of virtue; and that it selects a seared conscience, and a heart become callous to all moral distinctions, as the special objects of its care. Nor is it only in profane history, that instances are to be found like those which we have mentioned, of persons committing the greatest crimes with a sincere conviction of the rectitude of their conduct. Scripture will afford us parallels; and it was surely to guard us against the very error which we have been now exposing, that our blessed Saviour forewarned his disciples, "The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."

A principle like this must then be abandoned, and the advocates for sincerity must be compelled to restore this abused term to its genuine signification, and to acknowledge that it must imply honesty of mind, a faithful use of the means of knowledge and improvement, a desire of being instructed, humble inquiry, impartial consideration, and unprejudiced judgment. It is to these we would earnestly call you; and to such dispositions of mind, ever to be accompanied with fervent prayer for the Divine blessing, scripture every where holds forth the most animating promises. "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters:" such are the comfortable assurances, such the gracious encouragements to the truly sincere inquirer. How deep will be our guilt, if we slight all these benevolent offers! "How many prophets and kings have desired to

hear the things that we hear, and have not heard them!" Great, indeed, are our opportunities; great also is our responsibility. Let us awaken to a true sense of our situation. Every consideration is presented to us, that can alarm our fears, or animate our industry. How soon may the brightness of our meridian sun be darkened! Or, should the long-suffering of God still continue to us the mercies which we so much abuse, this will only aggravate our crime, and in the end enhance our punishment. The time of reckoning will at length arrive. And when finally summoned to the bar of God, to give an account of our stewardship, what plea can we have to urge in our defence, if we remain willingly and obstinately ignorant of the way which leads to life, with such transcendent means of knowing it, and such urgent motives to its pursuit?

CHAPTER II.

CORRUPTION OF HUMAN NATURE.

SECT. I.

Inadequate conceptions of the corruption of human nature.

AFTER considering the defective notions Popular notions. of the importance of Christianity *in general*, which prevail among the higher orders of professed Christians, the particular misconceptions which first come under our notice, respect the corruption and weakness of human nature. This is a topic on which it is possible that many, into whose hands the present work shall fall, may not have bestowed much attention. If the case be so, it may be requisite to intreat them to lend a patient and a serious ear. The subject is of the deepest import. Nor are we afraid of going too far, when we assert, that it lies at the very root of all true religion, and is eminently the basis and groundwork of Christianity.

So far as the writer has had an opportunity of remarking, the generality of professed Christians among the higher classes, either altogether overlook or deny, or at least greatly extenuate, the corruption and weakness here in question. They acknowledge, indeed, that there is, and ever has been in the world, a great portion of vice and

wickedness; that mankind have been ever prone to sensuality and selfishness, in disobedience to the more refined and liberal principles of their nature; that in all ages and countries, in public and in private life, innumerable instances have been afforded of oppression, of rapacity, of cruelty, of fraud, of envy, and of malice. They own that it is too often in vain that you inform the understanding, and convince the judgment. They admit that you do not thereby reform the hearts of men. Though they *know* their duty, they will not practise it; no, not even when you have forced them to acknowledge that the path of virtue is also that of real interest, and of solid enjoyment.

These facts are certain; they cannot be disputed; and they are, at the same time, so obvious, that one would have thought the celebrated apophthegm of the Grecian sage, "the majority are wicked," would scarcely have established his claim to intellectual superiority.

But, though these effects of human depravity are every where acknowledged and lamented, we must not expect to find them traced to their true origin:

Causa latet, vis est notissima.

Prepare yourself to hear rather of frailty and infirmity, of petty transgressions, of occasional failings, of sudden surprisals, and of such other qualifying terms as may serve to keep out of view the true source of the evil, and, without shocking the understanding, may administer consolation to the pride of human nature. The bulk of professed Christians are used to speak of man as of a being, who, naturally pure, and inclined to all virtue, is sometimes, almost involuntarily, drawn out of the

right course, or is overpowered by the violence of temptation. Vice with them is rather an accidental and temporary, than a constitutional and habitual distemper; a noxious plant, which, though found to live, and even to thrive, in the human mind, is not the natural growth and production of the soil.

Far different is the humiliating language of Christianity. From it we learn that man is an apostate creature, fallen from his high original, degraded in his nature, and depraved in his faculties; indisposed to good, and disposed to evil; prone to vice, it is natural and easy to him; disinclined to virtue, it is difficult and laborious; that he is tainted with sin, not slightly and superficially, but radically and to the very core. These are truths which, however mortifying to our pride, one would think (if this very corruption itself did not warp the judgment) none would be hardy enough to attempt to controvert. I know nothing which brings them home so forcibly to my own feelings, as the consideration of what still remains to us of our primitive dignity, when contrasted with our present state of moral degradation,

True account
proved from
reason and
scripture.

“Into what depth thou seest,
From what height fallen.”

Examine first with attention the natural powers and faculties of man; invention, reason, judgment, memory: a mind “of large discourse,” “looking before and after,” reviewing the past, thence determining for the present, and anticipating the future; discerning, collecting, combining, comparing; capable, not merely of appre-

hending, but of admiring the beauty of moral excellence: with fear and hope, to warn and animate; with joy and sorrow, to solace and soften; with love to attach, with sympathy to harmonize, with courage to attempt, with patience to endure, and with the power of conscience, that faithful monitor within the breast, to enforce the conclusions of reason, and direct and regulate the passions of the soul. Truly, we must pronounce him "majestic though in ruin." "Happy, happy world!" would be the exclamation of the inhabitant of some other planet, on being told of a globe like ours, peopled with such creatures as these, and abounding with situations and occasions to call forth the multiplied excellencies of their nature. "Happy, happy world! with what delight must your great Creator and Governor witness your conduct, and what a glorious recompense awaits you, when your term of probation shall have expired."

"I, bone, quo virtus tua te vocat, i pede fausto,
Grandia laturus meritorum premia."

But we have indulged too long in these delightful speculations; a sad reverse presents itself, on our survey of the *actual* state of man, when, from viewing his *natural* powers, we follow him into *practice*, and see the uses to which he applies them. Take in the whole of the prospect, view him in every age, and climate, and nation, in every condition and period of society. Where now do you discover the characters of his exalted nature? "How is the gold become dim, and the fine gold changed!" How is his reason clouded, his affections perverted, his conscience stupified! How do anger, and envy, and hatred, and re-

venge, spring up in his wretched bosom! How is he a slave to the meanest of his appetites! What fatal propensities does he discover to evil! What inaptitude to good!

Dwell awhile on the state of the ancient world; not merely on that benighted part of it where all lay buried in brutish ignorance and barbarism, but on the seats of civilized and polished nations, on the empire of taste, and learning, and philosophy: yet in these chosen regions, with whatever lustre the sun of science poured forth its ray, the moral darkness was so thick "that it might be felt." Behold their sottish idolatries, their absurd superstitions, their want of natural affection, their brutal excesses, their unfeeling oppression, their savage cruelty! Look not to the illiterate and the vulgar, but to the learned and refined. Form not your ideas from the conduct of the less restrained and more licentious; you will turn away with disgust and shame from the allowed and familiar habits of the decent and the moral. St. Paul best states the facts, and furnishes the explanation; "because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, he gave them over to a reprobate mind."*

Now direct your view to another quarter, to the inhabitants of a new hemisphere, where the bane-

* *Exempla duo, quæ pravitatis humanæ vim animo meo luculenter exhibent, non proferre non possum. Alterum decens ille Virgilius, alterum Cicero, probus idem verique studiosus, suppeditat. Virgilius, innocuam certe pastorum vitam depicturus, ita incipit.*

"Formosum pastor Corydon ardebat Alexim."

Cicero in libro de officiis primo, ubi de actionibus prout inter se apte et convenientes sint, loci temporis et agentis ratione habita, disserit, argumentum sic illustrat: "Turpe est enim, valdeque vitiosum, in re severa, convivio dignum, aut delicatum aliquem inferre sermonem. Bene Pericles, quum haberet collegam in prætura Sophoclem poetam, hique de communi officio convenissent, et casu formosus puer præ-

ful practices and contagious example of the old world had never travelled. Surely, among these children of nature we may expect to find those virtuous tendencies, for which we have hitherto looked in vain! Alas! our search will still be fruitless! They are represented by the historian of America (whose account is more favourable than those of some other great authorities) as being a compound of pride, indolence, selfishness, cunning, and cruelty;* full of a revenge which nothing could satiate, of a ferocity which nothing could soften; strangers to the most amiable sensibilities of nature.† They appeared incapable of conjugal affection, or parental fondness, or filial reverence, or social attachments; uniting, too, with their state of barbarism, many of the vices and weaknesses of polished society. Their horrid treatment of captives taken in war, on whose bodies they feasted, after putting them to death by the most cruel tortures, is so well known, that we may spare the disgusting recital. No commendable qualities relieve this gloomy picture, except fortitude, and perseverance, and zeal for the welfare of their little community; if this last quality, exercised and directed as it was, can be thought deserving of commendation.

But you give up the heathen nations as inde-

teriret, dixissetque Sophocles, O puerum pulchrum Pericle! At enim, inquit Pericles, prætorem Sophoclem decet non solum manus, sed etiam oculos abstinentes habere. Atqui hoc idem Sophocles, si in athletarum probatione dixisset, *justa reprehensione caruisset, tanta vis est, et loci et temporis.*"

Quomodo sese res habuisse necesse est, cum vir antiquorum prestantissimis adscribendus, philosophiam, immo mores et officia tractans, talia doceret! Qualem sibi ipse virtutis normam proposuerat, satis liquet. Vide inter alia, *justa reprehensione, &c. et tanta vis est, &c. &c.*

* Robertson, vol. ii. p. 130.

† Ibid. book iv. sect. 2. Head, Condition of Women, vol. ii. 8vo. 90, 91.

fensible, and wish rather to form your estimate of man from a view of countries which have been blessed with the light of revelation. True it is, and with joy let us record the concession, Christianity has set the general tone of morals much higher than it was ever found in the pagan world. She has every where improved the character of man, and multiplied the comforts of society, particularly to the poor and the weak, who from the beginning she professed to take under her special patronage. Like her divine Author, "who sends his rain on the evil and on the good," she showers down unnumbered blessings on thousands who profit from her bounty, while they forget or deny her power, and set at nought her authority. Yet even in this more favoured situation we shall discover too many lamentable proofs of the depravity of man. Nay, this depravity will now become even more apparent and less excusable. For what bars does it not now overleap? Over what motives is it not now victorious? Consider well the superior light and advantages which we enjoy, and then appreciate the superior obligations which are imposed on us. Consider in how many cases our evil propensities are now kept from breaking forth, by the superior restraints under which vice is laid among us by positive laws, and by the amended standard of public opinion; and we may be assisted in conjecturing what force is to be assigned to these motives by the dreadful proofs which have been lately exhibited in a neighbouring country, that, when their influence is withdrawn, the most atrocious crimes can be perpetrated shamelessly and in the face of day. Consider then the superior excellence of our moral code, the new principles

of obedience furnished by the gospel, and, above all, the awful sanction which the doctrines and precepts of Christianity derive from the clear discovery of a future state of retribution, and from the annunciation of that tremendous day "when we shall stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." Yet, in spite of all our knowledge, thus enforced and pressed home by so solemn a notice, how little has been our progress in virtue! It has been by no means such as to prevent the adoption, in our days, of various maxims of antiquity, which, when well considered, too clearly establish the depravity of man. It may not be amiss to adduce a few instances in proof of this assertion. It is now no less acknowledged than heretofore, that prosperity hardens the heart; that unlimited power is ever abused, instead of being rendered the instrument of diffusing happiness; that habits of vice grow up of themselves, whilst those of virtue are of slow and difficult formation; that they who draw the finest pictures of virtue, and seem most enamoured of her charms, are often the least under her influence, and by the merest trifles are drawn aside from that line of conduct which they most seriously recommend to others; that all this takes place, though most of the pleasures of vice are to be found with less alloy in the paths of virtue; whilst, at the same time, these paths afford superior and more exquisite delights, peculiar to themselves, and are free from the diseases and bitter remorse, at the price of which vicious gratifications are so often purchased.

It may suffice to touch very slightly on some other arguments, which it would hardly be right to leave altogether unnoticed: one of these (the

justice of which, however denied by superficial moralists, parents of strict principles can abundantly testify) may be drawn from the perverse and froward dispositions perceivable in children, the correction of which too often baffles the most strenuous efforts of the wise and good. Another may be drawn from the various deceits we are apt to practise on ourselves, to which no one can be a stranger, who has ever contemplated the operations of his own mind with serious attention. To the influence of this species of corruption it has been in a great degree owing, that Christianity itself has been too often disgraced. The gospel of peace has been turned into an engine of cruelty, and, amidst the bitterness of persecution, every trace has disappeared of the mild and beneficent spirit of the religion of Jesus. In what degree must the taint have worked itself into the frame, and corrupted the habit, when the most wholesome nutriment can be thus converted into the deadliest poison! Wishing always to argue from such premises as are not only really sound, but from such as cannot even be questioned by those to whom this work is addressed, little was said, in representing the deplorable state of the heathen world, respecting their defective and unworthy conceptions in what regards the Supreme Being, who even then "left not himself without witness, but gave them rain and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food and gladness." But surely to any who call themselves Christians, it may be justly urged as an astonishing instance of human depravity, that we ourselves, who enjoy the full light of revelation; to whom God has vouchsafed such clear discoveries

of what we are concerned to know of his being and attributes; who profess to believe "that in him we live, and move, and have our being;" that to him we owe all the comforts we here enjoy, and the offer of eternal glory, purchased for us by the atoning blood of his own Son; ("thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!") that we, thus loaded with mercies, should be continually chargeable with forgetting his authority, and being ungrateful for his benefits; with slighting his gracious proposals, or at best receiving them with cold and unaffected hearts.

But to put the question concerning the natural depravity of man to the severest test: take the best of the human species, the watchful self-denying Christian, and let *him* decide the controversy; not by inferences drawn from the practices of a thoughtless and dissolute world, but by an appeal to his personal experience. Go with him into his closet, ask him *his* opinion of the corruption of the heart, and he will tell you that he is deeply sensible of its power, for that he has learned it from much self-observation, and long acquaintance with the workings of his own mind. He will tell you, that every day strengthens this conviction; yea, that hourly he sees fresh reason to deplore his want of simplicity in intention, his infirmity of purpose, his low views, his selfish unworthy desires, his backwardness to set about his duty, his languor and coldness in performing it: that he finds himself obliged continually to confess, that he feels within him two opposite principles, and that "he cannot do the things that he would." He cries out in the language of the excellent Hooker, "The little fruit which we have in holi-

ness, it is, God knoweth, corrupt and unsound : we put no confidence at all in it, we challenge nothing in the world for it, we dare not call God to reckoning, as if we had him in our debt-books ; our continual suit to him is, and must be, to bear with our infirmities, and pardon our offences.”

Such is the moral history, such the condition of man. The figures of the piece may vary, and the colouring may sometimes be of a darker, sometimes of a lighter hue ; but the principles of the composition, the grand outlines, are every where the same. Wherever we direct our view, we discover the melancholy proofs of our depravity ; whether we look to ancient or modern times, to barbarous or civilized nations, to the conduct of the world around us, or to the monitor within the breast ; whether we read, or hear, or act, or think, or feel, the same humiliating lesson is forced upon us,

Juppiter est quodcunque vides, quocunque moveris.

Now, when we look back to the picture which was formerly drawn of the *natural powers* of man, and compare this his *actual* state with that for which, from a consideration of those powers, he seems to have been originally designed, how are we to account for the astonishing contrast ! will frailty, or infirmity, or occasional lapses, or sudden surprisals, or any such qualifying terms, convey an adequate idea of the nature of the distemper, or point out its cause ? How, on any principles of common reasoning, can we account for it, but by conceiving that man, since he came out of the hands of his Creator, has contracted a taint, and that the venom of this subtle poison has

been communicated throughout the race of Adam, every where exhibiting incontestable marks of its fatal malignity? Hence it has arisen, that the appetites deriving new strength, and the powers of reason and conscience being weakened, the latter have feebly and impotently pleaded against those forbidden indulgences which the former have solicited. Sensual gratifications and illicit affections have debased our nobler powers, and indisposed our hearts to the discovery of God, and to the consideration of his perfections; to a constant willing submission to his authority, and obedience to his laws. By a repetition of vicious acts, evil habits have been formed within us, and have riveted the fetters of sin. Left to the consequences of our own folly, the understanding has grown darker, and the heart more obdurate; reason has at length betrayed her trust, and even conscience herself has aided the delusion, till, instead of deploring our miserable condition, we have too often hugged our chains, and even gloried in our ignominious bondage.

Such is the general account of the progress of vice, where it is suffered to attain to its full growth in the human heart. The circumstances of individuals indeed will be found to differ; the servitude of some, to continue a figure so exactly descriptive of the case, is more rigorous than that of others, their bonds more galling, their degradation more complete. Some, too, have for a while appeared almost to have escaped from their confinement, but none are altogether free; all, without exception, in a greater or less degree, bear about them, more visible or more concealed, the disgraceful marks of their captivity.

Such, on a full and fair investigation, must be confessed to be the state of facts; and how can this be accounted for on any other supposition, than that of some original taint, some radical principle of corruption? All other solutions are unsatisfactory, whilst the potent cause which has been assigned does abundantly, and can alone sufficiently, account for the effect. It appears, then, that the corruption of human nature is proved by the same mode of reasoning as that which hath been deemed conclusive in establishing the existence of the principle of gravitation and ascertaining its laws; that the doctrine rests on that solid basis on which Newton hath raised the superstructure of his sublime philosophy; that it is not a mere speculation, an uncertain though perhaps an ingenious theory, but the sure result of large and actual experiment; deduced from incontestable facts, and still more fully approving its truth by harmonizing with the several parts, and accounting for the various phenomena, jarring otherwise and inexplicable, of the great system of the universe.

Here, however, revelation interposes, and sustains the fallible conjectures of our unassisted reason. The holy scriptures speak of us as fallen creatures; in almost every page we shall find something that is calculated to abate the loftiness and silence the pretensions of man. "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." "What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?"* "How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water?" †

* Job xv. 14.

† Ibid. 16.

“The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside; they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”* “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?”† “The *heart* is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can know it?” “Behold, I was shapen in wickedness, and in sin hath my mother conceived me.” “We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.” “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death!” Passages might be multiplied upon passages, which speak the same language, and these again might be illustrated and confirmed by various other considerations, drawn from the same sacred source; such as those which represent a thorough change, a renovation of our nature, as being necessary to our becoming true Christians; or which are suggested by observing that holy men refer their good dispositions and affections to the immediate agency of the Supreme Being.

SECTION II.

Evil spirit.—Natural state of man.

Evil spirit. **BUT** the word of God instructs us that we have to contend not only with our own natural depravity, but with the power of darkness, the evil spirit, who rules in the hearts of

* Psalm xiv. 2, 3.

† Prov. xx. 9.

the wicked, and whose dominion we learn from scripture to be so general, as to entitle him to the denomination of "the prince of this world." There cannot be a stronger proof of the difference which exists between the religious system of the scriptures, and that of the bulk of nominal Christians, than the proof which is afforded by the subject now in question. The existence and agency of the evil spirit, though so distinctly and repeatedly affirmed in scripture, are almost universally exploded, in a country which professes to admit the authority of the sacred volume. Some other doctrines of revelation, the force and meaning of which are commonly in a great degree explained away, are yet conceded in general terms; but this seems almost on the point of being universally abandoned, as a post no longer tenable. It is regarded as an evanescent prejudice, which it would now be a discredit to any man of understanding to believe. Like ghosts and witches, and other phantoms, which haunted the night of superstition, it cannot in these more enlightened times stand the test of our severe scrutiny. To be suffered to pass away quietly, is as much as it can hope for; and it might rather expect to be laughed off the stage, as a just object of contempt and derision.

But although the scripture doctrine concerning the evil spirit is thus generally exploded, yet, were we to consider the matter seriously and fairly, we should probably find ground for believing that there is no better reason for its being abandoned, than that many absurd stories, concerning spirits and apparitions, have been used to be propagated amongst weak and credulous people; and that the evil spirit not being the object of our

bodily eyes, it would argue the same weakness to give credit to the doctrine of its existence and agency. But, to be consistent with ourselves, we might almost as well, on the same principle, deny the reality of all other incorporeal beings. What is there, in truth, in the doctrine, which is in itself improbable, or which is not confirmed by analogy? We see, in fact, that there are wicked men, enemies to God, and malignant towards their fellow-creatures, who take pleasure, and often succeed, in seducing others to the commission of evil. Why, then, should it be deemed incredible, that there may be spiritual intelligences of similar propensities, who may, in like manner, be permitted to tempt men to the practice of sin? Surely, we may retort upon our opponents the charge of absurdity, and justly accuse them of gross inconsistency, in admitting, without difficulty, the existence and operation of these qualities in a being like man, compounded of matter and spirit, and yet denying them in a purely spiritual being, (in direct contradiction to the authority of scripture, which they allow to be conclusive,) when they cannot pretend for a moment, that there is any thing belonging to the nature of matter, to which these qualities naturally adhere.

Natural
state of
man. But it is needless to dilate farther on a topic which, however it may excite the ridicule of the inconsiderate, will suggest matter of serious apprehension to all who form their opinions on a sincere and impartial examination of the word of God. Thus brought as we are into captivity, and exposed to danger—depraved and weakened within, and tempted from

without—it might well fill our hearts with anxiety to reflect, “that the day will come,” when “the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat;” “when the dead, small and great, shall stand before the tribunal of God,” and we shall have to give account of all things done in the body. We are naturally prompted to turn over the page of revelation with solicitude, in order to discover the attributes and character of our Judge, but these only serve to turn painful apprehension into fixed and certain terror. First, with regard to the attributes of our Judge. As all nature bears witness to his irresistible power, so we read in scripture that nothing can escape his observation, or elude his discovery; not only our actions, but our most secret cogitations are open to his view. “He is about our path and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways.”* “The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.”† “And he will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart.”

Now, hear his character, and the rule of his award: “The Lord our God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.” “He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.” “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” “The wages of sin is death.” These positive declarations are enforced by the accounts which, for our warning, we read in sacred history, of the terrible vengeance of the Almighty; his punishment of “the angels who kept not their first estate, and whom he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the

* Psalm cxxxix. 3.

† 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

great day;" the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah; the sentence issued against the idolatrous nations of Canaan, and of which the execution was assigned to the Israelites, by the express command of God, at their own peril in case of disobedience; the ruin of Babylon, of Tyre, of Nineveh, and of Jerusalem, prophetically denounced as the punishment of their crimes, and taking place in an exact and terrible accordance with the Divine predictions. Surely these examples may suffice to confound that fallacious confidence, which, presuming on the Creator's knowledge of our weakness, and his disposition to allow for it, should allege, that, instead of giving way to gloomy apprehensions, we might throw ourselves, in full assurance of hope, on the infinite benevolence of the Supreme Being. It is true, indeed, that with the threatenings of the word of God, there are mixed many gracious declarations of pardon, on repentance, and thorough amendment. But, alas! who is there among us whose conscience must not reproach him with having trifled with the long-suffering of God, and with having but ill kept the resolutions of amendment which had been formed in the seasons of recollection and remorse? And how is the disquietude, naturally excited by such a retrospect, confirmed and heightened by passages like these? "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you:

then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not chuse the fear of the Lord."* The apprehensions, which must be excited by thus reading the recorded judgments and awful language of scripture, are confirmed to the inquisitive and attentive mind by a close observation of the moral constitution of the world. In fact, all that has been suggested of the final consequences of vice, is strictly analogous to what we may observe in the ordinary course of human affairs, from a careful survey of which it will appear, that God hath established such an order of causes and effects, as (however interrupted here below, by hinderances and obstructions apparently of a temporary nature) loudly proclaim the principles of his moral government, and strongly suggest that vice and imprudence will finally terminate in misery.† Not that this species of proof was wanted; for that which we must acknowledge, on weighing the evidence, to be a revelation from God, requires not the aid of such a confirmation: but yet, as this accordance might be expected between the words and the works of the same Almighty Being, it is no idle speculation to remark, that the visible constitution of things in the world around us falls in with the scriptural representations of the dreadful consequences of vice, nay, even of what is commonly termed inconsiderateness and imprudence.

If such then be indeed our sad condition, what is to be done? Is there no hope? Nothing left for us, "but a fearful looking for of judgment,

* Prov. i. 24—29.

† Vide Butler's Analogy.

Christianity and fiery indignation, which shall de-
 breaks in. your the adversaries ?”* Blessed be
 God ! we are not shut up irrecoverably in this
 sad condition : “ Turn you to the strong hold, ye
 prisoners of hope :” hear one who proclaims his
 designation, “ to heal the broken-hearted, to
 preach liberty to the captives, and recovering of
 sight to the blind.” They who have formed a
 true notion of their lost and helpless state, will
 most gladly listen to the sound, and most justly
 estimate the value, of such a deliverance. And
 hence appears the importance of not passing over
 in a cursory manner those important topics of the
 original and superinduced corruption and weak-
 ness of man ; a discussion painful and humiliating
 to the pride of human nature, to which the mind
 listens with difficulty, nay, with a mixture of anger
 and disgust ; but well suited to our case, and, like
 the distasteful lessons of adversity, permanently
 useful in its consequences. It is here, never let
 it be forgotten, that our foundation
 must be laid ; otherwise our super-
 structure, whatever we may think of
 it, will one day prove tottering and
 insecure. This therefore is not a
 metaphysical speculation, but a practical matter.
 Slight and superficial conceptions of our state of
 natural degradation, and of our insufficiency to
 recover from it of ourselves, fall in too well with
 our natural inconsiderateness, and produce that
 fatal insensibility to the Divine warning to “ flee
 from the wrath to come,” which we cannot but
 observe to prevail so generally. Having no due
 sense of the malignity of our disease, and of its

Practical im-
 portance and
 uses of the
 doctrine of
 human cor-
 ruption.

* Heb. x. 27.

dreadful issue, we do not set ourselves to work in earnest to obtain the remedy, for let it be remembered that this deliverance is not *forced on us*, but *offered to us*; we are furnished indeed with every help, and are always to bear in mind, that we are unable of ourselves to will or to do rightly; but we are plainly admonished to “work out our own salvation with fear and trembling;” * to be watchful, “because we are encompassed with dangers;” “to put on the whole armour of God,” because “we are beset with enemies.”

May we be enabled to shake off that lethargy which is so apt to creep upon us! For this end, a deep practical conviction of our natural depravity and weakness will be found of eminent advantage. As it is by this we must at first be roused from our fallacious security, so by this we must be kept wakeful and active unto the end. Let us, therefore, make it our business to have this doctrine firmly seated in our understandings, and radically worked into our hearts. With a view to the former of these objects, we should seriously and attentively consider the firm grounds on which it rests. It is plainly made known to us by the light of nature, and irresistibly enforced on us by the dictates of our unassisted understandings. But, lest there should be any so obstinately dull as not to discern the force of the evidence suggested to our reason, and confirmed by all experience, or, rather, so heedless as not to notice it, the authoritative stamp of revelation is superadded, as we have seen, to complete the proof; and we must therefore be altogether inexcusable, if we

Practical advice respecting it, and its practical uses.

* Philippians ii. 12.

still remain unconvinced by such an accumulated mass of argument.

But it is not sufficient to *assent* to the doctrine, we must also *feel* it. To this end, let the power of habit be called in to our aid. Let us accustom ourselves to refer to our natural depravity; as to their primary cause, the sad instances of vice and folly of which we read, or which we see around us, or to which we feel the propensities in our own bosoms; ever vigilant and distrustful of ourselves, and looking with an eye of kindness and pity on the faults and infirmities of others, whom we should learn to regard with the same tender concern as that with which the sick are used to sympathize with those who are suffering under the same distemper. This lesson, once well acquired, we shall feel the benefit of it in all our future progress; and though it be a lesson which we are slow to learn, it is one in which study and experience, the incidents of every day, and every fresh observation of the workings of our own hearts, will gradually concur to perfect us. Let it not, after all, then, be our reproach, and at length our ruin, that these abundant means of instruction are possessed in vain.

SECTION III.

Corruption of human nature.—Objection.

Objection—That our corruption and weakness, being natural to us, will be excused and allowed for—stated and considered.

BUT there is one difficulty still behind, more formidable than all the rest. The pride of man is loth to be humbled. Forced to abandon the plea of innocence, and pressed

so closely that he can no longer escape from the conclusion to which we would drive him, some more bold objector faces about and stands at bay, endeavouring to justify what he cannot deny, "Whatever I am," he contends, "I am what my Creator made me. I inherit a nature, you yourself confess, depraved, and prone to evil: how, then, can I withstand the temptations to sin, by which I am environed? If this plea cannot establish my innocence, it must excuse, or at least extenuate, my guilt. Frail and weak as I am, a Being of infinite justice and goodness will never try me by a rule which, however equitable in the case of creatures of a higher nature, is altogether disproportionate to mine."

Let not my readers be alarmed! The writer is not going to enter into the discussion of the grand question concerning the origin of moral evil, or to attempt to reconcile its existence and consequent punishment with the acknowledged attributes and perfections of God. These are questions, of which, if one may judge from the little success with which the acutest and profoundest reasoners have been ever labouring to solve the difficulties they contain, the full and clear comprehension is above the intellect of man. Yet, as the objection above mentioned is sometimes heard from the mouths of professed Christians, it must not be passed by without a few short observations.

Were the language in question to be addressed to us by an avowed sceptic, though it might not be very difficult to expose to him the futility of *his* reasonings, we should almost despair of satisfying him of the soundness of our own. We should, perhaps, suggest impossibilities, which might stand

in the way of such a system as he would establish : we might indeed point out wherein (arguing from concessions which he would freely make) his pre-conceptions concerning the conduct of the Supreme Being had been in fact already contradicted, particularly by the existence at all of natural or moral evil : and if thus proved erroneous in one instance, why might they not be so likewise in another ? But though by these and similar arguments we might at length silence our objector, we could not much expect to bring him over to our opinions. We should probably do better, if we were to endeavour rather to draw him off from those dark and slippery regions, (slippery, in truth, they are to every human foot,) and to contend with him, where we might tread with firmness and freedom, on sure ground, and in the light of day. Then we might fairly lay before him all the various arguments for the truth of our holy religion ; arguments which have been sufficient to satisfy the wisest, and the best, and the ablest of men. We might afterwards insist on the abundant confirmation Christianity receives from its being exactly suited to the nature and wants of man ; and we might conclude, with fairly putting it to him, whether all this weight of evidence were to be overbalanced by one difficulty, on a subject so confessedly high and mysterious ; considering, too, that he must allow, we see but a part (Oh, how small a part !) of the universal creation of God, and that our faculties are wholly incompetent to judge of the schemes of his infinite wisdom. This, if the writer may be permitted to offer his own judgment, is, at least in general, the best mode, in the case of the objection now in question, of dealing with unbelievers ; and, to adopt the

contrary plan, seems somewhat like that of any one, who, having to convince some untutored Indian of the truth of the Copernican system, instead of beginning with plain and simple propositions, and leading him on to what is more abstruse and remote, should state to him at the outset some startling problems, to which the understanding can only yield its slow assent, when constrained by the decisive force of demonstration. The novice, instead of lending himself to such a mistaken method of instruction, would turn away in disgust, and be only hardened against his preceptor. But it must be remembered, that the present work is addressed to those who acknowledge the authority of the holy scriptures. And, in order to convince all such that there is, somewhere or other, a fallacy in our objector's reasoning, it will be sufficient to establish that, though the word of God clearly asserts the justice and goodness of the Supreme Being, and also the natural depravity of man, yet it no less clearly lays down, that this natural depravity shall never be admitted as an excuse for sin, but that "they which have done evil, shall rise to the resurrection of damnation;"* that the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God." And it is worthy of remark, that, as if for the very purpose of more effectually silencing those unbelieving doubts which are ever springing up in the human heart, our blessed Saviour, though the messenger of peace and goodwill to man, has again and again repeated these awful denunciations.

Nor are the holy scriptures less clear and full in guarding us against supposing our sins, or the

* John v. 29.

dreadful consequences of them, to be chargeable on God. “Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God : for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man ;”* “the Lord is not willing that any should perish.” † And in other passages, where the idea is repelled as injurious to his character—“Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die ? saith the Lord God ; and not that he should return from his ways, and live ?” ‡ “For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God.” || Indeed, almost every page of the word of God contains some warning or invitation to sinners ; and all these, to a considerate mind, must be unquestionable proofs of our present position.

It has been the more necessary not to leave unnoticed the objection which we have been now refuting, because, where not admitted to such an unqualified extent as altogether to take away the moral responsibility of man, and when not avowed in the daring language in which it has been above stated ; it may frequently be observed to exist in an inferior degree : and often, when not distinctly formed into shape, it lurks in secret, diffusing a general cloud of doubt or unbelief, or lowering our standard of right, or whispering fallacious comfort, and producing a ruinous tranquillity. It is of the utmost importance to remark, that though the holy scriptures so clearly state the natural corruption and weakness of man, yet they never, in the remotest degree, countenance, but throughout directly oppose, the supposition to which we are often too forward to listen, that our natural corruption and weakness will be admitted as lowering

* James i. 13. † 2 Peter iii. 9. ‡ Ezek. xviii. 23 || Ezek. xviii. 32.

the demands of Divine justice, and in some sort palliating our transgressions of the laws of God. It would not be difficult to shew, that such a notion is at war with the whole scheme of redemption by the atonement of Christ. But perhaps it may be enough, when any such suggestions as those which we are condemning force themselves into the imagination of a Christian, to recommend it to him to silence them by what is their best practical answer—that if our natural condition be depraved and weak, our temptations numerous, and our Almighty Judge infinitely holy; yet that he offers to penitent sinners of pardon, and grace, and strength are universal and unlimited. Let it not however surprise us, if in all this there seem to be involved difficulties which we cannot fully comprehend. How many such every where present themselves! Scarcely is there an object around us, that does not afford endless matter of doubt and argument. The meanest reptile which crawls on the earth, nay, every herb and flower which we behold, baffles the imbecility of our limited inquiries. All nature calls upon us to be humble. Can it then be surprising if we are at a loss on this question, which respects, not the properties of matter or of numbers, but the counsels and ways of Him whose “understanding is infinite,”* “whose judgments are declared to be unsearchable, and his ways past finding out?” † In this our ignorance, however, we may calmly repose ourselves on his own declaration, “That though clouds and darkness are round about him, yet righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne.” ‡ Let it also be remembered, that

• Psal. cxlvii. 5.

† Rom. xi. 33.

‡ Psal. xcvi. 2.

if in Christianity some things are difficult, that which we are most concerned to know, is plain and obvious. To this it is true wisdom to attach ourselves, assenting to what is revealed where above our comprehension, we do not say contrary to our reason, or the credit of what is clearly discerned, and satisfactorily established. In truth, we are all perhaps too apt to plunge into depths which it is beyond our power to fathom; and it was to warn us against this very error, that the inspired writer, when he had been threatening the people, whom God had selected as the objects of his special favour, with the most dreadful punishments, if they should forsake the law of the Lord, and has introduced surrounding nations as asking the meaning of the severe infliction, winds up the whole with this instructive admonition: "Secret things belong unto the Lord our God; but those which are revealed belong unto us, and to our children for ever, that we may *do* all the words of this law."*

To any one who is seriously impressed with a sense of the critical state in which we are here placed, a short and uncertain space in which to make our peace with God, and then the last judgment, and an eternity of unspeakable happiness or misery, it is indeed an awful and an affecting spectacle to see men thus busying themselves in vain speculations of an arrogant curiosity, and trifling with their dearest, their everlasting interests. It is but a feeble illustration of this exquisite folly, to compare it to the conduct of some convicted rebel, who, when brought into the presence of his sovereign, instead of seizing the

* Deut. xxix. 29.

occasion to sue for mercy, should even treat with neglect and contempt the pardon which should be offered to him, and insolently employ himself in prying into his sovereign's designs, and criticising his counsels. But our case, too similar as it is to that of the convicted rebel, differs from it in this grand particular, that at the best, his success must be uncertain, ours, if it be not our own fault, is sure; and while, on the one hand, our guilt is unspeakably greater than that of any rebel against an earthly monarch; so, on the other, we know that our Sovereign is "long-suffering, and easy to be entreated;" more ready to grant forgiveness than we to ask it. Well then may we adopt the language of the poet—

"What better can we do, than prostrate fall
Before him reverent; and there confess
Humbly our faults, and pardon beg; with tears
Watering the ground, and with our sighs the air
Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign
Of sorrow unfeign'd, and humiliation meek!"

CHAPTER III.

CHIEF DEFECTS OF THE RELIGIOUS SYSTEM OF THE BULK OF PROFESSED CHRISTIANS, IN WHAT REGARDS OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT; WITH A DISSERTATION CONCERNING THE USE OF THE PASSIONS IN RELIGION.

 SECT. I.

Inadequate conceptions concerning our Saviour and the Holy Spirit.

Leading doctrines concerning Christ and the Holy Spirit, as stated in scripture.

THAT "God so loved the world, as of his tender mercy to give his only Son Jesus Christ for our redemption:"

That our blessed Lord willingly left the glory of the Father, and was made man:

That "he was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:"

That "he was wounded for our transgressions; that he was bruised for our iniquities:"

That "the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all:"

That at length "he humbled himself even to the death of the cross, for us miserable sinners; to the end that all who with hearty repentance and

true faith, should come to him, might not perish, but have everlasting life :”

That he “is now at the right hand of God, making intercession” for his people :

That “being reconciled to God by the death of his Son, we may come boldly unto the throne of grace, to obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need :”

That our heavenly Father “will surely give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him :”

That “the Spirit of God must dwell in us ;” and that “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his :”

That by this Divine influence “we are to be renewed in knowledge after the image of him who created us,” and “to be filled with the fruits of righteousness, to the praise of the glory of his grace ;” that, “being thus made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light,” we shall sleep in the Lord ; and that, when the last trumpet shall sound, this corruption shall put on incorruption—and that being at length perfected after his likeness, we shall be admitted into his heavenly kingdom.

These are the leading doctrines concerning our Saviour, and the Holy Spirit, which are taught in the holy Scriptures, and held by the church of England. The truth of them, agreeably to our general plan, will be taken for granted. Few of those, who have been used to join in the established form of worship, can have been, it is hoped, so inattentive as to be ignorant of these grand truths, which are to be found every where dispersed throughout our excellent liturgy. Would to God it could be presumed, with equal con-

fidence, that all who assent to them in terms, discern their force and excellency in the understanding, and feel their power in the affections, and their transforming influence in the heart. What lively emotions are they calculated to excite in us of deep self-abasement, and abhorrence of our sins; together with humble hope, and firm faith, and heavenly joy, and ardent love, and active unceasing gratitude!

Popular notions. But here, it is to be feared, will be found a grand defect in the religion of the bulk of professed Christians; a defect, like the palsy at the heart, which, while, in its first attack, it changes but little the exterior appearance of the body, extinguishes the internal principle of heat and motion, and soon extends its benumbing influence to the remotest fibres of the frame. This defect is closely connected with that which was the chief subject of the last chapter: "they that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Had we duly felt the burden of our sins, accompanied with a deep conviction that the weight of them must finally sink us into perdition, our hearts would have danced at the sound of the gracious invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* But in those who have scarcely felt their sins as any incumbrance, it would be mere affectation to pretend to very exalted conceptions of the value and acceptableness of the proffered deliverance. This pretence, accordingly, is seldom now kept up; and the most superficial observer, comparing the sentiments and views of the bulk of the Christian world, with the Articles still retained

* Matt. xi. 28.

in their creed, and with the strong language of scripture, must be struck with the amazing disproportion.

To pass over the throng from whose minds religion is altogether excluded by the business or the vanities of life, how is it with the more decent and moral? To what criterion shall we appeal? Are their hearts really filled with these things, and warmed by the love which they are adapted to inspire? Then surely their minds are apt to stray to them almost unseasonably; or at least to hasten back to them with eagerness, when escaped from the estrangement imposed by the necessary cares and business of life. He was a masterly describer of human nature, who thus portrayed the characters of an undissembled affection—

“Unstaid and fickle in all other things,
Save in the constant image of the object
That is beloved.”

“And how,” it may be perhaps replied, “do you know but that the minds of these people are thus occupied? Can you look into the bosoms of men?” Let us appeal to a test to which we resorted in a former instance. “Out of the abundance of the heart,” it has been pronounced, “the mouth speaketh.” Take these persons then in some well-selected hour, and lead the conversation to the subject of religion. The utmost which can be effected is, to bring them to talk of things in the gross. They appear lost in generalities; there is nothing precise and determinate, nothing which implies a mind used to the contemplation of its object. In vain you strive to bring them to speak on that topic, which one might expect to be ever uppermost in the hearts of redeemed sinners. They

elude all your endeavours ; and if you make mention of it yourself, it is received with no very cordial welcome, at least, if not with unequivocal disgust ; it is at the best a forced and formal discussion. The excellence of our Saviour's moral precepts, the kindness and simplicity, the self-denial and unblemished purity of his life, his patience and meekness in the hour of death, cannot indeed be spoken of but with admiration, when spoken of at all, as they have often extorted unwilling praise from the most daring and malignant infidels. But are not these mentioned as qualities in the abstract, rather than as the perfections and lineaments of our patron, and benefactor, and friend, "who loved us, and gave himself for us?" of him "who died for *our* offences, and rose again for *our* justification;" "who is even now at the right hand of God, making intercession for *us*?" Who would think that the kindness, and humanity, and self-denial, and patience in suffering, which we so drily commend, had been exerted towards *ourselves*, in acts of more than finite benevolence of which *we* were to derive the benefit, in condescensions and labours submitted to for *our* sakes, in pain and ignominy endured for *our* deliverance?

But these grand truths are not suffered to vanish altogether from our remembrance. Thanks to the compilers of our liturgy, more than to too many of the occupiers of our pulpits, they are forced upon our notice in their just bearings and connexions, as often as we attend the service of the church. Yet is it too much to affirm, that though there entertained with decorum, as what belong to the day and place, and occupation, they are yet

too generally heard of with little interest; like the legendary tales of some venerable historian, or other transactions of great antiquity, if not of doubtful credit, which, though important to our ancestors, relate to times and circumstances so different from our own, that we cannot be expected to take any great concern in them? We hear them therefore with apparent indifference; we repeat them almost as it were by rote, assuming by turns the language of the deepest humiliation and of the warmest thankfulness, with a calm unaltered composure; and when the service of the day is ended, they are dismissed altogether from our thoughts, till on the return of another Sunday, a fresh attendance on public worship gives occasion for the renewed expressions of our periodical humility and gratitude. In noticing such lukewarmness as this, surely the writer were to be pardoned, if he were to be betrayed into some warmth of condemnation. The Unitarian and Socinian indeed, who deny, or explain away, the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, may be allowed to feel these grand truths, and to talk of them with little emotion. But in those who profess a sincere belief in them, this coldness is insupportable. The greatest possible services of man to man must appear contemptible, when compared with "the unspeakable mercies of Christ:" mercies so dearly bought, so freely bestowed—a deliverance from eternal misery—the gift of a "crown of glory, that fadeth not away." Yet, what judgment should we form of such conduct, as is here censured in the case of any one who had received some signal services from a fellow-creature? True love is an ardent and an active principle—a cold, a dormant,

a phlegmatic gratitude, are contradictions in terms. When these generous affections really exist in vigour, are we not ever fond of dwelling on the value, and enumerating the merits, of our benefactor? How are we moved when any thing is asserted to his disparagement! How do we delight to tell of his kindness! With what pious care do we preserve any memorial of him, which we may happen to possess! How gladly do we seize any opportunity of rendering to him, or to those who are dear to him, any little good offices, which, though in themselves of small intrinsic worth, may testify the sincerity of our thankfulness! The very mention of his name will cheer the heart, and light up the countenance! And if he be now no more, and if he had made it his dying request that, in a way of his own appointment, we would occasionally meet to keep the memory of his person and of his services in lively exercise; how should we resent the idea of failing in the performance of so sacred an obligation!

Such are the genuine characters, such the natural workings of a lively gratitude. And can we believe, without doing violence to the most established principles of human nature, that where the *effects* are so different, the *internal principle* is in truth the same?

If the love of Christ be thus languid in the bulk of nominal Christians, their joy and trust in him cannot be expected to be very vigorous. Here again we find reason to remark, that there is nothing distinct, nothing specific, nothing which implies a mind acquainted with the nature of the Christian's privileges, and familiarized with their use; habitually solacing itself with the hopes held

out by the gospel, and animated by the sense of its high relations, and its glorious reversion.

The doctrine of the sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit, appears to have met with still worse treatment. It would be to convey a very inadequate idea of the scantiness of the conceptions on this head, of the bulk of the Christian world, to affirm merely, that they are too little conscious of the inefficacy of their own unassisted endeavours after holiness of heart and life, and that they are not daily employed in humbly and diligently using the appointed means for the reception and cultivation of the Divine assistance. We should hardly go beyond the truth in asserting, that for the most part their notions on this subject are so confused and faint, that they can scarcely be said in any fair sense to believe the doctrine at all.

The writer of these sheets is by no means unapprised of the objections which he may expect from those, whose opinions he has been so freely condemning. He is prepared to hear it urged, that often where there have been the strongest pretences to the religious affections, there has been little or nothing of the reality of them; and that even omitting the instances (which, however, have been but too frequent) of studied hypocrisy, those affections which have assumed to themselves the name of religious, have been merely the flights of a lively imagination, or the workings of a heated brain; in particular, that this love of our Saviour, which has been so warmly recommended, is no better than a vain fervour, that dwells only in the disordered mind of the enthusiast. That religion is of a more steady nature; of a more sober and

Language of one who objects against the religious affections towards our Saviour.

manly quality; and that she rejects with scorn the support of a mere feeling, so volatile and indeterminate, so trivial and useless, as that with which we would associate her; a feeling varying in different men, and even in the same man at different times, according to the accidental flow of the animal spirits; a feeling, of which it may perhaps be said, we are from our very nature hardly susceptible towards an invisible Being.

And against
the operations
of the Holy
Spirit.

“As to the operations of the Holy Spirit,” it may probably be further urged, that “it is perhaps scarcely worth while to spend much time in inquiring into the theory, when, in practice at least, it is manifest that there is no sure criterion whereby any one can ascertain the reality of them, even in his own case, much less in that of another. All we know is, that pretenders to these extraordinary assistances have never been wanting to abuse the credulity of the vulgar, and to try the patience of the wise. From the canting hypocrites and wild fanatics of the last century, to their less dangerous, chiefly because less successful, descendants of the present day, we hear the same unwarranted claims, the same idle tales, the same low cant; and we may discern, not seldom, the same mean artifices and mercenary ends. The doctrine, to say the best of it, can only serve to favour the indolence of man, while, professing to furnish him with a compendious method of becoming wise and good, it supersedes the necessity of his own personal labours. Quitting therefore all such slothful and chimerical speculations, it is true wisdom to attach ourselves to what is more solid and practical; to the work which you will not deny to be sufficiently

difficult to find us of itself full employment: the work of rectifying the disorders of the passions, and of implanting and cultivating the virtues of the moral character." "It is the service of the understanding which God requires of us, which you would degrade into a mere matter of bodily temperament and imaginary impulses. You are contending for that which not only is altogether unworthy of our Divine Master, but which, with considerate men, has ever brought his religion into suspicion and disrepute, and, under a shew of honouring him, serves only to injure and discredit his cause." Our objector, warming as he proceeds, will perhaps assume a more impatient tone. "Have not these doctrines," he may exclaim, "been ever perverted to purposes the most disgraceful to the religion of Jesus? If you want an instance, look to the standard of the inquisition, and behold the pious Dominicans torturing their miserable victims for the love of Christ.* Or would you rather see the effects of your principles on a larger scale, and *by wholesale*, (if the phrase may be pardoned;) cast your eyes across the Atlantic, and let your zeal be edified by the holy activity of Cortez and Pizarro, and their apostles of the western hemisphere. To what else have been owing the extensive ravages of national persecutions, and religious wars and crusades; whereby rapacity, and pride, and cruelty, sheltering themselves under the mask of this specious principle, have so often afflicted the world? The Prince of peace has been made to assume the port of a ferocious conqueror, and, forgetting the message of good-will to men, has issued forth like a second

* This was the motto on their banner.

Scourge of the Earth,† to plague and desolate the human species.”

Reply to the
above allega-
tions.

That the sacred name of religion has been too often prostituted to the most detestable purposes; that furious bigots, and bloody persecutors, and self-interested hypocrites of all qualities and dimensions, from the rapacious leader of an army, to the canting oracle of a congregation, have falsely called themselves Christians, are melancholy and humiliating truths, which (as none so deeply lament them) none will more readily admit, than they who best understand the nature of Christianity, and are most concerned for her honour. We are ready to acknowledge also without dispute, that the religious affections, and the doctrine of Divine assistance, have at all times been more or less disgraced by the false pretences and extravagant conduct of wild fanatics and brain-sick enthusiasts. All this, however, is only as it happens in other instances, wherein the depravity of man perverts the bounty of God. Why is it here only to be made an argument, that there is danger of abuse? So is there also in the case of every operative principle, whether in the natural or moral world. Take for an instance the powers and properties of matter. These were doubtless designed by Providence for our comfort and well-being; yet they are often misapplied to trifling purposes, and still more frequently turned into so many agents of misery and death. On this fact indeed is founded the well-known maxim, not more trite than just, that “the best things when corrupted become the worst;” a maxim which is

† Title of Attila king of the Huns, whose desolating ravages are well known.

peculiarly just in the instance of religion. For in this case it is not merely, as in some others, that a great power, when mischievously applied, must be hurtful in proportion to its strength; but that the very principle on which in general we depend for restraining and retarding the progress of evil, not only ceases to interpose any kindly check, but is powerfully active in the opposite direction. But will you therefore discard religion altogether? It is upon this very ground that the infidels of a neighbouring country have lately made war against Christianity, with what effects the world has not now to learn. But suppose religion were discarded, then liberty remains to plague the world; a power which though, when well employed, the dispenser of light and happiness, has been often proved, and eminently in the instance of a neighbouring country, to be capable, when abused, of becoming infinitely mischievous. Well, then, extinguish liberty. Then what more abused by false pretenders, than patriotism? Well, extinguish patriotism. But then the wicked career to which we have adverted, must have been checked but for courage. Blot out courage—and so might you proceed to extinguish one by one, reason, and speech, and memory, and all the discriminating prerogatives of man. But perhaps more than enough has been urged in reply to an objection, which is built on ground so indefensible, as that which would equally warrant our condemning any physical or moral faculty altogether, on account of its being occasionally abused.

As to the position of our opponent, that there is no way whereby the validity of any pretensions to the religious affections may be ascertained; it must

partly be admitted. Doubtless, we are not able always to read the hearts of men, and to discover their real characters; and hence it is, that we in some measure lie open to the false and hypocritical pretences which are brought forward against us so triumphantly. But then these pretences no more prove all similar claims to be founded in falsehood and hypocrisy, than there having been many false and interested pretenders to wisdom and honesty, would prove that there can be no such thing as a wise or an honest man. We do not argue thus but where our reason is under a corrupt bias. Why should we be so much surprized and scandalized, when these impostors are detected in the church of Christ? It is no more than our blessed Master himself taught us to expect; and when the old difficulty is stated, "didst thou not sow good seed in thy field, whence then hath it tares?" his own answer furnishes the best solution, "an enemy hath done this." Hypocrisy is indeed *detestable*, and enthusiasm sufficiently mischievous to justify our guarding against its approaches with jealous care. Yet it may not be improper to take this occasion for observing, that we are now and then apt to draw too unfavourable conclusions from unpleasant appearances, which may perhaps be chiefly or altogether owing to gross or confused conceptions, or to a disgusting formality of demeanor, or to indeterminate, low, or improperly familiar expressions. The mode and language, in which a vulgar man will express himself on the subject of religion, will probably be vulgar, and it is difficult for people of literature and refinement not to be unreasonably shocked by such vulgarities. But we should at least endeavour to

correct the rash judgments which we may be disposed to form on these occasions, and should learn to recognize and to prize a sound texture and just configuration, though disguised beneath a homely or uncouth drapery. It was an apostle who declared, that he had come to the learned and accomplished Grecians, "not with excellency of speech, or the wisdom of words." From these he had studiously abstained, lest he should have seemed to owe his success rather to the graces of oratory, than to the efficacy of his doctrines, and to the Divine power with which they were accompanied. Even in our own times, when, the extraordinary operations and miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit having ceased, the necessity of study and preparation, and of attention to manner as well as matter, in order to qualify men to become teachers of religion, are no longer superseded, yet it is no more than an act of justice explicitly to remark, that a body of Christians, which from the peculiarly offensive grossnesses of language in use among them, had, not without reason, excited suspicions of the very worst nature, have since reclaimed their character,* and have perhaps excelled all mankind in solid and unequivocal proofs of the love of Christ, and of the most ardent, and active, and patient zeal in his service. It is a zeal tempered with prudence, softened with meekness, soberly aiming at great ends by the gradual operation of well-adapted means, supported by a courage which no danger can intimidate, and a quiet constancy which no hardship can exhaust.

* Vide the testimony of West India merchants to the Moravians, in the Report of the Privy Council on the Slave Trade.

SECTION II.

On the admission of the passions into religion.

THE objection of our opponent, that by insisting on the obligation of making our blessed Saviour the object of our religious affections, we are degrading the worship of the understanding, and are substituting a set of mere feelings in its stead; is one which deserves our most serious consideration. If it be just, it is decisive; for ours must be unquestionably "a reasonable service."* The objector must mean, either, that these affections are unreasonable in themselves, or, that they are misplaced in religion. He can scarcely, however, intend, that the affections are in their own nature unreasonable. To suppose him to maintain this position, were to suppose him ignorant of what every school-boy knows of the mechanism of the human mind. We shall therefore take it for granted, that this cannot be his meaning, and proceed to examine the latter part of the alternative. Here also it may either be intended, that the affections are misplaced in religion *generally*, or that our blessed Saviour is not the proper object of them.

This notion of the affections being out of place in religion, is indeed an opinion which appears to be generally prevalent. The affections are regarded as the strong holds of enthusiasm. It is therefore judged most expedient to act, as prudent generals are used to do, when they raze the fortress, or spike up the cannon, which are likely to fall

* Rom. ii. i.

into the hands of an enemy. Mankind are apt to be the dupes of misapplied terms ; and the progress of the persuasion now in question, has been considerably aided by an abuse of language, not sufficiently checked in its first advances, whereby that species of religion which is opposite to the warm and affectionate kind, has been suffered, almost without disturbance, to usurp to itself the epithet of *rational*. But let not this claim be too hastily admitted. Let the position in question be thoroughly and impartially discussed, and it will appear, if I mistake not, to be a gross and pernicious error. If amputation be indeed indispensable, we must submit to it ; but we may surely expect to be heard with patience, or rather with favour and indulgence, while we proceed to shew that there is no need to have recourse to so desperate a remedy. The discussion will necessarily draw us into length. But our prolixity will not be greater than may well be claimed by the importance of the subject, especially as it scarcely seems to have hitherto sufficiently engaged the attention of writers on the subject of religion.

It cannot, methinks, but afford a considerable presumption against the doctrine which we are about to combat, that it proposes to exclude at once from the service of religion so grand a part of the composition of man ; that in this our noblest employment it condemns, as worse than useless, all the most active principles of our nature. One cannot but suppose that like the organs of the body, so the elementary qualities and original passions of the mind were all given us for valuable purposes by our all-wise Creator. It is indeed one of the sad evidences of our fallen condition,

that they are now perpetually rebelling against the powers of reason and conscience, to which they should be subject. But even if revelation had been silent, natural reason might have in some degree presumed that it would be the effect of a religion which should come from God, completely to repair the consequences of our superinduced depravity. The schemes of mere human wisdom had indeed tacitly confessed that this was a task beyond their strength. Of the two most celebrated systems of philosophy, the one expressly confirmed the usurpation of the passions; while the other, despairing of being able to regulate them, saw nothing left but their extinction. The former acted like a weak government, which gives independence to a rebellious province which it cannot reduce. The latter formed its boasted scheme merely upon the plan of that barbarous policy, which composes the troubles of a turbulent land by the extermination of its inhabitants. This is the calm, not of order, but of inaction; it is not tranquillity, but the stillness of death—

“ Trucidare falso nomine imperium, et ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant:”—

Christianity, we might hope, would not be driven to any such wretched expedients; nor in fact does she condescend to them. They only thus undervalue her strength, who mistake her character, and are ignorant of her powers. It is her peculiar glory, and her main office, to bring all the faculties of our nature into their just subordination and dependence; that so the whole man, complete in all his functions, may be restored to the true ends of his being, and be devoted, entire and harmonious, to the service and glory of God. “ My

son, give me thine *heart* ;” “ Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy *heart*.” Such are the direct and comprehensive claims which are made on us in the holy scriptures. We can scarcely indeed look into any part of the sacred volume without meeting abundant proofs, that it is the religion of the affections which God particularly require. Love, zeal, gratitude, joy, hope, trust, are each of them specified ; and are not allowed to us as weaknesses, but enjoined on us as our bounden duty, and commended to us as our acceptable worship. Where passages are so numerous, there would be no end of particular citations. Let it be sufficient, therefore, to refer the reader to the word of God. There let him observe, too, that as the lively exercise of the passions towards their legitimate object is always spoken of with praise, so a cold, hard, unfeeling heart is represented as highly criminal. Luke-warmness is stated to be the object of God’s disgust and aversion ; zeal and love, of his favour and delight ; and the taking away of the heart of stone and the implanting of a warmer and more tender nature in its stead, is specifically promised as the effect of his returning favour, and the work of his renewing grace. It is the prayer of an inspired teacher, in behalf of those for whom he was most interested, “ that their love” (already acknowledged to be great) “ might abound yet more and more :” those modes of worship are prescribed, which are best calculated to excite the dormant affections, and to maintain them in lively exercise ; and the aids of music and singing are expressly superadded to increase their effect. If we look to the most eminent of the scripture characters, we shall find

them warm, zealous, and affectionate. When engaged in their favourite work of celebrating the goodness of their Supreme Benefactor, their souls appear to burn within them, their hearts kindle into rapture; the powers of language are inadequate to the expression of their transports; and they call on all nature to swell the chorus, and to unite with them in hallelujahs of gratitude, and joy, and praise. The man after God's own heart most of all abounds in these glowing effusions; and his compositions appear to have been given us in order to set the tone, as it were, to all succeeding generations. Accordingly (to quote the words of a late excellent prelate,* who was himself warmed with the same heavenly flame,) "in the language of this divine book, the praises of the church have been offered up to the throne of grace from age to age." When God was pleased to check the future apostle of the gentiles in his wild career, and to make him a monument of transforming grace; was the force of his affections diminished, or was it not that their direction only was changed? He brought his affections entire and unabated into the service of his blessed Master. His zeal now burned even with an increase of brightness; and no intenseness, no continuance of sufferings, could allay its ardour, or damp the fervours of his triumphant exultations. Finally: the worship and service of the glorified spirits in heaven is not represented to us as a cold intellectual investigation, but as the worship and service of gratitude and love. And surely it will not be disputed, that it should be even here the humble endeavour of those who are promised while on earth "to be made

* Dr. Horne.

meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light," to bring their hearts into a capacity for joining in those everlasting praises.

But it may not be unadvisable for the writer here to guard against a mistaken supposition, from which the mind of our objector, by no means appears exempt, that the force of the religious affections is to be chiefly estimated by the degree of mere animal fervour, by ardours, and transports, and raptures, of which, from constitutional temperament, a person may be easily susceptible; or into which daily experience must convince us, that people of strong imaginations and of warm passions may work themselves without much difficulty, where their hearts are by no means truly or deeply interested. Every tolerable actor can attest the truth of this remark. These high degrees of the passions bad men may experience, good men may want. They may be affected; they may be genuine; but, whether genuine or affected, they form not the true standard by which the real nature or strength of the religious affections is to be determined. To ascertain these points, we must examine, whether they appear to be grounded in knowledge, to have their root in strong and just conceptions of the great and manifold excellences of their object, or to be ignorant, unmeaning, or vague; whether they are natural and easy, or constrained and forced; wakeful, and apt to fix on their great objects, delighting in their proper nutriment, the exercises of prayer, of praise, and religious contemplation; or voluntarily omitting offered occasions of receiving it, looking forward to them with little

True test and measure of the religious affections.

expectation, looking back on them with little complacency, and being disappointed of them with little regret; we must observe whether these religious affections are merely occasional visitants, or the abiding inmates of the soul: whether they have got the mastery over the vicious passions and propensities, with which, in their origin, and nature, and tendency, they are at open variance; or whether, if the victory be not yet complete, the war is at least constant, and the breach irreconcilable; whether they moderate and regulate all the inferior appetites and desires which are culpable only in their excess, thus striving to reign in the bosom with a settled and undisputed predominance: and we must examine whether, above all, they manifest themselves by prompting to the active discharge of the duties of life, the personal, the domestic, the relative, the professional, the social, and civil duties. Here the wideness of their range, and the universality of their influence, will generally serve to distinguish them from those partial efforts of diligence and self-denial, to which mankind are prompted by subordinate motives. All proofs other than this, deduced from conduct, are in some degree ambiguous. This, this only, whether we argue from reason or from scripture, is a sure infallible criterion. From the daily incidents of conjugal and domestic life, we learn that a heat of affection, occasionally vehement, but superficial and transitory, may consist too well with a course of conduct exhibiting incontestable proofs of neglect and unkindness. But the passion, which alone the holy scriptures dignify with the name of love, is a deep, not a superficial feeling; a fixed and permanent, not an

occasional emotion. It proves the validity of its title, by actions corresponding with its nature, by practical endeavours to gratify the wishes, and to promote the interests, of the object of affection. "If a man love me, he will keep my sayings." "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments." This, therefore, is the best standard by which to try the quality, or, the quality being ascertained, to estimate the strength of the religious affections. Without suffering ourselves to derive too much complacency from transient fervours of devotion, we should carefully and frequently prove ourselves by this less dubitable test; impartially examining our daily conduct; and often comparing our actual with our possible services, the fair amount of our exertions, with our natural or acquired means and opportunities of usefulness.

After this large explanation, the prolixity of which will, we trust, be pardoned on account of the importance of the subject, and the danger of mistakes both on the right hand and on the left, we are perfectly ready to concede to the objector, that the religious affections must be expected to be more or less lively in different men, and in the same man at different times, in proportion to natural tempers, ages, situations, and habits of life. But, to found an objection on this ground, would be as unreasonable as it were altogether to deny the obligation of the precepts, which command us to relieve the necessities of the indigent, because the infinitely varying circumstances of mankind must render it impossible to specify beforehand the sum which each individual ought, on the whole, to allot to this purpose, or to fix in

every particular instance, on any determinate measure and mode of contribution. To the one case, no less than to the other, we may apply the maxim of an eminent writer, "An honest heart is the best casuist." He who every where but in religion is warm and animated, there only phlegmatic and cold, can hardly expect (especially if this coldness be not the subject of unfeigned humiliation and sorrow) that his plea on the ground of natural temper should be admitted; any more than that of a person who should urge his poverty as a justification of his not relieving the wants of the necessitous, at the very time that he should be launching out into expense without restraint, on occasions in which he should be really prompted by his inclinations. In both cases, "it is the *willing* mind which is required." Where that is found, "every man will be judged according to what he hath, and not according to what he hath not." *

After the decisive proofs already adduced from the word of God, of the unreasonableness of the objection to the admission of the passions into religion, all farther arguments may appear superfluous to any one who is disposed to bow to scriptural authority. Yet the point is of so much importance, and, it is to be feared, so little regarded, that it may not be amiss to continue the discussion. The best conclusions of reason will be shewn to fall in with what clearly appears to be the authoritative language of revelation; and to call in the aid of the affections to the service of religion, will prove to be not only what sober reason may permit, as in some sort allowable;

* 2 Cor. viii. 12.

but to be that which she clearly and strongly dictates to our deliberate judgments, as being what the circumstances of our natural condition indispensably require. We have every

The affections not merely allowable in religion, but highly necessary.

one of us a work to accomplish, wherein our eternal interests are at stake; a work to which we are naturally indisposed. We live in a world abounding with objects which distract our attention, and divert our endeavours; and a deadly enemy is ever at hand, to seduce and beguile us. If we persevere, indeed, success is certain; but our efforts must know no remission. There is a call on us for vigorous and continual resolution, self-denial, and activity. Now, man is not a being of mere intellect.

Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor,

is a complaint which, alas! we all of us might daily utter. The slightest solicitation of appetite is often able to draw us to act in opposition to our clearest judgment, our highest interests, and most resolute determinations. Sickness, poverty, disgrace, and even eternal misery itself, sometimes in vain solicit our regards; they are all excluded from the view, and thrust as it were beyond the sphere of vision, by some poor unsubstantial transient object, so minute and contemptible as almost to escape the notice of the eye of reason.

These observations are more strikingly confirmed in our religious concerns than in any other; because in them the interests at stake are of transcendent importance: but they hold equally in every instance, according to its measure, wherein there is a call for laborious, painful,

and continued exertions, from which we are likely to be deterred by obstacles, or seduced by the solicitations of pleasure. What then is to be done in the case of any such arduous and necessary undertaking? The answer is obvious, You should endeavour not only to convince the understanding, but also to affect the heart; and, for this end, you must secure the reinforcement of the passions. This is indeed the course which would be naturally followed by every man of common understanding, who should know that some one for whom he was deeply interested, a child, for instance, or a brother, were about to enter on a long, difficult, perilous, and critical adventure, wherein success was to be honour and affluence, defeat was to be contempt and ruin. And still more, if the parent were convinced that his child possessed faculties which, strenuously and unremittingly exerted, would prove equal to all the exigences of the enterprise, but knew him also to be volatile and inconstant, and had reason to doubt his resolution and his vigilance; how would the friendly monitor's endeavour be redoubled, so to possess his pupil's mind with the worth and dignity of the undertaking, that there should be no opening for the entrance of any inferior consideration! "Weigh well (he would say) the value of the object for which you are about to contend, and contemplate and study its various excellences, till your whole soul be on fire for its acquisition. Consider, too, that, if you fail, misery and infamy are united in the alternative which awaits you. Let not the mistaken notion of its being a safe and easy service, for a moment beguile you into the discontinuance or remission of your efforts. Be aware of your imminent

danger, and at the same time know your true security. It is a service of labour and peril; but one wherein the powers which you possess, strenuously and perseveringly exerted, cannot but crown you with victory. Accustom yourself to look first to the dreadful consequences of failure; then fix your eye on the glorious prize which is before you; and when your strength begins to fail, and your spirits are well nigh exhausted, let the animating view rekindle your resolution, and call forth in renewed vigour the fainting energies of your soul."

It was the remark of an unerring observer, "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light." And it is indisputably true, that in religion we have to argue and plead with men for principles of action, the wisdom and expediency of which are universally acknowledged in matters of worldly concern. So it is in the instance before us. The case which has been just described, is an exact, but a faint representation of our condition in this life. Frail and "infirm of purpose," we have a business to execute, of supreme and indispensable necessity. Solicitations to neglect it, every where abound: the difficulties and dangers are numerous and urgent; and the night of death cometh, how soon we know not, "when no man can work." All this is granted. It seems to be a state of things wherein one should look out with solicitude for some powerful stimulants. Mere knowledge is confessedly too weak. The affections alone, remain to supply the deficiency. They precisely meet the occasion, and suit the purposes intended. Yet, when we propose to fit ourselves for our great undertaking, by calling

them in to our help, we are to be told that we are acting contrary to reason. Is this reasonable—to strip us first of our armour of proof, and then to send us to the sharpest of encounters? to summon us to the severest labours, but first to rob us of the precious cordials which should brace our sinews and recruit our strength?

Let these pretended advocates for reason, at length then confess their folly, and do justice to the superior wisdom as well as goodness of our heavenly Instructor, who, better understanding our true condition, and knowing our frowardness and inadvertency, has most reasonably, as well as kindly, pointed out and enjoined on us the use of those aids which may counteract our infirmities; who, commanding the effect, has commanded also the means whereby it may be accomplished.

Christ the just object of our warm affections. And now, if the use of the affections in religion, in *general*, be at length shewn to be conformable to reason, it will not require many words to prove that our blessed Saviour is the proper object of them. We know that love, gratitude, joy, hope, trust, have all their appropriate objects. Now, it must be at once conceded, that if these appropriate objects be not exhibited, it is perfectly unreasonable to expect that the correspondent passions should be excited. If we ask for love, in the case of an object which has no excellence or desirableness; for gratitude, where no obligation has been conferred; for joy, where there is no just cause of self-congratulation; for hope, where nothing is expected; for trust, where there exists no ground of reliance; then, indeed, we must kiss the rod, and patiently submit to correction. This

would be indeed Egyptian bondage, to demand the effects without the means of producing them. Is the case then so? Are we ready to adopt the language of the avowed enemies of our adorable Saviour; and again to say of him, "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," that "he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him?"* Is it no obligation, that he who "thought it not robbery to be equal with God," should yet for our sakes "make himself of no reputation, and take upon him the form of a servant, and be made in the likeness of men; and humble himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross?"† Is it no cause of "joy, that to us is born a Saviour,"‡ by whom we may "be delivered from the power of darkness, and be made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light?"§ Can there be a "hope comparable to that of our calling,"|| "which is Christ in us, the hope of glory?"¶ Can there be a *trust* to be preferred to the reliance on Christ Jesus, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever?"** Surely, if our opponent be not dead to every generous emotion, he cannot look his own objection in the face, without a blush of shame and indignation.

* Isaiah liii. 2.
 || Ephes. i. 18.

† Phil. ii. 6—8.
 ¶ Col. i. 27.

‡ Luke ii. 10, 11.
 ** Heb. xiii. 8.

§ Cor. i. 12, 13.



SECTION III.

Consideration of the reasonableness of affections towards an invisible Being.

The affec-
tions denied
to be possible
towards an
invisible
Being.

BUT, forced at last to retreat from his favourite position, and compelled to acknowledge that the religious affections towards our blessed Saviour are not unreasonable; the objector still maintains the combat, suggesting that, by the very constitution of our nature, we are not susceptible of them towards an invisible Being; with regard to whom, it is added, we are shut out from all those means of communication and intercourse which knit and cement the union between man and man.

The above
position dis-
cussed and
answered.

We mean not to deny that there is something in this objection. It might even seem to plead the authority of scripture in its favour — “He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?”* And it was indeed no new remark in Horace’s days—

*Segnius irritant animos demissa per aures,
Quam quæ sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus.*

We receive impressions more readily from visible objects, we feel them more strongly, and retain them more durably. But, though it must be granted that this circumstance makes it a more difficult task to preserve the affections in question

* 1 John iv. 20.

in a healthful and vigorous state; is it thereby rendered impossible? This were, indeed, a most precipitate conclusion; and any one who should be disposed to admit the truth of it, might be at least induced to hesitate, when he should reflect that the argument applies equally against the possibility of the love of God, a duty of which the most cursory reader of scripture, if he admit its divine authority, cannot but acknowledge the indispensable obligation. But we need only look back to the scripture proofs which have been already adduced, to be convinced that the religious affections are therein inculcated on us, as a matter of high and serious obligation. Hence we may be assured, that the impossibility stated by our opponent does not exist.

Let us scrutinize this matter, however, a little more minutely, and we shall be compelled to acknowledge, that the objection vanishes when we fairly and accurately investigate the circumstances of the case. With this view, let us look a little into the nature of the affections of the human mind, and endeavour to ascertain whence it is that they derive their nutriment, and are found from experience to increase in strength.

The state of man is such, that his feelings are not the obedient servants of his reason, prompt at once to follow its dictates, as to their direction and their measure. Excellence is the just object of love; good in expectancy, of hope; evil to be apprehended, of fear; the misfortunes and sufferings of our fellow-creatures constitute the just objects of pity. Each of these passions, it might be thought, would be excited, in proportion to what our reason should inform us were the mag-

nitude and consequent claims of its corresponding object. But this is by no means the case. Take first, for a proof, the instance of pity. We read of slaughtered thousands with less emotion than we hear the particulars of a shocking accident which has happened in the next street; the distresses of a novel, which, at the same time, we know to be fictitious, affect us more than the dry narrative of a battle. We become so much interested by these incidents of the imagination, that we cannot speedily banish them from our thoughts, nor recover the tone of our minds; and often we scarcely bring ourselves to lay down our book at the call of real misfortune, of which, perhaps, we go to the relief, on a principle of duty, but with little sense of interest or emotion of tenderness. It were easy to shew that it is much the same in the case of the other affections. Whatever be the cause of this disproportion, which (as metaphysics fall not within our province) we shall not stop to examine, the fact is undeniable. There appears naturally to be a certain strangeness between the passion and its object, which familiarity and the power of habit must gradually overcome. You must contrive to bring them into *close contact*; they must be jointed and glued together by the particularities of little incidents. Thus, in the production of heat in the physical world, the flint and the steel produce not the effect without collision; the rudest barbarian will tell us the necessity of attrition, and the chemist of mixture. Now, an object, it is admitted, is brought into *closer contact* with its corresponding passion, by being seen and conversed with. This we grant is one way; but does it follow that there is no

other? To assert this, would be something like maintaining, in contradiction to universal experience, that objects of vision alone are capable of attracting our regard. But nothing can be more unfounded than such a supposition. It might seem too near an approach to the ludicrous, to suggest, as an example to the contrary, the metaphysician's attachment to his unsubstantial speculations, or the zeal displayed in the pursuit,

Extra flammantia moenia mundi,

of abstract sciences, where there is no idea of bringing them "within the visible diurnal sphere" to the vulgarity of practical application. The instance of novel-reading proves that we may be extremely affected by what we know to be merely ideal incidents and beings. By much thinking or talking of any one; by using our minds to dwell on his excellences; by placing him in imaginary situations which interest and affect us; we find ourselves becoming insensibly more and more attached to him: whereas it is the surest expedient for extinguishing an attachment which already exists, to engage in such occupations or society as may cause our casual thoughts and more fixed meditations to be diverted from the object of it. Ask a mother who has been long separated from her child, especially if he has been in circumstances of honour, or of danger, to draw her attention to him, and to keep it in wakefulness and exercise, and she will tell you, that so far from becoming less dear, he appears to have grown more the object of her affections. She seems to herself to love him even better than the child who has been living under her roof, and has

been daily in her view. How does she rejoice in his good fortune, and weep over his distresses! With what impatience does she anticipate the time of his return!

We find therefore that sight and personal intercourse do not seem necessary to the production or increase of attachment, where the means of *close contact* have been afforded; but, on the other hand, if an object have been prevented from coming into *close contact*, sight and personal intercourse are not sufficient to give it the power of exciting the affections in proportion to its real magnitude. Suppose the case of a person whom we have often seen, and may have occasionally conversed with, and of whom we have been told in the general, that he possesses extraordinary merits. We assent to the assertion. But if we have no knowledge of particulars, no close acquaintance with him, nothing in short which brings his merits home to us, they interest us less than a far inferior degree of the very same qualities in one of our common associates. A parent has several children, all constantly under his eye, and equally dear to him. Yet if any one of them be taken ill, it is brought into so much *closer contact* than before, that it seems to absorb and engross the parent's whole affection. Thus then, though it will not be denied that an object by being visible may thereby excite its corresponding affection with more facility; yet this is manifestly far from being the prime consideration. And so far are we from being the slaves of the sense of vision, that a familiar acquaintance with the intrinsic excellences of an object, aided, it must be admitted, by the power of habit, will render us almost insensible to the

impressions which its outward form conveys, and able entirely to lose the consciousness of an unsightly exterior.

We may be permitted to remark, that the foregoing observations furnish an explanation, less discreditable than that which has been sometimes given, of an undoubted phenomenon in the human mind, that the greatest public misfortunes, however the understanding may lecture, are apt really to affect our feelings less than the most trivial disaster which happens to ourselves. An eminent writer* scarcely overstated the point when he observed, "that it would occasion a man of humanity more real disturbance to know that he was the next morning to lose his little finger, than to hear that the great empire of China had been suddenly swallowed up by an earthquake. The thoughts of the former would keep him awake all night; in the latter case, after making many melancholy reflections on the precariousness of human life, and the vanity of all the labours of man which could be thus annihilated in a moment; after a little speculation too perhaps on the causes of the disaster, and its effects in the political and commercial world; he would pursue his business or his pleasure with the same ease and tranquillity as if no such accident had happened; and snore at night with the most profound serenity over the ruin of a hundred million of his fellow-creatures. Selfishness is not the cause of this, for the most unfeeling brute on earth would surely think nothing of the loss of a finger, if he could thereby prevent so dreadful a calamity." This doctrine of *contact* which has been opened above, affords a

* Dr. Adam Smith. Vide *Theory of Moral Sentiments*.

satisfactory solution ; and from all that has been said, the circumstances, by which the affections of the mind towards any particular object are generated and strengthened, may be easily collected. The chief of these appear to be, whatever tends to give a distinct and lively impression of the object, by setting before us its minute parts, and by often drawing towards it the thoughts and affections, so as to invest it by degrees with a confirmed ascendancy—whatever tends to excite and to keep in exercise a lively interest in its behalf—in other words, full knowledge, distinct and frequent mental entertainment, and pathetic contemplations. Supposing these means to have been used in any given degree, it may be expected that they will be more or less efficacious in proportion as the intrinsic qualities of the object afford greater or less scope for their operation, and more or fewer materials with which to work. Can it then be conceived, that they will be of no avail when steadily practised in the case of our Redeemer ! If the principles of love, and gratitude, and joy, and hope, and trust are not utterly extinct within us, they cannot but be called forth by the various corresponding objects which that blessed contemplation would gradually bring forth to our view. Well might the language of the apostle be addressed to Christians, “Whom having *not seen*, ye love ; in whom, though now ye *see him not*, yet believing, ye *rejoice* with joy unspeakable and full of glory.”*

But in the present instance, fresh considerations pour in still more to invalidate the plea of its being impossible to love an invisible being. Our blessed

* 1 Pet. i. 8.

Saviour, if we may be permitted so to say, is not removed far from us; and the various relations in which we stand towards him, seem purposely made known to us, in order to furnish so many different bonds of connexion with him, and consequent occasions of continual intercourse. He exhibits not himself to us "dark with excessive brightness," but is let down as it were to the possibilities of human converse. We may not think that he is incapable of entering into our little concerns, and sympathizing with them; for we are graciously assured that he is not one "who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, having been in all points tempted like as we are."* The figures under which he is represented, are such as convey ideas of the utmost tenderness. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs in his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."† "They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the heat nor sun smite them; for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them."‡ "I will not leave you orphans"§ was one of his last consolatory declarations.|| The children of Christ are here separated indeed from the personal view of him; but not from his paternal affection and paternal care. Meanwhile let them quicken their regards by the animating anticipation of that blessed day, when he "who is gone to prepare a place for them,

Special grounds for the religious affections towards our Saviour.

* Heb. iv. 15.

† Isa. xl. 11.

‡ Isa. xlix. 10.

§ The word "comfortless" is rendered in the margin orphans.

|| John xiv. 18.

will come again to receive them unto himself." Then shall they be admitted to his more immediate presence: "Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know, even as I am known."*

Surely more than enough has been now said, to prove that this particular case, from its very nature, furnishes the most abundant and powerful considerations and means for exciting the feelings; and it might be contended, without fear of refutation, that by the diligent and habitual use of those considerations and means, we might, with confident expectation of success, engage in the work of raising our affections towards our blessed Saviour to a state of due force and activity. But, blessed be God, we have a still better reliance; for the grand circumstance of all yet remains behind, which the writer has been led to defer, from his wish to contend with his opponents on their own ground. This circumstance is, that here, no less than in other particulars, the Christian's hope is founded, not on the speculations or the strength of man, but on the declaration of Him who cannot lie—on the power of Omnipotence.

We learn from the scriptures, that it is one main part of the operations of the Holy Spirit, to implant those heavenly principles in the human mind, and to cherish their growth. We are encouraged to believe that, in answer to our prayers, this aid from above will give efficacy to our earnest endeavours, if used in humble dependence on Divine grace. We may therefore with confidence take the means which have been suggested. But let us, in our turn, be permitted to ask our

* 1 Cor. xiii. 12.

opponents, have *they* humbly and perseveringly applied for this Divine strength? or disclaiming that assistance, perhaps as tempting them to indolence, have they been so much the more strenuous and unwearied in the use of their own unaided endeavours? or rather, have they not been equally negligent of both? Renouncing the one, they have wholly omitted the other. But this is far from being all. They even reverse all the methods which we have recommended as being calculated to increase regard; and exactly follow that course which would be pursued by any one who should wish to reduce an excessive affection. Yet thus leaving untried all the means, which, whether from reason or scripture, we maintain to be necessary to the production of the end, nay, using such as are of a directly opposite nature, these men presume to talk to us of impossibilities! We may rather contend, that they furnish a fresh proof of the soundness of our reasonings. We lay it down as a fundamental position, that speculative knowledge alone, mere superficial cursory considerations, will be of no avail. Nothing is to be done without the diligent continued use of the appointed method. They themselves afford an instance of the truth of our assertions; and while they supply no argument against the efficacy of the mode prescribed, they acknowledge at least that they are wholly ignorant of any other.

Unreasonable conduct of our objectors in the present instance.

But let us now turn our eyes to Christians of a higher order, to those who have actually proved the truth of our reasonings; who have not only

Appeal to fact in proof of our former positions.

assumed the name, but who have possessed the substance, and felt the power, of Christianity; who, though often foiled by their remaining corruptions, and shamed and cast down under a sense of their many imperfections, have known, in their better seasons, what it was to experience its firm hope, its dignified joy, its unshaken trust, its more than human consolations. In their hearts, love also towards their Redeemer has glowed; a love not *superficial* and unmeaning, but constant and rational, resulting from a strong impression of the worth of its object, and heightened by an abiding sense of great, unmerited, and continually accumulating obligations; ever manifesting itself in acts of diligent obedience, or of patient suffering. Such was the religion of the holy martyrs of the sixteenth century, the illustrious ornaments of the English church. They realized the theory which we have now been faintly tracing. Look to their writings, and you will find that their thoughts and affections had been much exercised in habitual views of the blessed Jesus. Thus they used the required *means*. What were the *effects*? Persecution and distress, degradation and contempt, in vain assailed them—all these evils served but to bring their affections into *closer contact* with their object; and not only did their love feel no diminution or abatement, but it rose to all the exigences of the occasion, and burned with an increase of ardour; and when brought forth at last to a cruel and ignominious death, they repined not at their fate, but rather rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ. The writer might refer to still more recent times, to prove the reality of this divine principle. But lest his

authorities should be disputed, let us go to the apostles of our Lord; and while, on a cursory perusal of their writings, we must acknowledge that they commend and even prescribe to us the love of Christ as one of the chief of the Christian graces; so, on a more attentive inspection of those writings, we shall discover abundant proofs that they were themselves bright examples of their own precept; that our blessed Saviour was really the object of their warmest affection; and what he had done and suffered for them, the continual subject of their grateful remembrance.

Inadequate conceptions concerning the Holy Spirit's
operations.

The disposition so prevalent in the bulk of nominal Christians, to form a religious system for themselves, instead of taking it from the word of God, is strikingly observable in their scarcely admitting, except in the most vague and general sense, the doctrine of the influence of the Holy Spirit. If we look into the scriptures for information on this particular, we learn a very different lesson. We are in them distinctly taught, that "of ourselves we can do nothing;" that "we are by nature children of wrath," and under the power of the evil spirit, our understandings being naturally dark, and our hearts averse from spiritual things; and we are directed to pray for the influence of the Holy Spirit, to enlighten our understandings, to dissipate our prejudices, to purify our corrupt minds, and to renew us after the image of our heavenly Father. It is this influence which is represented as originally awakening us from slumber, as enlightening us in darkness, as

“quickenings us when dead,”* as “delivering us from the power of the devil,” as drawing us to God, as “translating us into the kingdom of his dear Son,”† as “creating us anew in Christ Jesus,”‡ as “dwelling in us, and walking in us;”§ so that, “putting off the old man with his deeds,” we are to consider ourselves as “having put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him;”|| and as those who are to be “an habitation of God through the Spirit.”¶ It is by this Divine assistance only that we can grow in grace, and improve in all holiness. So expressly, particularly, and repeatedly does the word of God inculcate these lessons, that one would think there were scarcely room for any difference of opinion among those who admit its authority. Sometimes** the whole of a Christian’s repentance and faith, and consequent holiness, are ascribed *generally* to the Divine influence; sometimes these are spoken of separately, and ascribed to the same Almighty power. Sometimes different particular graces of the Christian character, those which respect our duties and tempers towards our fellow-creatures, no less than those which have reference to the Supreme Being, are particularly traced to this source. Sometimes they are all referred collectively to this common root, being comprehended under the compendious denomination of “the fruits of the Spirit.” In exact correspondence with these representations, this aid from above is promised in other parts of scripture

* Eph. ii. 1. 5. † Col. i. 13. ‡ Ephes. ii. 10. § 2 Cor. vi. 16.
 || Col. iii. 9, 10. ¶ Ephes. ii. 22.

** Vide Dr. Doddridge’s eight Sermons on Regeneration, a most valuable compilation; and M’Laurin’s Essay on Divine Grace.

for the production of those effects; and the withholding or withdrawing of it is occasionally threatened as a punishment for the sins of men, and as one of the most fatal consequences of the Divine displeasure.

The liturgy of the church of England strictly agrees with the representation which has been here given of the instructions of the word of God.

SECT. IV.

Mistaken conceptions entertained by nominal Christians, of the terms of acceptance with God.

IF it be true then, that, in contradiction to the plainest dictates of scripture, and to the ritual of our established church, the sanctifying operations of the Holy Spirit, the first-fruits of our reconciliation to God, the purchase of our Redeemer's death, and his best gift to his true disciples, are too generally undervalued and slighted; if it be also true, that our thoughts of the blessed Saviour are confused and faint, our affections towards him languid and lukewarm; little proportioned to what they, who at such a price have been rescued from ruin, and endowed with a title to eternal glory, might be justly expected to feel towards the Author of that deliverance; little proportioned to what has been felt by others, ransomed from the same ruin, and partakers of the same inheritance: if this, let it be repeated, be indeed so, let us not shut our eyes against the perception of our real state; but rather endeavour to trace the evil to its source. We are loudly called on to *examine well*

our foundations. If any thing be *there* unsound and hollow, the superstructure could not be safe, though its exterior were less suspicious. Let the question then be asked, and let the answer be returned with all the consideration and solemnity which a question so important may justly demand, whether, in the grand concern of all, *the means of a sinner's acceptance with God*, there be not reason to apprehend, that the nominal Christians whom we have been addressing, too generally entertain very superficial and confused, if not highly dangerous, notions? Is there not cause to fear, that with little more than an indistinct and nominal reference to Him who "bore our sins in his own body on the tree," they really rest their eternal hopes on a vague, general persuasion of the unqualified mercy of the Supreme Being; or that, still more erroneously, they rely, in the main, on their own negative or positive merits? "They can look upon their lives with an impartial eye, and congratulate themselves on their inoffensiveness in society; on their having been exempt, at least, from any gross vice, or, if sometimes accidentally betrayed into it, on its never having been indulged habitually; or if not even so, (for there are but few who can say this, if the term vice be explained according to the strict requisitions of the gospel,) yet on the balance being in their favour, or on the whole not much against them, when their good and bad actions are fairly weighed, and due allowance is made for human frailty." These considerations are sufficient for the most part to compose their apprehensions; these are the cordials which they find most at hand in the moments of serious thought, or of occasional de-

jection; and sometimes perhaps, in seasons of less than ordinary self-complacency, they call in also to their aid the general persuasion of the unbounded mercy and pity of God. Yet persons of this description by no means disclaim a Saviour, or avowedly relinquish their title to a share in the benefits of his death. They close their petitions with the name of Christ; but if not chiefly from the effect of habit, or out of decent conformity to the established faith, yet surely with something of the same ambiguity of principle which influenced the expiring philosopher, when he ordered the customary mark of homage to be paid to the god of medicine.

Others go farther than this; for there are many shades of difference between those who flatly renounce, and those who cordially embrace, the doctrine of redemption by Christ. This class has a sort of general, indeterminate, and ill-understood dependence on our blessed Saviour. But their hopes, so far as they can be distinctly made out, appear ultimately to rest on the persuasion that they are now, through Christ, become members of a new dispensation, wherein they will be tried by a more lenient rule than that to which they must have been otherwise subject. "God will not now be extreme to mark what is done amiss; but will dispense with the rigorous exactions of his law, too strict, indeed, for such frail creatures as we are to hope that we can fulfil it. Christianity has moderated the requisitions of Divine justice; and all that is now required of us is, thankfully to trust to the merits of Christ for the pardon of our sins, and the acceptance of our sincere though imperfect obedience. The frailties

and infirmities to which our nature is liable, or to which our situation in life exposes us, will not be severely judged; and as it is practice that really determines the character, we may rest satisfied, that if on the whole our lives be tolerably good, we shall escape with little or no punishment, and, through Jesus Christ our Lord, shall be finally partakers of heavenly felicity."

We cannot dive into the human heart, and therefore should always speak with caution and diffidence, when from external appearances or declarations we are affirming the existence of any internal principles and feelings; especially as we are liable to be misled by the ambiguities of language, or by the inaccuracy with which others may express themselves. But it is sometimes not difficult to any one who is accustomed, if the phrase may be allowed, to the anatomy of the human mind, to discern that, generally speaking, the persons who use the above language rely not so much on the merits of Christ, and on the agency of Divine grace, as on their own power of fulfilling the moderated requisitions of Divine justice. He will hence, therefore, discover in them a disposition rather to extenuate the malignity of their disease, than to magnify the excellence of the proffered remedy. He will find them apt to palliate in themselves what they cannot fully justify, to enhance the merit of what they believe to be their good qualities and commendable actions, to set, as it were in an account, the good against the bad; and if the result be not very unfavourable, they conceive that they shall be entitled to claim the benefits of our Saviour's sufferings, as a thing of course. They have little

idea, so little, that it might almost be affirmed that they have no idea at all, of the importance or difficulty of the duty of what the scripture calls "submitting ourselves to the righteousness of God;" or of our proneness rather to justify ourselves in his sight, than in the language of imploring penitents to acknowledge ourselves guilty and helpless sinners. They have never summoned themselves to this entire and unqualified renunciation of their own merits, and their own strength; and therefore they remain strangers to the natural loftiness of the human heart, which such a call would have awakened into action, and roused to resistance. **ALL THESE THEIR SEVERAL ERRORS NATURALLY RESULT FROM THE MISTAKEN CONCEPTION ENTERTAINED OF THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIANITY.** They consider not that Christianity is a scheme for "justifying *the ungodly*,"* by Christ's dying for them "*when yet sinners*:" † a scheme for reconciling us to God—"*when enemies*;" and for making the fruits of holiness *the effects*, ‡ *not the cause*, of our being justified and reconciled: that, in short, it opens freely the door of mercy,

Prevailing fundamental misconception of the scheme and essential principle of the gospel.

* Rom. iv. 5.

† Ibid. v. 6—8.

‡ The writer trusts he cannot be misunderstood to mean that any, continuing sinners and ungodly, can, by believing, be accepted, or finally saved. The following chapter, particularly the latter part of it, (section vi.) would abundantly vindicate him from any such misconstruction. Meanwhile, he will only remark, that true faith (in which repentance is considered as involved) is in scripture regarded as *the radical principle of holiness*. If the root exist, the proper fruits will be brought forth. An attention to this consideration would have easily explained and reconciled those passages of St. Paul's and St. James's Epistles, which have furnished so much matter of argument and criticism. St. James, it may be observed, all along speaks not of a man who *has* faith, but who *says* that he hath faith. Vide James ii. 14, &c. &c.

‡ Vide chap. iv. sect. vi.

to the greatest and best of penitent sinners ; who, obeying the blessed impulse of the grace of God, whereby they had been awakened from the sleep of death, and moved to seek for pardon, may enter in, and, through the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit, be enabled to bring forth the fruits of righteousness. But they rather conceive of Christianity as opening the door of mercy, that those who, on the ground of their own merits, could not have hoped to justify themselves before God, may yet be admitted for Christ's sake, on condition of their having previously satisfied the moderated requisitions of Divine justice. In speaking to others, also, of the gospel scheme, they are apt to talk too much of terms and performances on our part, on which we become entitled to an interest in the sufferings of Christ ; instead of stating the benefits of Christ's satisfaction as extended to us freely, "without money, and without price."

Some practical consequences of the fundamental error above pointed out.

The *practical* consequences of these errors are such as might be expected. They tend to prevent that sense which we ought to entertain of our own natural misery and helplessness ; and that deep feeling of gratitude for the merits and intercession of Christ, to which we are wholly indebted for our reconciliation to God, and for the will and the power, from first to last, to work out our own salvation. They consider it too much in the light of a contract between two parties, wherein each, independently of the other, has his own distinct condition to perform ; man, to do his duty ; God, to justify and accept for Christ's sake : if they fail not in the discharge of

their condition, assuredly the condition on God's part will be faithfully fulfilled. Accordingly, we find, in fact, that they who represent the gospel scheme in the manner above described, give evidence of the subject with which their hearts are most filled, by their proneness to run into merely moral disquisitions, either not mentioning at all, or, at least, but cursorily touching on the sufferings and love of their Redeemer; and are little apt to kindle at their Saviour's name, and, like the apostles, to be betrayed by their fervour into what may be almost an untimely descant on the riches of his unutterable mercy. In addressing others, also, whom they conceive to be living in habits of sin, and under the wrath of God, they rather advise them to amend their ways, as a preparation for their coming to Christ, than exhort them to throw themselves with deep prostration of soul at the foot of the cross, there to obtain pardon, and find grace to help in time of need.

The great importance of the subject in question will justify the writer in having been thus particular. It has arisen from a wish that, on a matter of such magnitude, it should be impossible to mistake his meaning. But, after all that has been said, let it also be remembered, that, except so far as the instruction of others is concerned, the point of importance is, the internal disposition of the mind; and it is to be hoped that a dependence for pardon and holiness may be placed where it ought to be, notwithstanding the vague manner in which men express themselves. Let us also hope that He who searches the heart, sees the right dispositions in many who use the mis-

taken and dangerous language to which we have objected.

If the preceding statement of the error so generally prevalent concerning the nature of the gospel offer, be in any considerable degree just, it will then explain that languor in the affections towards our blessed Saviour, together with that inadequate impression of the necessity and value of the assistance of the Divine Spirit, which so generally prevail. According to the soundest principles of reasoning, it may be also adduced as an additional proof of the correctness of our present statement, that it so exactly falls in with those phenomena, and so naturally accounts for them. For, even admitting that the persons above mentioned, particularly the last class, do at the bottom rely on the atonement of Christ, yet on their scheme it must necessarily happen, that the object to which they are most accustomed to look, with which their thoughts are chiefly conversant, from which they most habitually derive complacency, is rather their own qualified merit and services, though confessed to be inadequate, than the sufferings and atoning death of a crucified Saviour. The affections towards our blessed Lord, therefore, (according to the theory of the passions formerly laid down) cannot be expected to flourish, because they receive not that which was shewn to be necessary to their nutriment and growth. If we would love him as affectionately, and rejoice in him as triumphantly, as the first Christians did; we must learn, like them, to repose our entire trust in him, and to adopt the language of the apostle, "God forbid that I should glory, save in

the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,"* "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."†

Doubtless, there have been too many who, to their eternal ruin, have abused the doctrine of salvation by grace, and have vainly trusted in Christ for pardon and acceptance, when by their vicious lives they have plainly proved the groundlessness of their pretensions. The tree is to be known by its fruits; and there is too much reason to fear that there is no principle of faith, when it does not decidedly evince itself by the fruits of holiness. Dreadful, indeed, will be the doom, above that of all others, of those loose professors of Christianity, to whom, at the last day, our blessed Saviour will address those words, "I never knew you; depart from me, all ye that work iniquity." But the danger of error on this side ought not to render us insensible to the opposite error; an error against which, in these days, it seems particularly necessary to guard. It is far from the intention of the writer of this work to enter into the niceties of controversy. But, surely, without danger of being thought to violate this design, he may be permitted to contend, that they who in the main believe the doctrines of the church of England, are bound to allow that our dependence on our blessed Saviour, as alone the meritorious cause of our acceptance with God, and as the means of all its blessed fruits and glorious consequences, must be not merely formal and nominal, but real and substantial; not vague, qualified, and partial, but direct, cordial, and

Condemnation of those who abuse the doctrine of free grace.

* Gal. vi. 14.

† 1 Cor. i. 30.

Believing in Christ, what it really implies. entire. "Repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ," was the sum of the apostolical instructions. It is not an occasional invocation of the name of Christ, or a transient recognition of his authority, that fills up the measure of the terms, *believing in Jesus*. This we shall find no such easy task; and if we trust that we do believe, we should all, perhaps, do well to cry out, in the words of an imploring suppliant, (he supplicated not in vain,) "Lord, help thou our unbelief." We must be deeply conscious of our guilt and misery, heartily repenting of our sins, and firmly resolving to forsake them; and thus penitently "fleeing for refuge to the hope set before us," we must found altogether on the merit of the crucified Redeemer our hopes of escape from their deserved punishment, and of deliverance from their enslaving power. This must be our first, our last, our only plea. We are to surrender ourselves up to him to "be washed in his blood,"* to be sanctified by his Spirit, resolving to receive him for our Lord and Master, to learn in his school, to obey all his commandments.

Answer to the objection, that we insist on metaphysical niceties. It may, perhaps, be not unnecessary, after having treated so largely on this important topic, to add a few words in order to obviate a charge which may be urged against us, that we are insisting on nice and abstruse distinctions in what is a matter of general concern; and this, too, in a system which, on its original promulgation, was declared to be peculiarly intended for the simple and poor. It will be abundantly evident, how-

* Rev. i. 5.

ever, on a little reflection, and experience fully proves the position, that what has been required is not the perception of a subtile distinction, but a state and condition of heart. To the former, the poor and the ignorant must be indeed confessed unequal; but they are far less indisposed than the great and the learned, to bow down to that "preaching of the cross which is to them that perish foolishness, but unto them that are saved the power of God, and the wisdom of God." The poor are not liable to be puffed up by the intoxicating fumes of ambition and worldly grandeur. They are less likely to be kept from entering into the strait and narrow way, and, when they have entered, to be drawn back again or to be retarded in their progress, by the cares or the pleasures of life. They may express themselves ill: but their views may be simple, and their hearts humble, penitent, and sincere. It is as in other cases; the vulgar are the subjects of phenomena, the learned explain them: the former know nothing of the theory of vision or of sentiment; but this ignorance hinders not that they see and think, and though unable to discourse elaborately on the passions, they can feel warmly for their children, their friends, their country.

After this digression, if that be indeed a digression which, by removing a formidable objection, renders the truth of the positions we wish to establish more clear and less questionable, we may now resume the thread of our argument. Still entreating, therefore, the attention of those who have not been used to think much of the necessity of this undivided, and, if it

The atonement and grace of Christ farther pressed as the subject of our habitual regard.

may be so termed, unadulterated reliance, for which we have been contending; we would still more particularly address ourselves to others who are disposed to believe that though, in some obscure and vague sense, the death of Christ, as the satisfaction for our sins, and for the purchase of our future happiness, and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, are to be admitted as fundamental articles of our creed, yet that these are doctrines so much above us, that they are not objects suited to our capacities; and that, turning our eyes therefore from these difficult speculations, we should fix them on the practical and moral precepts of the gospel. "These it most concerns us to know; these, therefore, let us study. Such is the frailty of our nature, such the strength and number of our temptations to evil, that, in reducing the gospel morality to practice, we shall find full employment; and, by attending to these moral precepts, rather than to those high mysterious doctrines which you are pressing on us, we shall best prepare to appear before God on that tremendous day, when 'He shall judge every man according to his WORKS.'"

"Vain wisdom all, and false philosophy!"

It will at once destroy this flimsy web, to reply in the words of our blessed Saviour, and of his beloved disciple, "This is the *work* of God, that ye *believe* in him whom he hath sent."* "This is his *commandment*, that we should *believe* on the name of his Son Jesus Christ."† In truth, if we consider but for a moment the opinions of men who argue thus, we must be conscious of

* John vi. 29.

† 1 John iii. 23.

their absurdity. Let the modern Unitarian reduce the gospel to a mere system of ethics, but surely it is in the highest degree unreasonable to admit into our scheme all the grand peculiarities of Christianity, and, having admitted, to neglect and think no more of them! "Wherefore," might the Socinian say, "wherefore all this costly and complicated machinery? It is like the Ty-chonic astronomy, encumbered and self-convicted by its own complicated relations and useless perplexities. It is so little like the simplicity of nature, it is so unworthy of the Divine hand, that it even offends against those rules of propriety which we require to be observed in the imperfect compositions of the human intellect."*

Well may the Socinian assume this lofty tone with those whom we are now addressing. If these be indeed the doctrines of revelation, common sense suggests to us, that, from their nature and their magnitude, they deserve our most serious regard. It is the very theology of Epicurus to allow the existence of these "heavenly things," but to deny their connexion with human concerns, and their influence on human actions. Besides the unreasonableness of this conduct, we might strongly urge also in this connexion the profaneness of thus treating as matters of subordinate consideration those parts of the system of Christianity which are so strongly impressed on our reverence by the dignity of the person to whom they relate. This very argument is indeed repeatedly and pointedly pressed by the sacred writers.†

Nor is the profane irreverence of this conduct

* *Nec Deus intersit, &c.*

† *Vide Heb. ii. 1, &c.*

more striking than its ingratitude. When, from reading that our Saviour was "the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, upholding all things by the word of his power," we go on to consider the purpose for which he came on earth, and all that he did and suffered for us; surely, if we have a spark of ingenuousness left within us, we shall condemn ourselves as guilty of the blackest ingratitude, in rarely noticing, or coldly turning away, on whatever shallow pretences, from the contemplation of these miracles of mercy. For those baser minds, however, on which fear alone can operate, that motive is superadded; and we are plainly forewarned, both directly and indirectly, by the example of the Jewish nation, that God will not hold them guiltless who are thus unmindful of his most signal acts of condescension and kindness. But as this is a question of pure revelation, reasonings from probability may not be deemed decisive. To revelation therefore we must appeal; and without entering into a laboured discussion of the subject, which might be to trespass on the reader's patience, I would refer him to the sacred writings themselves for complete satisfaction. We would earnestly recommend it to him to weigh with the utmost seriousness those passages of scripture wherein the peculiar doctrines of Christianity are expressly mentioned; and, farther, to attend with due regard to the illustration and confirmation, which the conclusions resulting from those passages receive incidentally from the word of God. They who maintain the opinion which we are combating, will thereby become convinced that theirs is indeed an *unscriptural* religion;

and will learn, instead of turning off their eyes from the grand peculiarities of Christianity, to keep these ever in view, as the pregnant principles whence all the rest must derive their origin, and receive their best support.*

Let us then each for himself solemnly Conclusion. ask ourselves, whether *we* have fled for refuge to the appointed hope? And whether *we* are habitually looking to it, as to the only source of

* Any one who wishes to investigate this subject will do well to study attentively M'Laurin's Essay on Prejudices against the Gospel. It may not be amiss here to direct the reader's attention to a few leading arguments, many of them those of the work just recommended. Let him maturely estimate the force of those terms whereby the apostle, in the following passages, designates and characterizes the whole of the Christian system. "We preach Christ crucified;" "We determined to know nothing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." The value of this argument will be acknowledged by all who consider, that a system is never designated by an immaterial or an inferior part of it, but by that which constitutes its prime consideration and essential distinction. The conclusion suggested by this remark is confirmed by the Lord's supper being the rite by which our Saviour himself commanded his disciples to keep him in remembrance; and, indeed, a similar lesson is taught by the sacrament of baptism, which shadows out our souls being washed and purified by the blood of Christ. Observe, next, the frequency with which our Saviour's death and sufferings are introduced, and how often they are urged as practical motives.

"The minds of the apostles seem full of this subject. Every thing put them in mind of it; they did not allow themselves to have it long out of their view, nor did any other branch of spiritual instruction make them lose sight of it." Consider, next, that part of the Epistle to the Romans, wherein St. Paul speaks of some who went about to establish their own righteousness, and had not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God. May not this charge be, in some degree, urged, and even more strongly than in the case of the Jews, against those who satisfy themselves with vague, general, occasional thoughts of our Saviour's mediation; and the source of whose habitual complacency, as we explained above, is rather their being tolerably well satisfied with their own characters and conduct? Yet St. Paul declares concerning those of whom he speaks, as concerning persons whose sad situation

consolation? "Other foundation can no man lay:" there is no other ground of dependence, no other plea for pardon; but *here* there is hope, even to the uttermost. Let us labour then to affect our hearts with a deep conviction of our need of a Redeemer, and of the value of his offered mediation. Let us fall down humbly before the throne of God, imploring pity and pardon in the name of the Son of his love. Let us beseech him to give us a true spirit of repentance, and of hearty undivided faith in the Lord Jesus. Let us not be satisfied till the cordiality of our belief be

could not be too much lamented, that he had great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart, adding still more emphatical expressions of deep and bitter regret.

Let the Epistle to the Galatians be also carefully examined and considered; and let it be fairly asked, what was the particular in which the Judaizing Christians were defective, and the want of which is spoken of in such strong terms as these; that it frustrates the grace of God, and must debar from all the benefits of the death of Jesus? The Judaizing converts were not immoral. They seem to have admitted the chief tenets concerning our Saviour. But they appear to have been disposed to trust (*not wholly, be it observed, also, but only in part*) for their acceptance with God, to the Mosaic institutions, instead of reposing entirely on the merits of Christ. Here, let it be remembered, that when a compliance with these institutions was not regarded as conveying this inference, the apostle shewed, by his own conduct, that he did not deem it criminal; whence, no less than from the words of the Epistle, it is clear that the offence of the Judaizing Christians whom he condemned, was what we have stated, that their crime did not consist in their obstinately continuing to adhere to a dispensation the ceremonial of which Christianity had abrogated, nor yet that it arose out of the sacrifices of the Levitical law, being from their very nature without efficacy for the blotting out of sin.—Vide Heb. x. 4, &c. It was not that the foundation on which they built was of a sandy nature, but that they built on *any other* foundation than that which God had laid in the gospel; it was not that they placed their confidence, either in part or in the whole, on a false or a defective object, but that they did not direct it exclusively to the only true object of hope held forth to us by the gospel.

confirmed to us by that character with which we are furnished by an inspired writer, "that to as many as believe, Christ is precious;" and let us strive to increase daily in *love* towards our blessed Saviour; and pray earnestly that "we may be filled with *joy* and *peace* in believing, that we may abound in *hope* through the power of the Holy Ghost." Let us diligently put in practice the directions already given for cherishing and cultivating the principle of the love of Christ. With this view let us labour assiduously to increase in knowledge, that our affection to the Lord who bought us may be deeply rooted and rational. By frequent meditation on the incidents of our Saviour's life, and still more on the astonishing circumstances of his death; by often calling to mind the state from which he proposes to rescue us, and the glories of his heavenly kingdom; by continual intercourse with him of prayer and praise, of dependence and confidence in dangers, of hope and joy in our brighter hours, let us endeavour to keep him constantly present to our minds, and to render all our conceptions of him more distinct, lively, and intelligent. The title of Christian is a reproach to us, if we estrange ourselves from Him after whom we are denominated. The name of Jesus is not to be to *us* like the Allah of the Mahometans, a talisman or an amulet, to be worn on the arm, merely as an external badge and symbol of our profession, and to preserve us from evil by some mysterious and unintelligible potency; but it is to be engraven deeply on the heart, there written by the finger of God himself in everlasting characters. It is our sure and undoubted title to present peace and

future glory. The assurance which this title conveys of a bright reversion, will lighten the burdens and alleviate the sorrows of life; and in some happier moments, it will impart to us somewhat of that fulness of joy which is at God's right hand, enabling us to join even here in the heavenly hosannah, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."* "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." †

* Rev. v. 12.

† Ibid. 13.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE PREVAILING INADEQUATE CONCEPTIONS CONCERNING THE NATURE AND THE STRICT- NESS OF PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY.

SECTION I.

ONE part of the foregoing title may perhaps on the first view excite some surprise in such of my readers as may have drawn a hasty inference from the charges conveyed by the two preceding chapters. It might perhaps be expected, that they who have very low conceptions of the corruption of human nature, would be proportionably less indulgent to human frailty; and that they who lay little stress on Christ's satisfaction for sin, or on the operations of the Holy Spirit, would be more high and rigid in their demands of diligent endeavours after universal holiness; since their scheme implies that we must depend chiefly on our own exertions and performances for our acceptance with God.

But any such expectations as these would be greatly disappointed. There is in fact a region of truth, and a region of errors. They who hold the fundamental doctrines of scripture in their due

force, hold also in its due degree of purity the practical system which scripture inculcates. But they who explain away the former, soften down the latter also, and reduce it to the level of their own defective scheme. It is not from any confidence in the superior amount of their own performances, or in the greater vigour of their own exertions, that they reconcile themselves to their low views of the satisfaction of Christ, and of the influence of the Spirit; but it should rather seem to be their plan so to depress the required standard of practice, that no man need fall short of it, and that no superior aid can be wanted for enabling us to attain to it. It happens, however, with respect to their simple method of morality, as in the case of the short ways to knowledge, of which some vain pretenders have vaunted themselves to be possessed; despising the beaten track in which more sober and humble spirits have been content to tread, they have indignantly struck into new and untried paths; but these have failed of conducting them to the right object, and have issued only in ignorance and conceit.

It seems in our days to be the commonly received opinion, that provided a man admit in general terms the truth of Christianity, though he neither know nor consider much concerning the particulars of the system; and if he be not habitually guilty of any of the grosser vices against his fellow-creatures, we have no great reason to be dissatisfied with him, or to question the validity of his claim to the name and privileges of a Christian. The title implies no more than a sort of formal, general assent to Christianity in the gross, and a degree of morality in practice, little if at all

superior to that for which we look in a good Deist, Mussulman, or Hindoo.

Should any one be disposed to deny that this is a fair representation of the religion of the bulk of the Christian world, he might be asked, whether if it were proved to them beyond dispute that Christianity is a mere forgery, would this occasion any great change in their conduct or habits of mind? Would any alteration be made in consequence of this discovery, except in a few of their speculative opinions, which, when distinct from practice, it is a part of their own system to think of little consequence; and with regard to public worship, (knowing the good effects of religion upon the lower orders of the people,) they might still think it better to attend occasionally for example's sake? Would not a regard for their character, their health, their domestic and social comforts, still continue to restrain them from vicious excesses, and prompt them to persist in the discharge, according to their present measure, of the various duties of their stations? Would they find themselves dispossessed of what had been to them hitherto the repository of counsel and instruction, the rule of their conduct, their habitual source of peace, and hope, and consolation?

It were needless to put these questions. They are answered in fact already by the lives of many known unbelievers, between whom and these professed Christians even the familiar associates of both, though men of discernment and observation, would discover little difference either in conduct or temper of mind. How little then does Christianity deserve that title to novelty and superiority which has been almost universally admitted; that

pre-eminence, as a practical code, over all other systems of ethics ! How unmerited are the praises which have been lavished upon it by its friends ; praises, in which even its enemies (not in general disposed to make concessions in its favour) have so often been unwarily drawn in to acquiesce !

Was it then for this, that the Son of God condescended to become our instructor and our pattern, leaving us an example that we might tread in his steps ? Was it for this that the apostles of Christ voluntarily submitted to hunger, and nakedness, and pain, and ignominy, and death, when forewarned too by their Master that such would be their treatment ? That, after all, their disciples should attain to no higher strain of virtue than those who, rejecting their Divine authority, should still adhere to the old philosophy ?

But it may perhaps be objected, that we are forgetting an observation which we ourselves have made, that Christianity has raised the general standard of morals ; to which therefore infidelity herself now finds it prudent to conform, availing herself of the pure morality of Christianity, and sometimes wishing to usurp to herself the credit of it, while she stigmatizes the authors with the epithets of ignorant dupes or designing impostors !

But let it be asked, are the motives of Christianity so little necessary to the practice of it, its principles to its conclusions, that the one may be spared, and yet the other remain in undiminished force ? Still, then, its *doctrines* are no more than a barren and inapplicable, or at least, an unnecessary theory, the place of which, it may perhaps be added, would be well supplied by a more simple and less costly scheme.

But can it be? Is Christianity then reduced to a mere creed? Is its practical influence bounded within a few external plausibilities? Does its essence consist only in a few speculative opinions, and a few useless and unprofitable tenets? And can this be the ground of that portentous distinction, which is so unequivocally made by the evangelist between those who accept and those who reject the gospel; "He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him?" This were to run into the very error which the bulk of professed Christians would be most forward to condemn, of making an unproductive faith the rule of God's future judgment, and the ground of an eternal separation. Thus, not unlike the rival circumnavigators from Spain and Portugal, who, setting out in contrary directions, found themselves in company at the very time they thought themselves farthest from each other; so the bulk of professed Christians arrive, though by a different course, almost at the very same point, and occupy nearly the same station as a set of enthusiasts, who also rest upon a barren faith, to whom on the first view they might be thought the most nearly opposite, and whose tenets they with reason profess to hold in peculiar detestation. By what pernicious courtesy of language is it, that this wretched system has been flattered with the name of Christianity?

The morality of the gospel is not so slight a fabric. Christianity throughout the whole extent exhibits proofs of its Divine original, and its practical precepts are no less pure than its doctrines are sublime. Can

Strictness of true practical Christianity.

the compass of language furnish injunctions stricter in their measure, or larger in their comprehension, than those with which the word of God abounds; “*Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus;*” “*Be ye holy, for God is holy:*” “*Be ye perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect:*” we are commanded to *perfect* holiness, to go on unto *perfection*.

Such are the scripture admonitions; and surely they to whom such admonitions are addressed, may not safely acquiesce in low attainments: a conclusion to which we are led as well by the force of the expressions by which Christians are characterized in scripture, as by the radical change which is represented as taking place in every man on his becoming a real Christian. “Every one,” it is said, “that hath this hope, purifieth himself, even as God is pure:” true Christians are said to be “partakers of the Divine nature;” “to be created anew in the image of God;” “to be temples of the Holy Ghost.” The effects of which must appear “in *all* goodness, and righteousness, and truth.”

Great as was the progress which the apostle Paul had made in all virtue, he declares of himself, that *he* still presses forward, “forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto the things which are before.” He prays for his beloved converts, “that they may be *filled* with *all* the fulness of God;” “that they may be *filled* with the fruits of righteousness:” “that they might walk worthy of the Lord unto *all* pleasing, being fruitful in *every* good work.” And from one of the petitions, which our blessed Saviour inserts in

that form of prayer which he has given as a model for our imitation, we may infer that the habitual sentiment of our hearts ought to be, “Thy will be done in earth *as it is in heaven.*”

These few extracts from the word of God will serve abundantly to evince the *strictness* of the Christian morality; but this point will be still more fully established, when we proceed to investigate the ruling *principles* of the Christian character.

I apprehend the essential practical characteristic of true Christians to be this: that, relying on the promises to repenting sinners of acceptance through the Redeemer, they have renounced and abjured all other masters, and have cordially and unreservedly devoted themselves to God. This is indeed the very figure which baptism daily represents to us: like the father of Hannibal, we there bring our infant to the altar, we consecrate him to the service of his *proper owner*, and vow *in his name* eternal hostilities against all the enemies of his salvation. After the same manner, Christians are become the sworn enemies of sin; they will henceforth hold no parley with it, they will allow it in no shape, they will admit it to no composition; the war which they have denounced against it is cordial, universal, irreconcilable.

And its essential nature opened and stated.

But this is not all—it is now their determined purpose to yield themselves without reserve to the reasonable service of their rightful sovereign. “They are not their own:” their bodily and mental faculties, their natural and acquired endowments, their substance, their authority, their time, their influence; all these, they consider as belonging to them, not for their own gratification, but as so

many instruments to be consecrated to the honour of God and employed in his service. This is the master principle to which every other must be subordinate. Whatever may have been hitherto their ruling passion; whatever hitherto their leading pursuit; whether sensual, or intellectual, of science, of taste, of fancy, or of feeling, it must now possess but a secondary place; or rather (to speak more correctly) it must exist only at the pleasure of its true and legitimate superior, and be put altogether under its direction and control.

Thus it is the prerogative of Christianity "to bring into captivity *every thought* to the obedience of Christ." They who really feel its power, are resolved "to live no longer to themselves, but to him that died for them:" they know indeed their own infirmities: they know, that the way on which they have entered is strait and difficult, but they know too the encouraging assurance, "They who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength," and, relying on this animating declaration, they deliberately purpose, that, so far as they may be able, the grand governing maxim of their future lives shall be "to do all to the glory of God."

Behold here the seminal principle, which contains within it, as in an embryo state, the rudiments of all true virtue; which striking deep its roots, though feeble perhaps and lowly in its beginnings, yet silently progressive, and almost insensibly maturing, will shortly, even in the bleak and churlish temperature of this world, lift up its head and spread abroad its branches, bearing abundant fruits; precious fruits of refreshment and consolation, of which the boasted products of phi-

osophy are but sickly imitations, void of fragrance and of flavour. But,

Ignæus est ollis vigor et cœlestis origo.

At length it shall be transplanted into its native region, and enjoy a more genial climate, and a kindlier soil; and, bursting forth into full luxuriance, with unfading beauty and unexhausted odours, shall flourish for ever in the paradise of God.

But while the servants of Christ continue in this life, glorious as is the issue of their labours, they receive but too many humiliating memorials of their remaining imperfections, and they daily find reason to confess that they cannot do the things that they would. Their *determination*, however, is still unshaken, and it is the fixed desire of their hearts to improve in *all holiness*—and this, let it be observed, on many accounts. Various passions concur to push them forward; they are urged on by the dread of failure, in this arduous but necessary work; they trust not, where their all is at stake, to lively emotions, or to internal impressions, however warm; the example of Christ is their pattern, the word of God is their rule: there they read, that “without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” It is the description of real Christians, that “they are gradually changed into the image of their Divine Master;” and they dare not allow themselves to believe their title sure, except so far as they can discern in themselves the growing traces of this blessed resemblance.

It is not merely, however, by the fear of misery, and the desire of happiness, that they are actuated in their endeavours to excel in all holiness; they

love it for its own sake; nor is it *solely* by the sense of self-interest (a principle it must be confessed of an inferior order, though often unreasonably condemned) that they are influenced in their determination to obey the will of God, and to cultivate his favour. This determination has its foundations, indeed, in a deep and humiliating sense of his exalted Majesty and infinite power, and of their own extreme inferiority and littleness, attended with a settled conviction of its being their duty, as his creatures, to submit in all things to the will of their great Creator. But these awful impressions are relieved and ennobled by an admiring sense of the infinite perfections and infinite amiableness of the Divine character; animated by a confiding though humble hope of his fatherly kindness and protection; and quickened by the grateful recollection of immense and continually increasing obligations. This is the Christian love of God! A love compounded of admiration, of preference, of hope, of trust, of joy; chastised by reverential awe, and wakeful with continual gratitude.

I would here express myself with caution, lest I should inadvertently wound the heart of some weak but sincere believer. The elementary principles which have been above enumerated, may exist in various degrees and proportions. A difference in natural disposition, in the circumstances of the past life, and in numberless other particulars, may occasion a great difference in the predominant tempers of different Christians. In one the love, in another the fear of God, may have the ascendancy; trust in one, and in another gratitude; but, in greater or less degrees, a cordial compla-

gency in the sovereignty of the Divine Being, an exalted sense of his perfections, a grateful impression of his goodness, and a humble hope of his favour, are common to them all. Common—the determination to devote themselves, without exceptions, to the service and glory of God. Common—the desire of holiness and of continual progress towards perfection. Common—an abasing consciousness of their own unworthiness, and of their many remaining infirmities, which interpose so often to corrupt the simplicity of their intentions, to thwart the execution of their purer purposes, and frustrate the resolutions of their better hours.

But some perhaps, who will not directly oppose the conclusions for which we have been contending, may endeavour to elude them. It may be urged, that to represent them as of general application, is going much too far; and however true in the case of some individuals of a higher order, it may be asserted they are not applicable to ordinary Christians; from these, so much will not surely be expected; and here perhaps there may be a secret reference to that supposed mitigation of the requisitions of the divine law under the Christian dispensation, which we have already noticed as being too prevalent among professing Christians. This is so important a point, that it ought not to be passed over: let us call in the authority of scripture; where the difficulty is not to find proofs, but to select with discretion from the multitude which pour in upon us. Here also, as in former instances, the positive injunctions of scripture are confirmed and illustrated by various considerations and inferences, suggested by other parts of the

sacred writings, all tending to the same infallible conclusion.

Precepts in broad terms. In the first place, the precepts are expressed in the most general terms; there is no hint given, that any persons are at liberty to conceive themselves exempted from the obligation of them; and in any who are disposed to urge such a plea of exemption, it may well excite the most serious apprehension to consider how the plea would be received by an earthly tribunal: no weak argument this, to such as are acquainted with the scriptures, and who know how often God is there represented as reasoning with mankind on the principles which they have established for their dealings with each other.

The precepts universal, because resulting from relations common to all Christians. But in the next place, the precepts of the gospel contain within themselves abundant proofs of their *universal* application, inasmuch as they are grounded on circumstances and relations common to *all* Christians, and of the benefits of which, even our objectors themselves (though they would evade the practical deductions from them) would not be willing to relinquish their share. Christians "are not their own," because "*they are bought with a price;*" they are not "to live unto themselves, but *to him that died for them;*" they are commanded to do the most difficult duties, "that they may be the children of their Father which is in heaven;" and "except a man *be born again of the Spirit* (thus again becoming one of the sons of God) *he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.*" It is "*because they are sons,*" that God has given them what in scripture language is styled *the Spirit of adoption.*

It is only of “as many as are led by the Spirit of God,” that it is declared that “they are the sons of God;” and we are expressly warned (in order as it were to prevent any such loose profession of Christianity as that which we are here combating) “If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” In short, Christians in general are every where denominated *the servants and the children* of God, and are required to serve him with that submissive obedience, and that affectionate promptitude of duty, which belong to those endearing relations.

Estimate, next, the force of that well-known passage, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with *all* thy heart, and with *all* thy mind, and with *all* thy soul, and with *all* thy strength!” The injunction is multiplied on us, as it were, to silence the sophistry of the caviller, and to fix the most inconsiderate mind. And though, for the sake of argument, we should concede for the present, that, under *the qualifications formerly suggested*, an *ardent* and *vigorous* affection were not indispensably required of us; yet surely, if the words have any meaning at all, the least which can be intended by them is that settled predominant esteem and cordial preference for which we are now contending. The conclusion which this passage forces on us, is strikingly confirmed by other parts of scripture, wherein the love of God is positively commended to the *whole* of a Christian church;* or wherein the want of it,† or wherein its not being the chief and ruling affection, is charged on persons

Strong practical precepts, and other confirmations.

* 2 Cor. xiii. 14.

† 1 John iii. 17, and Rom. xvi. 18, compared with Phil. iii. 19.

professing themselves Christians, as being sufficient to disprove their claim to that appellation, or as being equivalent to denying it.* Let not therefore any deceive themselves by imagining, that only an absolute unqualified renunciation of the desire of the favour of God is *here* condemned. God will not accept of a *divided* affection; a *single* heart, and a *single* eye, are in express terms declared to be indispensably required of us. We are ordered, under the figure of amassing heavenly treasure, to make the favour and service of God our *chief* pursuit, for this very reason, because "where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also." It is on this principle that in speaking of particular vices, such phrases are often used in scripture, as suggest that their criminality mainly consists in drawing away the HEART from Him who is the just object of its preference; and that sins, which we might think very different in criminality, are classed together, because they all agree in this grand character. Nor is this preference asserted only over affections which are vicious in themselves, and to which therefore Christianity might well be supposed hostile; but over those also which in their just measure are not only lawful, but even most strongly enjoined on us. "He that loveth father and mother more than me," says our blessed Saviour, "is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me."† The spirit of these injunctions harmonizes with many commendations in scripture of zeal for the honour of God; as well as with that strong expression of disgust and abhorrence with which the lukewarm, those that are

* 2 Tim. iii. 4.

† Matt. x. 37.

neither cold nor hot, are spoken of as being more loathsome and offensive than even open and avowed enemies.

Another class of instances tending to the same point is furnished by those many passages of scripture, wherein the promoting of *the glory* of God is commanded as our supreme and universal aim, and wherein the honour due unto *Him* is declared to be that in which he will allow no competitor to participate. On this head indeed the holy scriptures are, if possible, more peremptory than on the former; and at the same time so full as to render particular citations unnecessary to those who have ever so little acquaintance with the word of God.

To put the same thing therefore in another light. All who have read the scriptures must confess that idolatry is the crime against which God's highest resentment is expressed, and his severest punishment denounced. But let us not deceive ourselves. It is not in bowing the knee to idols that idolatry consists, so much as in the internal homage of the heart; as in feeling towards them any of that supreme love, or reverence, or gratitude, which God reserves to himself as his own exclusive prerogative. On the same principle, whatever else draws off the heart from him, engrosses our prime regard, and holds the chief place in our esteem and affections, *that*, in the estimation of reason, is no less an idol to us, than an image of wood or stone would be, before which we should fall down and worship. Think not this a strained analogy; it is the very language and argument of inspiration. The servant of God is commanded not to set up his idol in his *heart*; and sensuality

and covetousness are repeatedly termed *idolatry*. The same God who declares, "My glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to *graven images*," declares also, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man *glory* in his might; let not the rich man *glory* in his riches."* "No flesh may *glory* in his presence;" "he that *glorieth*, let him glory in the Lord." The sudden vengeance by which the vain-glorious ostentation of Herod was punished, when, acquiescing in the servile adulation of an admiring multitude, "he gave not God the *glory*," is a dreadful comment on these injunctions.

Extreme importance of the above - mentioned considerations.

These awful declarations, it is to be feared, are little regarded. Let the great, and the wise, and the learned, and the successful, lay them seriously to heart, and labour habitually to consider their superiority, whether derived from nature, or study, or fortune, as the unmerited bounty of God. This reflection will naturally tend to produce a disposition, in all respects the opposite to that proud self-complacency so apt to grow upon the human heart: a disposition honourable to God, and useful to man, a temper composed of reverence, humility, and gratitude, and delighting to be engaged in the praises, and employed in the benevolent service, of the universal Benefactor.

But, to return to our subject, it only remains to be remarked, that here, as in the former instances, the characters of the righteous and of the wicked, as delineated in scripture, exactly correspond with the representations which have been given of the scripture injunctions.

* Jer. ix. 23.

The necessity of this cordial unreserved devotedness to the glory and service of God, as being indispensable to the character of the true Christian, has been insisted on at the greater length, not only on account of its own extreme importance, but also because it appears to be a duty too generally overlooked. Once well established, it will serve as a fundamental principle both for the government of the heart and regulation of the conduct; and will prove eminently useful in the decision of many practical cases, which it might be difficult to bring under the undisputed operation of any subordinate or appropriate rule.

SECT. II.

AND now, having endeavoured to establish the strictness, and to ascertain the essential character of true practical Christianity, let us investigate a little more in detail the practical system of the bulk of professed Christians among ourselves*.

It was formerly remarked, that the whole subject of Religion was often viewed from such a distance as to be seen only in the gross. We now, it is to be feared, shall find too much cause for believing that they who approach a little nearer, and do discover in Christianity somewhat of a distinct form, yet

General notion of practical Christianity amongst the bulk of nominal Christians, stated and illustrated.

* It will be remembered by the reader, that it is not the object of this work to animadvert on the vices, defects, and erroneous opinions of the times, except so far as they are received into the prevailing religious system, or are tolerated by it, and are not thought sufficient to prevent a man from being esteemed on the whole a very tolerable Christian.

come not close enough to discern her peculiar lineaments and conformation. The writer must not be understood to mean that the several misconceptions, which he shall have occasion to point out, will be generally found to exist with any thing like precision, much less that they are regularly digested into a system; nor will it be expected they all should meet in the same person, nor that they will not be found in different people, and under different circumstances, variously blended, combined, and modified. It will be enough if we succeed in tracing out great and general outlines. The human countenance may be well described by its general characters, though infinitely varied by the peculiarities which belong to different individuals, and often by such shades and minutenesses of difference, as, though abundantly obvious to our perceptions, yet would exceed the power of definition to discriminate, or even of language to express.

A very erroneous notion appears to prevail concerning the true nature of Religion. Religion, agreeably to what has been already stated, (the importance of the subject will excuse repetition) may be considered as the implantation of a vigorous and active principle; it is seated in the heart, where its authority is recognised as supreme, whence by degrees it expels whatever is opposed to it, and where it gradually brings all the affections and desires under its complete control and regulation.

But though the heart be its special residence, it may be said to possess in a degree the ubiquity of its Divine Author. Every endeavour and pursuit must acknowledge its presence; and whatever

receives not its sacred stamp, is to be condemned as inherently defective, and is to be at once relinquished. It is like the principle of vitality, which, animating every part, lives throughout the whole of the human body, and communicates its kindly influence to the smallest and remotest fibres of the frame. But the notion of Religion entertained by many among us seems altogether different. They begin indeed, in submission to her clear prohibitions, by fencing off from the field of human action, a certain district, which, though it in many parts bear fruits on which they cast a longing eye, they cannot but confess to be forbidden ground. They next assign to Religion a portion, larger or smaller according to whatever may be their circumstances and views, in which, however, she is to possess merely a qualified jurisdiction; and having so done, they conceive that without let or hinderance they have a right to range at will over the spacious remainder. Religion can claim only a stated proportion of their thoughts, their time, their fortune, and influence; and of these, or perhaps of any of them, if they make her any thing of a liberal allowance, she may well be satisfied: the rest is now their own, to do what they will with; they have paid their tithes, say rather their composition, the demands of the church are satisfied, and they may surely be permitted to enjoy what she has left, without molestation or interference.

It is scarcely possible to state too strongly the mischief which results from this fundamental error. At the same time its consequences are so natural and obvious, that one would think it

General consequences of the above - mentioned error.

scarcely possible not to foresee that they must infallibly follow. The greatest part of human actions is considered as indifferent. If men are not chargeable with actual vices, and are decent in the discharge of their religious duties; if they do not stray into the forbidden ground, if they respect the rights of the conceded allotment, what more can be expected from them? Instead of keeping at a distance from *all sin*, in which alone consists our safety, they will be apt not to care how near they approach what they conceive to be the boundary line; if they have not actually passed it, there is no harm done, it is no trespass. Thus the free and active spirit of Religion is "cribbed and hemmed in;" she is checked in her disposition to expand her territory, and enlarge the circle of her influence. She must keep to her prescribed confines, and every attempt to extend them will be resisted as an encroachment.

But this is not all. Since whatever can be gained from her allotment, or whatever can be taken in from the forbidden ground, will be so much of addition to that land of liberty, where men may roam at large, free from restraint or molestation, they will of course be constantly, and almost insensibly, straitening and pressing upon the limits of the religious allotment on the one hand; and on the other, will be removing back a little farther and farther the fence which abridges them on the side of the forbidden ground. If Religion attempt for a time to defend her frontier, she by degrees gives way. The space she occupies diminishes till it be scarcely discernible; whilst, her spirit extinguished, and her force destroyed,

she is little more than the nominal possessor even of the contracted limits to which she has been avowedly reduced.

This, it is to be feared, is but too faithful a representation of the general state of things among ourselves. The promotion of the glory of God, and the possession of his favour, are no longer recognized as the objects of our highest regard and most strenuous endeavours; as furnishing to us, a vigorous, habitual, and universal principle of action. We set up for ourselves: we are become our own masters. The sense of constant homage and continual service is irksome and galling to us; and we rejoice in being emancipated from it, as from a state of base and servile villanage. Thus the very tenure and condition, by which life and all its possessions are held, undergo a total change; our faculties and powers are now our own; whatever we have is regarded rather as a property than as a trust! or if there still exist the remembrance of some paramount claim, we are satisfied with an occasional acknowledgment of a nominal right; we pay our pepper-corn, and take our estates to ourselves in full and free enjoyment.

The preceding statement confirmed by an appeal to various classes of nominal Christians.

Hence it is that so little sense of responsibility seems attached to the possession of high rank, or splendid abilities, or affluent fortunes, or other means or instruments of usefulness. The instructive admonitions, "give an account of thy stewardship;" "occupy till I come;" are forgotten. Or if it be acknowledged by some men of larger views than ordinary, that a reference is to be had to some principle superior to that of our own gratification, it is, at best, to the good of society, or

to the welfare of our families : and even then the obligations resulting from these relations are seldom enforced on us by any higher sanctions than those of family comfort, and of worldly interest or estimation. Besides, what multitudes of persons are there, people without families, in private stations, or of a retired turn, to whom they are scarcely held to apply ! and what multitudes of cases to which it would be thought unnecessary scrupulosity to extend them ! Accordingly we find, *in fact*, that the generality of mankind among the higher order, in the formation of their schemes, in the selection of their studies, in the choice of their place of residence, in the employment and distribution of their time, in their thoughts, conversation, and amusements, are considered as being at liberty, if there be no actual vice, to consult in the main their own gratification.

Thus the generous and wakeful spirit of Christian benevolence, seeking and finding everywhere occasions for its exercise, is exploded, and a system of *decent selfishness* is avowedly established in its stead ; a system scarcely more to be abjured for its impiety, than to be abhorred for its cold insensibility to the opportunities of diffusing happiness. “ Have we no families, or are they provided for ? Are we wealthy, and bred to no profession ? Are we young and lively, and in the gaiety and vigour of youth ? Surely we may be allowed to take our pleasure. We neglect no duty, we live in no vice, we do nobody any harm, and have a right to amuse ourselves. We have nothing better to do, we wish we had ; our time hangs heavy on our hands for want of it.”

I pity the man who can travel from Dan to

Beersheba, and cry, "It is all barren." No man has a right to be idle. Not to speak of that great work which we all have to accomplish, and surely the *whole* attention of a short and precarious life is not more than an eternal interest may well require! where is it that in such a world as this, health, and leisure, and affluence, may not find some ignorance to instruct, some wrong to redress, some want to supply, some misery to alleviate? Shall ambition and avarice never sleep? Shall they never want objects on which to fasten? Shall they be so observant to discover, so acute to discern, so eager, so patient to pursue, and shall the benevolence of Christians want employment?

Yet thus life rolls away with too many of us in a course of "shapeless idleness." Its recreations constitute its chief business. Watering places—the sports of the field—cards! never-failing cards!—the assembly—the theatre; all contribute their aid: amusements are multiplied, and combined, and varied, "to fill up the void of a listless and languid life;" and by the judicious use of these different resources, there is often a kind of sober settled plan of domestic dissipation, in which, with all imaginable decency, year after year wears away in unprofitable vacancy. Even old age often finds us pacing in the same round of amusements which our early youth had tracked out. Meanwhile, being conscious that we are not giving into any flagrant vice, perhaps that we are guilty of no irregularity, and it may be, that we are not neglecting the offices of Religion, we persuade ourselves that we need not be uneasy. In the main, we do not fall below the general standard of morals of the class and station to which we belong, we may

therefore allow ourselves to glide down the stream without apprehension of the consequences.

In the votaries of sensual pleasure. Some, of a character often hardly to be distinguished from the class we have been just describing, take up with *sensual* pleasures. The chief happiness of their lives consists in one species or another of animal gratification; and these persons perhaps will be found to compose a pretty large description. It will be remembered, that it belongs not to our purpose to speak of the grossly and scandalously profligate, who renounce all pretensions to the name of Christians: but of those who, maintaining a certain decency of character, and perhaps being tolerably observant of the forms of religion, may yet be not improperly termed *sober sensualists*. These, though less impetuous and more measured, are not less staunch and steady than the professed votaries of licentious pleasure, in the pursuit of their favourite objects. "Mortify the flesh, with its affections and lusts," is the Christian *precept*; a soft luxurious course of habitual indulgence, is the *practice* of the bulk of modern Christians: and that constant moderation, that wholesome discipline of restraint and self-denial, which are requisite to prevent the unperceived encroachments of the inferior appetites, seem altogether disused, as the exploded austerities of monkish superstition.

Christianity calls her professors to a state of diligent watchfulness and active services. But the persons of whom we are now speaking, forgetting alike the duties they owe to themselves and to their fellow-creatures, often act as though their condition were meant to be a state of uniform indulgence, and vacant, unprofitable sloth. To

multiply the comforts of affluence, to provide for the gratification of appetite, to be luxurious without diseases, and indolent without lassitude, seems the chief study of their lives. Nor can they be clearly exempted from this class, who, by a common error, substituting the means for the end, make the preservation of health and spirits, not as instruments of usefulness, but as sources of pleasure, their great business and continual care.

Others again seem more to attach themselves to what have been well termed the ‘poms and vanities of this world.’ Magnificent houses, grand equipages, numerous retinues, splendid entertainments, high and fashionable connections, appear to constitute, in their estimation, the supreme happiness of life. This class too, if we mistake not, will be found numerous in our days; for it must be considered, *that it is the heart, set on these things*, which constitutes the essential character. It often happens, that persons, to whose rank and station these indulgences most properly belong, are most indifferent to them. The undue solicitude about them is more visible in persons of inferior conditions and smaller fortunes, in whom it is not rarely detected by the studious contrivances of a misapplied ingenuity to reconcile parade with economy, and to glitter at a cheap rate. But this temper of display and competition is a direct contrast to the lowly, modest, unassuming carriage of the true Christian: and wherever there is an evident effort and struggle to excel in the particulars here in question, a manifest wish thus to rival superiors, to outstrip equals, to dazzle inferiors; it is manifest the great end of life, and of all its possessions, is too little

In the votaries of pomp and parade.

kept in view, and it is to be feared that the gratification of a vain ostentatious humour is the predominant disposition of the heart.

In the votaries of wealth and ambition. As there is a sober sensuality, so is there also a sober avarice, and a sober ambition. The commercial and the professional world compose the chief sphere of their influence. They are often recognized and openly avowed as just master principles of action. But where this is not the case, they assume such plausible shapes, are called by such specious names, and urge such powerful pleas, that they are received with cordiality, and suffered to gather strength without suspicion. The seducing considerations of diligence in our callings, of success in our profession, of making handsome provisions for our children, beguile our better judgments. "We rise early, and late take rest, and eat the bread of carefulness." In our few intervals of leisure, our exhausted spirits require refreshment; the serious concerns of our immortal souls are matters of speculation too grave and gloomy to answer the purpose, and we fly to something that may better deserve the name of relaxation, till we are again summoned to the daily labours of our employment.

Meanwhile Religion seldom comes in our way, scarcely occurs to our thoughts; and when some secret misgivings begin to be felt on this head, company soon drowns, amusements dissipate, or habitual occupations insensibly displace or smother the rising apprehension. Professional and commercial men perhaps, especially when they happen to be persons of more than ordinary reflection, or of early habits of piety not quite worn away,

easily quiet their consciences by the plea, that necessary attention to their business leaves them no time to think on these serious subjects at present. "Men of leisure, they confess, should consider them; they themselves will do it hereafter when they retire; meanwhile they are usefully, or at least innocently employed." Thus business and pleasure fill up our time, and the "one thing needful" is forgotten. Respected by others, and secretly applauding ourselves, (perhaps congratulating ourselves that we are not like such an one who is a spendthrift, or a mere man of pleasure, or such another who is a notorious miser,) the true principle of action is no less wanting in us, and personal advancement, or the acquisition of wealth, is the object of our supreme desires and predominant pursuits.

It would be to presume too much on the reader's patience, to attempt a delineation of the characters of the politician, the metaphysician, the scholar, the poet, the virtuoso, the man of taste, in all their varieties. Of these and many other classes, which might be enumerated, suffice it to remark, and to appeal to every man's own experience for the truth of the observation, that they in like manner are often completely engrossed by the objects of their several pursuits. In many of these cases, indeed, a generous spirit surrenders itself wholly up with the less reserve, and continues absorbed with the fuller confidence, from the consciousness of not being led to its object by self-interested motives. Here, therefore, these men are ardent, active, laborious, persevering, and they think, and speak, and act as those whose happiness wholly turns on the success or failure of their endeavours. When such is

the undisturbed composure of mere triflers, it is less wonderful that the votaries of learning and of taste, when absorbed in their several pursuits, should be able to check still more easily any growing apprehension, silencing it by the suggestion, that they are more than harmlessly, that they are meritoriously, employed. "Surely the thanks of mankind are justly paid to those more refined spirits who, superior alike to the seductions of ease and the temptations of avarice, devote their time and talents to the less gainful labours of increasing the stores of learning, or enlarging the boundaries of science; who are engaged in raising the character and condition of society, by improving the liberal arts, and adding to the innocent pleasures or elegant accomplishments of life." Let not the writer be so far misunderstood, as to be supposed to insinuate that religion is an enemy to the pursuits of taste, much less to those of learning and of science. Let these have their *due* place in the estimation of mankind; but this must not be the *highest* place. Let them know their just *subordination*. They deserve not to be the *primary* concern, for there is another, to which in importance they bear no more proportion than our span of existence to eternity.

Conclusion
from the pre-
ceding review
—and general
fault of all the
above classes.

Thus the centre to which the chief desires of the heart should tend, losing its attractive force, our affections are permitted, without control, to take their course, whatever it may be, which best suits our natural temper, or to which they are impelled by our various situations and circumstances. Sometimes they manifestly appear to be almost entirely confined to a single

track ; but perhaps more frequently the lines in which they move are so intermingled and diversified, that it becomes not a little difficult, even when we look into ourselves, to ascertain the object by which they are chiefly attracted, or to estimate with precision the amount of their several forces, in the different directions in which they move. "Know thyself," is in truth an injunction with which the careless and the indolent cannot comply. For this compliance, it is requisite, in obedience to the scripture precept, "to keep the heart with all diligence." Mankind are in general deplorably ignorant of their true state ; and there are few perhaps who have any adequate conception of the real strength of the ties by which they are bound to the several objects of their attachment, or who are aware how small a share of their regard is possessed by those concerns on which it ought to be supremely fixed.

But if it be indeed true, that except the affections of the soul be supremely fixed on God, that unless it be *the leading and governing desire and primary pursuit* to possess his favour and promote his glory, we are considered as having transferred our fealty to an usurper, and as being, in fact, revolted from our lawful sovereign ; if this be indeed the Scripture doctrine, all the several attachments which have been lately enumerated, of the different classes of society, wherever they interest the affections, and possess the soul in any such measure of strength as deserves to be called *predominance*, are but so many varied expressions of *disloyalty*. God requires to set up his throne in the heart, and to reign in it without a rival : if he be kept out of his right, it matters not by what com-

petitor. The revolt may be more avowed or more secret ; it may be the treason of deliberate preference, or of inconsiderate levity ; we may be the subjects of a master more or less creditable ; we may be employed in services more gross or more refined : but whether the slaves of avarice, of sensuality, of dissipation, of sloth, or the votaries of ambition, of taste, or of fashion ; whether supremely governed by vanity and self-love, by the desire of literary fame or of military glory, we are alike estranged from the dominion of our rightful sovereign. Let not this seem a harsh position ; it can appear so only from not adverting to what was shewn to be the *essential nature* of true religion. He who bowed the knee to the god of medicine or of eloquence, was no less an idolater than the worshipper of the deified patrons of lewdness or of theft. In the several cases which have been specified, the *external acts* indeed are different, but in *principle* the disaffection is the same ; and unless we return to our allegiance, we must expect the title, and prepare to meet the punishment, of rebels, on that tremendous day, when all false colours shall be done away, and (there being no longer any room for the evasions of worldly sophistry, or the smooth plausibilities of worldly language) “ that which is often highly esteemed amongst men, shall appear to have been abomination in the sight of God.”

Effects of the fundamental error above mentioned on our judgments and practice in the case of *others*.

These fundamental truths seem vanished from the mind, and it follows of course, that every thing is viewed less and less through a religious medium. To speak no longer of instances wherein *we ourselves* are concerned,

and wherein the unconquerable power of indulged appetite may be supposed to beguile our better judgment, or force us on in defiance of it; not to insist on the motives by which the conduct of men is determined, often avowedly, in what are to *themselves* the most important incidents of life; what are the judgments which they form in the case of *others*? Idleness, profusion, thoughtlessness, and dissipation, the misapplication of time or of talents, the trifling away of life in frivolous occupations or unprofitable studies! all these things we may regret in those around us, in the view of their temporal effects; but they are not considered in a religious connection, or lamented as endangering everlasting happiness. Excessive vanity and inordinate ambition are spoken of as weaknesses rather than as sins; even covetousness itself, though a hateful passion, yet, if not extreme, scarcely presents the face of *irreligion*. Is some friend, or even some common acquaintance, sick, or has some accident befallen him? how solicitously do we inquire after him, how tenderly do we visit him, how much perhaps do we regret that he has not better advice, how apt are we to prescribe for him, and how should we reproach ourselves if we were to neglect any means in our power of contributing to his recovery! But “the mind diseased” is neglected and forgotten—“*that* is not our affair; we hope (we do not perhaps really believe) that here it is well with him.” The truth is, we have no solicitude about his spiritual interest. Here he is treated like the unfortunate traveller in the Gospel; we look upon him: we see but too well his sad condition, but (priest and levite

like) we pass by on the other side, and leave him to the officious tenderness of some poor despised Samaritan.

Nay, take the case of our very children, when, our hearts being most interested to promote their happiness, we must be supposed most desirous of determining on right principles, and where therefore the real standard of our deliberate judgments may be indisputably ascertained: in their education and marriage, in the choice of their professions, in our comparative consideration and judgment of the different parts of their several characters, how little do we reflect that they are immortal beings! Health, learning, credit, the amiable and agreeable qualities, above all, fortune and success in life, are taken, and not unjustly taken, into the account; but how small a share in forming our opinions is allowed to the probable effect which may be produced on their eternal interests! Indeed, the subjects of our mutual inquiries, and congratulations, and condolences, prove but too plainly what considerations are in these cases uppermost in our thoughts.

Further effects
—religion de-
graded into a
set of statutes.

Such are the fatal and widely spreading effects, which but too naturally follow from the admission of the grand fundamental error before mentioned, that of not considering religion as a principle of universal application and command. Robbed of its best energies, religion now takes the form of a cold compilation of restraints and prohibitions. It is looked upon simply as a set of penal statutes; these, though wise and reasonable, are, however, so far as they extend, abridgments of our natural

liberty, and nothing which comes to us in this shape is extremely acceptable :—

Atqui nolint occidere, quemquam posse volunt.

Considering, moreover, that the matter of them is not in general very palatable, and that the partiality of every man, where his own cause is in question, will be likely to make him construe them liberally in his own favour, we might beforehand have formed a tolerable judgment of the manner in which they are actually treated. Sometimes we attend to the words rather than to the spirit of Scripture injunctions, overlooking the principle they involve, which a better acquaintance with the word of God would have clearly taught us to infer from them. At others, “the spirit of an injunction is all;” and this we contrive to collect so dexterously, as thereby to relax or annul the strictness of the terms. “Whatever is not expressly forbidden cannot be *very* criminal; whatever is not positively enjoined, cannot be indispensably necessary—if we do not offend against the laws, what more can be expected from us? The persons to whom the strict precepts of the gospel were given, were in very different circumstances from those in which we are placed. The injunctions were drawn rather tighter than is quite necessary, in order to allow for a little relaxation in practice. The expressions of the sacred writers are figurative; the eastern style is confessedly hyperbolical.”

By these and other such dishonest shifts (by which, however, we seldom deceive ourselves, except it be in thinking that we deceive others,) the pure but strong morality of the word of God

is explained away, and its two rigid canons are softened down, with as much dexterity as is exhibited by those who practise a logic of the same complexion, in order to escape from the obligations of human statutes. Like Swift's unfortunate brothers,* we are sometimes put to difficulties, but our ingenuity is little inferior to theirs. If *totidem verbis*† will not serve our turn, try *totidem syllabis*; if *totidem syllabis* fail, try *totidem literis*: then there is in our case, as well as in theirs, "an allegorical sense" to be adverted to; and if every other resource fail us, we come at last to the same conclusion as the brothers adopted, that, after all, those rigorous clauses require some allowance, and a favourable interpretation, and ought to be understood "*cum grano salis*."

But when the law both in its spirit and its letter is obstinate and incorrigible, what we cannot bend to our purpose we must break. "Our sins, we hope, are of the smaller order; a little harmless gallantry, a little innocent jollity, a few foolish expletives, which we use from the mere force of habit, meaning nothing by them; a little warmth of colouring, and license of expression; a few freedoms of speech in the gaiety of our hearts, which, though not perhaps strictly correct, none but the over-rigid would think of treating any otherwise than as venal infirmities, and in which very grave and religious men will often take their share, when they may throw off their state, and relax without impropriety. We serve an all-merciful Being, who knows the frailty of our nature, the number and strength of our temptations, and will not be

* Vide Tale of a Tub.

† Ibid.

extreme to mark what is done amiss. Even the less lenient judicatures of human institution concede somewhat to the weakness of man. It is an established maxim, 'De minimis non curat lex.' We hope we are not worse than the generality. All men are imperfect. We own we have our infirmities; we confess it is so; we wish we were better, and trust, as we grow older, we shall become so; we are ready to acknowledge, that we must be indebted for our admission into a future state of happiness, not to our own merit, but to the clemency of God, and the mercy of our Redeemer."

But let not this language be mistaken for that of true Christian humiliation, of which it is the very essence to feel the burden of sin, and to long to be released from it: nor let two things be confounded, than which none can be more fundamentally different—the allowed want of universality in our determination, and our endeavour to obey the will of God, and that defective accomplishment of our purposes, which even the best of men will too often find reason to deplore. In the persons of whom we have been now speaking, the unconcern with which they can amuse themselves upon the borders of sin, and the easy familiarity with which they can actually dally with it in its less offensive shapes, shew plainly that, distinctly from its consequences, it is by no means the object of their aversion; that there is no love of holiness, as such; no endeavour to acquire it, no care to prepare the soul for the reception of this divine principle, and to expel or keep under whatever might be likely to obstruct its entrance, or dispute its sovereignty.

Another effect
—religion placed
in external
actions, instead
of habits of
mind.

It is, indeed, a most lamentable consequence of the practice of regarding religion as a compilation of statutes, and not as an internal principle, that it soon comes to be considered as being conversant about *external actions*, rather than about *habits of mind*. This sentiment sometimes has even the hardiness to insinuate and maintain itself under the guise of extraordinary concern for *practical religion*; but it soon discovers the falsehood of this pretension, and betrays its real nature. The expedient, indeed, of attaining to superiority in practice, by not wasting any of the attention on the internal principles from which alone practice can flow, is about as reasonable, and will answer about as well, as the economy of the architect, who should account it mere prodigality to expend any of his materials in laying foundations, from an idea that they might be more usefully applied to the raising of the superstructure. We know what would be the fate of such an edifice.

It is, indeed, true, and a truth never to be forgotten, that all pretensions to internal principles of holiness are vain when they are contradicted by the conduct; but it is no less true, that the only effectual way of improving the latter, is by a vigilant attention to the former. It was, therefore, our blessed Saviour's injunction, "Make the tree good," as the necessary means of obtaining good fruit; and the holy scriptures abound in admonitions to make it our chief business to cultivate our hearts with all diligence, to examine into their state with impartiality, and watch over them with continual care. Indeed, it is the *heart* which

constitutes the *man*; and external actions derive their whole character and meaning from the motives and dispositions of which they are the indications. Human judicatures, it is true, are chiefly conversant about the former, but this is only because, to our limited perceptions, the latter can seldom be any otherwise clearly ascertained. The real object of inquiry to human judicature is, the *internal* disposition; it is to this that they adapt the nature, and proportion the degree, of their punishment.

Yet, though this be a truth so obvious, so established, that to have insisted on it may seem almost needless; it is a truth of which we are apt to lose sight, in the review of our religious character, and with which the *habit*, of considering religion as consisting rather in external actions than internal principles, is at direct and open war. This mode of judging may well be termed *habitual*; for, though by some persons it is advisedly adopted, and openly avowed, yet, in many cases, for want of due watchfulness, it has stolen insensibly upon the mind; it exists unsuspected, and is practised, like other habits, without consciousness or observation.

In what degree soever this pernicious principle prevails, in the same degree is the mischief it produces.

Evils resulting from the last-mentioned error.

The vicious affections, like noxious weeds, sprout up and increase of themselves but too naturally; while the graces of the Christian temper, exotics in the soil of the human heart, like the more tender productions of the vegetable world, though the light and breath of heaven must quicken them, require on our part

Christian dispositions not cultivated.

also, in order to their being preserved in health and vigour, constant superintendence and assiduous care. But, so far from their being earnestly sought for, or watchfully reared, with un-remitted prayers for that Divine grace, without which all our labours must be ineffectual ; such is the result of the principle we are here condemning, that no endeavours are used for their attainment, or they are suffered to droop and die almost without an effort to preserve them. The culture of the mind is less and less attended to, and at length perhaps is almost wholly neglected. Way being thus made for the unobstructed growth of other dispositions, these naturally overspread, and quietly possess the mind ; their contrariety to the Christian spirit not being discerned, and even, perhaps, their presence being scarcely acknowledged, except when their existence and their nature are manifested in the conduct by marks too plain to be overlooked or mistaken.

This is a point which we will now endeavour to ascertain by an induction of particular instances.

Most men forget that the Christian's life is a life of faith ; and the true Christian's character in this respect.

First, then, it is the comprehensive compendium of the character of true Christians, that, " they are walking by faith, and not by sight." By this description is meant, not merely that they so firmly believe in the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, as to be influenced by that persuasion to adhere, in the main, to the path of duty, though tempted to forsake it by present interest, and present gratification ; but farther, that the great truths revealed in scripture, concerning the unseen

world, are, for the most part, uppermost in their minds, and about which, habitually, their hearts are most interested. This state of mind contributes, if the expression may be allowed, to rectify the illusions of vision, to bring forward into nearer view those eternal things which, from their remoteness, are apt to be either wholly overlooked, or to appear but faintly in the utmost bounds of the horizon; and to remove backward, and reduce to their true comparative dimensions, the objects of the present life, which are apt to fill the human eye, assuming a false magnitude from their vicinity. The true Christian knows from experience, however, that the former are apt to fade from the sight, and the latter again to swell on it. He makes it, therefore, his continual care to preserve those just and enlightened views which, through Divine mercy, he has obtained. Not that he will retire from that station in the world which Providence seems to have appointed him to fill: he will be active in the business of life, and enjoy its comforts with moderation and thankfulness; but he will not be "totus in illis," he will not give up his whole soul to them, they will be habitually subordinate in his estimation to objects of more importance. This awful truth has sunk deep into his mind, that "the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal;" and in the tumult and bustle of life, he is sobered by the still small voice which whispers to him that "the fashion of this world passes away." This circumstance, alone, must, it is obvious, constitute a vast difference between the habitual temper of his mind, and that of the generality of nominal Christians, who are almost entirely taken up with the con-

cerns of the present world. They *know*, indeed, that they are mortal, but they do not *feel* it. The truth rests in their understandings, and cannot gain admission into their hearts. This speculative persuasion is altogether different from that strong *practical* impression of the infinite importance of eternal things, which, attended with a proportionate sense of the shortness and uncertainty of all below, while it prompts to activity, from a conviction that, "the night cometh when no man can work," produces a certain firmness of texture, which hardens us against the buffetings of fortune, and prevents our being very deeply penetrated by the cares and interests, the good or evil, of this transitory state. Thus, this just impression of the relative value of temporal and eternal things maintains in the soul a dignified composure through all the vicissitudes of life. It quickens our diligence, yet moderates our ardour; urges us to just pursuits, yet checks any undue solicitude about the success of them, and thereby enables us, in the language of scripture, "to use this world as not abusing it," rendering us at once beneficial to others, and comfortable to ourselves.

But this is not all: besides the distinction between the nominal and the real Christian, which results from the impressions produced on them respectively by the *eternal duration* of heavenly things, there is another, grounded on their *nature*, no less marked, nor less important. They are stated in scripture, not only as entitling themselves to the notice of the true Christian from considerations of interest, but as approving themselves to his judgment from a conviction of their excellence, and yet farther, as recommending themselves to

his feelings by their being suited to the renewed dispositions of his heart. Indeed, were the case otherwise, did not their qualities correspond with his inclinations; however he might endure them on principles of duty, and be coldly conscious of their superior worth, he could not lend himself to them with cordial complacency, much less look to them as the surest source of pleasure. But this is the light in which they are habitually regarded by the true Christian. He walks in the ways of religion, not by constraint, but willingly; they are to him not only safe, but comfortable; "ways of pleasantness as well as of peace." Not but that here also he is from experience aware of the necessity of constant support and continued watchfulness; without these, his old estimate of things is apt to return on him, and the former objects of his affections to resume their influence. With earnest prayers, therefore, for the Divine help, with jealous circumspection, and resolute self-denial, he guards against whatever might be likely again to darken his *enlightened judgment*, or to vitiate his reformed taste; thus making it his unwearied endeavour to grow in the knowledge and love of heavenly things, and to obtain a warmer admiration, and a more cordial relish of their excellence.

That this is a just representation of the habitual judgment, and of the leading disposition of true Christians, will be abundantly evident, if, endeavouring to form ourselves after our proper model, we consult the sacred scripture. But in vain are Christians there represented as having set their *affections* on things above, as *cordially rejoicing* in the service, and delighting in the worship of

God. Pleasure and religion are contradictory terms with the bulk of nominal Christians. They may look back indeed on their religious offices with something of a secret satisfaction, and even feel it during the performance of them, from the idea of being engaged in the discharge of a duty ; but this is altogether different from the pleasure which attends an employment in itself acceptable and grateful to us. We are not condemning a deficiency merely in the *warmth* and *vehemence* of religious affections. Not to ask whether the service and worship of God are *delightful*, are they *pleasant* to such persons ? Do they diffuse over the soul any thing of that calm complacency, that mild and grateful composure, which bespeaks a mind in good humour with itself and all around it, and engaged in a service suited to its taste, and congenial with its feelings ?

Sunday ; and
hints for its
employment. Let us appeal to that day which is especially devoted to the offices of religion : do they joyfully avail themselves of this blessed opportunity of withdrawing from the business and cares of life ; when, without being disquieted by any doubt whether they are neglecting the duties of their proper callings, they may be allowed to detach their minds from earthly things, that by a fuller knowledge of heavenly objects, and a more habitual acquaintance with them, their hope may grow more “ full of immortality ?” Is the day cheerfully devoted to those holy exercises for which it was appointed ? Do they indeed “ come into the courts of God with gladness ?” And how are they employed when not engaged in the public services of the day ? Are they busied in studying the word of God, in

meditating on his perfections, in tracing his providential dispensations, in admiring his works, in revolving his mercies, (above all, the transcendent mercies of redeeming love,) in singing his praises “and speaking good of his name?” Do their secret retirements witness the earnestness of their prayers and the warmth of their thanksgivings, their diligence and impartiality in the necessary work of self-examination, their mindfulness of the benevolent duty of intercession? Is the kind purpose of the institution of a Sabbath answered by them, in its being made to their servants and dependants a season of rest and comfort? Does the instruction of their families, or of the more poor and ignorant of their neighbours, possess its due share of their time? If blessed with talents or with affluence, are they sedulously employing a part of this interval of leisure in relieving the indigent, and visiting the sick, and comforting the sorrowful, in forming plans for the good of their fellow-creatures, in considering how they may promote both the temporal and spiritual benefit of their friends and acquaintance: or if theirs be a larger sphere, in devising measures whereby, through the Divine blessing, they may become the honoured instruments of the more extended diffusion of religious truth? In the hours of domestic or social intercourse, does their conversation manifest the subject of which their hearts are full? Do their language and demeanour shew them to be more than commonly gentle, and kind, and friendly, free from rough and irritating passions?

Surely an entire day should not seem long amidst these various employments. It might well be deemed a privilege thus to spend it, in the

more immediate presence of our heavenly Father, in the exercises of humble admiration and grateful homage; of the benevolent, and domestic, and social feelings, and of all the best affections of our nature, prompted by their true motives, conversant about their proper objects, and directed to their noblest end; all sorrows mitigated, all cares suspended, all fears repressed, every angry emotion softened, every envious or revengeful or malignant passion expelled; and the bosom, thus quieted, purified, enlarged, ennobled, partaking almost of a measure of the heavenly happiness, and become for a while the seat of love, and joy, and confidence, and harmony.

The nature, and uses, and proper employments of a Christian Sabbath have been pointed out more particularly, not only because the day will be found, when thus employed, eminently conducive, through the Divine blessing, to the maintenance of the religious principle in activity and vigour; but also because we must have all had occasion often to remark, that many persons, of the graver and more decent sort, seem not seldom to be nearly destitute of religious resources. The Sunday is with them, to say the best of it, a *heavy* day; and that larger part of it, which is not claimed by the public offices of the church, dully draws on in comfortless vacuity, or, without improvement, is trifled away in vain and unprofitable discourse. Not to speak of those who by their more daring profanation of this sacred season, openly violate the laws and insult the religion of their country, how little do many seem to enter into the *spirit* of the institution, who are not wholly inattentive to its exterior decorums! How

glad are they to qualify the rigour of their religious labours! How hardly do they plead against being compelled to devote the *whole* of the day to religion, claiming to themselves no small merit for giving up to it a part, and purchasing, therefore, as they hope, a right to spend the remainder more agreeably! How dexterously do they avail themselves of any plausible plea for introducing some week-day employment into the Sunday, whilst they have not the same propensity to introduce any of the Sunday's peculiar employment into the rest of the week! How often do they find excuses for taking journeys, writing letters, balancing accounts; or, in short, doing something, which by a little management might probably have been anticipated, or which, without any material inconvenience, might be postponed! Even business itself is recreation, compared with religion, and from the drudgery of this day of sacred rest they fly for relief to their ordinary occupations.

Others, again, who would consider business as a profanation, and who still hold out against the encroachments of the card-table, get over much of the day, and gladly seek for an innocent resource in the social circle or in family visits, where it is not even pretended that the conversation turns on such topics as might render it in any way conducive to religious instruction or improvement. Their families meanwhile are neglected, their servants robbed of Christian privileges, and their example quoted by others, who cannot see that they are themselves less religiously employed, while playing an innocent game at cards, or relaxing in the concert room.

But all these several artifices, *whatever they may be, to unhallow* the Sunday, and to change its character, (it might be almost said "to mitigate its horrors,") prove but too plainly, however we may be glad to take refuge in religion, when driven to it by the loss of every other comfort, and to retain, as it were, a reversionary interest in an asylum, which may receive us when we are forced from the transitory enjoyments of our present state; that *in itself* it wears to us a gloomy and forbidding aspect, and not a face of consolation and joy; that the worship of God is with us a *constrained* and not a *willing* service, which we are glad therefore to abridge, though we dare not omit it.

Some indeed there are who with concern and grief will confess this to be their uncomfortable and melancholy state; who humbly pray, and diligently endeavour, for an imagination less distracted at devotional seasons, for a heart more capable of relishing the excellence of divine things; and who carefully guard against whatever has a tendency to chain down their affections to earthly enjoyments. Let not such be discouraged. It is not they whom we are condemning: but such as, knowing and even acknowledging this to be their case, yet proceed in a way directly contrary; who, scarcely seeming to suspect that any thing is wrong with them, voluntarily acquiesce in a state of mind which is directly contrary to the positive commands of God, which forms a perfect contrast to the representations given us in scripture of the Christian character, and accords but too faithfully in one leading feature with the character of those who are stated to be the objects of Divine dis-

pleasure in this life, and of Divine punishment in the next.

It is not, however, only in these essential constituents of a devotional frame, that the bulk of nominal Christians are defective. This they freely declare (secretly feeling perhaps some complacency from the frankness of the avowal) to be a higher strain of piety than that to which they aspire. Their forgetfulness also of some of the leading dispositions of Christianity, is undeniably apparent in their allowed want of the spirit of kindness, and meekness, and gentleness, and patience, and long-suffering; and, above all, of that which is the stock on which alone these dispositions can grow and flourish, that *humility* and *lowliness of mind*, in which, perhaps more than in any other quality, may be said to consist the true essence and vital principle of the Christian temper. These dispositions are not only neglected, but even disavowed and exploded, and their opposites, if not rising to any great height, are acknowledged and applauded. *A just pride, a proper and becoming pride*, are terms which we daily hear from Christian lips. To possess *a high spirit*, to behave with *a proper spirit* when used ill—by which is meant a quick feeling of injuries, and a promptness in resenting them—entitles to commendation; and a meek-spirited disposition, the highest scripture eulogium, expresses ideas of disapprobation and contempt. Vanity and vain-glory are suffered without interruption to retain their natural possession of the heart. But here a topic opens upon us of such importance, and on which so many mistakes are to be found both in the writings of respectable

Other internal defects noticed.

authors, and in the commonly prevailing opinions of the world, that it may be allowed us to discuss it more at large, and for this purpose to treat of it in a separate section.

SECTION III.

On the desire of human estimation and applause.—The generally prevailing opinions contrasted with those of the true Christian.

Universality of the passions. **THE** desire of human estimation, and distinction, and honour, of the admiration and applause of our fellow-creatures, if we take it in its full comprehension, and in all its various modifications, from the thirst of glory to the dread of shame, is the passion of which the empire is by far the most general, and perhaps the authority the most commanding. Though its power be most conspicuous and least controllable in the higher classes of society, it seems, like some resistless conqueror, to spare neither age, nor sex, nor condition; and taking ten thousand shapes, insinuating itself under the most specious pretexts, and sheltering itself when necessary under the most artful disguises, it winds its way in secret, when it dares not openly avow itself, and mixes in all we think, and speak, and do. It is in some instances the determined and declared pursuit, and confessedly the main practical principle; but where this is not the case, it is not seldom the grand spring of action; and in the beauty, and the author, no less than in the soldier, it is often the master passion of the soul.

This is the principle which parents recognize with joy in their infant offspring, which is diligently instilled and nurtured in advancing years, which, under the names of honourable ambition and of laudable emulation, it is the professed aim of schools and colleges to excite and cherish. The writer is well aware that it will be thought he is pushing his opinions much too far, when he ventures to assail this great principle of human action; “a principle,” its advocates might perhaps exclaim, “the extinction of which, if you could succeed in your rash attempt, would be like the annihilation in the material world of the principle of motion; without it all were torpid and cold and comfortless. We grant,” they might go on to observe, “that we never ought to deviate from the paths of duty in order to procure the applause or to avoid the reproaches of men, and we allow that this is a rule too little attended to in practice. We grant that the love of praise is in some instances a ridiculous, and in others a mischievous passion; that to it we owe the breed of coquettes and coxcombs, and, a more serious evil, the noxious race of heroes and conquerors. We too are ready, when it appears in the shape of vanity, to smile at it as a foible; or in that of false glory, to condemn it as a crime. But all these are only its perversions; and on account of them, to contend against its true forms, and its legitimate exercise, were to give into the very error which you formerly yourself condemned, of arguing against the use of a salutary principle altogether, on account of its being liable to occasional abuse. When turned into the right direction, and applied to its true purposes, it prompts

The common notions asserted.

to every dignified and generous enterprise. It is erudition in the portico, skill in the lycæum, eloquence in the senate, victory in the field. It forces indolence into activity, and extorts from vice itself the deeds of generosity and virtue. When once the soul is warmed by its generous ardour, no difficulties deter, no dangers terrify, no labours tire. It is this which, giving by its stamp to what is virtuous and honourable its just superiority over the gifts of birth and fortune, rescues the rich from a base subjection to the pleasures of sense, and makes them prefer a course of toil and hardship to a life of indulgence and ease. It prevents the man of rank from acquiescing in his hereditary greatness, and spurs him forward in pursuit of *personal* distinction, and of a nobility which he may justly term his own. It moderates and qualifies the over-great inequalities of human conditions; and, reaching to those who are above the sphere of laws, and extending to cases which fall not within their province, it limits and circumscribes the power of the tyrant on his throne, and gives gentleness to war, and to pride humility.

“Nor is its influence confined to public life, nor is it known only in the great and the splendid. To it is to be ascribed a large portion of that courtesy and disposition to please, which, naturally producing a mutual appearance of good will, and a reciprocation of good offices, constitute much of the comfort of private life, and give their choicest sweets to social and domestic intercourse. Nay, from the force of habit, it follows us even into solitude, and in our most secret retirements we often act as if our conduct were subject to human observation, and we derive no small compla-

gency from the imaginary applauses of an ideal spectator.”

So far of the *effects* of the love of praise and distinction : and if, after enumerating some of these, you should proceed to investigate its nature, “ We admit,” it might be added, “ that a hasty and misjudging world often misapplies commendations and censures ; and whilst we therefore confess that the praises of the discerning few are alone truly valuable, we acknowledge that it were better if mankind were always to act from the sense of right and the love of virtue, without reference to the opinions of their fellow-creatures. We even allow, that, independently of consequences, this were perhaps in itself a higher strain of virtue ; but it is a degree of purity which it would be in vain to expect from the bulk of mankind. When the *intrinsic excellence* of this principle, however, is called in question, let it be remembered, that in its higher degrees it was styled, by one who meant rather to detract from its merits than to aggravate them, ‘ the infirmity of *noble* minds ;’ and surely, that in such a soil it most naturally springs up, and flourishes, is no mean proof of its exalted origin and generous nature.

“ But were these more dubious, and were it no more than a splendid error ; yet, considering that it works so often in the right direction, it were enough to urge in its behalf, that it is a principle of real *action*, and approved energy ; that, as much as practice is better than theory, and solid realities than empty speculation, so much is it to be preferred for general use before those higher principles of morals, which, however just and excellent in themselves, you would in vain attempt to

bring home to the 'business and bosoms of mankind' at large. Reject not then a principle thus universal in its influence, thus valuable in its effects; a principle which, by whatever name you may please to call it, acts by motives and considerations suited to our condition; and which, putting it at the very lowest, must be confessed, in our present infirm state, to be an habitual aid and an ever present support to the feebleness of virtue! In a selfish world, it produces the effects of disinterestedness; and when public spirit is extinct, it supplies the want of patriotism. Let us therefore with gratitude avail ourselves of its help, and not relinquish the good which it freely offers, from we know not what vain dreams of impracticable purity and unattainable perfection."

The above vindication questioned. All this and much more might be urged by the advocates of this favourite principle. It would be, however, no difficult task to shew that it by no means merits this high eulogium. To say nothing of that larger part of the argument of our opponents, which betrays, and even proceeds upon, that mischievous notion of the innocence of error, against which we have already entered our formal protest, the principle in question is manifestly of a most inconstant and variable nature; as inconstant and variable as the innumerably diversified modes of fashions, habits, and opinions in different periods and societies. What it tolerates in one age, it forbids in another; what in one country it prescribes and applauds, in another it condemns and stigmatizes! Obviously and openly, it often takes vice into its patronage, and sets itself in direct opposition to virtue. It is calculated to produce rather the

appearance than the *reality* of excellence ; and at best not to check the *love*, but only the *commission*, of vice. Much of this indeed was seen and acknowledged by the philosophers, and even by the poets, of the pagan world. They de-claimed against it as a mutable and inconsistent principle ; they lamented the fatal effects which, under the name of false glory, it had produced on the peace and happiness of mankind. They condemned the pursuit of it when it led its followers out of the path of virtue, and taught that the praise of the wise and of the good only was to be desired.

Opinions of pagan moralists on this head.

But it was reserved for the page of scripture to point out to us distinctly, wherein it is apt to be essentially defective and vicious, and to discover to us more fully its encroaching nature and dangerous tendencies ; teaching us at the same time, how, being purified from its corrupt qualities, and reduced under just subordination, it may be brought into legitimate exercise, and be directed to its true end.

And scripture lessons stated and illustrated

In the sacred volume, we are throughout reminded, that we are originally the creatures of God's formation, and continual dependants on his bounty. There too we learn the painful lesson of man's degradation and unworthiness. We learn that humiliation and contrition are the dispositions of mind best suited to our fallen condition, and most acceptable in the sight of our Creator. We learn that these (to the repression and extinction of that spirit of arrogance and self-importance so natural to the heart of man) it should be our habitual care to cherish and cultivate ; studiously

maintaining a continual sense, that, not only for all the *natural* advantages over others which we may possess, but that for all our *moral* superiority also, we are altogether indebted to the unmerited goodness of God. It might perhaps be said to be the great end and purpose of all revelation, and especially to be the design of the gospel, to reclaim us from our natural pride and selfishness, and their fatal consequences; to bring us to a just sense of our weakness and *depravity*; and to dispose us, with unfeigned humiliation, to abase ourselves, and give glory to God. "No flesh may glory in his presence; he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord." "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted."*

These solemn admonitions are too generally disregarded, and their intimate connexion with the subject we are now considering appears to have been often entirely overlooked, even by Christian moralists. These authors, without reference to the main spring and internal principle of conduct, are apt to speak of the love of human applause, as being meritorious or culpable, as being the desire of true or false glory, accordingly as the external actions it produces, and the pursuits to which it prompts, are beneficial or mischievous to mankind. But it is undeniably manifest, that in the judgment of the word of God, the love of worldly admiration and applause is in its *nature* essentially and radically corrupt; so far as it partakes of a disposition to exalt and aggrandize ourselves, to pride ourselves on our natural or acquired endow-

*Isaiah ii. 11.

ments, or to assume to ourselves the merit and credit of our good qualities, instead of ascribing all the honour and glory where only they are due. Its *guilt* therefore, in these cases, is not to be measured by its effects on the happiness of mankind; nor is it to be denominated *true* or *false* glory, accordingly as the ends to which it is directed are beneficial or mischievous, just or unjust, objects of pursuit; but it is *false*, because it exalts that which ought to be abased, and *criminal*, because it encroaches on the prerogative of God.

The scriptures further instruct us, not merely that mankind are liable to error, and therefore that the world's commendations *may be* sometimes mistaken; but that their judgment being darkened and their hearts depraved, its applauses and contempt will for the most part be systematically misplaced; that though the beneficent and disinterested spirit of Christianity, and her obvious tendency to promote domestic comfort and general happiness, cannot but extort applause; yet that her aspiring after more than ordinary excellence, by exciting secret misgivings in others, or a painful sense of inferiority not unmixed with envy, cannot fail often to disgust and offend. The word of God teaches us, that though such of the doctrines and precepts of Christianity as are coincident with worldly interests and pursuits, and with worldly principles and systems, may be professed without offence; yet, that what is opposite to these, or even different from them, will be deemed needlessly precise and strict, the indulgence of a morose and gloomy humour, the symptoms of a contracted and superstitious spirit, the marks of a mean, enslaved,

or distorted understanding. That for these and other reasons, the follower of Christ must not only make up his mind to the *occasional relinquishment* of worldly favour, but that it should even afford him matter of holy jealousy and suspicion of himself, when it is very lavishly and very generally bestowed.

But though the standard of worldly estimation differed less from that of the gospel; yet since our affections ought to be set on heavenly things, and conversant about heavenly objects; and since in particular the love and favour of God ought to be the matter of our supreme and habitual desire, to which every other should be rendered subordinate, it follows, that the love of human applause must be manifestly injurious, so far as tends to draw down our regards to earthly concerns, and to circumscribe our desires within the narrow limits of this world. Particularly, that it is *impure*, so far as it is tinctured with a disposition to estimate too highly, and love too well, the good opinion and commendations of man.

But though, by these and other instructions and considerations, the holy scripture warns us against the inordinate desire or earnest pursuit of worldly estimation and honour; though it so greatly reduces their value, and prepares us for losing them without surprise, and for relinquishing them with little reluctance: yet it teaches us, that Christians in general are not only not called upon absolutely and voluntarily to renounce and forego them; but that when, without our having solicitously sought them, they are bestowed on us for actions intrinsically good, we are to accept them as being intended by Providence to be sometimes, even in

this disorderly state of things, a present solace and a reward to virtue. Nay, more, we are instructed, that in our general deportment, that in little particulars of conduct otherwise indifferent, that in the *circumstances* and *manner* of performing actions in themselves of a determined character and indispensable obligation, (guarding, however, against the smallest degree of artifice or deceit) that by watching for opportunities of doing little kindnesses, that by avoiding singularities, and even humouring prejudices, where it may be done without the slightest infringement on truth or duty, we ought to have a due respect and regard to the approbation and favour of men. These, however, we should not value chiefly as they may administer to our own gratification, but rather as furnishing means and instruments of influence, which we may turn to good account, by making them subservient to the improvement and happiness of our fellow-creatures, and thus conducive to the *glory of God*. The remark is almost superfluous, that on occasions like these we must even watch our hearts with the most jealous care, lest pride and self-love insensibly infuse themselves, and corrupt the purity of principles so liable to contract a taint.

Credit and reputation, in the judgment of the true Christian, stand on ground not very different from riches; which he is not to prize highly, or to desire and pursue with solicitude; but which, when they are allotted to him by the hand of Providence, he is to accept with thankfulness, and use with moderation; relinquishing them, when it becomes necessary, without a murmur; guarding most circumspectly, so long as they remain with

him, against that sensual and selfish temper, and no less against that pride and wantonness of heart, which they are too apt to produce and cherish; thus considering them as in themselves acceptable, but, from the infirmity of his nature, as highly dangerous possessions, and valuing them chiefly, not as instruments of luxury or splendour, but as affording the means of honouring his heavenly benefactor, and lessening the miseries of mankind.

Christianity, however, be it remembered, proposes not to extinguish our natural desires, but to bring them under just control, and direct them to their true objects. In the case both of riches and of honour, she maintains the consistency of her character. While she commands us not to set our hearts on *earthly* treasures, she reminds us that "we have in *heaven* a better and more enduring substance" than this world can bestow; and while she represses our solicitude respecting earthly credit, and moderates our attachment to it, she holds forth to us, and bids us habitually to aspire after, the splendours of that better state, where is true glory, and honour, and immortality; thus exciting in us a just ambition, suited to our high origin, and worthy of our large capacities, which the little, misplaced, and perishable distinctions of this life would in vain attempt to satisfy.

Generally prevailing notions opposed to those of scripture. It would be mere waste of time to enter into any laboured argument to prove, at large, that the light in which worldly credit and estimation are regarded by the bulk of professed Christians, is extremely different from that in which they are placed by the page of scripture. The *inordinate* love of *worldly glory* indeed, implies a passion,

which from the nature of things cannot be called into exercise in the generality of mankind, because, being conversant about great objects, it can but rarely find that field which is requisite for its exertions. But we every where discover the same principle reduced to the dimensions of common life, and modified and directed according to every one's sphere of action. We may discover it in a supreme love of distinction, and admiration, and praise; in the universal acceptableness of flattery; and, above all, in the excessive valuation of our worldly character, in that watchfulness with which it is guarded, in that jealousy when it is questioned, in that solicitude when it is in danger, in that hot resentment when it is attacked, in that bitterness of suffering when it is impaired or lost. All these emotions, as they are too manifest to be disputed, so are they too reputable to be denied. Dishonour, disgrace, and shame present images of horror too dreadful to be faced; they are evils, which it is thought the mark of a generous spirit to consider as excluding every idea of comfort and enjoyment, and to feel, in short, as too heavy to be borne.

The consequences of all this are natural and obvious. Though it be not openly avowed, that we are to follow after worldly estimation, or to escape from worldly disrepute, when they can only be pursued or avoided by declining from the path of duty; nay, though the contrary be recognized as being the just opinion; yet all the effect of this speculative concesson is soon done away *in fact*. Estimating worldly credit as of the highest intrinsic excellence, and worldly shame as the greatest of all possible evils, we sometimes shape and turn

the path of duty itself from its true directions, so as it may favour our acquisition of the one, and avoidance of the other; or, when this cannot be done, we boldly and openly turn aside from it, declaring the temptation is too strong to be resisted.

Various proofs of the truth of our representations of the opinions on this point, of the bulk of nominal Christians.

It were easy to adduce numerous proofs of the truth of these assertions. It is proved, indeed, by that general tendency in religion to conceal herself from the view, (for we might hope that in these cases she often is by no means altogether extinct) by her being apt to vanish from our conversations, and even to give place to a pretended licentiousness of sentiments and conduct, and a false shew of infidelity. It is proved, by that complying acquiescence and participation in the habits and manners of this dissipated age, which has almost confounded every external distinction between the Christian and the Infidel, and has made it so rare to find any one who dares incur the charge of Christian singularity, or who can say with the apostle, that "he is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ." It is

Proof from the house of commons.

proved (how can this proof be omitted by one to whose lot it has so often fallen to witness and lament, sometimes, he fears, to afford an instance of it?) by that quick resentment, those bitter contentions, those angry retorts, those malicious triumphs, that impatience of inferiority, that wakeful sense of past defeats and promptness to revenge them, which too often change the character of a Christian deliberative assembly, into that of a stage for prize-fighters; violating at once the proprieties of public

conduct, and the rules of social decorum, and renouncing and chasing away all the charities of the religion of Jesus.

But from all lesser proofs, our attention is drawn to one of a still larger size, and more determined character. Surely the reader will here anticipate our mention of the practice of duelling: a practice which, to the disgrace of a Christian society, has long been suffered to exist with little restraint or opposition.

This practice, whilst it powerfully supports, chiefly rests on, that excessive overvaluation of character, which teaches that worldly credit is to be preserved at *any* rate, and disgrace at *any* rate to be avoided. The *unreasonableness* of duelling has been often proved, and it has often been shewn to be criminal on various principles: sometimes it has been opposed on grounds hardly tenable; particularly when it has been considered as an indication of malice and revenge.* But it seems hardly to have been enough noticed in what chiefly consists its *essential* guilt; that it is a deliberate preference of the favour of man, before the favour and approbation of God, *in articulo mortis*, in an instance, wherein our own life and that of a fellow-creature are at stake, and wherein we run the risk of rushing into the presence of our Maker in the very act of offending him. It would detain us too long, and it were somewhat beside our present purpose, to enumerate the mischievous consequences which result from this practice. They are many and great; and if regard be had merely to the tem-

From duelling.

Duelling —
wherein its
guilt chiefly
consists.

* Vide Hey's tract, Rousseau's *Eloisa*, and many periodical essays and sermons.

poral interests of men, and to the well-being of society, they are but poorly counterbalanced by the plea, which must be admitted in its behalf by a candid observer of human nature, of a courtesy and refinement in our modern manners unknown to ancient times.

But there is one observation which must not be omitted, and which seems to have been too much overlooked. In the judgment of that religion which requires purity of heart, and of that Being to whom, as was before remarked, "thought is action," he cannot be esteemed innocent of this crime, who lives in a settled habitual determination to commit it when circumstances shall call upon him so to do.* This is a consideration which places the crime of duelling on a different footing from almost any other; indeed, there is perhaps NO other, which mankind habitually and deliberately resolve to practise whenever the temptation shall occur. It shews also that the crime of duelling is far more general in the higher classes than is commonly supposed, and that the whole sum of the guilt which the practice produces is great, beyond what has perhaps been ever conceived! It will be the writer's comfort to have solemnly suggested this consideration to the consciences of those by whom this impious practice might be suppressed: if such there be, which he is strongly inclined to believe, theirs is the crime, and theirs the responsibility, of suffering it to continue. †

* Vide "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her," &c. Matt. v. 28.

† The writer cannot omit this opportunity of declaring, that he should long ago have brought this subject before the notice of parlia-

In the foregoing observations, it has not been the writer's intention to discuss completely that copious subject, the love of worldly estimation. It would be to exceed the limits of a work like this, fully to investigate so large, and at the same time so important a topic. Enough, however, may have perhaps been said, to make it evident that this principle is of a character highly *questionable*; that it should be brought under absolute subjection, and watched with the most jealous care: that, notwithstanding its lofty pretensions, it often can by no means justly boast that high origin and exalted nature which its superficial admirers are disposed to concede to it. What real intrinsic essential value, it might be asked, does there appear to be in a virtue, which had wholly changed its nature and character, if public opinion had been different? But it is in truth of base extraction, and ungenerous qualities, springing from selfishness, and vanity, and low ambition; by these it subsists, and thrives, and acts; and envy, and jealousy, and detraction, and hatred, and variance, are its too faithful and natural associates. It is, to say the best of it, a root which bears fruits of a poisonous as well as of a beneficial quality. If it

Real nature of inordinate love of human estimation.

ment, but for a perfect conviction that he should probably thereby only give encouragement to a system he wishes to see at an end. The practice has been at different periods nearly stopped by positive laws, in various nations on the Continent; and there can be little doubt of the efficacy of what has been more than once suggested—a Court of Honour, to take cognizance of such offences as would naturally fall within its province. The effects of this establishment would doubtless require to be enforced by legislative provisions, directly punishing the practice; and, by discouraging at court, and in the military and naval situations, all who should directly or indirectly be guilty of it.

sometimes stimulates to great and generous enterprises, if it urges to industry, and sometimes to excellence, if in the more contracted sphere it produces courtesy and kindness; yet to its account we must place the ambition which desolates nations, and many of the competitions and resentments which interrupt the harmony of social life. The former indeed has been often laid to its charge, but the latter have not been sufficiently attended to; and still less has its *noxious* influence on the vital principle and distinguishing graces of the Christian character been duly pointed out and enforced.

To read indeed the writings of certain Christian moralists,* and to observe how little they seem disposed to call it in question, except where it raves in the conqueror, one should be almost tempted to suspect, that, considering it as a principle of such potency and prevalence, as that they must despair of bringing it into just subjection, they were intent only in complimenting it into good humour (like those barbarous nations which worship the evil spirit through fear;) or rather, that they were making a sort of composition with an enemy they could not master, and were willing, on condition of its giving up the trade of war, to suffer it to rule undisturbed, and range at pleasure.

But the truth is, that the reasonings of Christian moralists too often exhibit but few traces of the genius of Christian morality. Of this position, the case before us is an instance. This principle of the desire of worldly distinction and applause, is often allowed, and even commended, with too few

*Vide, in particular, a paper in the Guardian, by Addison, on honour, vol. 2.

qualifications, and too little reserve. To covet wealth is base and sordid, but to covet honour is treated as the mark of a generous and exalted nature. These writers scarcely seem to bear in mind, that though the principle in question tends to prevent the commission of those grosser acts of vice which would injure us in the general estimation; yet that it not only stops there, but that it there begins to exert almost an equal force in the opposite direction. They do not consider how apt this principle is, even in the case of those who move in a contracted sphere, to fill us with vain conceits, and vicious passions; and, above all, how it tends to fix the affections on earthly things, and to steal away the heart from God. They acknowledge it to be criminal when it produces mischievous effects, but forget how apt it is, by the substitution of a false and corrupt motive, to vitiate the purity of our good actions, depriving them of every thing which rendered them truly and essentially valuable. That, not to be too hastily approved, because it takes the side of virtue, it often works her ruin while it asserts her cause, and, like some vile seducer, pretends affection only the more surely to betray.

It is the distinguishing glory of Christianity not to rest satisfied with superficial appearances, but to rectify the *motives*, and purify the *heart*. The true Christian, in obedience to the lessons of scripture, no where keeps over himself a more resolute and jealous guard than where the desire of human estimation and distinction is in question. No where does he more deeply feel the insufficiency of his unassisted strength, or more diligently and

The true Christian's conduct in relation to this principle.

earnestly pray for Divine assistance. He may well indeed watch and pray against the encroachments of a passion, which, when suffered to transgress its just limits, discovers a peculiar hostility to the distinguishing graces of the Christian temper; a passion which must insensibly acquire force, because it is in continual exercise; to which almost every thing *without* administers nutriment, and the growth of which *within* is favoured and cherished by such powerful auxiliaries as pride and selfishness, the natural and perhaps inexterminable inhabitants of the human heart; of which the predominance, if established, is thus so pernicious, and which possesses so many advantages for effecting its establishment.

Strongly impressed, therefore, with a sense of the indispensable necessity of guarding against the progress of this encroaching principle, in humble reliance on superior aid, the true Christian thankfully uses the means, and habitually exercises himself in the considerations and motives, suggested to him for that purpose by the word of God. He is much occupied in searching out and contemplating his own infirmities. He endeavours to acquire and maintain a just conviction of his great unworthiness; and to keep in continual remembrance, that whatever distinguishes himself from others, is not properly his own, but that he is altogether indebted for it to the undeserved bounty of heaven. He diligently endeavours also, habitually to preserve a *just* sense of the real worth of human distinction and applause, knowing that he shall covet them less when he has learned not to overrate their value. He labours to bear in mind, how undeservedly they are often bestowed, how pre-

cariously they are always possessed. The censures of good men justly render him suspicious of himself, and prompt him carefully and impartially to examine into those parts of his character, or those particulars of his conduct, which have drawn on him their animadversions. The favourable opinion and the praises of good men are justly acceptable to him, where they accord with the testimony of his own heart; that testimony being thereby confirmed and warranted. Those praises favour also and strengthen the growth of mutual confidence and affection, where it is his delight to form friendships, rich not less in use than comfort, and to establish connexions which may last for ever. But even in the case of commendations of good men, he suffers not himself to be beguiled into an overvaluation of them, lest he should be led to substitute them in the place of conscience. He guards against this by reflecting how indistinctly we can discern each other's motives, how little enter into each others circumstances, how mistaken therefore may be the judgments formed of us, or of our actions, even by good men, and that it is far from improbable, that a time may come in which we may be compelled to forfeit their esteem, by adhering to the dictates of our own consciences.

But if he endeavours thus to sit loose to the favour and applause even of good men, much more to those of the world at large: not but that he is sensible of their worth as means and instruments of usefulness and influence; and under the limitations and for the ends allowed in scripture, he is glad to possess, observant to acquire, and careful to retain them. He considers them, however, if we may again introduce the metaphor, like the pre-

cious metals, as having rather an exchangeable than an intrinsic value, as desirable not simply in their possession, but in their use. In this view, he holds himself to be responsible for that share of them which he enjoys, and, to continue the figure, as bound not to let them lie by him unemployed; this were hoarding; not to lavish them prodigally, this would be waste; not imprudently to misapply them, this were folly and caprice; but as under an obligation to regard them as conferred on him that they might be brought into action, and as what therefore he may by no means throw away, though ready, if it be required, to relinquish them with cheerfulness; and never feeling himself at liberty, in consideration of the use he intends to make of them, to acquire or retain them unlawfully. He holds it to be his bounden duty to seek diligently for occasions of rendering them subservient to their true purposes; and when any such occasion is found, to expend them cheerfully and liberally, but with discretion and frugality; being no less prudent in determining the measure, than in selecting the objects of their application, that they may go the farther by being thus managed with economy.

Acting, therefore, on these principles, he will studiously and diligently use any degree of worldly credit he may enjoy, in removing or lessening prejudices; in conciliating good will, and thereby making way for the less obstructed progress of truth; and in providing for its being entertained with candour, or even with favour, by those who would bar all access against it in any rougher or more homely form. He will make it his business to set on foot, and forward, benevolent and useful

schemes; and where they require united efforts, to obtain and preserve for them this co-operation. He will endeavour to discountenance vice, to bring modest merit into notice; to lend as it were his light to men of real worth, but of less creditable name, and perhaps of less conciliating qualities and manners; that they may thus shine with a reflected lustre, and be useful in their turn, when invested with their just estimation. But while by these and various other means he strives to render his reputation, so long as he possesses it, subservient to the great ends of advancing the cause of religion and virtue, and of promoting the happiness and comfort of mankind, he will not transgress the rule of the scripture precepts, in order to obtain, to cultivate, or to preserve it, resolutely disclaiming that dangerous sophistry of "doing evil that good may come." Ready, however, to relinquish his reputation when required so to do, he will not throw it away; and, so far as he allowably may, he will cautiously avoid occasions of diminishing it, instead of studiously seeking, or needlessly multiplying them, as seems sometimes to have been the practice of worthy but imprudent men. There will be no capricious humours, no selfish tempers, no moroseness, no discourtesy, no affected severity of deportment, no peculiarity of language, no indolent neglect, or wanton breach, of the ordinary forms or fashions of society. His reputation is a possession capable of uses too important to be thus sported away; if sacrificed at all, it shall be sacrificed at the call of duty. The world shall be constrained to allow him to be amiable, as well as respectable in other parts of his character; though in what regards religion, they may account him

unreasonably precise and strict. In this, no less than in other particulars, he will endeavour to reduce the enemies of religion to adopt the confession of the accusers of the Jewish ruler, "We shall not find any fault or occasion against this Daniel—except concerning the law of his God:" and even there, if he give offence, it will only be where he dares not do otherwise; and if he fall into disesteem or disgrace, it shall not be chargeable to any conduct which is justly dishonourable, or even to any unnecessary singularities on his part, but to the false standard of estimation of a misjudging world. When his character is thus mistaken, or his conduct thus misconstrued, he will not wrap himself up in a mysterious sullenness; but will be ready, where he thinks any one will listen to him with patience and candour, to clear up what has been dubious, to explain what has been imperfectly known, and, "speaking the truth in love," to correct, if it may be, the erroneous impressions which have been conceived of him. He may sometimes feel it his duty publicly to vindicate his character from unjust reproach, and to repel the false charges of his enemies; but he will carefully, however, watch against being led away by pride, or being betrayed into some breach of truth or of Christian charity, when he is treading in a path so dangerous. At such a time he will also guard, with more than ordinary circumspection, against any undue solicitude about his worldly reputation for its own sake; and when he has done what duty requires for its vindication, he will sit down with a peaceable and quiet mind, and it will be matter of no very deep concern to him if his endeavours should have been ineffectual. If

good men in every age and nation have been often unjustly calumniated and disgraced, and if, in such circumstances, even the darkness of paganism has been able contentedly to repose itself on the consciousness of innocence, shall one who is cheered by the Christian's hope, who is assured also, that a day will shortly come in which whatever is secret shall be made manifest, and the mistaken judgments of men, perhaps even of good men, being corrected, that "he shall then have praise of God;" shall such an one, I say, sink? shall he even bend or droop under such a trial? They might be more excusable in over-valuing human reputation, to whom all beyond the grave was dark and cheerless. They also might be more easily pardoned for pursuing, with some degree of eagerness and solicitude, that glory which might survive them; thus seeking, as it were, to extend the narrow span of their earthly existence: but far different is our case, to whom these clouds are rolled away, and "life and immortality brought to light by the gospel." Not but that worldly favour and distinction are amongst the best things this world has to offer: but the Christian knows it is the very condition of his calling, *not* to have his portion here; and as in the case of any other earthly enjoyments, so in that also of worldly honour, he dreads, lest his supreme affections being thereby gratified, it should be hereafter said to him "Remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things."

He is required by his holy calling to be victorious over the world; and to this victory, the conquest of the dread of its disesteem and dishonour is essentially and indispensably required. He

reflects on those holy men who "had trial of cruel mockings;" he remembers that our blessed Saviour himself "was despised and rejected of men;" and what is he, that he should be exempted from the common lot, or think it much to bear the scandal of his profession? If therefore he is creditable and popular, he considers this, if the phrase may be pardoned, as something beyond his bargain; and he watches himself, with double care, lest he should grow over-fond of what he may be shortly called upon to relinquish. He meditates often on the probability of his being involved in such circumstances as may render it necessary for him to subject himself to disgrace and obloquy; thus familiarizing himself with them betimes, and preparing himself, that when the trying hour arrives they may not take him unawares.

But the cultivation of the desire of "that honour which cometh from God," he finds the most effectual means of bringing his mind into a proper temper, in what regards the love of human approbation. Christian! wouldst thou indeed reduce this affection under just control—*sursum corda!* Rise on the wings of contemplation, until the praises and the censures of men die away upon the ear, and the still small voice of conscience is no longer drowned by the din of this nether world. Here the sight is apt to be occupied with earthly objects, and the hearing to be engrossed with earthly sounds; but there thou shalt come within the view of that resplendent and incorruptible crown, which is held forth to thy acceptance in the realms of light, and thine ear shall be regaled with heavenly melody! Here we dwell in a variable atmosphere—the prospect is at one time dark-

ened by the gloom of disgrace, and at another the eye is dazzled by the gleamings of glory: but thou hast now ascended above this inconstant region; no storms agitate, no clouds obscure the air, and the lightnings play and the thunders roll beneath thee.

Thus, at chosen seasons, the Christian exercises himself; and when, from this elevated region, he descends into the plain below, and mixes in the bustle of life, he still retains the impressions of his more retired hours. By these he realizes to himself the unseen world; he accustoms himself to speak and act as in the presence of "an innumerable company of angels, and of the spirits of just men made perfect, and of God the Judge of all;" the consciousness of *their* approbation cheers and gladdens his soul, under the scoffs and reproaches of an undiscerning world, and to his delighted ear, their united praises form a *harmony* which a few discordant earthly voices cannot interrupt.

But though the Christian be sometimes enabled thus to triumph over the inordinate love of human applause, he does not therefore deem himself secure from its encroachments. On the contrary, he is aware, so strong and active is its principle of vitality, that even where it seems extinct, let but circumstances favour its revival, and it will spring forth again in renewed vigour. And as his watchfulness must thus during life know no termination, because the enemy will ever be at hand; so it must be the more close and vigilant, because he is no where free from danger, but is on every side open to attack. "Sume superbiam quæsitam meritis," was the maxim of a worldly moralist:

but the Christian is aware, that he is particularly assailable where he really excels; there he is in especial danger, lest his motives, originally pure, being insensibly corrupted, he should be betrayed into an anxiety about worldly favour, false in principle or excessive in degree, when he is endeavouring to render his virtue amiable and respected in the eyes of others, and, in obedience to the scripture injunction, is willing to let his "light so shine before men, that they may see his good works, and glorify his Father which is in heaven."

He watches himself also on small as well as on great occasions: the latter indeed, in the case of many persons, can hardly ever be expected to occur, whereas the former are continually presenting themselves: and thus, whilst on the one hand they may be rendered highly useful in forming and strengthening a just habit of mind with respect to the opinion of the world; so, on the other, they are the means most at hand for enabling us to discover our own real character. Let not this be slightly passed over. If any one finds himself shrinking from disrepute or disesteem in little instances; but apt to solace himself with the persuasion, that his spirits being fully called forth to the encounter, he could boldly stand the brunt of sharper trials; let him be slow to give entertainment to so beguiling a suggestion; and let him not forget that these little instances, where no credit is to be got, and the vainest can find small room for self-complacency, furnish perhaps the truest tests whether we are ashamed of the gospel of Christ, and are willing, on principles really pure, to bear reproach for the name of Jesus.

The Christian, too, is well aware that the ex-

cessive desire of human approbation is a passion of so subtle a nature, that there is nothing into which it cannot penetrate: and from much experience, learning to discover it where it would lurk unseen, and to detect it under its more specious disguises, he finds, that, elsewhere disallowed and excluded, it is apt to insinuate itself into his very religion, where it especially delights to dwell, and obstinately maintains its residence. Proud piety and ostentatious charity, and all the more open effects it there produces, have been often condemned, and we may discover the tendencies to them in ourselves, without difficulty. But where it appears not so large in bulk, and in shape so unambiguous, let its operation be still suspected. Let not the Christian suffer himself to be deceived by any external dissimilitudes between himself and the world around him, trusting perhaps to the sincerity of the principle to which they originally owed their rise; but let him beware lest, through the insensible encroachments of the subtle usurper, his religion should at length have "only a name to live," being gradually robbed of its vivifying principle; lest he should be chiefly preserved in his religious course by the dread of incurring the charge of levity, for quitting a path on which he had deliberately entered. Or where, on a strict and impartial scrutiny of his governing motives, he may fairly conclude this not to be the case, let him beware lest he be influenced by this principle in particular parts of his character, and especially where any external singularities are in question; closely scrutinizing his apparent motives, lest he should be prompted to his more than ordinary religious observances, and be kept from partici-

pating in the licentious pleasures of a dissipated age, not so much by a vigorous principle of internal holiness, as by a fear of lessening himself in the good opinion of the stricter circle of his associates, or of suffering even in the estimation of the world at large, by violating the proprieties of his assumed character.

Parting counsel
to those who
wish to bring
this passion un-
der due regula-
tion.

To those who, in the important particular which we have been so long discussing, wish to conform themselves to the injunctions of the word of God, we must advise a laborious watchfulness, a jealous guard, a close and frequent scrutiny of their own hearts, that they may not mistake their real character, and too late find themselves to have been mistaken, as to what they had conceived to be their governing motives. Above all, let them labour, with humble prayers for the Divine assistance, to fix in themselves a deep, habitual, and practical sense of the excellence of "that honour which cometh from God," and of the comparative worthlessness of all earthly estimation and pre-eminence. In truth, unless the affections of the soul be thus predominantly engaged on the side of heavenly, in preference to that of human honour, though we may have relinquished the pursuit of fame, we shall not have acquired that firm contexture of mind which can bear disgrace and shame without yielding to the pressure. Between these two states there is a wide interval; and he who, on a sober review of his conduct and motives, finds reason to believe he has arrived at the one, must not therefore conclude he has reached the other. To the one, a little natural moderation and quietness of temper may be sufficient to conduct

us : but to the other, we can only attain by much discipline and slow advances ; and when we think we have made great way, we shall often find reason to confess in the hour of trial, that we had greatly, far too greatly, over-rated our progress.

When engaged too in the prosecution of this course, we must be aware of the snares which lie in our way, and of the deceits to which we are liable : and we must be provided against these impositions, by having obtained a full and distinct conception of the temper of mind, with regard to human favour, which is prescribed to us in scripture ; and by continually examining our hearts and lives, to ascertain how far they correspond with it. This will prevent our substituting contemplation in the place of action, and giving ourselves too much up to those religious meditations which were formerly recommended, in which we must not indulge to the neglect of the common *duties* of life : this will prevent our mistaking the gratification of an indolent temper for the Christian's disregard of fame ; for, never let it be forgotten, we must *deserve* estimation, though we may not *possess* it ; forcing men of the *world* to acknowledge that we do not want their boasted spring of action to set us in motion, but that its place is better supplied to us by another, which produces all the good of theirs, without its evil ; thus demonstrating the superiority of the principle which animates us, by the superior utility and excellence of its effects. This principle, in order to be pure and genuine, though nerved with more than mortal firmness, must be sweetened by love and tempered with humility. The former of these qualities will render us kind, friendly, and benefi-

cent, preventing our being no longer on the watch to promote the happiness or comfort of others, than whilst we are stimulated by the desire of their applause; the produce of which passion, whatever may be vaunted of its effects on social intercourse, is often nothing better than selfishness, but ill concealed under a superficial covering of exterior courtesy.

Humility, again, reducing us in our own value, will moderate our claims on worldly estimation. It will check our tendency to ostentation and display, prompting us rather to avoid than to attract notice. It will dispose us to sit down in quiet obscurity, though, judging ourselves impartially, we believe ourselves better entitled to credit than those on whom it is conferred; closing the entrance against a proud, painful, and malignant passion, from which, under such circumstances, we can otherwise be hardly free, the passion of "high disdain from sense of injured merit."

Love and humility will concur in producing a frame of mind, not more distinct from an ardent thirst of glory, than from that frigid disregard, or insolent contempt, or ostentatious renunciation of human favour and distinction, which we have sometimes seen opposed to it. These latter qualities may not unfrequently be traced to a slothful, sensual, and selfish temper; to the consciousness of being unequal to any great and generous attempts; to the disappointment of schemes of ambition or of glory; to a little personal experience of the world's capricious and inconstant humour. The renunciation in these cases, however sententious, is often far from sincere; and it is even made, not unfrequently, with a view to the attain-

ment of that very distinction which it affects to disclaim. In some other of these instances, the over-valuation and inordinate desire of worldly credit, however disavowed, are abundantly evident, from the merit which is assumed for relinquishing them; or from that sour and surly humour, which betrays a gloomy and a corroded mind, galled and fretting under the irritating sense of the want of that which it most wishes to possess.

But far different is the temper of a Christian. Not a temper of sordid sensuality, or lazy apathy, or dogmatizing pride, or disappointed ambition: more truly independent of worldly estimation than philosophy with all her boasts, it forms a perfect contrast to epicurean selfishness, and to stoical pride, and to cynical brutality. It is a temper compounded of firmness, and complacency, and peace, and love; and manifesting itself in acts of kindness and of courtesy; a kindness, not pretended, but genuine; a courtesy, not false and superficial, but cordial and sincere. In the hour of popularity it is not intoxicated or insolent; in the hour of unpopularity, it is not desponding or morose; unshaken in constancy, unwearied in benevolence, firm without roughness, and assiduous without servility.

Notwithstanding the great importance of the topic which we have been investigating, it will require much indulgence on the part of the reader, to excuse the disproportionate length into which the discussion has been almost insensibly drawn out: yet this, it is hoped, may not be without its uses, if the writer have in any degree succeeded in his endeavour to point out the dangerous qualities and unchristian tendencies of a principle of such

general predominance throughout the higher classes of society, and to suggest to the serious inquirer some practical hints for its regulation and control. Since the principle, too, of which we have been treating, is one of the most ordinary modifications of pride, the discussion may also serve in some degree to supply a manifest deficiency, a deficiency to be ascribed to the fear of trespassing too far on the reader's patience, in having but slightly touched on the allowed prevalence of that master passion, and on the allowed neglect of its opposite, humility.

SECTION IV.

The generally prevailing error, of substituting amiable tempers and useful lives in the place of religion, stated and confuted ; with hints to real Christians.

Generally prevailing error. **THERE** is another practical error very generally prevalent, the effects of which are highly injurious to the cause of religion ; and which in particular is often brought forward when, upon Christian principles, any advocates for Christianity would press the practice of Christian virtues.

The error to which we allude, is that of exaggerating the merit of certain amiable and useful qualities, and of considering them as of themselves sufficient to compensate for the want of the supreme love and fear of God.

It seems to be an opinion pretty generally prevalent, that kindness and sweetness of temper ;

sympathizing, benevolent, and generous affections ; attention to what in the world's estimation are the domestic, relative, and social duties ; and, above all, a life of general activity and usefulness—may well be allowed, in our imperfect state, to make up for the defect of what, in strict propriety of speech, is termed Religion.

Many, indeed, will unreservedly declare, and more will hint the opinion, that “ the difference between the qualities above-mentioned and religion, is rather a verbal or logical, than a real and essential difference ; for in truth what are they but religion in substance if not in name ? Is it not the great end of religion, and in particular the glory of Christianity, to extinguish the malignant passions ; to curb the violence, to control the appetites, and to smooth the asperities of man ; to make us compassionate and kind and forgiving one to another ; to make us good husbands, good fathers, good friends, and to render us active and useful in the discharge of the relative, social, and civil duties ? We do not deny that in the general mass of society, and particularly in the lower orders, such conduct and tempers cannot be diffused and maintained by any other medium than that of religion. But if the end be effected, surely it is only unnecessary refinement to dispute about the means. It is even to forget your own principles ; and to refuse its just place to solid practical virtue, while you assign too high a value to speculative opinions.”

Common language on this head.

Thus a fatal distinction is admitted between morality and religion : a great and desperate error, of which it is the more necessary to take notice, because many who would condemn, as too strong

the language in which this opinion is sometimes openly avowed, are yet more or less tinged with the notion itself; and under the habitual and almost unperceived influence of this beguiling suggestion, are vainly solacing their imaginations, and repressing their well-grounded fears concerning *their own* state; and are also quieting their just solicitude concerning the spiritual condition of *others*, and soothing themselves in the neglect of friendly endeavours for their improvement.

There can hardly be a stronger proof of the cursory and superficial views, with which men are apt to satisfy themselves in religious concerns, than the prevalence of the opinion here in question; the falsehood and sophistry of which must be acknowledged by any one who, admitting the authority of scripture, will examine it with ever so little seriousness and impartiality of mind.

The worth of amiable tempers estimated by the standard of unassisted reason. Appealing indeed to a less strict standard, it would not be difficult to shew that the moral worth of these sweet and benevolent tempers, and of these useful lives, is apt to be greatly over-rated. The former involuntarily gain upon our affections and disarm our severer judgments, by their kindly, complying, and apparently disinterested nature; by their prompting men to flatter instead of mortifying our pride, to sympathize either with our joys or our sorrows, to abound in obliging attentions and offices of courtesy; by their obvious tendency to produce and maintain harmony and comfort in social and domestic life. It is not, however, unworthy of remark, that from the commendations which are so generally bestowed on these qualities, and their rendering men universally acceptable

and popular, there is many a false pre-
tender to them, who gains a credit for
them which he by no means deserves ;

Many false
pretenders to
these tem-
pers.

in whom they are no more than the proprieties of his assumed character, or even a mask which is worn in public, only the better to conceal an opposite temper. Would you see this man of courtesy and sweetness stripped of his false covering, follow him unobserved into his family ; and you shall behold, too plain to be mistaken, selfishness and spleen harassing and vexing the wretched subjects of their unmanly tyranny ; as if, being released at length from their confinement, they were making up to themselves for the restraint which had been imposed on them in the world.

But where the benevolent qualities
are genuine, they often deserve the
name rather of amiable instincts, than
of moral virtues. In many cases they

Real nature
of amiable
tempers when
not grounded
on religion.

imply no mental conflict, no previous discipline : they are apt to evaporate in barren sensibilities, and transitory sympathies, and indolent wishes, and unproductive declarations ; they possess not that strength and energy of character, which, in contempt of difficulties and dangers, produce alacrity in service, vigour and perseverance in action. Destitute of proper firmness, they often encourage that vice and folly which it is their especial duty to repress ; and it is well if, from their soft complying humour, they are not often drawn in to participate in what is wrong, as well as to connive at it. Thus their possessors are frequently, in the eye of truth and reason, bad magistrates, bad parents, bad friends ; defective in those very qualities which give to each of those several

relations its chief and appropriate value. And this, let it be also observed, is a defect which might well bring into question that freedom from selfishness which is so often claimed for them ; inasmuch as there is too great reason to fear, that it often arises in us chiefly from indisposition to submit to a painful effort, though real good-will commands the sacrifice, or from the fear of lessening the regard in which we are held, and the good opinion which is entertained of us.

Their short and precarious duration. It should farther also be observed concerning these qualities, when they are not rooted in religion, that they are of a sickly and a short-lived nature, and want that hardy and vigorous temperament, which is requisite for enabling them to bear without injury, or even to survive, the rude shocks and the variable and churlish seasons, to which in such a world as this they must ever be exposed. It is only a *Christian* love, of which it is the character, that "it suffereth long, and yet is kind ;" "that it is not easily provoked, that it beareth all things, and endureth all things." In the spring of youth, indeed, the blood flows freely through the veins ; we are flushed with health and confidence ; hope is young and ardent, our desires are unsated, and whatever we see has the grace of novelty ; we are the more disposed to be good-natured, because we are pleased ; pleased, because universally well received. Wherever we cast our eyes, we see some face of friendship, and love, and gratulation. All nature smiles around us. In this season, the amiable tempers of which we have been speaking naturally spring up. The soil suits, the climate favours them. They appear to shoot forth vigorously, and blossom in gay luxu-

riance. To the superficial eye, all is fair and flourishing; we anticipate the fruits of autumn, and promise ourselves an ample produce. But, by and by, the sun scorches, the frost nips, the winds rise, the rains descend; our golden dreams are blasted, all our fond expectations are no more. Our youthful efforts, let it be supposed, have been successful; and we rise to wealth or eminence. A kind flexible temper and popular manners have produced in us, as they are too apt, a youth of easy social dissipation and unproductive idleness; and we are overtaken, too late, by the consciousness of having wasted that time which cannot be recalled, and those opportunities which we cannot now recover. We sink into disregard and obscurity when, there being a call for qualities of more energy, indolent good nature must fall back. We are thrust out of notice by accident or misfortunes. We are left behind by those with whom we started on equal terms, and who, originally, perhaps, having less pretensions and fewer advantages, have greatly outstripped us in the race of honour; and, their having got before us is often the more galling, because it appears to us, and perhaps with reason, to have been chiefly owing to a generous, easy, good-natured humour on our part, which disposed us to allow them at first to pass by us without jealousy, and led us to give place, without a struggle, to their more lofty pretensions. Thus we suffered them quietly to occupy a station to which, originally, we had as fair a claim as they; but, this station being once tamely surrendered, we have forfeited it for ever. Meanwhile, our awkward and vain endeavours to recover it, at the same time that they shew the want

of self-knowledge and composure in our riper years, as much as in our younger we had been destitute of exertion, serve only to make our inferiority more manifest, and to bring our discontent into the fuller notice of an ill-natured world, which, however, not unjustly condemns and ridicules our misplaced ambition.

It may be sufficient to have hinted at a few of the vicissitudes of advancing life; let the reader's own mind fill up the catalogue. Now the bosom is no longer cheerful and placid; and if the countenance preserve its exterior character, this is no longer the honest expression of the heart. Prosperity and luxury, gradually extinguishing sympathy and puffing up with pride, harden and debase the soul. In other instances, shame secretly clouds, and remorse begins to sting, and suspicion to corrode, and jealousy and envy to imbitter. Disappointed hopes, unsuccessful competitions, and frustrated pursuits sour and irritate the temper. A little personal experience of the selfishness of mankind damps our generous warmth and kind affections; repressing the prompt sensibility and unsuspecting simplicity of our earlier years. Above all, ingratitude sickens the heart, and chills and thickens the very life's-blood of benevolence: till at length our youthful Nero, soft and susceptible, becomes a hard and cruel tyrant; and our youthful Timon, the gay, the generous, the beneficent, is changed into a cold, sour, silent misanthrope.

Worth of useful lives estimated by the standard of unassisted reason.

And as in the case of amiable tempers, so in that also of what are called useful lives, it must be confessed that their intrinsic worth, arguing still

merely on principles of reason, is apt to be greatly over-rated. They are often the result of a disposition naturally bustling and active, which delights in motion, and finds its labour more than repaid, either by the very pleasure which it takes in its employments, or by the credit which it derives from them. Nay, further; if it be granted that religion tends in general to produce usefulness, particularly in the lower orders, who compose a vast majority of every society; and therefore that these irreligious men of useful lives are rather exceptions to the general rule; it must at least be confessed that they are so far useless, or even positively mischievous, as they either neglect to encourage, or actually discourage, that principle which is the great operative spring of usefulness in the bulk of mankind.

Thus it might well perhaps be questioned, estimating these men by their own standard, whether the *particular* good in this case is not more than counterbalanced by the *general* evil; still more, if, their conduct being brought to a strict account, they should be charged, as they justly ought, with the loss of the good which, if they had manifestly and avowedly acted from a higher principle, might have been produced, not only directly in themselves, but indirectly and remotely in others, from the extended efficacy of a religious example. They may be compared, not unaptly, to persons whom some peculiarity of constitution enables to set at defiance those established rules of living which must be observed by the world at large. These healthy debauchees, however they may plead in their defence that they do themselves no injury, would probably, but for their excesses, have both

enjoyed their health better, and preserved it longer, as well as have turned it to better account; and it may at least be urged against them, that they disparage the laws of temperance, and fatally betray others into the breach of them, by affording an instance of their being transgressed with impunity.

Real worth of amiable tempers and useful lives, when not grounded in religion, estimated on Christian principles.

But were the merit of these amiable qualities greater than it is, and though it were not liable to the exceptions which have been alleged against it, yet could they be in no degree admitted, as a compensation for the want of the supreme love and fear of God, and of a predominant desire to promote his glory. The observance of one commandment, however clearly and forcibly enjoined, cannot make up for the neglect of another which is enjoined with equal clearness and equal force. To allow this plea in the present instance, would be to permit men to abrogate the first table of the law, on condition of their obeying the second. But religion suffers not any such *composition* of duties. It is on the very self-same miserable principle, that some have thought to atone for a life of injustice and rapine by the strictness of their religious observances. If the former class of men can plead the diligent discharge of their duties to their fellow-creatures, the latter will urge that of their's to God. We easily see the falsehood of the plea in the latter case; and it is only self-deceit and partiality which prevent its being equally visible in the former. Yet so it is; such is the unequal measure, if I may be allowed the expression, which we deal out to God, and to

each other. It would justly and universally be thought false confidence in the religious thief or the religious adulterer, (to admit for the sake of argument such a solecism in terms) to solace himself with the firm persuasion of the Divine favour: but it will, to many, appear hard and precise, to deny this firm persuasion of Divine approbation to the avowedly irreligious man of social and domestic usefulness.

Will it here be urged, that the writer is not doing justice to his opponent's argument; which is not, that irreligious men of useful lives may be excused for neglecting their duties towards God, in consideration of their exemplary discharge of their duties towards their fellow-creatures; but that in performing the latter they perform the former *virtually* and *substantialiy*, if not in name?

Can, then, our opponent deny, that the holy scriptures are in nothing more full and unequivocal than in their injunctions on us supremely to love and fear God, and to worship and serve him continually with humble and grateful hearts; habitually regarding him as our Benefactor, and Sovereign, and Father, and abounding in sentiments of gratitude, and loyalty, and respectful affection? Can he deny that these positive precepts are rendered, if possible, still more clear, and their authority still more binding, by illustrations and indirect confirmations almost innumerable? And who, then, is that bold intruder into the counsels of infinite wisdom, who, in palpable contempt of these precise commands, thus illustrated also and confirmed, will dare to maintain that, knowing the intention with which they were

primarily given, and the ends they were ultimately designed to produce, he may innocently neglect or violate their plain obligations ; on the plea that he conforms himself, though in a different manner, to this primary intention, and produces, though by different means, these real and ultimate ends ?

This mode of arguing is one, with which, to say nothing of its insolent profaneness, the heart of man, prone to deceive himself, and partial in his own cause, is not fit to be trusted. Here again, more cautious and jealous in the case of our worldly than of our religious interests, we readily discern the fallacy of this reasoning, and protest against it, when it is attempted to be introduced into the commerce of life. We see clearly that it would afford the means of refining away by turns every moral obligation. The adulterer might allow himself, with a good conscience, to violate the bed of his unsuspecting friend, whenever he could assure himself that his crime would escape detection ; for then, where would be the evil and misery, the prevention of which was the real ultimate object of the prohibition of adultery ? The thief, in like manner, and even the murderer, might find abundant room for the *innocent* exercise of their respective occupations, arguing from the primary intention and real objects of the commands by which theft and murder were forbidden. There perhaps exists not a crime, to which this crooked morality would not furnish some convenient opening.

But this miserable sophistry deserves not that we should spend so much time in the refutation of it. To discern its fallaciousness, requires not acuteness of understanding, so much as a little

common honesty. "There is indeed no surer mark of a false and hollow heart, than a disposition thus to quibble away the clear injunctions of duty and conscience."* It is the wretched resource of a disingenuous mind, endeavouring to escape from convictions before which it cannot stand, and to evade obligations which it dares not disavow.

The arguments which have been adduced would surely be sufficient to disprove the extravagant pretensions of the qualities under consideration, though those qualities were *perfect* in their *nature*. But they are not perfect. On the contrary, they are radically defective and corrupt; they are a body without a soul; they want the vital actuating principle, or rather they are animated and actuated by a false one. Christianity, let me avail myself of the very words of a friend† in maintaining her argument, is "a religion of motives." *That* only is Christian practice, which flows from Christian principles; and none else will be admitted as such by Him who will be obeyed as well as worshipped "in spirit and in truth."

This also is a position of which, in our intercourse with our fellow-creatures, we clearly discern the justice, and universally admit the force. Though we have received a benefit at the hands of any one, we scarcely feel grateful, if we do not believe the intention towards us to have been friendly. Have we served any one from motives of kindness, and is a return of service made to us? We hardly feel ourselves worthily requited, except that return be dictated by gratitude. We should think

*Vide Smith's theory of moral sentiments.

† The writer hopes that the work to which he is referring is so well known, that he needs scarcely name Mrs. H. More.

ourselves rather injured than obliged by it, if it were merely prompted by a proud unwillingness to continue in our debt.* What husband, or what father, not absolutely dead to every generous feeling, would be satisfied with a wife or a child, who, though he could not charge them with any actual breach of their respective obligations, should yet confessedly perform them from a cold sense of duty, in place of the quickening energies of conjugal and filial affection? What an insult would it be to such an one, to tell him gravely that he had no reason to complain!

The unfairness, with which we suffer ourselves to reason in matters of religion, is no where more striking than in the instance before us. It were perhaps not unnatural to suppose that, as we cannot see into each other's bosoms, and have no sure way of judging any one's internal principles but by his external actions, it would have grown into an established rule, that when the latter were unobjectionable, the former were not to be questioned; and, on the other hand, that in reference to a Being who searches the heart, our motives, rather than our external actions, would be granted to be the just objects of inquiry. But we exactly reverse these natural principles of reasoning. In the case of our fellow-creatures, the motive is that which we principally inquire after and regard. But in the case of our supreme Judge, from whom no secrets are hid, we suffer ourselves to believe that internal principles may be dispensed with, if the external action be performed!

Let us not however be supposed ready to concede, in contradiction to what has been formerly con-

* See Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments.

tended, that where the true motive is wanting, the external actions themselves will not generally betray the defect.

The true Christian really the most amiable and useful.

Who is there that will not confess, in the instance of a wife and a child who should discharge their respective obligations merely from a cold sense of duty, that the inferiority of their actuating principle would not be confined to its *nature*, but would be discoverable also in its *effects*? Who is there that does not feel that these domestic services, thus robbed of their vital spirit, would be so debased and degraded in our estimation, as to become not barely lifeless and uninteresting, but even distasteful and loathsome? Who will deny that these would be performed in fuller measure, with more wakeful and unwearied attention, as well as with more *heart*; where, with the same sense of duty, the enlivening principle of affection should be also associated?

The enemies of religion are sometimes apt to compare the irreligious man, of a temper naturally sweet and amiable, with the religious man of natural roughness and severity; the irreligious man of natural activity, with the religious man who is naturally indolent; and thence to draw their inferences. But this mode of reasoning is surely unjust. If they would argue the question fairly, they should make their comparisons between persons of similar natural qualities, and not in one or two examples, but in a mass of instances. They would then be compelled to confess the efficacy of religion, in heightening the benevolence and increasing the usefulness of men; and to admit that, granting the occasional but rare existence of genuine and persevering benevolence of disposition and

usefulness of life, where the religious principle is wanting; yet that experience gives us reason to believe, that true religion, while it would have implanted these qualities in persons in whom before they had no place, would in general have given, to these very characters in whom they do exist, additional force in the same direction. It would have rendered the amiable more amiable, the useful more useful, with fewer inconsistencies, with less abatement.

Admonitions to
true Christians
on these heads.

Let *true Christians*, meanwhile, be ever mindful, that *they* are loudly called upon to make this argument still more clear, these positions still less questionable. You are every where commanded to be tender and sympathetic, diligent and useful; and it is the character of that "wisdom from above," in which you are to be proficient, that it "is gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits." Could the efficacy of Christianity in softening the heart be denied by those who saw, in the instance of the great apostle of the Gentiles, that it was able to transform a bigoted, furious, and cruel persecutor into an almost unequalled example of candour, and gentleness, and universal tenderness and love? Could its spirit of active beneficence be denied by those, who saw its divine Author so diligent and unwearied in his benevolent labours, as to justify the compendious description which was given of him by a personal witness of his exertions, that he "went about doing good?" Imitate these blessed examples: so shall you vindicate the honour of your profession, and "put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." so shall you obey those divine injunctions

of adorning the doctrine of Christ, and of "letting your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." Beat the world at its own best weapons. Let your love be more affectionate, your mildness less open to irritation, your diligence more laborious, your activity more wakeful and persevering. Consider sweetness of temper and activity of mind, if they naturally belong to you, as talents of special worth and utility, for which you will have to give account. Carefully watch against whatever might impair them, cherish them with constant assiduity, keep them in continual exercise, and direct them to their noblest ends. The latter of these qualities renders it less difficult, and therefore more incumbent on you, to be ever abounding in the work of the Lord; and to be copious in the production of that species of good fruit, of which mankind in general will be most ready to allow the excellence, because they best understand its nature. In *your* instance, the solid substance of Christian practice is easily susceptible of that high and beautiful polish, which may attract the attention and extort the admiration of a careless and undiscerning world, so slow to notice, and so backward to acknowledge, intrinsic worth, when concealed under a less sightly exterior. Know, then, and value as ye ought, the honourable office which is especially devolved on you. Let it be your acceptable service to recommend the discredited cause, and sustain the fainting interests of religion, to furnish to her friends matter of sound and obvious argument, and of honest triumph: and if your best endeavours cannot

conciliate, to refute at least, and confound her enemies.

To the naturally rough and austere.

If, on the other hand, you are conscious that you are naturally rough and austere, that disappointments have soured or prosperity has elated you, or that habits of command have rendered you quick in expression, and impatient of contradiction; or if, from whatever other cause, you have contracted an unhappy peevishness of temper, or asperity of manners, or harshness and severity of language, (remember that these defects are by no means incompatible with an aptness to perform services of substantial kindness;) if nature has been confirmed by habit, till at length your soul seems thoroughly tinctured with these evil dispositions, yet do not despair. Remember that the Divine agency is promised, "to take away the heart of stone, and give a heart of flesh," of which it is the natural property to be tender and susceptible. Pray then earnestly and perseveringly, that the blessed aid of Divine grace may operate effectually on your behalf. Beware of acquiescing in the evil tempers which have been condemned, under the idea that they are the ordinary imperfections of the best of men; that they shew themselves only in little instances; that they are only occasional, hasty, and transient effusions, when you are taken off your guard; the passing shade of your mind, and not the settled colour. Beware of excusing or allowing them in yourself, under the notion of warm zeal for the cause of religion and virtue, which you perhaps own is now and then apt to carry you into somewhat over-great severity of judgment, or sharpness in reproof. Listen not to

these, or any other such flattering excuses, which your own heart will be but too ready to suggest to you. Scrutinize yourself rather with rigorous strictness; and where there is so much room for self-deceit, call in the aid of some faithful friend, and, unbosoming yourself to him without concealment, ask his impartial and unreserved opinion of your behaviour and condition. Our unwillingness to do this, often betrays to others, (not seldom it first discovers to ourselves,) that we entertain a secret distrust of our own character and conduct. Instead also of extenuating to yourself the criminality of the vicious tempers under consideration, strive to impress your mind deeply with a sense of it. For this end, often consider seriously, that these rough and churlish tempers are a direct contrast to the "meekness and gentleness of Christ;" and that Christians are strongly and repeatedly enjoined to copy after their great model in these particulars, and to be themselves patterns of "mercy, and kindness, and humbleness of mind, and meekness, and long-suffering." They are to "put away all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking," not only, "being ready to every good work, but being *gentle* unto *all* men," "shewing *all* meekness unto *all* men," "forbearing, forgiving," tender-hearted. Remember the apostle's declaration, that "if any man bridleth not his tongue, he only seemeth to be religious, and deceiveth his own heart;" and that it is one of the characters of that love, without which all pretensions to the name of Christian are but vain, that "it doth not behave itself unseemly." Consider how much these acrimonious tempers must break in upon the peace, and destroy the comfort, of those around you. Remember also that the

honour of your Christian profession is at stake, and be solicitous not to discredit it: justly dreading lest you should disgust those whom you ought to conciliate; and by conveying an unfavourable impression of your principles and character, should incur the guilt of putting an "offence in your brother's way;" thereby "hindering the gospel of Christ," the advancement of which should be your daily and assiduous care.

Thus having come to the full knowledge of your disease, and to a just impression of its malignity, strive against it with incessant watchfulness. Guard with the most jealous circumspection against its breaking forth into act. Force yourself to abound in little offices of courtesy and kindness; and you shall gradually experience in the performance of these a pleasure hitherto unknown, and awaken in yourself the dormant principles of sensibility. But take not up with external amendment; guard against a false shew of sweetness of disposition; and remember that the Christian is not to be satisfied with the world's superficial courtliness of demeanor, but that his "love is to be without dissimulation." Examine carefully, whether the unchristian tempers, which you would eradicate, are not maintained in vigour by selfishness and pride; and strive to subdue them effectually, by extirpating the roots from which they derive their nutriment. Accustom yourself to endeavour to look attentively upon a careless and inconsiderate world, which, while it is in such imminent peril, is so ignorant of its danger. Dwell upon this affecting scene, till it has excited your pity; and this pity, while it melts the mind to Christian love, shall insensibly produce a temper of habitual sympathy and softness. By

means like these, perseveringly used in constant dependence on Divine aid, you may confidently hope to make continual progress. Among men of the world, a youth of softness and sweetness will often, as we formerly remarked, harden into insensibility, and sharpen into moroseness. But it is the office of Christianity to reverse this order. It is pleasing to witness this blessed renovation; to see, as life advances, asperities gradually smoothing down, and roughness mellowing away; while the subject of this happy change experiences within, increasing measures of the comfort which he diffuses around him; and, feeling the genial influences of that heavenly flame which can thus give life and warmth and action to what had been hitherto rigid and insensible, looks up with gratitude to Him who has shed abroad this principle of love in his heart;

Miraturque novas frondes et non sua poma.

Let it not be thought that in the foregoing discussion, the amiable and useful qualities, where they are not prompted and governed by a principle of religion, have been spoken of in too disparaging terms. Nor would I be understood as unwilling to concede to those who are living in the exercise of them, their proper tribute of commendation; *Inest sua gratia.* Of such persons it must be said, in the language of scripture, "they have their reward." They have it in the inward complacency which a sweet temper seldom fails to inspire, in the comforts of the domestic or social circle, in the pleasure which from the constitution of our nature accompanies pursuit and action. They are always beloved in private, and generally respected in public life. But when devoid of religion, if the word of God be not a

Their just praise given to amiable tempers, and useful lives.

fable, "they cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven." True practical Christianity (never let it be forgotten) consists in devoting the heart and life to God; in being supremely and habitually governed by a desire to know, and a disposition to fulfil his will, and in endeavouring under the influence of *these motives* to "live to his glory." Where these essential requisites are wanting, however amiable the character may be, however creditable and respectable among men; yet as it possesses not the grand distinguishing essence, it must not be complimented with the name of Christianity. This, however, when the external decorums of religion are not violated, must commonly be a matter between God and a man's own conscience; and we ought never to forget how strongly we are enjoined to be candid and liberal in judging of the motives of others, while we are strict in scrutinizing and severe in questioning our own. And this strict scrutiny is no where more necessary, because there is no where more room for the operation of self-deceit. We are all extremely prone to lend ourselves to the good opinion which, however falsely, is entertained of us by others; and though we at first confusedly suspect, or even indubitably know, that their esteem is unfounded, and their praises undeserved, and that they would have thought and spoken of us very differently, if they had discerned our secret motives, or had been accurately acquainted with all the circumstances of our conduct; we gradually suffer ourselves to adopt their judgment of us, and at length feel that we are in some sort injured or denied our due, when these false commendations are contradicted or withheld. Without the most constant watchful-

ness, and the most close and impartial self-examination, irreligious people of amiable tempers, and still more those of useful lives, from the general popularity of their character, will be particularly liable to become the dupes of this propensity. Nor is it they only who have here need to be on their guard: men of real religion will also do well to watch against this delusion. There is, however, another danger to which these are still more exposed, and against which it is the rather necessary to warn them, because of our having insisted so strongly on their being bound to be diligent in the discharge of the active duties of life. In their endeavours to fulfil this obligation, let them particularly beware, lest, setting out on right principles, they insensibly lose them in the course of their progress; lest, engaging originally in the business and bustle of the world, from a sincere and earnest desire to promote the glory of God, their minds should become so heated and absorbed in the pursuit of their object, as that the true motive of action should either altogether cease to be an habitual principle, or should at least lose much of its life and vigour; lest their thoughts and affections being engrossed by temporal concerns, their sense of the reality of "unseen things" should fade away, and they should lose their relish for the employments and offices of religion.

Our amiable-ness of temper, and usefulness of life, apt to deceive and mislead us.

Danger to true Christians from mixing too much in worldly business.

The Christian's path is beset with dangers.—On the one hand, he justly dreads an inactive and unprofitable life; on the other, he no less justly trembles for the loss of that spiritual-mindedness, which is the very essence and power of his profes-

sion. This is not quite the place for the full discussion of the difficult topic now before us: and if it were, the writer of these sheets is too conscious of his own incompetencies, not to be desirous of asking rather than of giving advice respecting it. Yet, as it is a matter which has often engaged his most serious consideration, and has been the frequent subject of his anxious inquiry into the writings and opinions of far better instructors, he will venture to deliver a few words on it, offering them with unaffected diffidence.

Advice to such
as suspect this
to be their
case.

Does then the Christian discover in himself, judging not from accidental and occasional feelings, on which little stress is either way to be laid, but from the permanent and habitual temper of his mind, a settled and still more a growing, coldness and indisposition towards the considerations and offices of religion? And has he reason to apprehend that this coldness and indisposition are owing to his being engaged too much or too earnestly in worldly business, or to his being too keen in the pursuit of worldly objects? Let him carefully examine the state of his own heart, and seriously and impartially survey the circumstances of his situation in life; humbly praying to the Father of light and mercy, that he may be enabled to see his way clearly in this difficult emergency. If he finds himself pursuing wealth, or dignity, or reputation with earnestness and solicitude; if these things engage many of his thoughts; if his mind naturally and inadvertently runs out into contemplations of them; if success in these respects greatly gladdens, and disappointments dispirit and distress his mind; he has but too plain grounds for self-condemnation.

“No man can serve two masters.” The world is evidently in possession of his heart, and it is no wonder that he finds himself dull, or rather dead, to the impression and enjoyment of spiritual things.

But though the marks of predominant estimation and regard for earthly things be much less clear and determinate; yet if the object which he is pursuing be one which, by its attainment, would bring him a considerable accession of riches, station, or honour, let him soberly and fairly question and examine whether the pursuit be warrantable? here also, asking the advice of some judicious friend; his backwardness to do which, in instances like these, should justly lead him to distrust the reasonableness of the schemes which he is prosecuting. In such a case as this, we have good cause to distrust ourselves. Though the inward hope, that we are chiefly prompted by a desire to promote the glory of our Maker, and the happiness of our fellow-creatures, by increasing our means of usefulness, may suggest itself to allay, yet let it not altogether remove, our suspicions. It is not improbable, that beneath this plausible mask we conceal, more successfully perhaps from ourselves than from others, an inordinate attachment to the pomps and transitory distinctions of this life; and as this attachment gains the ascendancy, it will ever be found, that our perception and feeling of the supreme excellence of heavenly things will proportionably subside.

But when the consequences which would follow from the success of our worldly pursuits do not render them so questionable, as in the case we have been just considering; yet, having such good

reason to believe that there is somewhere a flaw, could we but discern it, let us carefully scrutinize the whole of our conduct, taking that word in its largest sense; in order to discover whether we may not be living either in the breach or in the omission of some known duty, and whether it may not therefore have pleased God to withdraw from us the influence of his Holy Spirit; particularly inquiring, whether the duties of self-examination, of secret and public prayer, the reading of the holy scriptures, and the other prescribed means of grace, have not been either wholly intermitted at their proper seasons, or at least been performed with precipitation or distraction? And if we find reason to believe, that the allotment of time, which it would be most for our spiritual improvement to assign to our religious offices, is often broken in upon and curtailed; let us be extremely backward to admit excuses for such interruptions and abridgments. It is more than probable, for many obvious reasons, that even our worldly affairs themselves will not, on the long run, go on the better for encroaching upon those hours, which ought to be dedicated to the more immediate service of God, and to the cultivation of the inward principles of religion. Our hearts at least and our conduct will soon exhibit proofs of the sad effects of this fatal negligence. They who in a crazy vessel navigate a sea wherein are shoals and currents innumerable, if they would keep their course or reach their port in safety, must carefully repair the smallest injuries, and often throw out their line and take their observations. In the voyage of life, also, the Christian who would not make shipwreck of his faith, while he is habitually

watchful and provident, must often make it his express business to look into his state, and ascertain his progress.

But to resume my subject: let us, when engaged in this important scrutiny, impartially examine ourselves whether the worldly objects which engross us are all of them such as properly belong to our profession, or station, or circumstances in life; which therefore we could not neglect with a good conscience? If they be, let us consider whether they do not consume a larger share of our time than they really require; and whether, by not trifling over our work, by deducting somewhat which might be spared from our hours of relaxation, or by some other little management, we might not fully satisfy their just claims, and yet have an increased overplus of leisure, to be devoted to the offices of religion.

But if we deliberately and honestly conclude that we ought not to give these worldly objects less of our *time*, let us endeavour at least to give them less of our *hearts*: striving that the settled frame of our desires and affections may be more spiritual; and that in the motley intercourses of life we may constantly retain a more lively sense of the Divine presence, and a stronger impression of the reality of unseen things; thus corresponding with the scripture description of true Christians, "walking by faith and not by sight, and having our conversation in heaven."

Above all, let us guard against the temptation, to which we shall certainly be exposed, of lowering down our views to our state, instead of endeavouring to rise to the level of our views. Let us rather determine to know the worst of our case,

and strive to be suitably affected with it; not forward to speak peace to ourselves, but patiently carrying about with us a deep conviction of our backwardness and inaptitude to religious duties, and a just sense of our great weakness and numerous infirmities. This cannot be an unbecoming temper, in those who are commanded to "work out their salvation with fear and trembling." It prompts to constant and earnest prayer. It produces that sobriety, and lowliness and tenderness of mind, that meekness of demeanor, and circumspection in conduct, which are such eminent characteristics of the true Christian.

Nor is it a state devoid of consolation, "O, tarry thou the Lord's leisure; be strong, and he shall comfort thy heart" "They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength." "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." These Divine assurances sooth and encourage the Christian's disturbed and dejected mind, and insensibly diffuse a holy composure. The tint may be solemn, nay even melancholy, but it is mild and grateful. The tumult of his soul has subsided, and he is possessed by complacency, and hope, and love. If a sense of undeserved kindness fill his eyes with tears, they are tears of reconciliation and joy: while a generous ardour springing up within him sends him forth to his worldly labours "fervent in spirit;" resolving through the Divine aid to be henceforth more diligent and exemplary in living to the glory of God, and longing meanwhile for that blessed time, when, "being freed from the bondage of corruption," he shall be enabled to render to his heavenly Benefactor more pure and acceptable service.

After having discussed so much at large the whole question concerning amiable tempers in general, it may be scarcely necessary to dwell upon that particular class of them which belongs to the head of generous emotions, or of exquisite sensibility. To these almost all that has been said above is strictly applicable; to which it may be added, that the persons in whom the latter qualities most abound, are often far from conducing to the peace and comfort of their nearest connexions. These qualities indeed may be rendered highly useful instruments, when enlisted into the service of religion. But we ought to except against them the more strongly, when not under her control; because there is still greater danger than in the former case, that persons in whom they abound, may be flattered into a false opinion of themselves by the excessive commendations often paid to them by others, and by the beguiling complacencies of their own minds, which are apt to be puffed up with a proud though secret consciousness of their own superior acuteness and sensibility. But it is the less requisite to enlarge on this topic, because it has been well discussed by many, who have unfolded the real nature of those fascinating qualities; who have well remarked, that though shewy and apt to catch the eye, they are of a flimsy and perishable fabric, not of that less gaudy but more substantial and durable texture, which, imparting permanent warmth and comfort, will long preserve its more sober honours, and stand the wear and tear of life, and the vicissitudes of seasons. It has been shewn, that these qualities often fail us when most we want their aid; that their possessors can

Exquisite sensibility—school of Rousseau and Sterne.

solace themselves with their imaginary exertions in behalf of ideal misery, and yet shrink from the labours of active benevolence, or retire with disgust from the homely forms of real poverty and wretchedness. In fine, the superiority of true Christian charity, and of plain practical beneficence, has been ably vindicated ; and the school of Rousseau has been forced to yield to the school of Christ, when the question has been concerning the best means of promoting the comfort of family life, or the temporal well-being of society.*

* While all are worthy of blame, who, to qualities like these, have assigned a more exalted place, than to religious and moral principle ; there is one writer who, eminently culpable in this respect, deserves, on another account, still severer reprehension. Really possessed of powers to explore and touch the finest strings of the human heart, and bound by his sacred profession to devote those powers to the service of religion and virtue, he every where discovers a studious solicitude to excite indecent ideas. We turn away our eyes with disgust from open immodesty ; but even this is less mischievous than that more measured style, which excites impure images, without shocking us by the grossness of the language. Never was delicate sensibility proved to be more distinct from plain practical benevolence, than in the writings of the author to whom I allude. Instead of employing his talents for the benefit of his fellow-creatures, they were applied to the pernicious purposes of corrupting the national taste, and of lowering the standard of manners and morals. The tendency of his writings is to vitiate that purity of mind, intended by Providence as the companion and preservative of youthful virtue ; and to produce, if the expression may be permitted, *a morbid sensibility in the perception of indecency*. An imagination exercised in this discipline is never *clean*, but seeks for and discovers something indelicate in the most common phrases and actions of ordinary life. If the general style of writing and conversation were to be formed on that model to which Sterne used his utmost endeavours to conciliate the minds of men, there is no estimating the effects which would soon be produced on the manners and morals of the age.

SECTION V.

Some other grand defects in the practical system of the bulk of nominal Christians.

IN the imperfect sketch which has been drawn of the religion of the bulk of nominal Christians, their fundamental error respecting the essential nature of Christianity has been discussed, and traced into some of its many mischievous consequences. Several of their particular misconceptions and allowed defects have also been pointed out and illustrated. It may not be improper to close the survey by noticing some others, for the existence of which we may now appeal to almost every part of the preceding delineation.

In the first place, then, there appears throughout, both in the principles and allowed conduct of the bulk of nominal Christians, a most inadequate idea of the *guilt and evil of sin*. We every where find reason to remark, that religion is suffered to dwindle away into a mere matter of *police*. Hence the guilt of actions is estimated, not by the proportion in which, according to scripture, they are offensive to God, but by that in which they are injurious to society. Murder, theft, fraud in all its shapes, and some species of lying, are manifestly, and in an eminent degree, injurious to social happiness. How different, accordingly, in the moral scale, is the place they hold, from that which is assigned to idolatry, to general irreligion, to swearing, drinking, fornication, lasciviousness, sensuality, excessive dissipation ; and, in particular circumstances, to pride, wrath, malice, and revenge !

Indeed, several of the above-mentioned vices are

held to be grossly criminal in the lower ranks, because manifestly ruinous to their temporal interests : but in the higher, they are represented as “losing half their evil by losing all their grossness,” as flowing naturally from great prosperity, from the excess of gaiety and good humour ; and they are accordingly “regarded with but a small degree of disapprobation, and censured very slightly, or not at all.”* “Non meus hic sermo est.” These are the remarks of authors, who have surveyed the stage of human life with more than ordinary observation ; one of whom in particular cannot be suspected of having been misled by religious prejudices, to form a judgment of the superior orders too unfavourable and severe.

Will these positions, however, be denied ? Will it be maintained that there is not the difference already stated, in the moral estimation of these different classes of vices ? Will it be said, that the one class is indeed more generally restrained, and more severely punished by human laws, because more properly cognizable by human judicatures, and more directly at war with the well-being of society ; but that when brought before the tribunal of internal opinion they are condemned with equal rigour ?

Facts may be denied, and charges laughed out of countenance : but where the general sentiment and feeling of mankind are in question, our common language is often the clearest and most impartial witness ; and the conclusions thus furnished are not to be parried by wit, or eluded by sophistry. In the present case, our ordinary modes of speech furnish sufficient matter for the determina-

* Vide Smith on the Wealth of Nations, vol. iii.

tion of the argument ; and abundantly prove our disposition to consider as matters of small account, such sins as are not held to be injurious to the community. We invent for them diminutive and qualifying terms, which, if not, as in the common uses of language,* to be admitted as signs of approbation and good will, must at least be confessed to be proofs of our tendency to regard them with palliation and indulgence. Free-thinking, gallantry, jollity,† and a thousand similar phrases might be adduced as instances. But it is worthy of remark, that no such soft and qualifying terms are in use, for expressing the smaller degrees of theft, or fraud, or forgery, or any other of those offences, which are committed by men against their fellow-creatures, and in the suppression of which we are interested by our regard to our temporal concerns.

The charge which we are urging is indeed undeniable. In the case of any question of honour or of moral honesty, we are sagacious in discerning and inexorable in judging the offence. No allowance is made for the suddenness of surprise or the strength of temptations. One single failure is presumed to imply the absence of the moral or honourable principle. The memory is retentive on these occasions, and the man's character is blasted for life. Here even the mere suspicion of having once offended can scarcely be got over : “ There is an awkward story about that man, which must be

*Vide the Grammarians and Dialecticians on the Diminutives of the Italian and other languages.

† Many more might be added, such as a good fellow, a good companion, a libertine, a little free, a little loose in talk, wild, gay, jovial, being no man's enemy but his own, &c. &c. &c ; above all, *having a good heart.*

explained before he and I can become acquainted." But in the case of sins against God, there is no such watchful jealousy, none of this rigorous logic. A man may go on in the frequent commission of known sins, yet no such inference is drawn respecting the absence of the religious principle. On the contrary, we say of him, that "though his *conduct* be a little incorrect, his *principles* are untouched;" that he has a *good heart*: and such a man may go quietly through life, with the titles of a *mighty worthy creature*, and a *very good Christian*.

But in the word of God actions are estimated by a far less accommodating standard. There we read of no little sins. Much of our Saviour's sermon on the mount, which many of the class we are condemning affect highly to admire, is expressly pointed against so dangerous a misconception. *There*, no such distinction is made between the rich and the poor. No notices are to be traced of one scale of morals for the higher, and of another for the lower classes of society. Nay, the former are expressly guarded against any such vain imagination; and are distinctly warned, that their condition in life is the more dangerous, because of the more abundant temptations to which it exposes them. Idolatry, fornication, lasciviousness, drunkenness, revellings, inordinate affection, are by the apostle likewise classed with theft and murder, and with what we hold in even still greater abomination; and concerning them all it is pronounced alike, that "they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."*

Inadequate
fear of God.

In truth the instance which we have lately specified, of the loose system of

* Gal. v. 19—21. Col. iii. 5—9.

these nominal Christians, betrays a fatal absence of the principle which is the very foundation of all religion. Their slight notions of the guilt and evil of sin discover an utter want of all suitable reverence for the Divine Majesty. This principle is justly termed in scripture, "the beginning of wisdom," and there is perhaps no one quality which it is so much the studious endeavour of the sacred writers to impress upon the human heart.*

Sin is considered in Scripture as rebellion against the sovereignty of God, and every different act of it equally violates his law, and, if persevered in, disclaims his supremacy. To the inconsiderate and the gay this doctrine may seem harsh, while vainly fluttering in the sunshine of worldly prosperity, they lull themselves into a fond security. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up." "Seeing then, that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness!"† We are but an atom in the universe. Worlds upon worlds surround us, all probably full of intelligent creatures, to whom, now or hereafter, we may be a spectacle, and afford an example of the Divine procedure. Who then shall take upon him to pronounce what might be the issue, if sin were suffered to pass unpunished in one corner of this universal empire? Who shall say what confusion might be the consequence, what disorder it might spread through the creation

* Job, xxviii. 28. Psalm, cxi. 10. Prov. i. 7.—x. 10.

† 2 Peter, iii. 10, 11.

of God? Be this, however, as it may, the language of scripture is clear and decisive, "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God."

It should be carefully observed too, that these awful denunciations of the future punishment of sin derive additional weight from this consideration, that they are represented, not merely as a judicial sentence which, without violence to the settled order of things, might be remitted through the mere mercy of our Almighty Governor, but as arising out of the established course of nature; as happening in the way of natural consequence, just as a cause is necessarily connected with its effect; as resulting from certain connexions and relations which rendered them suitable and becoming. It is stated, that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan are both set up in the world, and that to the one or the other of these we must belong. "The righteous have *passed* from death unto life" — "they are delivered from the power of darkness, and are translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son."* They are become "the children," and "the subjects of God." While on earth, they love his day, his service, his people; they "speak good of his name;" they abound in his works. Even here they are in some degree possessed of his image, by and by it shall be perfected; they shall awake up after his likeness," and being "heirs of eternal life," they shall receive "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

Of sinners, on the other hand, it is declared, that "they are of their father the devil;" while on

* Col. i. 13.

earth, they are styled his "children," "his servants;" they are said to do his works," "to hold of his side," to be 'subjects of his kingdom:" at length "they shall partake his portion," when the merciful Saviour shall be changed into an avenging Judge, and shall pronounce that dreadful sentence, "depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

Is it possible that these declarations should not strike terror, or at least excite serious and fearful apprehension in the lightest and most inconsiderate mind? But the imaginations of men are fatally prone to suggest to them fallacious hopes in the very face of these positive declarations. "We cannot persuade ourselves that God will in fact prove so severe." It was the very delusion to which our first parents listened, "Ye shall not surely die."

Let me ask these rash men, who are thus disposed to trifle with their immortal interests, had they lived in the antediluvian world, would they have conceived it possible that God would then execute his predicted threatening? Yet the event took place at the appointed time; the flood came, and swept them all away; and this awful instance of the anger of God against sin is related in the inspired writings for our instruction. Still more to rouse us to attention, the record is impressed in indelible characters on the solid substance of the very globe we inhabit; which thus, in every country upon earth, furnishes practical attestations to the truth of the sacred writings, and to the actual accomplishment of their awful predictions. For myself I must declare, that I never can read without awe the passage, in which our Saviour is speak-

ing of the state of the world at the time of this memorable event. The wickedness of men is represented to have been great and prevalent; yet not, as we are ready to conceive, such as to interrupt the course, and shake the very frame, of society. The general face of things was, perhaps, not very different from that which is exhibited in many of the European nations. It was a selfish, a luxurious, an irreligious, and an inconsiderate world. They were called, but they would not hearken; they were warned, but they would not believe—"they did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage;" such is the account of one of the evangelists; in that of another it is stated nearly in the same words; "They were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, and knew not until the flood came, and swept them all away."

Inadequate sense of the difficulty of getting to heaven.

Again, we see throughout, in the system which we have been describing, a most inadequate conception of the difficulty of becoming true Christians; and an utter forgetfulness of its being the great business of life to secure our admission into heaven, and to prepare our hearts for its service and enjoyments. The general notion appears to be, that, if born in a country of which Christianity is the established religion, we are born Christians. We do not, therefore, look out for positive evidence of our really being of that number; but, putting the *onus probandi* (if it may be so expressed) on the wrong side, we conceive ourselves such *of course*, except our title be disproved by positive evidence to the contrary. And we are so slow in giving ear to what conscience urges to us on this side; so dex-

terous in justifying what is clearly wrong, in palliating what we cannot justify, in magnifying the merits of what is fairly commendable, in flattering ourselves that our habits of vice are only occasional acts, and in multiplying our single acts into habits of virtue, that we must be bad indeed, to be compelled to give a verdict against ourselves. Besides, having no suspicion of our state, we do not set ourselves in earnest to the work of self-examination; but only receive in a confused and hasty way some occasional notices of our danger, when sickness, or the loss of a friend, or the recent commission of some act of vice of greater size than ordinary, has awakened in our consciences a more than usual degree of sensibility.

Thus, by the generality, it is altogether forgotten that the Christian has a great work to execute; that of forming himself after the pattern of his Lord and Master, through the operation of the Holy Spirit of God, which is promised to our fervent prayers and diligent endeavours. Unconscious of the obstacles which impede, and of the enemies which resist their advancement; they are naturally forgetful also of the ample provision which is in store, for enabling them to surmount the one, and to conquer the other. The scriptural representations of the state of the Christian on earth, by the images of "a race," and "a warfare;" of its being necessary to rid himself of every incumbrance which might retard him in the one, and to furnish himself with the whole armour of God for being victorious in the other, are, so far as these nominal Christians are concerned, figures of no propriety or meaning. As little have they, in correspondence with the scripture descriptions of the feelings and

language of real Christians, any idea of acquiring a relish, while on earth, for the worship and service of heaven. If the truth must be told, their notion is rather a confused idea of future gratification in heaven, in return for having put a force upon their inclinations, and endured so much religion while on earth.

But all this is only *nominal* Christianity ; which exhibits a more inadequate image of her real excellences, than the cold copyings, by some insipid pencil, convey of the force and grace of nature, or of Raphael. In the language of scripture, Christianity is not a geographical, but a moral term. It is not the being a native of a Christian country : it is *a condition, a state* ; the possession of a *peculiar nature*, with the *qualities and properties* which belong to it.

Farther than this, it is a state into which we are not *born*, but into which we must be *translated* ; a nature which we do not *inherit*, but into which we are to be *created anew*. To the undeserved grace of God, which is promised on our use of the appointed means, we must be indebted for the attainment of this nature ; and, to acquire and make sure of it, is that great “ work of our salvation,” which we are commanded to “ work out with fear and trembling.” We are every where reminded, that this is a matter of labour and difficulty, requiring continual watchfulness, and unceasing effort, and unwearied patience. Even to the very last, towards the close of a long life consumed in active service, or in cheerful suffering, we find St. Paul himself declaring, that he conceived bodily self-denial and mental discipline to be indispensably necessary to his very safety. Christians, who are

really worthy of the name, are represented as being "made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light;" as "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ;" as "looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God." It is stated as being enough to make them happy, that "Christ should receive them to himself;" and the songs of the blessed spirits in heaven are described to be the same as those in which the servants of God on earth pour forth their gratitude and adoration.

Conscious, therefore, of the indispensable necessity and of the arduous nature of the service in which he is engaged, the true Christian sets himself to the work with vigour, and prosecutes it with diligence. His motto is that of the painter; "*nullus dies sine linea.*" Fled as it were from a country in which the plague is raging, he thinks it not enough just to pass the boundary line, but would put out of doubt his escape beyond the limits of infection. Prepared to meet with difficulties, he is not discouraged when they occur; warned of his numerous adversaries, he is not alarmed on their approach, or unprovided for encountering them. He knows that the beginnings of every new course may be expected to be rough and painful; but he is assured that the paths on which he is entering will ere long seem smoother, and become indeed "paths of pleasantness and peace."

Now, of the state of such an one, the expressions of pilgrim and stranger are a lively description: and all the other figures and images, by which Christians are represented in scripture, have in his case a determinate meaning and a just application. there is indeed none, by which the Christian's

state on earth is in the word of God more frequently imaged, or more happily illustrated, than by that of a journey : and it may not be amiss to pause for a while, in order to survey it under that resemblance. The Christian is travelling on business through a strange country, in which he is commanded to execute his work with diligence, and pursue his course homeward with alacrity. The fruits which he sees by the way-side he gathers with caution ; he drinks of the streams with moderation ; he is thankful when the sun shines, and his way is pleasant ; but if it be rough and rainy, he cares not much, he is but a traveller. He is prepared for vicissitudes ; he knows that he must expect to meet with them in the stormy and uncertain climate of this world. But he is travelling to "a better country," a country of unclouded light and undisturbed serenity. He finds also by experience, that when he has had the least of external comforts, he has always been least disposed to loiter ; and if for the time it be a little disagreeable, he can solace himself with the idea of his being thereby forwarded in his course. In a less unfavourable season, he looks round him with an eye of observation ; he admires what is beautiful ; he examines what is curious ; he receives with complacency the refreshments which are set before him, and enjoys them with thankfulness. Nor does he churlishly refuse to associate with the inhabitants of the country through which he is passing ; nor, so far as he may, to speak their language, and adopt their fashions. But he neither suffers pleasure, nor curiosity, nor society, to take up too much of his time, and is still intent on transacting the business which he has to execute,

and on prosecuting the journey which he is ordered to pursue. He knows also, that, to the very end of life, his journey will be through a country in which he has many enemies ; that his way is beset with snares ; that temptations throng around him, to seduce him from his course, or check his advancement in it ; that the very air disposes to drowsiness, and that therefore to the very last it will be requisite for him to be circumspect and collected. Often therefore he examines whereabouts he is, how he has got forward, and whether or not he is travelling in the right direction. Sometimes he seems to himself to make considerable progress, sometimes he advances but slowly, too often he finds reason to fear he has fallen backward in his course. Now he is cheered with hope, and gladdened by success ; now he is disquieted with doubts, and damped by disappointments. Thus, while to nominal Christians, religion is a dull uniform thing, and they have no conception of the desires and disappointments, the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows, which it is calculated to bring into exercise ; in the true Christian all is life and motion, and his great work calls forth alternately the various passions of the soul. Let it not therefore be imagined that his is a state of unenlivened toil and hardship. His very labours are “ the labours of love ;” if “ he has need of patience,” it is “ the patience of hope ;” and he is cheered in his work by the constant assurance of present support and of final victory. Let it not be forgotten, that this is the very idea given us of happiness by one of the ablest examiners of the human mind ; “ a constant employment for a desired end, with the consciousness of a continual

progress." So true is the scripture declaration, that "godliness has the promise of the life that now is, as well as of that which is to come."

Bulk of nominal Christians defective in the love of God. Our review of the character of the bulk of nominal Christians has exhibited abundant proofs of their allowed defectiveness in that great constituent of the true Christian character, *the love of God*. Many instances, in proof of this assertion, have been incidentally pointed out; and the charge is in itself so obvious, that it were superfluous to spend much time in endeavouring to establish it. Put the question fairly to the test. Concerning the proper marks and evidences of affection, there can be little dispute. Let the most candid investigator examine the character, and conduct, and language of the persons of whom we have been speaking; and he will be compelled to acknowledge, that so far as love towards the Supreme Being is in question, these marks and evidences are no where to be met with. It is in itself a decisive evidence of a contrary feeling in those nominal Christians, that they find no pleasure in the service and worship of God. Their devotional acts resemble less the free-will offerings of a grateful heart, than that constrained and reluctant homage which is exacted by some hard master from his oppressed dependants, and paid with cold sullenness and slavish apprehension. It was the very charge brought by God against his ungrateful people of old, that, while they called him Sovereign and Father, they withheld from him the regards which severally belong to those respected and endearing appellations. Thus we likewise think it enough to offer to the most excellent and amiable

of beings, to our supreme and unwearied Benefactor, a dull, artificial, heartless gratitude, of which we should be ashamed in the case of a fellow-creature, who had ever so small a claim on our regard and thankfulness !

It may be of infinite use to establish in our minds a strong and habitual sense of that first and great commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength." This passion, operative and vigorous in its very nature, like a master spring, would set in motion and maintain in action all the complicated movements of the human soul. Soon also would it terminate many practical questions concerning the allowableness of certain compliances ; questions which, with other similar difficulties, are often only the cold offspring of a spirit of reluctant submission, and cannot stand the encounter of this trying principle. If, for example, it were disputed, whether or not the law of God were so strict as had been stated, in condemning the slightest infraction of its precepts ; yet, when, from the precise demands of justice, the appeal shall be made to the more generous principle of love, there would be at once an end of the discussion. Fear will deter from acknowledged crimes, and self-interest will bribe to laborious services : but it is the peculiar glory, and the very characteristic, of this more generous passion, to shew itself in ten thousand little and undefinable acts of sedulous attention, which love alone can pay, and of which, when paid, love alone can estimate the value. Love outruns the deductions of reasoning ; it scorns the refuge of casuistry ; it requires

not the slow process of laborious and undeniable proof that one action would be injurious and offensive, or another beneficial or gratifying, to the object of its affection. The least hint, the slightest surmise, is sufficient to make it start from the former, and fly with eagerness to the latter.

I am well aware that I am now about The stage. to tread on very tender ground ; but it would be an improper deference to the opinions and manners of the age, altogether to avoid it. There has been much argument concerning the lawfulness of theatrical amusements.* Let it be sufficient to remark, that the controversy would be short indeed, if the question were to be tried by this criterion of love to the Supreme Being. If there were any thing of that sensibility for the honour of God, and of that zeal in his service, which we shew in behalf of our earthly friends, or of our political connexions, should we seek our pleasure in that place which the debauchee, inflamed with wine, or bent on the gratification of other licentious appetites, finds most congenial to his state and temper of mind ? In that place, from the neighbourhood of which, (how justly termed a school of morals, might hence alone be inferred,) decorum, and modesty, and regularity retire, while riot and lewdness are invited to the spot, and invariably select it for their chosen residence ! where the sacred name of God is often profaned ! where sentiments are often heard with delight, and motions and gestures often applauded, which would not be tolerated in private company, but which may far exceed the utmost license allowed in the social circle, without

* It is almost unnecessary to remark, that the word is to be understood in a large sense, as including the opera, &c.

at all transgressing the large bounds of theatrical decorum! where, when moral principles are inculcated, they are not such as a Christian ought to cherish in his bosom, but such as it must be his daily endeavour to extirpate; not those which scripture warrants, but those which it condemns as false and spurious, being founded in pride and ambition! and the over-valuation of human favour! where, surely, if a Christian should trust himself at all, it would be requisite for him to prepare himself with a double portion of watchfulness and seriousness of mind, instead of selecting it as the place in which he may throw off his guard, and unbend without danger! The justness of this last remark, and the general tendency of theatrical amusements, is attested by the same well-instructed master in the science of human life, to whom we had before occasion to refer. By him they are recommended as the most efficacious expedient for relaxing, among any people, that "*preciseness and austerity* of morals," to use his own phrase, which, under the name of holiness, it is the business of scripture to inculcate and enforce. Nor is this position merely theoretical. The experiment was tried, and tried successfully, in a city upon the continent,* in which it was wished to corrupt the simple morality of purer times.

Let us try the question by a parallel instance.

What judgment should we form of the warmth of that man's attachment to his sovereign, who, at

* Geneva.—It is worthy of remark, that the play-houses have multiplied extremely in Paris since the revolution; and that last winter there were twenty open every night, and all crowded. It should not be left unobserved, and it is seriously submitted to the consideration of those who regard the stage as a school of morals, that the pieces which were best composed, best acted, and most warmly and generally

seasons of recreation, should seek his pleasures in scenes as ill accordant with the principle of loyalty, as those of which we have been speaking are with the genius of religion? If, for this purpose, he were to select the place, and frequent the amusements, to which democrats and jacobins* should love to resort for entertainment, and in which they should find themselves so much at home, as invariably to select the spot for their abiding habitation; where dialogue, and song, and the intelligible language of gesticulation, should be used, to convey ideas and sentiments, not perhaps palpably treasonable, or falling directly within the strict precision of any legal limits, but yet palpably contrary to the spirit of monarchical government; which, further, the highest authorities had recommended as sovereign specifics for cooling the warmth and enlarging the narrowness of an excessive loyalty! What opinion should we form of the delicacy of that friendship, or of the fidelity of that love, which, in relation to their respective objects, should exhibit the same contradictions?

In truth, the *hard measure*, if the phrase may be pardoned, which we give to God; and the very different way in which we allow ourselves to act,

applauded, were such as abounded in touches of delicate sensibility. The people of Paris have never been imagined to be more susceptible, than the generality of mankind, of these emotions, and this is not the particular period when the Parisians have been commonly conceived most under their influence. Vide *Journal d'un Voyageur Neutre*. The author of the work expresses himself as astonished by the phænomenon, and as unable to account for it.

* The author is almost afraid of using the terms, lest they should convey an impression of party feelings, of which he wishes this book to exhibit no traces; but he here means by democrats and jacobins, not persons on whom party violence fastens the epithet, but persons who are really and avowedly such.

and speak, and feel, where he is concerned, from that which we require, or even practise, in the case of our fellow-creatures, is in itself the most decisive proof that the principle of the love of God, if not altogether extinct in us, is at least in the lowest possible degree of languor.

From examining the degree in which the bulk of nominal Christians are defective in the love of God, if we proceed to inquire concerning the strength of their love towards their fellow-creatures, the writer is well aware of its being generally held, that here, at least, they may rather challenge praise than submit to censure. And the many beneficent institutions in which this country abounds, probably above every other, whether in ancient or modern times, may be perhaps appealed to in proof of the opinion. Much of what might have been otherwise urged in the discussion of this topic, has been anticipated in the inquiry into the grounds of the extravagant estimation assigned to amiable tempers and useful lives, when unconnected with religious principle. What was then stated may serve, in many cases, to lower, in the present instance, the loftiness of the pretensions of these nominal Christians; and we shall hereafter have occasion to mention another consideration, of which the effect must be, still further to reduce their claims. Meanwhile, let it suffice to remark, that we must not rest satisfied with merely superficial appearances, if we would form a fair estimate of the degree of purity and vigour in which the principle of good-will towards men warms the bosoms of the generality of professed Christians in the higher and more opulent classes

Practical system of nominal Christians defective in what regards the love of their fellow-creatures.

in this country. In a highly polished state of society, for instance, we do not expect to find moroseness ; and, in an age of great profusion, though we may reflect with pleasure on those numerous charitable institutions, which are justly the honour of Great Britain, we are not too hastily to infer a strong principle of internal benevolence, from liberal contributions to the relief of indigence and misery. When these contributions indeed are equally abundant in frugal times, or from individuals personally economical, the source from which they originate becomes less questionable. But a vigorous principle of philanthropy must not be at once conceded, on the ground of liberal benefactions to the poor, in the case of one who by his liberality in this respect is curtailed in no necessary, is abridged of no luxury, is put to no trouble either of thought or of action ; who, not to impute a desire of being praised for his benevolence, is injured in no man's estimation ; in whom also familiarity with large sums has produced that freedom in the expenditure of money, which it never fails to operate, except in minds under the influence of a strong principle of avarice.

True marks
of benevo-
lence.

Our conclusion, perhaps, would be less favourable, but not less fair, if we were to try the characters in question by those surer tests, which are stated by the apostle to be less ambiguous marks of a real spirit of philanthropy. The strength of every passion is to be estimated by its victory over passions of an opposite nature. What judgment then shall we form of the force of the benevolence of the age, when measured by this standard ? How does it stand the shock, when it comes into encounter, with our

pride, our vanity, our self-love, our self-interest, our love of ease or of pleasure, with our ambition, with our desire of worldly estimation? Does it make us self-denying, that we may be liberal in relieving others? Does it make us persevere in doing good in spite of ingratitude; and only pity the ignorance, or prejudice, or malice, which misrepresents our conduct, or misconstrues our motives? Does it make us forbear from what we conceive may probably prove the occasion of harm to a fellow-creature; though the harm should not seem naturally or even fairly to flow from our conduct, but to be the result only of his own obstinacy or weakness? Are we slow to believe any thing to our neighbour's disadvantage? and when we cannot but credit it, are we disposed rather to cover, and, as far as we justly can, to palliate, than to divulge or aggravate it? Suppose an opportunity to occur of performing a kindness, to one who, from pride or vanity, should be loth to receive, or to be known to receive, a favour from us; should we honestly endeavour, so far as we could with truth, to lessen in his own mind and in that of others, the merit of our good offices, and by so doing dispose him to receive them with diminished reluctance, and a less painful weight of obligation? This end, however, must be accomplished, if to be accomplished at all, by a simple and fair explanation of the circumstances, which may render the action in no wise inconvenient to ourselves, though highly beneficial to another; not by speeches of affected disparagement, which, we might easily foresee, must produce the contrary effect. Can we, from motives of kindness, incur or risk the charge of being deficient in spirit, in

penetration, or in foresight? Do we tell another of his faults, when the communication, though probably beneficial to *him*, cannot be made without embarrassment or pain to ourselves, and may probably lessen his regard for our person, or his opinion of our judgment? Can we stifle a repartee which would wound another; though the utterance of it would gratify our vanity, and the suppression of it may disparage our character for wit? If any one advance a mistaken proposition, in an instance wherein the error may be mischievous to him; can we, to the prejudice perhaps of our credit for discernment, forbear to contradict him in public, if it be probable that in so doing, by piqueing his pride we might only harden him in his error? and can we reserve our counsel for some more favourable season, the "*mollia tempora fandi*," when it may be communicated without offence? If we have recommended to any one a particular line of conduct, or have pointed out the probable mischiefs of the opposite course, and if our admonitions have been neglected, are we *really hurt* when our predictions of evil are accomplished? Is our love superior to envy, and jealousy, and emulation? Are we acute to discern and forward to embrace any fair opportunity of promoting the interests of another; if it be in a line wherein we ourselves also are moving, and in which we think our progress has not been proportioned to our desert? Can we take pleasure in bringing his merits into notice, and in obviating the prejudices which may have retarded his advancement? If even to this extent we should be able to stand the scrutiny, let it be farther asked, how, in the case of our enemies, do we correspond

with the scripture representations of love? Are we meek under provocations, ready to forgive, and apt to forget injuries? Can we, with sincerity, "bless them that curse us, do good to them that hate us, and pray for them which despitefully use us, and persecute us?" Do we prove to the Searcher of hearts a real spirit of forgiveness, by our forbearing not only from avenging an injury when it is in our power, but even from telling to any one how ill we have been used; and that, too, when we are not kept silent by a consciousness that we should lose credit by divulging the circumstance? And, lastly, can we not only be content to return our enemies good for evil, (for this return, as has been remarked by one of the greatest of uninspired authorities,* may be prompted by pride, and repaid by self-complacency,) but, when they are successful or unsuccessful without our having contributed to their good or ill fortune, can we not only be content, but cordially rejoice in their prosperity, or sympathize with their distresses?

These are but a few specimens of the characteristic marks which might be stated, of a true predominant benevolence: yet even these may serve to convince us how far the bulk of nominal Christians fall short of the requisitions of scripture, even in that particular which exhibits their character in the most favourable point of view. The truth is, we do not enough call to mind the exalted tone of scripture morality; and are therefore apt to value ourselves on the heights to which we attain, when a better acquaintance with our standard would have convinced us of our falling far short of the elevation prescribed to us. It is in the very instance of

* Lord Bacon.

the most difficult of the duties lately specified, the forgiveness and love of enemies, that our Saviour points out to our imitation the example of our Supreme Benefactor. After stating that, by being kind and courteous to those who, even in the world's opinion, had a title to our good offices and good-will, we should in vain set up a claim to *Christian* benevolence, he emphatically adds, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

The Stage. We must here, again, resort to a topic which was lately touched on, that of theatrical amusements; and recommend it to their advocates to consider them in connexion with the duty, of which we have now been exhibiting some of the leading characters.

It is an undeniable fact, for the truth of which we may safely appeal to every age and nation, that the situation of the performers, particularly of those of the female sex, is remarkably unfavourable to the maintenance and growth of the religious and moral principle, and, of course, highly dangerous to their eternal interests. Might it not, then, be fairly asked, how far, in all who confess the truth of this position, it is consistent with the sensibility of Christian benevolence, merely for the entertainment of an idle hour, to encourage the continuance of any of their fellow-creatures in such a way of life, and to take a part in tempting any others to enter into it; how far, considering that, by their own concession, they are employing whatever they spend in this way, in sustaining and advancing the cause of vice, and consequently in promoting misery, they are herein bestowing this share of their wealth in a manner agreeable to the

intention of their holy and benevolent Benefactor? how far also they are not in this instance the rather criminal, from there being so many sources of innocent pleasure open to their enjoyment? how far they are acting conformably to that golden principle of doing to others as we would they should do to us? how far they harmonize with the spirit of the apostle's affectionate declaration, that he would deny himself for his whole life the most innocent indulgence, nay, what might seem almost an absolute necessary, rather than cause his weak fellow Christian to offend? or, lastly, how far they are influenced by the solemn language of our Saviour himself, "It must needs be that offences come, but wo to that man by whom the offence cometh; it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were cast into the depths of the sea?" The present instance is, perhaps, another example of our taking greater concern in the temporal, than in the spiritual interests of our fellow-creatures. That man would be deemed, and justly deemed, of an inhuman temper, who, in these days, were to seek his amusement in the combats of gladiators and prize-fighters: yet *Christians* appear conscious of no inconsistency, in finding their pleasure in spectacles maintained at the risk, at least, if not the ruin, of the eternal happiness of those who perform in them!

SECTION VI.

Grand defect—neglect of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity.

BUT the grand radical defect in the practical system of these nominal Christians, is their forget-

fulness of all the peculiar doctrines of the religion which they profess—the corruption of human nature, the atonement of the Saviour, and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit.

Here, then, we come again to the grand distinction, between the religion of Christ and that of the bulk of nominal Christians in the present day. The point is of the utmost *practical importance*, and we would therefore trace it into its actual effects.

This evil pursued into its effects.

There are, it is to be apprehended, not a few, who, having been for some time hurried down the stream of dissipation in the indulgence of all their natural appetites, (except, perhaps, that they were restrained from very gross vice by a regard to character, or by the yet unsubdued voice of conscience;) and who, having all the while thought little, or scarcely at all, about religion, “living,” to use the emphatical language of scripture, “without God in the world,” become in some degree impressed with a sense of the infinite importance of religion. A fit of sickness, perhaps, or the loss of some friend or much-loved relative, or some other stroke of adverse fortune, damps their spirits, awakens them to a practical conviction of the precariousness of all human things, and turns them to seek for some more stable foundation of happiness than this world can afford. Looking into themselves ever so little, they become sensible that they must have offended God. They resolve, accordingly, to set about the work of reformation. Here it is that we shall recognize the fatal effects of the prevailing ignorance of the real nature of Christianity, and the general forgetfulness of its grand peculiarities.

These men *wish* to reform, but they know neither the real *nature* of their distemper nor its true remedy. They are aware, indeed, that they must “cease to do evil, and learn to do well;” that they must relinquish their habits of vice, and attend more or less to the duties of religion: but, having no conception of the actual malignity of the disease under which they labour, or of the perfect cure which the gospel has provided for it, or of the manner in which that cure is to be effected,

“They do but skim and film the ulcerous place,
While rank corruption, mining all within,
Infects unseen.”

It often happens, therefore, but too naturally in this case, that where they do not soon desist from their attempt at reformation, and relapse into their old habits of sin, they take up with a partial and scanty amendment, and fondly flatter themselves that it is a thorough change. They now conceive that they have a right to take to themselves the comforts of Christianity. Not being able to raise their practice up to their standard of right, they lower their standard to their practice: they sit down for life contented with their present attainments, beguiled by the complacencies of their own minds, and by the favourable testimony of surrounding friends; and it often happens, particularly where there is any degree of strictness in formal and ceremonial observances, that there are no people more jealous of their character for religion.

Others, perhaps, go farther than this. The dread of the wrath to come has sunk deeper into their hearts; and for a while they strive with all

their might to resist their evil propensities, and to walk without stumbling in the path of duty. Again and again they resolve: again and again they break their resolutions.* All their endeavours are foiled, and they become more and more convinced of their own moral weakness, and of the strength of their inherent corruption. Thus groaning under the enslaving power of sin, and experiencing the futility of the utmost efforts which they can use for effecting their deliverance, they are tempted (sometimes, it is to be feared, they yield to the temptation) to give up all in despair, and to acquiesce under their wretched captivity, conceiving it impossible to break their chains. Sometimes, probably, it even happens that they are driven to seek for refuge from their disquietude in the suggestions of infidelity; and to quiet their troublesome consciences by arguments which they themselves scarcely believe, at the very moment in which they suffer themselves to be lulled asleep by them. In the mean time, while this conflict has been going on, their walk is sad and comfortless, and their couch is nightly watered with tears. These men are pursuing the right object, but they mistake the way in which it is to

* If any one would read a description of this process, enlivened and enforced by the powers of the most exquisite poetry, let him peruse the middle and latter part of the fifth book of Cowper's *Task*. My warm attachment to the beautifully natural compositions of this truly Christian poet may, perhaps, bias my judgment; but the part of the work to which I refer appears to me scarcely surpassed by any thing in our language. The honourable epithet of *Christian* may justly be assigned to a poet, whose writings, while they fascinate the reader by their manifestly coming from the heart, breathe throughout, the spirit of that character of Christianity, with which she was announced to the world, "Glory to God, peace on earth, good-will towards men."

be obtained. *The path in which they are now treading is not that which the gospel has provided for conducting them to true holiness, nor will they find in it any solid peace.*

Persons under these circumstances naturally seek for religious instruction. They turn over the works of our modern religionists, and, as well as they can, collect the advice addressed to men in

Advice of modern religionists to such as are desirous of repenting.

their situation; the substance of it is, at the best, of this sort:—"Be sorry indeed for your sins, and discontinue the practice of them, but do not make yourselves so uneasy. Christ died for the sins of the whole world. Do your utmost; discharge with fidelity the duties of your stations, not neglecting your religious offices; and fear not but that in the end all will go well; and that, having thus performed the conditions required on your part, you will at last obtain forgiveness of our merciful Creator through the merits of Jesus Christ, and be aided, where your own strength shall be insufficient, by the assistance of his Holy Spirit. Meanwhile, you cannot do better than read carefully such books of practical divinity as will instruct you in the principles of a Christian life. We are excellently furnished with works of this nature; and it is by the diligent study of them that you will gradually become a proficient in the lessons of the gospel."

But the holy scriptures, and with them the Church of England, call upon those who are in the circumstances above-stated, to *lay afresh the whole*

Advice given to the same persons by the holy scriptures.

foundation of their religion. In concurrence with the scripture, that church calls upon them,

in the first place, gratefully to adore that undeserved goodness which has awakened them from the sleep of death ; to prostrate themselves before the cross of Christ with humble penitence and deep self-aborrence ; solemnly resolving to forsake all their sins, but relying on the grace of God alone for power to keep their resolution. Thus, and thus only, she assures them that all their crimes will be blotted out, and that they will receive from above a new living principle of holiness. She produces from the word of God the ground and warrant of her counsel : “ Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.”—“ No man,” says our blessed Saviour, “ cometh unto the Father, but by me.”—“ I am the true Vine. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me.”—“ He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit ; for without” (or severed from) “ me ye can do nothing.”—“ By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God ; not of works, lest any man should boast ; for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.”

Extreme importance of the point now under discussion.

Let me not be thought tedious, or be accused of running into needless repetitions, in pressing this point with so much earnestness. It is in fact a point which can never be too much insisted on. It is the cardinal point on which the whole of Christianity turns ; on which it is peculiarly proper in this place to be perfectly distinct. There have been some who have imagined that the wrath of God was to be deprecated, or his favour conciliated, by austerities and penances, or even by

forms and ceremonies, and external observances. But all men of enlightened understandings, who acknowledge the moral government of God, must also acknowledge, that vice must offend and virtue delight him. In short they must, more or less, assent to the scripture declaration, "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." But the grand distinction, which subsists between the true Christian and all other religionists, (the class of persons in particular whom it is my object to address) is concerning the *nature* of this holiness, and the *way in which it is to be obtained*. The views, entertained by the latter, of the *nature* of holiness, are of all degrees of inadequateness; and they conceive it is to be *obtained* by their own natural unassisted efforts: or if they admit some vague indistinct notion of the assistance of the Holy Spirit, it is unquestionably obvious, on conversing with them, that this does not constitute the *main practical* ground of their dependence. *But the nature of the holiness, to which the desires of the true Christian are directed, is no other than the restoration of the image of God: and as to the manner of acquiring it, disclaiming with indignation every idea of attaining it by his own strength, all his hopes of possessing it rest altogether on the Divine assurances of the operation of the Holy Spirit, in those who cordially embrace the gospel of Christ. He knows, therefore, that this holiness is not to PRECEDE his reconciliation to God, and be its CAUSE; but to follow it, and be its EFFECT. That, in short, it is by FAITH IN CHRIST only* that he is to be justified in the*

* Here again let it be remarked, that faith, where genuine, always supposes repentance, abhorrence of sin, &c.

sight of God ; to be delivered from the condition of a child of wrath, and a slave of Satan ; to be adopted into the family of God ; to become an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ, entitled to all the privileges which belong to this high relation ; here, to the Spirit of grace, and a partial renewal after the image of his Creator ; hereafter, to the more perfect possession of the Divine likeness, and an inheritance of eternal glory.

The true Christian's practical use of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity.

And as it is in this way, that, in obedience to the dictates of the gospel, the true Christian must originally become possessed of the vital spirit and living principle of universal holiness ; so, in order to grow in grace, he must also study in the same school ; finding in the consideration of the peculiar doctrines of the gospel, and in the contemplation of the life, and character, and sufferings of our blessed Saviour, the elements of all practical wisdom, and an inexhaustible storehouse of instructions and motives, no otherwise to be so well supplied. From the neglect of these peculiar doctrines arise the main practical errors of the bulk of professed Christians. These gigantic truths, retained in view, would put to shame the littleness of their dwarfish morality. It would be impossible for them to make these harmonize with their inadequate conceptions of the wretchedness and danger of our natural state, which is represented in scripture as having so powerfully called forth the compassion of God, that he sent his only begotten Son to rescue us. Where *now* are their low views of the worth of the soul, when means like these were taken to redeem it ? Where *now* their inadequate conceptions of the guilt of sin, for

which in the divine counsels it seemed requisite that an atonement no less costly should be made, than that of the blood of the only begotten Son of God? How can they reconcile their low standard of Christian practice with the representation of our being "temples of the Holy Ghost?" Their cold sense of obligation, and scanty grudging returns of service, with the glowing gratitude of those who, having been "delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son," may well conceive that the labours of a whole life will be but an imperfect expression of their thankfulness.

The peculiar doctrines of the gospel being once admitted, the conclusions which have been now suggested are clear and obvious deductions of reason. But our neglect of these important truths is still less pardonable, because they are distinctly and repeatedly applied in scripture to the very purposes in question, and the whole superstructure of Christian morals is grounded on their deep and ample basis. Sometimes these truths are represented in scripture, *generally*, as furnishing Christians with a vigorous and ever present principle of universal obedience. And our slowness in learning the lessons of heavenly wisdom is still further stimulated, by almost every particular Christian duty being occasionally traced to them 'as to its proper source. They are every where represented as warming the hearts of the people of God on earth with continual admiration, and thankfulness, and love, and joy; as triumphing over the attack of the last great enemy, and as calling forth afresh in heaven the ardent effusions of their unexhausted gratitude.

If then we would indeed be “filled with wisdom and spiritual understanding;” if we would “walk worthy of the Lord, unto all well-pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;” here let us fix our eyes! Laying “aside every weight, and the sin that does so easily beset us; let us run with patience the race that is set before us, **LOOKING UNTO JESUS**, the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”*

Use of the peculiar doctrines in enforcing the importance of Christianity.

Here best we may learn the infinite *importance* of Christianity;—how little it can deserve to be treated in that slight and superficial way, in which it is in these days regarded by the bulk of nominal Christians, who are apt to think it may be enough, and almost equally pleasing to God, to be religious *in any way*, and upon *any* system;—what exquisite folly it must be to risk the soul on such a venture, in direct contradiction to the dictates of reason, and the express declaration of the word of God! “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?”

LOOKING UNTO JESUS!

In enforcing the duty of an unconditional surrender of ourselves to God.

Here we shall best learn the duty and reasonableness of an absolute and unconditional surrender of soul and body to the will and service of God. “We are not our own; for we are bought with a price,” and must therefore make it our grand concern to “glorify God with our

* Heb. xii. 1, 2.

bodies and our spirits, which are God's." Should we be base enough, even if we could do it with safety, to make any reserves in our returns of service to that gracious Saviour, who "gave up *himself* for us?" If we have formerly talked of compounding by the performance of some commands for the breach of others; can we now bear the mention of a *composition* of duties, or of retaining to ourselves the right of practising *little* sins! The very suggestion of such an idea fills us with indignation and shame, if our hearts be not dead to every sense of gratitude.

LOOKING UNTO JESUS!

Here we find displayed, in the most lively colours, the guilt of sin, and how hateful it must be to the perfect holiness of that Being, who is of "purer eyes than to behold iniquity." When we see that, rather than sin should go unpunished, "God spared not his own Son," but "was *pleased* to bruise him and put him to grief" for our sakes; how vainly must impenitent sinners flatter themselves with the hope of escaping the vengeance of Heaven, and buoy themselves up with I know not what desperate dreams of the Divine benignity!

In enforcing the guilt of sin and the dread of its punishment.

Here too we may anticipate the dreadful sufferings of that state, "where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth;" when, rather than that we should undergo them, "the Son of God" himself, who "thought it no robbery to be equal with God," consented to take upon him our degraded nature with all its weaknesses and infirmities; to be "a man of sorrows," "to hide not his face

from shame and spitting," "to be wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities," and at length to endure the sharpness of death, "even the death of the cross," that he might deliver us from the "wrath to come," and open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

LOOKING UNTO JESUS!

In promoting
the love of
God.

Here best we may learn to grow in the love of God! The certainty of his pity and love towards repenting sinners, thus irrefragably demonstrated, chases away the sense of tormenting fear, and best lays the ground in us of reciprocal affection. And while we steadily contemplate this wonderful transaction, and consider in its several relations the amazing truth, "that God spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all;" if our minds be not utterly dead to every impulse of sensibility, the emotions of admiration, of preference, of hope, and trust, and joy, cannot but spring up within us, chastened with reverential fear, and softened and quickened by overflowing gratitude: * *here* we shall become animated by an abiding disposition to endeavour to please our great Benefactor; and by a humble persuasion, that the weakest endeavours of this nature will not be despised by a Being, who has already proved himself so kindly affected towards us. † *Here* we cannot fail to imbibe an earnest desire of possessing his favour, and a conviction, founded on his own declarations thus unquestionably con-

* Vide chap. iii. Where these were shewn to be the elementary principles of the passion of love.

† Rom. v. 9, 10.

firmed, that the desire shall not be disappointed. Whenever we are conscious that we have offended this gracious Being, a single thought of the great work of redemption will be enough to fill us with compunction. We shall feel a deep concern, grief mingled with indignant shame, for having conducted ourselves so unworthily towards one who to us has been infinite in kindness: we shall not rest till we have reason to hope that he is reconciled to us; and we shall watch over our hearts and conduct in future with a renewed jealousy, lest we should again offend him. To those who are ever so little acquainted with the nature of the human mind, it were superfluous to remark, that the affections and tempers which have been enumerated are the infallible marks of the constituent properties of love. Let *him* then who would abound and grow in this Christian principle, be much conversant with the great doctrines of the gospel.

It is obvious, that the attentive and frequent consideration of these great doctrines, must have a still more direct tendency to produce and cherish in our minds the principle of the love of Christ. But on this head, so much was said in a former chapter, as to render any farther observations unnecessary.

Much also has been already observed concerning the love of our fellow-creatures, and it has been distinctly stated to be the indispensable, and indeed the characteristic duty of Christians. It remains, however, to be here farther remarked, that this grace can no where be cultivated with more advantage than at the foot of the cross. No where can our Saviour's dying in-

In promoting the love of Christ.

In promoting the love of our fellow-creatures.

junction to the exercise of this virtue be recollected with more effect ; “ This is my commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you.” No where can the admonition of the apostle more powerfully affect us ; “ Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ’s sake, hath forgiven you.” The view of mankind which is here presented to us, as having been all involved in one common ruin ; and the offer of deliverance held out to all, by the Son of God’s giving of himself up to pay the price of our reconciliation, produce that sympathy towards our fellow-creatures, which, by the constitution of our nature, seldom fails to result from the consciousness of an identity of interests and a similarity of fortunes. Pity for an unthinking world assists this impression. Our enmities soften and melt away : we are ashamed of thinking much of the *petty injuries* which we may have suffered, when we consider what the Son of God, “ who did no wrong, neither was guile found in his mouth,” patiently underwent. Our hearts become tender while we contemplate this signal act of loving-kindness. We grow desirous of imitating what we cannot but admire. A vigorous principle of enlarged and active charity springs up within us ; and we go forth with alacrity, desirous of treading in the steps of our blessed Master, and of manifesting our gratitude for his unmerited goodness, by bearing each others burdens, and abounding in the disinterested labours of benevolence.

LOOKING UNTO JESUS !

In promoting
humility

He was meek and lowly of heart, and from the study of *his* character we shall

best learn the lessons of humility. Contemplating the work of redemption, we become more and more impressed with the sense of our natural darkness, and helplessness, and misery, from which it was requisite to ransom us at such a price; more and more conscious that we are utterly unworthy of all the amazing condescension and love which have been manifested towards us; ashamed of the callousness of our tenderest sensibility, and of the poor returns of our most active services. Considerations like these, abating our pride and reducing our opinions of *ourselves*, naturally moderate our pretensions towards *others*. We become less disposed to exact that respect for our persons, and that deference for our authority, which we naturally covet; we less sensibly feel a slight, and less hotly resent it; we grow less irritable, less prone to be dissatisfied; more soft, and meek, and courteous, and placable, and condescending. We are not literally required to practise the same humiliating submissions, to which our blessed Saviour himself was not ashamed to stoop;* but the *spirit* of the remark applies to us, "the servant is not greater than his Lord:" and we should especially bear this truth in mind, when the occasion calls upon us to discharge some duty, or patiently to suffer some ill treatment, whereby our pride will be wounded, and we are likely to be in some degree degraded from the rank we had possessed in the world's estimation. At the same time the sacred scriptures assuring us, that to the powerful operations of the Holy Spirit, purchased for us by the death of Christ, we must be indebted for the success of all

* John xiii. 13—17. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet, &c.

our endeavours after improvement in virtue ; the conviction of this truth tends to render us diffident of our own powers, and to suppress the first risings of vanity. Thus, while we are conducted to heights of virtue no otherwise attainable, due care is taken to prevent our becoming giddy from our elevation.* It is the scripture characteristic of the gospel system, that by it all disposition to exalt ourselves is excluded ; and if we really grow in grace, we shall grow also in humility.

LOOKING UNTO JESUS!

In promoting a spirit of moderation in earthly pursuits, & cheerfulness in suffering.

“ He endured the cross, despising the shame.” While we steadily contemplate this solemn scene, that sober frame of spirit is produced within us, which best befits the Christian militant here on earth. We become impressed with a sense of the shortness and uncertainty of time, and that it behoves us to be diligent in making provision for eternity. In such a temper of mind, the pomps and vanities of life are cast behind us as the baubles of children. We lose our relish for the frolics of gaiety, the race of ambition, or the grosser gratifications of voluptuousness. In the case even of those objects, which may more justly claim the attention of reasonable and immortal beings ; in our family arrangements, in our plans of life, in our schemes of business, we become, without relinquishing the path of duty, more moderate in pursuit, and more indifferent about the issue. Here also we learn to correct the world’s false estimate of things, and to “ look through the

* Vide Pascal’s Thoughts on Religion.—A book abounding in the deepest views of practical Christianity.

shallowness of earthly grandeur;" to venerate what is truly excellent and noble, though under a despised and degraded form; and to cultivate within ourselves that true magnanimity, which can make us rise superior to the smiles or frowns of this world; that dignified composure of soul, which no earthly incidents can destroy or ruffle. Instead of repining at any of the little occasional inconveniences we may meet with in our passage through life; we are almost ashamed of the multiplied comforts and enjoyments of our condition, when we think of Him, who, though "the Lord of glory," "had not where to lay his head." And if it be our lot to undergo evils of more than ordinary magnitude, we are animated under them by reflecting, that we are hereby more conformed to the example of our blessed Master: though we must ever recollect one important difference, that the sufferings of Christ were voluntarily borne for *our* benefit, and were probably far more exquisitely agonizing than any which we are called upon to undergo. Besides, it must be a solid support to us amidst all our troubles to know, that they do not happen to us by chance; that they are not even merely the punishment of sin; but that they are the dispensations of a kind Providence, and sent on messages of mercy. "The cup that our Father hath given us, shall we not drink it?" — "Blessed Saviour! by the bitterness of thy pains we may estimate the force of thy love; we are *sure* of thy kindness and compassion; thou wouldst not willingly call on us to suffer; thou hast declared unto us, that all things shall finally work together for good to them that love thee; and, therefore, if thou so ordainest it, wel-

come disappointment and poverty, welcome sickness and pain, welcome even shame, and contempt, and calumny. If this be a rough and thorny path, it is one in which thou hast gone before us. Where we see thy footsteps, we cannot repine. Meanwhile, thou wilt support us with the consolations of thy grace ; and even here thou canst more than compensate to us for any temporal sufferings, by the possession of that peace which the world can neither give nor take away."

LOOKING UNTO JESUS !

In promoting courage and confidence in dangers, and heavenly-mindedness.

"The author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God." From the scene of our Saviour's weakness and degradation, we follow him, in idea, into the realms of glory, where "he is on the right hand of God ; angels, and principalities, and powers being made subject unto him." But though changed in place, yet not in nature, he is still full of sympathy and love ; and, having died "to save his people from their sins," "he ever *liveth* to make intercession for them." Cheered by this animating view, the Christian's fainting spirits revive. Under the heaviest burdens he feels his strength recruited ; and, when all around him is dark and stormy, he can lift up an eye to heaven, radiant with hope, and glistening with gratitude. At such a season, no dangers can alarm, no opposition can move, no provocations can irritate. He may also adopt, as the language of his sober exultation, what in the philosopher was but an idle rant ; and, consider-

ing that it is only the garment of mortality which is subject to the rents of fortune; while his spirit, cheered with the divine support, keeps its place within, secure and unassailable, he can sometimes almost triumph at the stake, or on the scaffold, and cry out, amidst the severest buffets of adversity, "Thou beatest but the case of Anaxarchus." But it is rarely that the Christian is elevated with this "joy unspeakable and full of glory:" he even lends himself to these views with moderation and reserve. Often, alas! emotions of another kind fill him with grief and confusion: and, conscious of having acted unworthy of his high calling, perhaps of having exposed himself to the just censure of a world ready enough to spy out his infirmities, he seems to himself almost "to have crucified the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame." But, let neither his joys intoxicate, nor his sorrows too much depress him. Let him still remember that his *chief* business while on earth is not to meditate, but to act; that the seeds of moral corruption are apt to spring up within him, and that it is requisite for him to watch over his own heart with incessant care; that he is to discharge with fidelity the duties of his particular station, and to conduct himself, according to his measure, after the example of his blessed Master, whose meat and drink it was to do the work of his heavenly Father; that he is diligently to cultivate the talents with which God has entrusted him, and assiduously to employ them in doing justice and shewing mercy, while he guards against the assaults of any internal enemy. In short, he is to demean himself, in all the common affairs of life, like an *accountable* creature, who, in correspond-

ence with the scripture character of Christians, is "waiting for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ." Often, therefore, he questions himself, "Am I employing my time, my fortune, my bodily and mental powers, so as to 'render up my account with joy, and not with grief?' Am I 'adorning the doctrine of God my Saviour in all things;' and proving that the servants of Christ, animated by a principle of filial affection, which renders their work a service of perfect freedom, are capable of as active and as persevering exertions, as the votaries of fame, or the slaves of ambition, or the drudges of avarice?"

Thus, without interruption to his labours, he may interpose occasional thoughts of things unseen; and amidst the many little intervals of business, may calmly look upwards to the heavenly Advocate, who is ever pleading the cause of his people, and obtaining for them needful supplies of grace and consolation. It is these realizing views, which give the Christian a relish for the worship and service of the heavenly world. And if these blessed images, "seen but through a glass darkly," can thus refresh the soul; what must be its state, when, on the morning of the resurrection, it shall awake to the unclouded vision of celestial glory! when, "to them that look for him, the Son of God shall appear a second time without sin unto salvation!" when, "sighing and sorrow being fled away;" when doubts and fears no more disquieting, and the painful consciousness of remaining imperfections no longer weighing down the spirit, they shall enter upon the fruition of "those joys which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive;"

and shall bear their part in that blessed anthem, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb," for ever and ever !

Thus, never let it be forgotten, the main distinction between real Christianity, and the system of the bulk of nominal Christians, chiefly consists in the different place which is assigned in the two schemes to the peculiar doctrines of the gospel. These, in the scheme of nominal Christians, if admitted at all, appear but like the stars of the firmament to the ordinary eye. Those splendid luminaries draw forth, perhaps, occasionally a transient expression of admiration, when we behold their beauty, or hear of their distances, magnitudes, or properties : now and then, too, we are led, perhaps, to muse upon their possible uses ; but, however curious as subjects of speculation, after all, it must be confessed, they twinkle to the common observer with a vain and "idle" lustre, and, except in the dreams of the astrologer, have no influence on human happiness, or any concern with the course and order of the world. But to the *real* Christian, on the contrary, **THESE peculiar doctrines constitute the centre to which he gravitates ! the very sun of his system ! the soul of the world ! the origin of all that is excellent and lovely ! the source of light, and life, and motion, and genial warmth, and plastic energy !** Dim is the light of reason, and comfortless our state, while left to her unassisted guidance. Even the Old Testament itself, though a revelation from Heaven, shines but with feeble and scanty rays. But the blessed truths of the gospel are now unveiled to *our* eyes, and *we* are

The place held by the peculiar doctrines of Christianity constitutes the grand distinction between nominal and real Christians.

called upon to behold and to enjoy "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, in the face of Jesus Christ," in the full radiance of its meridian splendour. The words of inspiration best express our highly-favoured state; "We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

Thou art the source and centre of all minds,
Their only point of rest, **ETERNAL WORD**;
From Thee departing, they are lost, and rove
At random, without honour, hope, or peace:
From Thee is all that soothes the life of man;
His high endeavour, and his glad success;
His strength to suffer, and his will to serve.
But, oh! Thou bounteous Giver of all good!
Thou art of all Thy gifts Thyself the crown:
Give what thou canst, without Thee we are poor,
And with Thee rich, take what Thou wilt away.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE EXCELLENCE OF CHRISTIANITY IN CERTAIN IMPORTANT PARTICULARS. ARGUMENT WHICH RESULTS THENCE IN PROOF OF ITS DIVINE ORIGIN.

THE writer of the present work, having now completed a faint delineation of the leading features of real Christianity, may be permitted to suspend for a few moments the farther execution of his plan, for the purpose of pointing out some excellences which she really possesses; but which, as they are not to be found in that superficial system which so unworthily usurps her name, appear scarcely to have attracted sufficient notice. If he should seem to be deviating from the plan which he proposed to himself, he would suggest as his excuse; that the observations which he is about to offer will furnish a strong argument in favour of the correctness of his preceding delineation of Christianity, since she will *now* appear to exhibit more clearly, than as she is usually drawn, the characters of her divine original.

It holds true, indeed, in the case of Christianity, as in that of all the works of God, that though a superficial and cursory view cannot fail to discover to us somewhat of their beauty; yet, when on

a more careful and accurate scrutiny we become better acquainted with their properties, we become also more deeply impressed by a conviction of their excellence. We may begin by referring to the last chapter for an instance of the truth of this

Consistency between the leading doctrines & practical precepts of Christianity. assertion. Therein was pointed out that intimate connexion, that perfect harmony, between the leading doctrines and the practical precepts of Christianity, which is apt to escape the attention of the ordinary eye.

Between the leading doctrines of Christianity amongst each other. It may not be improper also to remark, though the position be so obvious as almost to render the statement of it needless, that there is the same close connexion and perfect harmony in the leading doctrines of Christianity among each other. It is self-evident, that the corruption of human nature, that our reconciliation to God by the atonement of Christ, and that the restoration of our primitive dignity by the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, are all parts of one whole, united in close dependence and mutual congruity.

Between the practical precepts amongst each other. Perhaps, however, it has not been sufficiently noticed, that in the chief practical precepts of Christianity, there is the same essential agreement, the same mutual dependency of one upon another. Let us survey this fresh instance of the wisdom of that system which is the only solid foundation of our present or future happiness.

The virtues most strongly and repeatedly enjoined in scripture, and by our progress in which we may best measure our advancement in holiness, are the fear and love of God and of Christ; love,

kindness, and meekness towards our fellow-creatures; indifference to the possessions and events of this life, in comparison with our concern about eternal things; self-denial; and humility.

It has been already pointed out in many particulars, how essentially such of these Christian graces as respect the Divine Being are connected with those which have more directly for their objects our fellow-creatures and ourselves. But in the case of these two last descriptions of Christian graces; the more attentively we consider them with reference to the acknowledged principles of human nature, and to indisputable facts, the more we shall be convinced that they afford mutual aid towards the acquisition of each other; and that when acquired, they all harmonize with each other in perfect and essential union. This truth may perhaps be sufficiently apparent from what has been already remarked; but it may not be useless to dwell on it a little more in detail. Take then the instances of loving-kindness and meekness towards others; and observe the solid foundation which is laid for them in self-denial, in moderation as to the good things of this life, and in humility. The chief causes of enmity among men are, pride and self-importance, the high opinion which men entertain of themselves, and the consequent deference which they exact from others; the over-valuation of worldly possessions and of worldly honours, and, in consequence, a too eager competition for them. The rough edges of one man rub against those of another, if the expression may be allowed; and the friction is often such as to injure the works, and disturb the just arrangements and regular motions of the social machine. But

by Christianity all these roughnesses are filed down: every wheel rolls round smoothly in the performance of its appointed function, and there is nothing to retard the several movements, or break in upon the general order. The religious system indeed of the bulk of nominal Christians is satisfied with some tolerable appearances of virtue: and accordingly, while it recommends love and beneficence, it tolerates pride and vanity in many cases; it even countenances and commends the excessive valuation of character; and at least allows a man's whole soul to be absorbed in the pursuit of the object which he is following, be it what it may, of personal or professional success. But though these latter qualities may, for the most part, fairly enough consist with a soft exterior and courtly demeanour, they cannot so well accord with the genuine internal principle of love. Some cause of discontent, some ground of jealousy or of envy, will arise, some suspicion will corrode, some disappointment will sour, some slight or calumny will irritate and provoke reprisals. In the higher walks of life, indeed, we learn to disguise our emotions; but such will be the real inward feelings of the soul, and they will frequently betray themselves when we are off our guard, or when we are not likely to be disparaged by the discovery. This state of the higher orders, in which men are scuffling eagerly for the same objects, and wearing all the while such an appearance of sweetness and complacency, has often appeared to me to be not ill illustrated by the image of a gaming table. There, every man is intent only on his own profit; the good success of one is the ill success of another, and therefore the general state of mind of the parties engaged

may be pretty well conjectured. All this, however, does not prevent, in well-bred societies, an exterior of perfect gentleness and good humour. But let the same employment be carried on among the lower orders, who are not so well schooled in the art of disguising their feelings; or in places where, by general connivance, people are allowed to give vent to their real emotions; and every passion will display itself, by which the "human face divine" can be distorted and deformed. For those who never have been present at so humiliating a scene, the pencil of Hogarth has provided a representation of it, which is scarcely exaggerated; and the horrid name,* by which it is familiarly known among its frequenters, sufficiently attests the fidelity of its resemblance.

But Christianity is not satisfied with producing merely the specious guise of virtue. She requires the substantial reality, which may stand the scrutinizing eye of that Being "who searches the heart." Meaning therefore that the Christian should live and breathe in an atmosphere, as it were, of benevolence, she forbids whatever can tend to obstruct its diffusion, or vitiate its purity. It is on this principle that emulation is forbidden: for, besides that this passion almost insensibly degenerates into envy, and that it derives its origin chiefly from pride and a desire of self-exaltation; how can we easily love our neighbour as ourselves, if we consider him at the same time as our rival, and are intent upon surpassing him in the pursuit of whatever is the subject of our competition?

Christianity, again, teaches us not to set our

* The *Hell*, so called, let it be observed, not by way of reproach, but familiarity, by those who frequent it.

hearts on earthly possessions and earthly honours ; and thereby provides for our really loving, or even cordially forgiving, those who have been more successful than ourselves in the attainment of them, or who have even designedly thwarted us in the pursuit. " Let the rich," says the apostle, " rejoice in that he is brought low." How can he who means to attempt, in any degree, to obey this precept, be irreconcilably hostile towards any one who may have been instrumental in his depression ?

Christianity also teaches us not to prize human estimation at a very high rate ; and thereby provides for the practice of her injunction, to love from the heart those who, justly or unjustly, may have attacked our reputation, and wounded our character. She commands not the shew, but the reality of meekness and gentleness ; and by thus taking away the aliment of anger and the fomenters of discord, she provides for the maintenance of peace, and the restoration of good temper among men, when it may have sustained a temporary interruption.

Another excellence of Christianity ; a higher value by it set on moral than on intellectual attainments.

It is another capital excellence of Christianity, that she values moral attainments at a far higher rate than intellectual acquisitions, and proposes to conduct her followers to the heights of virtue rather than of knowledge. On the contrary, most of the false religious systems which have prevailed in the world, have proposed to reward the labour of their votary by drawing aside the veil which concealed from the vulgar eye their hidden mysteries, and by introducing him to the knowledge of their deeper and more sacred doctrines.

This is eminently the case in the Hindoo and in the Mahometan religion, in that of China, and, for the most part, in the various modifications of ancient paganism. In systems which proceed on this principle, it is obvious that the bulk of mankind can never make any great proficiency. There was accordingly, among the nations of antiquity, one system, whatever it was, for the learned, and another for the illiterate. Many of the philosophers spoke out, and professed to keep the lower orders in ignorance for the general good; plainly suggesting that the bulk of mankind was to be considered as almost of an inferior species. Aristotle himself countenanced this opinion. An opposite mode of proceeding naturally belongs to Christianity, which without distinction professes an equal regard for all human beings, and which was characterized by her first promulgator as the messenger of "glad tidings to the poor."

But her preference of moral to intellectual excellence is not to be praised, only because it is congenial with her general character, and suitable to the ends which she professes to have in view. It is the part of true wisdom to endeavour to excel there, where we may really attain to excellence. This consideration might be alone sufficient to direct our efforts to the acquisition of virtue rather than of knowledge. How limited is the range of the greatest human abilities! how scanty the stores of the richest human knowledge! Those who undeniably have held the first rank, both for natural and acquired endowments, instead of thinking their pre-eminence a just ground of self-exaltation, have commonly been the most forward to confess that their views were bounded and their attain-

ments moderate. Had they indeed been less candid, this is a discovery which we could not have failed to make for ourselves. Experience daily furnishes us with examples of weakness, and short-sightedness, and error, in the wisest and the most learned of men, which might serve to confound the pride of human wisdom.

Not so in morals. Made at first in the likeness of God, and still bearing about us some faint traces of our high original, we are offered by our blessed Redeemer the means of purifying ourselves from our corruptions, and of once more regaining the image of our heavenly Father.* In love, the compendious expression for almost every virtue, in fortitude under all its forms, in justice, in humility, and in all the other graces of the Christian character, we are made capable of attaining to heights of real elevation: and were we but faithful in the use of the means of grace which we enjoy; the operations of the Holy Spirit, prompting and aiding our diligent endeavours, would infallibly crown our labours with success, and make us partakers of a divine nature. The writer has himself known some who have been instances of the truth of this remark. To the memory of one, † now no more, may he be permitted to offer the last tribute of respectful friendship? His course, short but laborious, has at length terminated in a better world; and his luminous track still shines in the sight, and animates the efforts, of all who knew him, and “marshals them the way” to heavenly glory. Let me not be thought to undervalue any

* Eph. ii.

† The Rev. Matthew Sabington, of Rothley, in Leicestershire, who died lately at Lisbon.

of the gifts of God, or of the fruits of human exertion: but let not these be prized beyond their proper worth. If one of those little industrious reptiles, to which we have been well sent for a lesson of diligence and foresight, were to pride itself upon its strength, because it could carry off a larger grain of wheat than any other of its fellow-ants, should we not laugh at the vanity which could be highly gratified with such a contemptible pre-eminence? And is it far different to the eye of reason, when man, weak, short-sighted man, is vain of surpassing others in knowledge, in which at best his progress must be so limited; forgetting the true dignity of his nature, and the path which would conduct him to real excellence.

The unparalleled value of the precepts of Christianity ought not to be passed over altogether unnoticed in this place, though it be needless to dwell on it; since it has been often justly recognised and asserted, and has in some points been ably illustrated and powerfully enforced by the masterly pen of a late writer. It is by no means, however, the design of this little work to attempt to trace the various excellences of Christianity; but it may not have been improper to point out a few particulars, which, in the course of investigation, have naturally fallen under our notice, and hitherto perhaps may scarcely have been enough regarded. Every such instance, it should always be remembered, is a fresh proof of Christianity being a revelation from God.

Excellence of
the practical
precepts of
Christianity.

It is still less, however, the intention of the writer to attempt to vindicate the Divine origin of our holy religion. This task has often been exe-

cuted by far abler advocates. In particular, every Christian, with whatever reserves his commendations must be qualified, should be forward to confess his obligations *on this head* to the author before alluded to; whose uncommon acuteness has enabled him, in a field already so much trodden, to discover arguments which had eluded the observation of all by whom he was preceded, and whose unequalled perspicuity puts his reader in complete possession of the fruits of his sagacity. Anxious, however, in my little measure, to contribute to the support of this great cause, may it be permitted me to state one argument which impresses my mind with particular force? This is, the great variety of the *kinds* of evidence which have been adduced in proof of Christianity, and the confirmation thereby afforded of its truth; the proof from prophecy—from miracles—from the character of Christ—from that of his apostles—from the nature of the doctrines of Christianity—from the nature and excellence of her *practical precepts*—from the accordance we have lately pointed out between the doctrinal and practical systems of Christianity, whether considered each in itself or in their mutual relation to each other—from other species of internal evidence, afforded in the more abundance in proportion as the sacred records have been scrutinized with greater care—from the accounts of contemporary or nearly contemporary writers—from the impossibility of accounting, on any other supposition than that of the truth of Christianity, for its promulgation and early prevalence: these and other lines of argument have all been brought forward, and ably urged by different writers, in proportion as they

have struck the minds of different observers more or less forcibly. Now, granting that some obscure and illiterate men, residing in a distant province of the Roman empire, had plotted to impose a forgery upon the world; though some foundation for the imposture might, and indeed must, have been attempted to be laid; it seems, at least to my understanding, morally impossible that *so many different species of proofs*, and all so strong, should have lent their *concurrent* aid, and have united their *joint* force in the establishment of the falsehood. It may assist the reader in estimating the value of this argument, to consider upon how different a footing, in this respect, has rested every other religious system, without exception, which was ever proposed to the world; and, indeed, every other historical fact, of which the truth has been at all contested

CHAPTER VI.

BRIEF INQUIRY INTO THE PRESENT STATE OF CHRISTIANITY IN THIS COUNTRY, WITH SOME OF THE CAUSES WHICH HAVE LED TO ITS CRITICAL CIRCUMSTANCES. ITS IMPORTANCE TO US AS A POLITICAL COMMUNITY, AND PRACTICAL HINTS FOR WHICH THE FOREGOING CONSIDERATIONS GIVE OCCASION.

IT may not be altogether improper to remind the reader, that hitherto our discussion has been merely concerning the prevailing religious opinions of *professed Christians*: no longer confining ourselves to persons of this description, let us now extend our inquiry, and briefly investigate the *general* state of Christianity in this country.

The tendency of religion in general to promote the temporal welfare of political communities, is a fact which depends on such obvious and undeniable principles, and which is so forcibly inculcated by the history of all ages, that there can be no necessity for entering into a formal proof of its truth. It has indeed been maintained, not merely by schoolmen and divines, but by the most celebrated philosophers, and moralists, and politicians of every age.

The peculiar excellence in this respect also of Christianity, considered independently of its truth

or falsehood, has been recognised by many writers, who, to say the least, were not disposed to exaggerate its merits. Either or both of these propositions being admitted, the state of religion in a country at any given period, not to mention its connexion with the eternal happiness of the inhabitants, immediately becomes a question of great *political* importance: and in particular it must be material to ascertain whether religion be in an advancing or in a declining state; and if the latter be the case, whether there be any practicable means for preventing at least its farther declension.

If the representations contained in the preceding chapters, of the state of Christianity among the bulk of professed Christians, be not very erroneous, they may well excite serious apprehension in the mind of every reader, when considered merely in a political view. And this apprehension would be increased, if there should appear reason to believe that, for some time past, religion has been on the decline amongst us, and that it continues to decline at the present moment.

When it is proposed, however, to inquire into the actual state of religion in any country, and in particular to compare that state with its condition at any former period, there is one preliminary observation to be made, if we would not be liable to gross error. There exists, established by tacit consent, in every country, what may be called a general standard or tone of morals, varying in the same community at different periods, and different at the same period in different ranks and situations in society. Whoever falls below this standard,

Preliminary consideration: general tone of moral practice.

and, not unfrequently, whoever also rises above it, offending against this general rule, suffers proportionably in the general estimation. Thus a regard for character, which is commonly the governing principle among men, becomes to a certain degree, though no farther, an incitement to morality and virtue. It follows of course, that where the practice does no more than come up to the required level, it will be no sufficient evidence of the existence, much less will it furnish any just measure of the force, of a real internal principle of religion. Christians, Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Heretics, persons of ten thousand different sorts of passions and opinions, being members at the same time of the same community, and all conscious that they will be examined by this same standard, will regulate their conduct accordingly, and, with no great difference, will all adjust themselves to the required measure.

It must also be remarked, that the causes which tend to raise or to depress this standard, commonly produce their effects by slow and almost insensible degrees; and that it often continues for some time nearly the same, when the circumstances, by which it was fixed, have materially altered.

It is a truth which will hardly be contested, that Christianity, whenever it has at all prevailed, has raised the general standard of morals to a height before unknown. Some actions, which among the ancients were scarcely held to be blemishes in the most excellent characters, have been justly considered by the laws of every Christian community, as meriting the severest punishments. In other instances, virtues formerly rare have become common; and in particular a merciful and

courteous temper has softened the rugged manners, and humanized the brutal ferocity prevalent among the most polished nations of the heathen world. But from what has been recently observed, it is manifest, that, so far as external appearances are concerned, these effects, when once produced by Christianity, are produced alike in those who deny, and in those who admit her divine original; I had almost said in those who reject and those who cordially embrace the doctrines of the gospel: and these effects might and probably would remain for a while, without any great apparent alteration, however her spirit might languish, or even her authority decline. The form of the temple, as was once beautifully remarked, may continue, when the *dii tutelares* have left it. When we are inquiring therefore into the real state of Christianity at any period, if we would not be deceived in this important investigation, it becomes us to be so much the more careful not to take up with superficial appearances.

It may perhaps help us to ascertain the advancing or declining state of Christianity in Great Britain at the present moment, and still more to discover some of the causes by which that state has been produced, to employ a little time in considering what might naturally be expected to be its actual situation; what advantages or disadvantages such a religion might be expected to derive from the circumstances in which it has been placed among us, and from those in which it still continues.

Present state
of Christianity
among us in-
vestigated.

Experience warrants, and reason justifies and explains the assertion, that persecution generally

tends to quicken the vigour and extend the prevalence of the opinions which she would eradicate. For the peace of mankind, it has grown at length almost into an axiom, that "her devilish engine back recoils upon herself." Christianity especially has always thriven under persecution. At such a season she has no lukewarm professors, no adherents concerning whom it is doubtful to what party they belong. The Christian is then reminded at every turn, that his Master's kingdom is not of this world. When all on earth wears a black and threatening aspect, he looks up to heaven for consolation; he learns practically to consider himself as a pilgrim and stranger. He then cleaves to fundamentals, and examines well his foundation, as at the hour of death. When religion is in a state of external quiet and prosperity, the contrary of all this naturally takes place. The soldiers of the church militant then forget that they are in a state of warfare. Their ardour slackens, their zeal languishes. Like a colony long settled in a strange country,* they are gradually assimilated in features, and demeanour, and language, to the native inhabitants, till at length almost every vestige of peculiarity dies away.

If, in general, persecution and prosperity be productive respectively of these opposite effects, this circumstance alone might teach us what expectations to form concerning the state of Christianity in this country, where she has long been embodied in an establishment which is intimately blended, and is generally and justly believed to have a

* The author must acknowledge himself indebted to Dr. Owen for this illustration.

common interest with our civil institutions ; which is liberally, though by no means too liberally, endowed, and, not more favoured in wealth than dignity, has been allowed “to exalt her mitred fronts in courts and parliaments :” an establishment—the offices in which are extremely numerous, and these, not like the priesthood of the Jews, filled up from a particular race, or, like that of the Hindoos, held by a separate caste in entailed succession ; but supplied from every class, and branching by its widely extended ramifications into almost every individual family in the community : an establishment, of which the ministers are not, like the Roman Catholic clergy, debarred from forming matrimonial ties, but are allowed to unite themselves, and multiply their holdings to the general mass of the community by the close bonds of family connexion ; not like some of the severer of the religious orders, immured in colleges and monasteries, but, both by law and custom, permitted to mix without restraint in all the intercourses of society.

Such being the circumstances of the pastors of the church, let the community in general be supposed to have been for some time in a rapidly improving state of commercial prosperity ; let it also be supposed to have been making no unequal progress in all those arts, and sciences, and literary productions, which have ever been the growth of a polished age, and are the sure marks of a highly finished condition of society. It is not difficult to anticipate the effects likely to be produced on *vital* religion, both in the clergy and the laity, by such a state of external prosperity as has been assigned to them respectively. And these effects would be

infallibly furthered, where the country in question should enjoy a free constitution of government. We formerly had occasion to quote the remark of an accurate observer of the stage of human life, that a much looser system of morals commonly prevails in the higher, than in the middling and lower orders of society. Now, in every country, of which the middling classes are daily growing in wealth and consequence, by the success of their commercial speculations; and, most of all, in a country having such a constitution as our own, where the acquisition of riches is the possession also of rank and power; with the comforts and refinements, the vices also of the higher orders are continually descending, and a mischievous uniformity of sentiments, and manners, and morals, gradually diffuses itself throughout the whole community. The multiplication of great cities also, and, above all, the habit, ever increasing with the increasing wealth of the country, of frequenting a splendid and luxurious metropolis, would powerfully tend to accelerate the discontinuance of the religious habits of a purer age, and to accomplish the substitution of a more relaxed morality. And it must even be confessed, that the commercial spirit, much as we are indebted to it, is not naturally favourable to the maintenance of the religious principle in a vigorous and lively state.

In times like these, therefore, the strict precepts and self-denying habits of Christianity naturally slide into disuse; and, even among the better sort of Christians, are likely to be softened, so far at least as to be rendered less abhorrent from the general disposition to relaxation and indulgence.

In such prosperous circumstances, men, in truth, are apt to think very little about religion. Christianity, therefore, seldom occupying the attention of the bulk of nominal Christians, and being scarcely at all the object of their study, we should expect, of course, to find them extremely unacquainted with its tenets. Those doctrines and principles indeed, which it contains in common with the law of the land, or which are sanctioned by the general standard of morals formerly described, being brought into continual notice and mention by the common occurrences of life, might continue to be recognised. But whatever she contains peculiar to herself, and which should not be habitually brought into recollection by the incidents of every day, might be expected to be less and less thought of, till at length it should be almost wholly forgotten. Still more might this be naturally expected to become the case, if the peculiarities in question should be, from their very nature, at war with pride, and luxury, and worldly-mindedness, the too general concomitants of rapidly increasing wealth: and this would particularly happen among the laity; if the circumstance of their having been at any time abused to purposes of hypocrisy or fanaticism, should have prompted even some of the better disposed of the clergy, perhaps from well-intentioned though erroneous motives, to bring them forward less frequently in their discourses on religion.

Causes from which the peculiarities of Christianity slide into disuse.

When so many should thus have been straying out of the right path, some bold reformer might, from time to time, be likely to arise, who should not unjustly charge them with their deviation;

but, though right perhaps in the main, yet deviating himself also in an opposite direction; and creating disgust by his violence, or vulgarity, or absurdities, he might fail, except in a few instances, to produce the effect of recalling them from their wanderings.

Still, however, the divine original of Christianity would not be professedly disavowed; partly from a real, and more commonly from a political, deference for the established faith, but most of all, from the bulk of mankind being not yet prepared, as it were, to throw away the scabbard, and to venture their eternal happiness on the issue of its falsehood. Some bolder spirits, indeed, might be expected to despise the cautious moderation of these timid reasoners, and to pronounce decisively, that the bible was a forgery: while the generality, professing to believe it genuine, should, less consistently, be satisfied with remaining ignorant of its contents; and, when pressed, should discover themselves by no means to believe many of the most important particulars contained in it.

When, by the operation of causes like these, any country has at length grown into the condition which has been here stated; it is but too obvious, that, in the bulk of the community, religion, already sunk very low, must be hastening fast to her entire dissolution. Causes, energetic and active, like these, though accidental hinderances may occasionally thwart their operation, will not at once become sluggish and unproductive. Their effect is sure; and the time is fast approaching, when Christianity will be almost as openly disavowed in the language, as in, fact, it is already supposed to have disappeared from the conduct of men; when infidelity will be held to be the

necessary appendage of a man of fashion ; and to *believe* will be deemed the indication of a feeble mind, and a contracted understanding.

Something like what have been here premised are the conjectures which we should naturally be led to form, concerning the state of Christianity in this country, and its probable issue, from considering her own nature, and the peculiar circumstances in which she has been placed. That her real condition differs not much from the result of this reasoning from probability, must, with whatever regret, be confessed by all who take a careful and impartial survey of the actual situation of things among us. But our hypothetical delineation, if just, will have approved itself to the reader's conviction, as we have gone along, by suggesting its archetypes ; and we may therefore be spared the painful and invidious task of pointing out in detail the several particulars wherein our statements are justified by facts. Everywhere we may actually trace the effects of increasing wealth and luxury, in banishing one by one the habits, and new-modelling the phraseology, of stricter times ; and in diffusing throughout the middle ranks those relaxed morals and dissipated manners which were formerly confined to the higher classes of society. We meet, indeed, with more refinement, and more generally with those amiable courtesies which are its proper fruits : those vices also have become less frequent, which naturally infest the darkness of a ruder and less polished age, and which recede on the approach of light and civilization.

*Defluxit numerus Saturnius, & grave virus
Munditiæ pepulere :*

But with these grossnesses, Religion, on the other hand, has also declined ; God is forgotten ; his providence is exploded ; his hand is lifted up, but we see it not : he multiplies our comforts, but we are not grateful ; he visits us with chastisements, but we are not contrite. The portion of the week set apart to the service of religion we give up, without reluctance, to vanity and dissipation. And it is much if, on the periodical return of a day of national humiliation, having availed ourselves of the certainty of an interval from public business, to secure a meeting for convivial purposes ; we do not insult the Majesty of heaven by feasting and jollity, and thus deliberately disclaim our being included in the solemn services of this season of penitence and recollection.

But when there is not this open and shameless disavowal of religion, few traces of it are to be found. Improving in almost every other branch of knowledge, we have become less and less acquainted with Christianity. The preceding chapters have pointed out, among those who believe themselves to be orthodox Christians, a deplorable ignorance of the religion they profess, an utter forgetfulness of the peculiar doctrines by which it is characterized, a disposition to regard it as a mere system of ethics, and, what might seem an inconsistency, at the same time a most inadequate idea of the nature and strictness of its practical principles. This declension of Christianity into a mere system of ethics, may partly be accounted for, as has been lately suggested, by considering the corruption of our nature, what Christianity is, and in what circumstances

Christianity reduced to a system of ethics, and a cause assigned which has specially operated in producing this effect.

she has been placed in this country. But it has also been considerably promoted by one peculiar cause, on which, for many reasons, it may not be improper to dwell a little more particularly.

Christianity in its best days (for the credit of our representations let this be remembered, by those who object to our statement as austere and contracted) was such as it has been delineated in the present work. This was the religion of the most eminent reformers, of those bright ornaments of our country who suffered martyrdom under Queen Mary; of their successors in the time of Elizabeth; in short, of all the pillars of our Protestant church; of many of its highest dignitaries; of Davenant, of Jewell, of Hall, of Reynolds, of Beveridge, of Hooker, of Andrews, of Smith, of Leighton, of Usher, of Hopkins, of Baxter,* and of many others of scarcely inferior note. In their pages, the peculiar doctrines of Christianity were every where visible; and on the deep and solid basis of these doctrinal truths were laid the foundations of a superstructure of morals proportionably broad and exalted. Of this fact their writings still extant are a decisive proof; and

* I must beg leave to class among the brightest ornaments of the Church of England, this great man, who with his brethren was so shamefully ejected from the church in 1666, in violation of the royal word, as well as of the clear principles of justice. With his controversial pieces I am little acquainted: but his practical writings, in four massy folios, are a treasury of Christian wisdom; and it would be a most valuable service to mankind to revise them, and perhaps to abridge them, so as to render them more suited to the taste of modern readers. This has been already done in the case of his *Dying Thoughts*, a beautiful little piece, and of his *Saint's Rest*. His *Life* also, written by himself, and in a separate volume, contains much useful matter, and many valuable particulars of the history of the times of Charles I., Cromwell, &c. &c.

they who may want leisure, or opportunity, or inclination, for the perusal of these valuable records, may satisfy themselves of the truth of the assertion, that, such as we have stated it, was the Christianity of those times, by consulting our articles and homilies, or even by carefully examining our excellent liturgy. But from that tendency to deterioration, lately noticed, these great fundamental truths began to be somewhat less prominent in the compositions of many of the leading divines before the time of the civil wars. During that period, however, the peculiar doctrines of Christianity were grievously abused by many of the sectaries, who were foremost in the commotions of those unhappy days; who, while they talked copiously of the free grace of Christ, and the operations of the Holy Spirit, were by their lives an open scandal to the name of Christian.*

* Let me by no means be understood to censure all the sectaries without discrimination. Many of them, and some who by the unhappy circumstances of the times became objects of notice in a political view, were men of great erudition, deep views of religion, and unquestionable piety: and though the writings of the puritans are prolix, and, according to the fashion of their age, rendered rather perplexed than clear by multiplied divisions and subdivisions; yet they are a mine of wealth, in which any one who will submit to some degree of labour will find himself well rewarded for his pains. In particular, the writings of Dr. Owen, Mr. Howe, and Mr. Flavell well deserve this character: of the first-mentioned author there are two pieces which I would especially recommend to the reader's perusal: one, on Heavenly Mindedness, abridged by Dr. Mayo; the other, on the Mortification of Sin in Believers. While I have been speaking in terms of such high, and, I trust, such just eulogium of many of the teachers of the Church of England, this may not be an improper place to express the high obligations which we owe to the Dissenters, for many excellent publications. Of this number are Dr. Evans's Sermons on the Christian Temper, and that most useful book, the Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul, by Dr. Doddridge; also, his Life, by Orton, and Letters, and

Towards the close of the last century, the divines of the established church (whether it arose from the obscurity of their own views, or from a strong impression of former abuses, and of the evils which had resulted from them) began to run into a different error. They professed to make it their chief object to inculcate the moral and practical precepts of Christianity, which they conceived to have been before too much neglected; but without sufficiently maintaining, often even without justly laying the grand foundation, of a sinner's acceptance with God; or pointing out how the practical precepts of Christianity grow out of her peculiar doctrines, and are inseparably connected with them.* By this fatal error, the very genius and essential nature of Christianity imperceptibly underwent a change. She no longer retained her peculiar characters, or produced that appropriate frame of spirit by which her followers had been characterized: *Facilis descensus*. The example thus set was followed during the present century, and its effect was aided by various causes already pointed out. In addition to these, it may be proper to mention as a cause of powerful operation, that for the last fifty years the press has teemed with moral essays, many of them published periodically, and most extensively circulated; which, being con-

two volumes of Sermons, one on Regeneration, the other on the Power and Grace of Christ. May the writer be permitted to embrace this opportunity of recommending two volumes, published separately, of Sermons, by the late Dr. Witherspoon, President of the College of New Jersey.

* Vide Section vi. of the ivth Chapter, where we have expressly and fully treated of this most important truth.

sidered either as works of mere entertainment, or, in which at least entertainment was to be blended with instruction, rather than as religious pieces, were kept free from whatever might give them the air of sermons, or cause them to wear an appearance of seriousness, inconsistent with the idea of relaxation. But in this way the fatal habit of considering Christian morals as distinct from Christian doctrines, insensibly gained strength. Thus the peculiar doctrines of Christianity went more and more out of sight; and, as might naturally have been expected, the moral system itself also began to wither and decay, being robbed of that which should have supplied it with life and nutriment. At length, in our own days, these peculiar doctrines have almost altogether vanished from the view. Even in many sermons, scarcely any traces of them are to be found.

But the degree of neglect into which they are really fallen may perhaps be rendered still more manifest by appealing to another criterion. There is a certain class of publications, of which it is the object to give us exact delineations of life and manners; and when these are written by authors of accurate observation and deep knowledge of human nature, (and many such there have been in our times,) they furnish a more faithful picture, than can be obtained in any other way, of the prevalent opinions and feelings of mankind. It must be obvious that novels are here alluded to. A careful perusal of the most celebrated of these pieces would furnish a strong confirmation of the apprehension, suggested from other considerations, concerning the very

low state of religion in this country; but they would still more strikingly illustrate the truth of the remark, that the grand peculiarities of Christianity are almost vanished from the view. In a sermon, although throughout the whole of it there may have been no traces of these peculiarities, either directly or indirectly, the preacher closes with an ordinary form; which if one were to assert that they were absolutely omitted, would immediately be alleged in contradiction of the assertion, and may just serve to protect them from falling into entire oblivion. But in novels, the writer is not so tied down. In these, people of religion, and clergymen too, are placed in all possible situations, and the sentiments and language deemed suitable to the occasion are assigned to them. They are introduced instructing, reproofing, counselling, comforting. It is often the author's intention to represent them in a favourable point of view, and accordingly he makes them as well informed, and as good Christians, as he knows how. They are painted amiable, benevolent, and forgiving; but it is not too much to say, that if all the peculiarities of Christianity had never existed, or had been proved to be false, the circumstance would scarcely create the necessity of altering a single syllable in any of the most celebrated of these performances. It is striking to observe the difference which there is in this respect in similar works of Mahometan authors, wherein the characters, which they mean to represent in a favourable light, are drawn vastly more observant of the peculiarities of their religion.*

* No exceptions have fallen within my own reading, but the writings of Richardson.

Other bad symptoms as to the practical state of Christianity.

It has also been a melancholy prognostic of the state to which we are progressive, that many of the most eminent of the literati of modern times have been professed unbelievers; and that others of them have discovered such lukewarmness in the cause of Christ, as to treat with especial good will, and attention, and respect, those men, who, by their avowed publications, were openly assailing, or insidiously undermining, the very foundations of the Christian hope; considering themselves as more closely united to them by literature, than severed from them by the widest religious differences.* Can it then occasion surprise, that, under all these circumstances, one of the most acute and most forward of the professed unbelievers† should appear to anticipate, as at no great distance, the more complete triumph of his

* It is with pain that the author finds himself compelled to place so great a writer as Dr. Robertson in this class. But, to say nothing of his phlegmatic account of the Reformation; a subject which we should have thought likely to excite in any one, who united the character of a Christian divine with that of an historian, some warmth of pious gratitude for the good providence of God: to pass over also the ambiguity, in which he leaves his readers as to his opinion of the authenticity of the Mosaic chronology, in his disquisitions on the trade of India; his letters to Mr. Gibbon, lately published, cannot but excite emotions of regret and shame in every sincere Christian. The author hopes, that he has so far explained his sentiments as to render it almost unnecessary to remark, what, however, to prevent misconstruction, he must here declare, that so far from approving, he must be understood decidedly to condemn, a hot, a contentious, much more an abusive manner of opposing or of speaking of the assailants of Christianity. The apostle's direction in this respect cannot be too much attended to. "The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men; apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth." 2 Timothy, ii. 24, 25.

† Mr. Hume.

sceptical principles; and that another author of distinguished name* not so openly professing those infidel opinions, should declare of the writer above alluded to, whose great abilities had been systematically prostituted to the open attack of every principle of religion, both natural and revealed, “that he had always considered him, both in his life-time and since his death, as approaching as nearly to the idea of a perfectly wise and virtuous man, as perhaps the nature of human frailty will permit?”

Can there then be a doubt, whither tends the path in which we are travelling, and whither at length it must conduct us? If any should hesitate, let them take a lesson from experience. In a neighbouring country several of the same causes have been in action; and they have at length produced their full effect. Manners corrupted, morals depraved, dissipation predominant, above all, religion discredited and infidelity grown into repute and fashion, † terminated in the public disavowal of every religious principle, which had been used to attract the veneration of mankind. The representatives of a whole nation publicly witnessing, not only without horror, but, to say the least, without disapprobation, an open unqualified denial of the very existence of God; and at length, as a body, withdrawing their allegiance from the Majesty of heaven.

* Vide Dr. A. Smith's Letter to W. Strahan, Esq.

† What is here stated must be acknowledged by all, be their political opinions concerning French events what they may; and it makes no difference in the writer's view of the subject, whether the state of morals was or was not, quite, or nearly, as bad, before the French revolution.

Objection that the author's system is too strict, and that if it were to prevail, the world could not go on.

There are not few, perhaps, who may have witnessed with apprehension, and may be ready to confess with pain, the gradual declension of religion; but who at the same time may conceive that the writer of this tract is disposed to carry things too far. They may even allege, that the degree of religion for which he contends is inconsistent with the ordinary business of life, and with the well-being of society; that if it were generally to prevail, people would be wholly engrossed by religion, and all their time occupied by prayer and preaching. Men not being sufficiently interested in the pursuit of temporal objects, agriculture and commerce would decline, the arts would languish, the very duties of common life would be neglected; and, in short, the whole machine of civil society would be obstructed, and speedily stopped. An opening for this charge is given by an ingenious writer* alluded to in an early period of our work; and is even somewhat countenanced by an author since referred to, from whom such a sentiment justly excites more surprise.†

The charge refuted.

In reply to this objection, it might be urged, that though we should allow it for a moment to be in a considerable degree well founded, yet this admission would not warrant the conclusion intended to be drawn from it. The question would still remain, whether our representation of what Christianity requires, be agreeable to the word of God? For if it be, surely it must be confessed to be a matter of small account to sacrifice a little worldly comfort and prosperity,

* Soame Jenyns.

† Paley's Evidences.

during the short span of our existence in this life, in order to secure a crown of eternal glory, and the enjoyment of those pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore! it might be added also, that our blessed Saviour had fairly declared, that it would often be required of Christians to make such a sacrifice; and had forewarned us, that, in order to be able to do it with cheerfulness whenever the occasion should arrive, we must habitually sit loose to all worldly possessions and enjoyments. And it might further be remarked, that though it were even admitted, that the *general prevalence of vital Christianity* should somewhat interfere with the views of national wealth and aggrandisement; yet that there is too much reason to believe that, do all we can, this general prevalence needs not to be apprehended, or, to speak more justly, could not be hoped for. But indeed the objection on which we have now been commenting, is not only groundless, but the very contrary to it is the truth. If Christianity, such as we have represented it, were generally to prevail; the world, from being such as it is, would become a scene of general peace and prosperity; and abating the chances and calamities "which flesh is inseparably heir to," would wear one unwearied face of complacency and joy.

On the first promulgation of Christianity, it is true, some of her early converts seem to have been in danger of so far mistaking the genius of the new religion, as to imagine that in future they were to be discharged from an active attendance on their secular affairs. But the apostle most pointedly guarded them against so gross an error; and expressly and repeatedly enjoined them to

perform the particular duties of their several stations with increased alacrity and fidelity, that they might thereby do credit to their Christian profession. This he did at the same time that he prescribed to them that predominant love of God and of Christ, that heavenly-mindedness, that comparative indifference to the things of this world, that earnest endeavour after growth in grace and perfection in holiness, which have already been stated as the essential characteristics of real Christianity. It cannot therefore be supposed by any who allow to the apostle even the claim of a consistent instructor, much less by any who admit his divine authority, that these latter precepts are incompatible with the former. Let it be remembered, that the grand characteristic mark of the true Christian, which has been insisted on, is *his desiring to please God in all his thoughts, and words, and actions; to take the revealed word to be the rule of his belief and practice; to "let his light shine before men;" and in all things to adorn the doctrine which he professes.* No calling is proscribed, no pursuit is forbidden, no science or art, no pleasure is disallowed, which is reconcileable with this principle. It must indeed be confessed that Christianity would not favour that vehement and inordinate ardour in the pursuit of temporal objects, which tends to the acquisition of immense wealth, or of widely spread renown; nor is it calculated to gratify the extravagant views of those mistaken politicians, the chief object of whose admiration, and the main scope of whose endeavours for their country, are, extended dominion, and commanding power, and unrivalled affluence, rather than

those more solid advantages of peace, and comfort, and security. These men would barter comfort for greatness. In their vain reveries they forget that a nation consists of individuals, and that true national prosperity is no other than the multiplication of particular happiness.

But in fact, so far is it from being true that the prevalence of *real* religion would produce a stagnation in life, that a man, whatever might be his employment or pursuit, would be furnished with a new motive to prosecute it with alacrity, a motive far more constant and vigorous than any human prospects can supply: at the same time, his solicitude being not so much to succeed in whatever he might be engaged in, as to act from a pure principle, and leave the event to God; he would not be liable to the same disappointments, as men who are active and laborious from a desire of worldly gain or of human estimation. Thus he would possess the true secret of a life at the same time useful and happy. Following peace also with all men, and looking upon them as members of the same family, entitled not only to the debts of justice, but to the less definite and more liberal claims of fraternal kindness; he would naturally be respected and beloved by others, and be in himself free from the annoyance of those bad passions, by which they who are actuated by worldly principles are so commonly corroded. If any country were indeed filled with men, each thus diligently discharging the duties of his own station without breaking in upon the rights of others, but on the contrary endeavouring, so far as he might be able, to forward their views

Good effects to us, as a political community, from the prevalence of vital Christianity.

and promote their happiness; all would be active and harmonious in the goodly frame of human society. There would be no jarrings, no discord. The whole machine of civil life would work without obstruction or disorder, and the course of its movements would be like the harmony of the spheres.

Such would be the happy state of a truly Christian nation within itself. Nor would its condition with regard to foreign countries form a contrast to this its internal comfort. Such a community, on the contrary, peaceful at home, would be respected and beloved abroad. General integrity in all its dealings would inspire universal confidence; differences between nations commonly arise from mutual injuries, and still more from mutual jealousy and distrust. Of the former there would be no longer any ground for complaint; the latter would find nothing to attach upon. But if, in spite of all its justice and forbearance, the violence of some neighbouring state should force it to resist an unprovoked attack, (for hostilities strictly defensive are those only in which it would be engaged,) its domestic union would double its national force; while the consciousness of a good cause, and of the general favour of Heaven, would invigorate its arm, and inspirit its efforts.

Position, that
Christianity is
hostile to pa-
triotism, op-
posed.

It is indeed the position of an author, to whom we have had frequent occasion to refer, and whose love of paradox has not seldom led him into error, that true Christianity is an enemy to patriotism. If by patriotism is meant that mischievous and domineering quality which renders men ardent to promote, not the happiness, but the

aggrandisement of their own country, by the oppression and conquest of every other; to such patriotism, so generally applauded in the heathen world, that religion must indeed be an enemy, whose foundation is justice, and whose compendious character is "peace—and good-will towards men." But if by patriotism be understood that quality which, without shutting up our philanthropy within the narrow bounds of a single kingdom, yet attaches us in particular to the country to which we belong; of this true patriotism Christianity is the most copious source, and the surest preservative. The contrary opinion can indeed only have arisen from not considering the fulness and universality of our Saviour's precepts. Not like the puny productions of human workmanship, which at the best can commonly serve but the particular purpose that they are specially designed to answer; the moral, as well as the physical, principles of the great Author of all things are capable of being applied at once to ten thousand different uses; thus, amidst infinite complication, preserving a grand simplicity, and therein bearing the unambiguous stamp of their divine original. Thus, to specify one out of the numberless instances which might be adduced; the principle of gravitation, while it is subservient to all the mechanical purposes of common life, keeps at the same time the stars in their courses, and sustains the harmony of worlds.

Thus also in the case before us: society consists of a number of different circles of various magnitudes and uses; and that circumstance, wherein the principle of patriotism chiefly consists, whereby the duty of patriotism is best practised, and the

happiest effects to the general weal produced, is, that it should be the desire and aim of every individual to fill well his own proper circle, as a part and member of the whole, with a view to the production of general happiness. This our Saviour enjoined when he prescribed the duty of universal love, which is but another term for the most exalted patriotism. Benevolence, indeed, when not originating from religion, dispenses but from a scanty and precarious fund; and, therefore, if it be liberal in the case of some objects, it is generally found to be contracted towards others. Men, who, acting from worldly principles, make the greatest stir about general philanthropy or zealous patriotism, are often very deficient in their conduct in domestic life; and very neglectful of the opportunities, fully within their reach, of promoting the comfort of those with whom they are immediately connected. But true Christian benevolence is always occupied in producing happiness to the utmost of its power, and according to the extent of its sphere, be it larger or more limited; it contracts itself to the measure of the smallest; it can expand itself to the amplitude of the largest. It resembles majestic rivers, which are poured from an unfailing and abundant source. Silent and peaceful in their outset, they begin with dispensing beauty and comfort to every cottage by which they pass. In their further progress they fertilize provinces and enrich kingdoms. At length they pour themselves into the ocean; where, changing their names but not their nature, they visit distant nations and other hemispheres, and spread throughout the world the expansive tide of their beneficence.

It must be confessed, that many of the good effects, of which religion is productive to political societies, would be produced even by a false religion, which should prescribe good morals, and should be able to enforce its precepts by sufficient sanctions. Of this nature are those effects which depend on our calling in the aid of a Being who sees the heart, in order to assist the weakness, and in various ways to supply the inherent defects, of all human jurisprudence. But the superior excellence of Christianity, in this respect, must be acknowledged, both in the superiority of her moral code, and in the powerful motives and efficacious means which she furnishes for enabling us to practise it; and, in the tendency of her doctrines to provide for the observance of her precepts, by producing tempers of mind which correspond with them.

But, more than all this: it has not perhaps been enough remarked, that true Christianity, from her essential nature, appears peculiarly and powerfully adapted to promote the preservation and healthfulness of political communities. What is in truth their grand malady? The answer is short; Selfishness. This is that young disease received at the moment of their birth, "which grows with their growth, and strengthens with their strength;" and through which they at length expire, if not cut off prematurely by some external shock or intestine convulsion.

The disease of selfishness, indeed, assumes different forms in the different classes of society. In the great and the wealthy, it displays itself in luxury, in pomp, and parade; and in all the frivolities of a sickly and depraved imagination,

which seeks in vain its own gratification, and is dead to the generous and energetic pursuits of an enlarged heart. In the lower orders, when not motionless under the weight of a superincumbent despotism, it manifests itself in pride, and its natural offspring, insubordination in all its modes. But though the external effects may vary, the internal principle is the same; a disposition in each individual to make self the grand centre and end of his desires and enjoyments; to over-rate his own merits and importance, and of course to magnify his claims on others, and, in return, to under-rate theirs on him; a disposition to under-value the advantages, and over-state the disadvantages, of his condition in life. Thence spring rapacity, and venality, and sensuality. Thence imperious nobles, and factious leaders; and an unruly commonality, bearing with difficulty the inconveniences of a lower station, and imputing to the nature or administration of their government, the evils which necessarily flow from the very constitution of our species, or which perhaps are chiefly the result of their own vices and follies. The opposite to selfishness is public spirit; which may be termed, not unjustly, the grand principle of political vitality, the very *life's breath* of states, which tends to keep them active and vigorous, and to carry them to greatness and glory.

The tendency of public spirit, and the opposite tendency of selfishness, have not escaped the observation of the founders of states, or of the writers on government; and various expedients have been resorted to and extolled, for cherishing the one, and for repressing the other. Sometimes a principle of internal agitation and dissension. re-

sulting from the very frame of the government, has been productive of the effect. Sparta flourished for more than seven hundred years under the civil institutions of Lycurgus; which guarded against the selfish principle, by prohibiting commerce, and imposing universal poverty and hardship. The Roman commonwealth, in which public spirit was cherished, and selfishness checked, by the principle of the love of glory, was also of long continuance. This passion naturally operates to produce an unbounded spirit of conquest, which, like the ambition of the greatest of its own heroes, was never satiated while any other kingdom was left it to subdue. The principle of political vitality, when kept alive only by means like these, merits the description once given of eloquence: "Sicut flamma, materiâ alitur, et motibus excitatur, et urendo clarescit." But, like eloquence, when no longer called into action by external causes, or fomented by civil broils, it gradually languishes. Wealth and luxury produce stagnation, and stagnation terminates in death.

To provide, however, for the continuance of a state, by the admission of internal dissensions, or even by the chilling influence of poverty, seems to be in some sort sacrificing the end to the means. Happiness is the end for which men unite in civil society; but, in societies thus constituted, little happiness, comparatively speaking, is to be found. The expedient, again, of preserving a state by the spirit of conquest, though even this has not wanted its admirers,* is not to be tolerated for a moment,

* See especially that great historian, Ferguson, who, in his *Essay on Civil Society*, endeavours to vindicate the cause of heroism from the censure conveyed by the poet,

"From Macedonia's madman to the Swede."

when considered on principles of universal justice. Such a state lives, and grows, and thrives, by the misery of others, and becomes professedly the general enemy of its neighbours, and the scourge of the human race. All these devices are, in truth, but too much like the fabrications of man, when compared with the works of the Supreme Being; clumsy, yet weak in the execution of their purpose, and full of contradictory principles and jarring movements.

I might here enlarge with pleasure on the unrivalled excellence, in this very view, of the constitution under which we live in this happy country; and point out how, more perhaps than any which ever existed upon earth, it is so framed, as to provide at the same time for keeping up a due degree of public spirit, and yet for preserving unimpaired the quietness, and comfort, and charities of private life; how it even extracts from selfishness itself many of the advantages which, under less happily constructed forms of government, public spirit only can supply. But such a political discussion, however grateful to a British mind, would here be out of place. It is rather our business to remark, how much Christianity in every way sets herself in direct hostility to selfishness, the mortal distemper of political communities; and consequently, how their welfare must be inseparable from her prevalence. It might, indeed, be almost stated as the main object and chief concern of Christianity, to root out our natural selfishness, and to rectify the false standard which it imposes on us; with views, however, far higher than any which concern merely our temporal and social well-being; to bring us to a just estimate of

ourselves, and of all around us, and to a due impression of the various claims and obligations resulting from the different relations in which we stand. Benevolence, enlarged, vigorous, operative benevolence, is her master principle. Moderation in temporal pursuits and enjoyments, comparative indifference to the issue of worldly projects, diligence in the discharge of personal and civil duties, resignation to the will of God, and patience under all the dispensations of his providence, are among her daily lessons. Humility is one of the essential qualities which her precepts most directly and strongly enjoin, and which all her various doctrines tend to call forth and cultivate; and humility lays the deepest and surest grounds for benevolence. In whatever class or order of society Christianity prevails, she sets herself to rectify the particular faults, or, if we would speak more distinctly, to counteract the particular mode of selfishness to which that class is liable. Affluence she teaches to be liberal and beneficent; authority to bear its faculties with meekness, and to consider the various cares and obligations belonging to its elevated station as being conditions on which that station is conferred. Thus, softening the glare of wealth, and moderating the insolence of power, she renders the inequalities of the social state less galling to the lower orders, whom also she instructs, in their turn, to be diligent, humble, patient; reminding them that their more lowly path has been allotted to them by the hand of God; that it is their part faithfully to discharge its duties, and contentedly to bear its inconveniences; that the present state of things is very short; that the objects about which worldly men

conflict so eagerly are not worth the contest ; that the peace of mind, which religion offers to all ranks indiscriminately, affords more true satisfaction than all the expensive pleasures which are beyond the poor man's reach ; that in this view, however, the poor have the advantage, and that if their superiors enjoy more abundant comforts, they are also exposed to many temptations from which the inferior classes are happily exempted ; that "having food and raiment, they should be therewith content," for that their situation in life, with all its evils, is better than they have deserved at the hand of God ; finally, that all human distinctions will soon be done away, and the true followers of Christ will all, as children of the same Father, be alike admitted to the possession of the same heavenly inheritance. Such are the blessed effects of Christianity on the temporal well-being of political communities.

But vital
Christianity
alone can pro-
duce these ef-
fects ; and, still
more, we must
either have
this, or none at
all.

But the Christianity which can produce effects like these must be real, not nominal—deep, not superficial. Such then is the religion we should cultivate, if we would realize these pleasing speculations, and arrest the progress of political decay. But in the present circumstances of this country, it is a farther reason for endeavouring to cultivate this vital Christianity, still considering its effects merely in a political view, that, according to all human appearance, we must either have this or none : unless the prevalence of this be in some degree restored, we are likely not only to lose all the advantages which we might have derived from true Christianity, but to incur all the manifold

evils which would result from the absence of all religion.

In the first place, let it be remarked, that a weakly principle of religion, (and even such an one, in a political view, is productive of many advantages,) though its existence may be prolonged if all external circumstances favour its continuance, can hardly be kept alive, when the state of things is so unfavourable to vital religion, as it must be confessed to be in our condition of society. Nor is it merely the ordinary effects of a state of wealth and prosperity, to which we here allude. Much also may justly be apprehended from that change which has taken place in our general habits of thinking and feeling, concerning the systems and opinions of former times. At a less advanced period of society, indeed, the religion of the state will be generally accepted, though it be not felt in its vital power. It was the religion of our forefathers: with the bulk, it is on that account entitled to reverence, and its authority is admitted without question. The establishment in which it subsists pleads the same prescription, and obtains the same respect. But in our days, things are very differently circumstanced. Not merely the blind prejudice in favour of former times, but even the proper respect for them, and the reasonable presumption in their favour, has abated. Still less will the idea be endured, of any system being kept up, when the imposture is seen through by the higher orders, for the sake of retaining the common people in subjection. A system, if not supported by a real persuasion of its truth, will fall to the ground. Thus it not unfrequently happens, that in a more advanced state of society, a religious

establishment must be indebted for its support to that very religion which in earlier times it fostered and protected; as the weakness of some aged mother is sustained, and her existence lengthened, by the tender assiduities of the child whom she had reared in the helplessness of infancy: so, in the present instance, unless there be reinfused into the mass of our society, something of that principle which animated our ecclesiastical system in its earlier days, it is vain for us to hope that the establishment will very long continue: for the anomaly will not much longer be borne, of an establishment, the *actual* principles of the bulk of whose members, and even teachers, are so extremely different from those which it professes. But in proportion as vital Christianity can be revived, in that same proportion the church establishment is strengthened; for the revival of vital Christianity is the very reinfusion of which we have been speaking. This is the very Christianity on which our establishment is founded; and that which her articles, and homilies, and liturgy teach throughout.

But if, when the reign of prejudice, and even of honest prepossession and of grateful veneration, is no more, (for by these almost any system may generally be supported, before a state, having passed the period of its maturity, is verging to its decline;) if there are any who think that a dry, unanimated religion, like that which is now professed by nominal Christians, can hold its place; much more, that it can be revived among the general mass of mankind, it may be affirmed, that, arguing merely on human principles, they know little of human nature. The kind of religion

which we have recommended, whatever opinion may be entertained concerning its truth, and to say nothing of the agency of Divine grace, must at least be conceded to be the only one which is at all suited to make impression upon the lower orders, by strongly interesting the passions of the human mind. If it be thought that a system of ethics may regulate the conduct of the higher classes; such an one is altogether unsuitable to the lower, who must be worked upon by their affections, or they will not be worked upon at all. The ancients were wiser than ourselves, and never thought of governing the community in general by their lessons of philosophy. These lessons were confined to the schools of the learned; while for the million, a system of religion, such as it was, was kept up, as alone adapted to their grosser natures. If this reasoning fail to convince, we may safely appeal to experience. Let the Socinian and the moral teacher of Christianity come forth, and tell us what effects *they* have produced on the lower orders. They themselves will hardly deny the inefficacy of their instructions. But, blessed be God, the religion which we recommend has proved its correspondence with the character originally given of Christianity, that it was calculated for the poor; by changing the whole condition of the mass of society in many of the most populous districts in this and other countries; and by bringing them from being scenes of almost unexampled wickedness and barbarism, to be eminent for sobriety, decency, industry, and, in short, for whatever can render men useful members of civil society.

If, indeed, through the blessing of Provi-

dence, a principle of true religion should, in any considerable degree, gain ground, there is no estimating the effects on public morals, and the consequent influence on our political welfare. These effects are not merely negative : though it would be much, merely to check the further progress of a gangrene which is eating out the very vital principles of our social and political existence. The general standard of morality formerly described would be raised, it would at least be sustained, and kept for a while from farther depression. The esteem which religious characters would personally attract, would extend to the system which they should hold, and to the establishment of which they should be members. These are all merely natural consequences. But to those who believe in a superintending Providence, it may be added, that the blessing of God might be drawn down upon our country, and the stroke of his anger be for a while suspended.

Political good effects from the revival of vital Christianity, & bad ones from its further decline.

Let us be spared the painful task of tracing, on the contrary, the fatal consequences of the extinction of religion among us. They are, indeed, such as no man, who is ever so little interested for the welfare of his country, can contemplate without the deepest concern. The very loss of our church establishment, though, as in all human institutions, some defects may be found in it, would in itself be attended with the most fatal consequences. No prudent man dares hastily pronounce how far its destruction might not greatly endanger our civil institutions. It would not be difficult to prove, that the want of it would also be in the highest degree injurious to the cause of Christi-

anity; and still more, that it would take away what appears from experience to be one of the most probable means of its revival. To what a degree might even the avowed principles of men, not altogether without religion, decline, when our inestimable liturgy should no longer remain in use! a liturgy justly inestimable, which continually sets before us a faithful model of the Christian's belief, and practice, and language; restraining us, as far as restraint is possible, from excessive deviations; furnishing us with abundant instruction when we would return into the right path; affording an advantage-ground of no little value to such instructors as still adhere to the good old principles of the Church of England; in short, daily shaming us, by preserving a living representation of the opinions and habits of better times; as some historical record, which reproaches a degenerate posterity, by exhibiting the worthier deeds of their progenitors. In such a state of things, to what a depth public morals might sink, may be anticipated by those who consider what would then be the condition of society; who reflect how bad principles and vicious conduct mutually aid each other's operation, and how, in particular, the former make sure the ground which the latter may have gained; who remember, that in the lower orders, the system of honour, and the responsibility of character, are wanting, which in the superior classes, in some poor degree, supply the place of higher principles. It is well for the happiness of mankind, that such a community could not long subsist. The cement of society being no more, the state would soon be dissolved into individuality.

Let it not be vainly imagined that our state of

civilization must prevent the moral degeneracy here threatened. A neighbouring nation has lately furnished a lamentable proof, that superior polish and refinement may well consist with a very large measure of depravity. But, to appeal to a still more decisive instance: it may be seen in the history of the latter years of the most celebrated of the pagan nations, that the highest degrees of civilization and refinement are by no means inseparable from the most shocking depravity of morals. The fact is certain, and the obvious inference, with regard to ourselves, cannot be denied. The cause of this strange phenomenon, (such it really appears to our view,) for which the natural corruption of man might hardly seem to account sufficiently, has been explained by an inspired writer. Speaking of the most polished nations of antiquity, he observes: "Because, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, and were not *solicitous** to retain him in their knowledge, he gave them over to a reprobate mind." Let us then beware, and take warning from their example: let us not suffer our self-love to beguile us: let us not vainly persuade ourselves, that although prosperity and wealth may have caused us to relax a little too much in those more serious duties which regard our Maker, yet that we shall stop where we are; or, at least, that we can never sink into the same state of moral depravation. Doubtless we should sink as low, if God were to give us up also to our own imaginations. And what ground have we to think he will not? If we would reason justly, we should not compare

* Such seems to be the just rendering of the word which our Testament translates, "did not like to retain God in their knowledge."

ourselves with the state of the heathen world when at its worst; but with its state at that period, when, for its forgetfulness of God, and its ingratitude towards him, it was suffered to fall, till at length it reached that worst, its ultimate point of depression. The heathens had only reason and natural conscience to direct them: we enjoy, superadded to these, the clear light of gospel revelation, and a distinct declaration of God's dealings with them, to be a lesson for our instruction. How then can we but believe that if we, enjoying advantages so much superior to theirs, are alike forgetful of our kind Benefactor, we also shall be left to ourselves? and if so left, what reason can be assigned why we should not fall into the same enormities?

What then is to be done? The inquiry is of the first importance, and the general answer to it is not difficult. The causes and nature of the decay of religion and morals among us sufficiently indicate the course, which, on principles of sound policy, it is in the highest degree expedient for us to pursue. The distemper of which, as a community, we are sick, should be considered rather as a moral than a political malady. How much has this been forgotten by the disputants of modern times! and accordingly, how transient may be expected to be the good effects of the best of their publications! We should endeavour to tread back our steps. Every effort should be used, to raise the depressed tone of public morals. This is a duty particularly incumbent on all who are in the higher walks of life; and it is impossible not to acknowledge the

Practical hints for the conduct of men in power, in the case of religion, suggested by the above statements.

obligations, which in this respect we owe as a nation, to those exalted characters, whom God in his undeserved mercy to us still suffers to continue on the throne, and who set to their subjects a pattern of decency and moderation rarely seen in their elevated station.

But every person of rank, and fortune, and abilities, should endeavour in like manner to exhibit a similar example, and recommend it to the imitation of the circle in which he moves. It has been the opinion of some well-meaning people, that by giving, as far as they possibly could with innocence, into the customs and practices of irreligious men, they might soften the prejudices too frequently taken up against religion, of its being an austere, gloomy service; and thus secure a previous favourable impression against any time, when they might have an opportunity of explaining or enforcing their sentiments. This is always a questionable, and, it is to be feared, a dangerous policy. Many mischievous consequences necessarily resulting from it might easily be enumerated. But it is a policy particularly unsuitable to our inconsiderate and dissipated times, and to the lengths at which we are arrived. In these circumstances, the most likely means of producing the *revulsion* which is required, must be boldly to proclaim the distinction between the adherents of "God and Baal." The expediency of this conduct in our present situation is confirmed by another consideration, to which we have before had occasion to refer. It is this—that when men are aware that something of difficulty is to be effected, their spirits rise to the level of the encounter; they make up their minds to bear hard-

ships and brave dangers, and to persevere in spite of fatigue and opposition: whereas in a matter which is regarded as of easy and ordinary operation, they are apt to slumber over their work, and to fail in what a small effort might have been sufficient to accomplish, for want of having called up the requisite degree of energy and spirit. Conformably to the principle which is hereby suggested, in the circumstances in which we are placed, the line of demarcation between the friends and the enemies of religion should now be made clear; the separation should be broad and obvious. Let him, then, who wishes well to his country, no longer hesitate what course of conduct to pursue. The question now is not, in what liberties he might unwarrantably indulge himself in another situation, but what are the restraints on himself which the exigencies of the present times render it advisable for him to impose. Circumstanced as we now are, it is more than ever obvious, that *the best man is the truest patriot*.

Nor is it only by their personal conduct (though this mode will always be the most efficacious) that men of authority and influence may promote the cause of good morals. Let them in their several stations encourage virtue and discountenance vice in others. Let them enforce the laws by which the wisdom of our forefathers has guarded against the grosser infractions of morals; and congratulate themselves, that in a leading situation on the bench of justice there is placed a man, who, to his honour be it spoken, is well disposed to assist their efforts.* Let them favour and take part in

* It is a gratification to the writer's personal, as well as public feelings, to pay this tribute of respect to the character of Lord Chief Justice Kenyon.

any plans which may be formed for the advancement of morality. Above all things, let them endeavour to instruct and improve the rising generation; that, if it be possible, an antidote may be provided for the malignity of that venom which is storing up in a neighbouring country. This has long been to my mind the most formidable feature of the present state of things in France; where, it is to be feared, a brood of moral vipers, as it were, is now hatching, which, when they shall have attained to their mischievous maturity, will go forth to poison the world. But fruitless will be all attempts to sustain, much more to revive, the fainting cause of morals, unless you can in some degree restore the prevalence of evangelical Christianity. It is in morals as in physics; unless the source of practical principles be elevated, it will be in vain to attempt to make them flow on a high level in their future course. You may force them for a while into some constrained position, but they will soon drop to their natural point of depression. By all, therefore, who are studious of their country's welfare, more particularly by all who desire to support our ecclesiastical establishment, every effort should be used to revive the Christianity of our better days. The attempt should especially be made in the case of the pastors of the church, whose situation must render the principles which they hold a matter of super-eminent importance. Wherever these teachers have steadily and zealously inculcated the true doctrines of the church of England, the happiest effects have commonly rewarded their labours. And it is worth observing, in the view which we are now taking, that these men, as might natu-

rally be expected, are, perhaps without exception, friendly to our ecclesiastical and civil establishments; * and consequently, that their instructions and influence tend *directly*, as well as *indirectly*, to the maintenance of the cause of order and good government. Nor should it be forgotten by any who, judging with the abstract coldness of mere politicians, might doubt whether, by adopting the measures here recommended, a religious warmth would not be called into action, which might break out into mischievous irregularities; that experience proves that an establishment affords, from its very nature, the happy means of exciting a considerable degree of fervour and animation, and at the same time of restraining them within due bounds. The duty of encouraging vital religion in the church particularly devolves on all who have the disposal of ecclesiastical preferment, and more especially on the dignitaries of the sacred order. Some of these have already sounded the alarm; justly censuring the practice of suffering Christianity to degenerate into a mere system of ethics, and recommending more attention to the peculiar doctrines of our religion. In our schools, in our universities, let the study be encouraged of the writings of those venerable divines who flourished in the purer times of Christianity. Let even a considerable proficiency in their writings be required of candidates for ordination. Let our churches no longer witness that unseemly discordance, which has too much prevailed, between the prayers which precede, and the sermon which follows.

* This is not thrown out rashly, but asserted on the writer's own knowledge.

But it may be enough to have briefly hinted at the course of conduct which, in the present circumstances of this country, motives merely political should prompt us to pursue. To all who have at heart the national welfare, the above suggestions are solemnly submitted. They have not been urged altogether without misgivings, lest it should appear as though the concern of eternity were melted down into a mere matter of temporal advantage, or political expediency. But since it has graciously pleased the Supreme Being so to arrange the constitution of things, as to render the prevalence of true religion and of pure morality conducive to the well-being of states, and the preservation of civil order; and since these subordinate inducements are not unfrequently held forth, even by the sacred writers, it seemed not improper, and scarcely liable to misconstruction, to suggest inferior motives to readers who might be less disposed to listen to considerations of a higher order.

Would to God that the course of conduct here suggested might be fairly pursued! Would to God that the happy consequences which would result from the principles we have recommended, could be realized; and above all, that the influence of true religion could be extensively diffused! It is the best wish which can be formed for his country, by one who is deeply anxious for its welfare—

*Lucem redde tuam, dux bone, patriæ!
Instar veris enim vultus ubi tuus
Affulsit populo, gratior it dies
Et soles melius nitent*

CHAPTER VII.

PRACTICAL HINTS TO VARIOUS DESCRIPTIONS OF PERSONS.

THUS have we endeavoured to trace the chief defects of the religious system of the bulk of professed Christians in this country. We have pointed out their low idea of the importance of Christianity in general; their inadequate conceptions of all its leading doctrines, and the effect hereby naturally produced in relaxing the strictness of its practical system: more than all, we have remarked their grand fundamental misconception of its genius and essential nature. Let not, therefore, the difference between them and true believers be considered as a trifling difference; as a question of forms or opinions. The question is of the very substance of religion; the difference is of the most serious and momentous amount. We must speak out. *Their Christianity is not Christianity.* It wants the radical principle. It is mainly defective in all the grand constituents. Let them no longer, then, be deceived by names, in a matter of infinite importance: but with humble prayer to the Source of all wisdom, that he would enlighten their understandings, and clear their hearts from prejudice; let them seriously examine, by the scripture standard, their real belief and allowed practice, and they will become sensible of the shallowness of their scanty system.

Difference between nominal and real Christians, of the first importance.

Helps in self-examination—
Frequent sources of self-deception pointed out.

If, through the blessing of Providence on any thing which may have been here written, there should be any whom it has disposed to this important duty of self-inquiry; let me previously warn them to be well aware of our natural proneness to think too favourably of ourselves. Selfishness is one of the principal fruits of the corruption of human nature; and it is obvious, that selfishness disposes us to overrate our good qualities, and to overlook or extenuate our defects. The corruption of human nature, therefore, being admitted, it follows undeniably, that in all our reckonings, if we would form a just estimate of our character, we must make an allowance for the effects of selfishness. It is also another effect of the corruption of human nature, to cloud our moral sight, and blunt our moral sensibility. Something must, therefore, be allowed for this effect likewise. Doubtless, the perfect purity of the Supreme Being makes him see in us stains far more in number and deeper in dye than we ourselves can discover. Nor should another awful consideration be forgotten. When we look into ourselves, those sins only, into which we have lately fallen, are commonly apt to excite any lively impression. Many individual acts of vice, or a continued course of vicious or dissipated conduct, which, when recent, may have smitten us with deep remorse, after a few months or years leave but very faint traces in our recollection; at least, those acts alone continue to strike us strongly, which were of very extraordinary magnitude. But the strong impressions which they at first excited, not the faded images which they subsequently pre-

sent to us, furnish the true measure of their guilt : and to the pure eyes of God, this guilt must always have appeared far greater than to us. Now, to the Supreme Being, we must believe that there is no past or future ; as whatever *will be*, so whatever *has been*, is retained by him in present and unvarying contemplation, continuing always to appear just the same as at the first moment of its happening. Well may it, then, humble us in the sight of that Being, “ who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity ;” to call to mind that, unless our offences have been blotted out by our obtaining an interest in the satisfaction of Christ, through true repentance and lively faith, we appear before him clothed with the sins of our whole lives, in all their original depth of colouring, and with all the aggravations which we no longer particularly remember ; but which, in general, we, perhaps, may recollect to have once filled us with shame and confusion of face. The writer is the rather desirous of enforcing this reflection, because he can truly declare, that he has found no consideration so efficacious in producing in his own mind the deepest self-abasement.

In treating of the sources of the erroneous estimates which we form of our religious and moral character, it may not, perhaps, be without its uses to take this occasion of pointing out some other common springs of self-deception. Many persons, as was formerly hinted, are misled by the favourable opinions entertained of them by others ; many, it is to be feared, mistake a hot zeal for orthodoxy, for a cordial acceptance of the great truths of the Gospel ; and almost all of us, at one time or other, are more or less misled by con-

founding the suggestions of the understanding with the impulses of the will, the assent which our judgment gives to religious and moral truths, with a hearty belief and approbation of them.

There is another frequent source of self-deception, which is productive of so much mischief in life, that, though it may appear to lead to some degree of repetition, it would be highly improper to omit the mention of it in this place. That we may be the better understood, it may be proper to premise, that certain particular vices, and likewise that certain particular good and amiable qualities, seem naturally to belong to certain particular periods and conditions of life. Now, if we would reason fairly in estimating our moral character, we ought to examine ourselves with reference to that particular "sin which does most easily beset us;" not to some other sin, to which we are not nearly so much liable. And in like manner, on the other hand, we ought not to account it matter of much self-complacency, if we find in ourselves that good and amiable quality which naturally belongs to our period or condition; but rather look for some less ambiguous sign of a real internal principle of virtue. But we are very apt to reverse these rules of judging; we are very apt, on the one hand, both in ourselves and in others, to excuse "the besetting sin," taking and giving credit for being exempt from others, to which we or they are less liable; and, on the other hand, to value ourselves extremely on our possession of the good or amiable quality which naturally belongs to us, and to require no more satisfactory evidence of the *sufficiency* at least of

Outgrowing, or merely changing our vices, mistaken for forsaking of all sin.

our moral character. The bad effects of this partiality are aggravated by the practice, to which we are sadly prone, of being contented, when we take a hasty view of ourselves, with negative evidences of our state; thinking it very well if we are not shocked by some great actual transgression, instead of looking for the positive signs of a true Christian, as laid down in the holy scripture.

But the source of self-deception, which it is more particularly our present object to point out, is a disposition to consider as a conquest of any particular vice, our merely forsaking it, on our quitting the period or condition of life to which that vice belongs; when, perhaps, also we substitute for it the vice of the new period or condition on which we are entering. We thus mistake our merely outgrowing our vices, or our relinquishing them from some change in our worldly circumstances, for a thorough, or at least for a sufficient reformation.

But this topic deserves to be viewed a little more closely. Young people may, without much offence, be inconsiderate and dissipated; the youth of one sex may indulge occasionally in licentious excesses; those of the other may be supremely given up to vanity and pleasure: yet, provided that they are sweet-tempered, and open, and not disobedient to their parents or other superiors, the former are deemed *good-hearted* young men, the latter *innocent* young women. Those who love them best, have no solicitude about their spiritual interests; and it would be deemed strangely strict in themselves, or in others, to doubt of their becoming more religious as they advance in life; to

speak of them as being actually under the Divine displeasure ; or, if their lives should be in danger, to entertain any apprehensions concerning their future destiny.

They grow older, and marry. The same licentiousness, which was formerly considered in young men as a venial frailty, is now no longer regarded in the husband and the father as compatible with the character of a decently religious man. The language is of this sort : " They have sown their wild oats, they must now reform, and be regular." Nor, perhaps, is the same manifest predominance of vanity and dissipation deemed innocent in the matron : but if they are kind respectively in their conjugal and parental relations, and are tolerably regular and decent, they pass for *mighty good sort of people* ; and it would be altogether unnecessary scrupulosity in them to doubt of their coming up to the requisitions of the Divine law, as far as in the present state of the world can be expected from human frailty. Their hearts, however, are perhaps no more than before supremely set on the great work of their salvation, but are chiefly bent on increasing their fortunes, or raising their families. Meanwhile, they congratulate themselves on their having amended from vices which they are no longer strongly tempted to commit, or their abstaining from which ought not to be too confidently assumed as a test of the strength of the religious principle, since the commission of them would prejudice their characters, and perhaps injure their fortune in life.

Old age has at length made its advances. Now, if ever, we might expect that it would be deemed high time to make eternal things the *main* object

of attention. No such thing! there is still an appropriate good quality, the presence of which calms the disquietude, and satisfies the requisitions both of themselves and of those around them. It is now required of them that they should be good-natured and cheerful, indulgent to the frailties and follies of the young; remembering, that when young themselves, they gave into the same practices. How opposite this to that dread of sin, which is the sure characteristic of the true Christian; which causes him to look back upon the vices of his own youthful days with shame and sorrow; and which, instead of conceding to young people to be wild and thoughtless, as a privilege belonging to their age and circumstances, prompts him to warn them against what had proved to himself matter of such bitter retrospection! Thus, throughout the whole of life, some means or other are devised for stifling the voice of conscience. "We cry peace, while there is no peace!" and both to ourselves and others that complacency is furnished, which ought only to proceed from a consciousness of being reconciled to God, and a humble hope of our possessing his favour.

I know that these sentiments will be termed uncharitable; but I must not be deterred by such an imputation.

Uncharitableness and true charity.

It is time to have done with that senseless cant of charity, which insults the understandings, and trifles with the feelings, of those who are really concerned for the happiness of their fellow-creatures. What matter of keen remorse and of bitter self-reproaches are they storing up for their future torment, who are themselves the miserable dupes of such misguided charity; or who, being charged

with the office of watching over the eternal interests of their children or relations, suffer themselves to be lulled asleep, or beguiled by such shallow reasonings into sparing themselves the momentary pain of executing their important duty! Charity, indeed, is partial to the object of her regard; and where actions are of a doubtful quality, this partiality disposes her to refer them to a good, rather than to a bad motive. She is apt also somewhat to exaggerate merits, and to see amiable qualities in a light more favourable than that which strictly belongs to them. But true charity is wakeful, fervent, full of solicitude, full of good offices, not so easily satisfied, not so ready to believe that every thing is going on well as a matter of course; but jealous of mischief, apt to suspect danger, and prompt to extend relief. These are the symptoms by which genuine regard will manifest itself in a wife or a mother, in the case of the *bodily* health of the object of her affections. And where there is any real concern for the *spiritual* interests of others, it is characterized by the same infallible marks. That wretched quality, by which the sacred name of charity is now so generally and so falsely usurped, is no other than indifference; which, against the plainest evidence, or at least where there is strong ground of apprehension, is easily contented to believe that all goes well, because it has no anxieties to allay, no fears to repress. It undergoes no alternation of passions; it is not at one time flushed with hope, nor at another chilled by disappointment.

To a considerate and feeling mind, there is something deeply afflicting, in seeing the engaging cheerfulness and cloudless gaiety incident to youth,

welcomed as a sufficient indication of internal purity by the delighted parents; who, knowing the deceitfulness of these flattering appearances, should eagerly avail themselves of this period, when once wasted never to be regained, of good-humoured acquiescence and dutiful docility: a period, when the soft and ductile temper of the mind renders it more easily susceptible of the impressions we desire; and when, therefore, habits should be formed, which may assist our natural weakness to resist the temptations to which we shall be exposed in the commerce of maturer life. This is more especially affecting in the female sex, because that sex seems, by the very constitution of its nature, to be more favourably disposed than ours to the feelings and offices of religion; being thus fitted by the bounty of Providence, the better to execute the important task which devolves on it, of the education of our earliest youth. Doubtless, this more favourable disposition to religion in the female sex, was graciously designed also to make women doubly valuable in the wedded state: and it seems to afford to the married man the means of rendering an active share in the business of life more compatible, than it would otherwise be, with the liveliest devotional feelings; that when the husband should return to his family, worn and harassed by worldly cares or professional labours, the wife, habitually preserving a warmer and more unimpaired spirit of devotion, than is perhaps consistent with being immersed in the bustle of life, might revive his languid piety; and that the religious impressions of both might derive new force and tenderness from the animating sympathies of

Women naturally more disposed to religion than men.

conjugal affection. Can a more pleasing image be presented to a considerate mind, than that of a couple, happy in each other and in the pledges of their mutual love, uniting in an act of grateful adoration to the Author of all their mercies; recommending each other, and the objects of their common care, to the Divine protection; and repressing the solicitude of conjugal and parental tenderness by a confiding hope, that, through all the changes of this uncertain life, the Disposer of all things will assuredly cause all to work together for the good of them that love and put their trust in him; and that, after this uncertain state shall have passed away, they shall be admitted to a joint participation of never-ending happiness. It is surely no mean or ignoble office which we would allot to the female sex, when we would thus commit to them the charge of maintaining, in lively exercise, whatever emotions most dignify and adorn human nature; when we would make them, as it were, the medium of our intercourse with the heavenly world, the faithful repositories of the religious principle, for the benefit both of the present and of the rising generation. Must it not, then, excite our grief and indignation, when we behold mothers, forgetful at once of their own peculiar duties, and of the high office which Providence designed their daughters to fulfil; exciting, instead of endeavouring to moderate, in them, the natural sanguineness and inconsiderateness of youth; hurrying them, night after night, to the resorts of dissipation; thus teaching them to despise the *common* comforts of the family circle; and, instead of striving to raise their views, and to direct their affections to their true object, acting as if with the

express design studiously to extinguish every spark of a devotional spirit, and to kindle in its stead an excessive love of pleasure, and, perhaps, a principle of extravagant vanity, and ardent emulation!

Innocent young women! Good-hearted young men! Wherein does this *goodness of heart* and this *innocence* appear? Remember that we are fallen creatures, born in sin, and naturally depraved. Christianity recognises no *innocence* or *goodness of heart*, but in the remission of sin, and in the effects of the operation of Divine grace. Do we find in these young persons the characters, which the holy scriptures lay down as the only satisfactory evidences of a safe state? Do we not on the other hand discover the specified marks of a state of alienation from God? Can the blindest partiality persuade itself that *they* are loving, or striving “to love God with all their hearts, and minds, and souls, and strength?” Are *they* “seeking first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness?” Are *they* “working out their salvation with fear and trembling?” Are *they* “clothed with humility?” Are *they* not, on the contrary, supremely given up to self-indulgence? Are *they* not at least “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God?” Are the offices of religion *their* solace, or *their* task? Do *they* not come to these sacred services with reluctance, continue in them by constraint, and quit them with gladness? And of how many of *these* persons may it not be affirmed in the spirit of the prophet’s language, “The harp, and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts; but they regard not

Innocent young people — term much abused.

the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands?" Are not the youth of one sex often actually committing, and still more often wishing for the opportunity, to commit those sins of which the scripture says expressly, "that they which do such things *shall not* inherit the kingdom of God?" Are not the youth of the other sex principally intent on the gratification of vanity; and looking for their chief happiness to the resorts of gaiety and fashion, to all the multiplied pleasures which public places, or the still higher gratifications of more refined circles, can supply?

And then, when the first ebullitions of youthful warmth are over, what is their boasted reformation? They may be decent, sober, useful, respectable, as members of the community, or amiable in the relations of domestic life. But is *this* the change of which the scripture speaks? Hear the expressions which it uses, and judge for yourselves—"Except a man be *born again*, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."—"The *old man* is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;" an expression but too descriptive of the vain delirium of youthful dissipation, and of the false dreams of pleasure which it inspires; but "the *new man*" is awakened from this fallacious estimate of happiness; "he is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." "He is created *after God* in righteousness and true holiness." The persons of whom we are speaking are no longer, indeed, so thoughtless, and wild, and dissipated, as formerly; so negligent in their attention to objects of real value; so eager in the pursuit of pleasure; so prone to yield to the impulse of appetite. But this is no more than the change

of which a writer of no very strict cast speaks, as naturally belonging to their riper age :

Conversis studiis, ætas, animusque virilis
 Quærit opes, et amicitias: inservit honori:
 Commisisse cavet, quod mox mutare laboret.

HOR.

This is a point of infinite importance: let it not be thought tedious to spend even yet a few more moments in the discussion of it. Put the question to another issue, and try it, by appealing to the principle of life being a state of probation; (a proposition, indeed, true in a certain sense, though not exactly in that which is sometimes assigned to it;) and you will still be led to no very different conclusion. Probation implies resisting, in obedience to the dictates of religion, appetites which we are naturally prompted to gratify. Young people are not tempted to be churlish, interested, covetous; but to be inconsiderate and dissipated, “lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.” People again, in middle-age, are not so strongly tempted to be thoughtless, and idle, and licentious. From excesses of this sort they are sufficiently withheld, particularly when happily settled in domestic life, by a regard to their characters, by the restraints of family connexions, and by a sense of what is due to the decencies of the married state. *Their* probation is of another sort; *they* are tempted to be supremely engrossed by worldly cares, by family interests, by professional objects, by the pursuit of wealth or of ambition. Thus occupied, they are tempted to “mind earthly rather than heavenly things,” forgetting “the one thing needful;” to “set their affections” on temporal rather than eternal concerns, and to take up

with "a form of godliness," instead of seeking to experience the power thereof: the foundations of this nominal religion being laid in the forgetfulness, if not in the ignorance, of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity. These are the *ready-made* Christians formerly spoken of, who consider Christianity as a geographical term, properly applicable to all those who have been born and educated in a country wherein Christianity is professed; not as indicating a renewed nature, as expressive of a peculiar character, with its appropriate desires and aversions, and hopes, and fears, and joys, and sorrows. To people of this description, the solemn admonition of Christ is addressed: "I know thy works; that thou hast a name, that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before God."

Hints to such as, having been hitherto careless, wish to become true Christians.

If there be any one who is inclined to listen to this solemn warning, who is awakened from his dream of false security, and is disposed to be not only *almost*, but *altogether* a Christian—Oh! let him not stifle or dissipate these beginnings of seriousness, but sedulously cherish them as the "workings of the Divine Spirit," which would draw him from the "broad" and crowded "road of destruction, into the narrow" and thinly-peopled path "that leadeth to life." Let him retire from the multitude—let him enter into his closet, and on his bended knees implore, for Christ's sake and in reliance on his mediation, that God would "take away from him the heart of stone, and give him a heart of flesh;" that the

Father of light would open his eyes to his true condition, and clear his heart from the clouds of prejudice, and dissipate the deceitful medium of self-love. Then let him carefully examine his past life, and his present course of conduct, comparing himself with God's word : and considering how any one might reasonably have been expected to conduct himself, to whom the holy scriptures had been always open, and who had been used to acknowledge them to be the revelation of the will of his Creator, and Governor, and Supreme Benefactor ; let him there peruse the awful denunciations against impenitent sinners ; let him labour to become more and more deeply impressed with a sense of his own radical blindness and corruption ; above all, let him steadily contemplate, in all its relations, that stupendous truth, *the incarnation and crucifixion of the only-begotten Son of God, and the message of mercy proclaimed from the cross to repenting sinners.* " Be ye reconciled unto God."—" Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."

When he fairly estimates the guilt of sin by the costly satisfaction which was required to atone for it, and the worth of his soul by the price which was paid for its redemption, and contrasts both of these with his own sottish inconsiderateness ; when he reflects on the amazing love and pity of Christ, and on the cold and formal acknowledgments with which he has hitherto returned this infinite obligation, making light of the precious blood of the Son of God, and trifling with the gracious invitations of his Redeemer : surely, if he be not lost to sensibility, mixed emotions of guilt, and fear, and shame, and re-

morse, and sorrow, will nearly overwhelm his soul; he will smite upon his breast, and cry out in the language of the publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." But blessed be God, such an one needs not despair—it is to persons in this very situation, and with these very feelings, that the offers of the gospel are held forth, and its promises assured; "to the weary and heavy laden" under the burden of their sins; to them who thirst for the water of life; to them who feel themselves "tied and bound by the chain of their sins;" who abhor their captivity, and long earnestly for deliverance. Happy, happy souls! whom the grace of God has visited, "has brought out of darkness into his marvellous light," and "from the power of Satan unto God." Cast yourselves then on his undeserved mercy, he is full of love, and will not spurn you: surrender yourselves into his hands, and solemnly resolve, through his grace, to dedicate henceforth all your faculties and powers to his service.

It is your's now "to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," relying on the fidelity of him who has promised to "work in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." Ever look to him for help: your only safety consists in a deep and permanent sense of your own weakness, and in a firm reliance on his strength. If you "give all diligence," his power is armed for your protection, his truth is pledged for your security. You are enlisted under the banner of Christ: fear not, though the world, and the flesh, and the devil are set in array against you. "Faithful is he that hath promised:"—"Be ye also faithful unto death, and he will give you a crown

of life."—"He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved." In such a world as this, in such a state of society as ours, especially if in the higher walks of life, you must be prepared to meet with many difficulties: arm yourselves, therefore, in the first place, with a determined resolution not to rate human estimation beyond its true value; not to dread the charge of particularity, when it shall be necessary to incur it; but let it be your constant endeavour to retain before your mental eye, that bright assemblage of invisible spectators, who are the witnesses of your daily conduct, and "to seek that honour which cometh from God." You cannot advance a single step, till you are in some good measure possessed of this comparative indifference to the favour of men. We have before explained ourselves too clearly to render it necessary to declare, that no one should needlessly affect singularity: but to aim at incompatible advantages, to seek to please God and the world, where their commands are really at variance, is the way to be neither respectable, nor good, nor happy. Continue to be ever aware of your own radical corruption and habitual weakness. Indeed, if your eyes be really opened, and your heart truly softened, "hungering and thirsting after righteousness," rising in your ideas of true holiness, and proving the genuineness of your hope, by desiring "to purify yourself even as God is pure;" you will become daily more and more sensible of your own defects, and wants, and weaknesses; and more and more impressed by a sense of the mercy and long-suffering of that gracious Saviour, "who forgiveth all your sin, and healeth all your infirmities."

This is the solution of what to a man of the world might seem a strange paradox, that in proportion as the Christian grows in grace, he grows also in humility. Humility is indeed the vital principle of Christianity; that principle by which, from first to last, she lives and thrives, and in proportion to the growth or decline of which she must decay or flourish. *This* first disposes the sinner, in deep self-abasement, to accept the offers of the gospel; *this*, during his whole progress, is the very ground and basis of his feelings and conduct, both in relation to God, his fellow-creatures, and himself; and when at length he shall be translated into the realms of glory, *this* principle shall still subsist in undiminished force: he shall "fall down, and cast his crown before the Lamb; and ascribe blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever." The *practical* benefits of this habitual lowliness of spirit are too numerous, and at the same time too obvious, to require enumeration. It will lead you to dread the beginnings, and fly from the occasions of sin; as that man would shun some infectious distemper, who should know that he was predisposed to take the contagion. It will prevent a thousand difficulties, and decide a thousand questions, concerning worldly compliances; by which those persons are apt to be embarrassed, who are not duly sensible of their own exceeding frailty, whose views of the Christian character are not sufficiently elevated, and who are not enough possessed with a continual fear of "grieving the Holy Spirit of God," and of thus provoking him to withdraw his gracious influence. But if you

are really such as we have been describing, you need not be urged to set the standard of practice high, and to strive after universal holiness. It is the desire of your hearts to act in all things with a single eye to the favour of God, and thus the most ordinary actions of life are raised into offices of religion. This is the purifying, the transmuting principle, which realizes the fabled touch which changes all to gold. But it belongs to this desire of pleasing God, that we should be continually solicitous to discover the path of duty; that we should not indolently wait, satisfied with not refusing occasions of glorifying God, when they are forced upon us; but that we should pray to God for wisdom and spiritual understanding, that we may be acute in discerning opportunities of serving him in the world, judicious in selecting, and wise in improving them. Guard, indeed, against the distraction of worldly cares; and cultivate heavenly-mindedness, and a spirit of continual prayer, and neglect not to watch incessantly over the workings of your deceitful heart; but be active also, and useful. Let not your precious time be wasted "in shapeless idleness;" an admonition which, in our days, is rendered but too necessary by the relaxed habits of persons even of real piety; but wisely husband and improve this fleeting treasure. Never be satisfied with your present attainments; but, "forgetting the things which are behind," labour still to "press forward" with undiminished energy, and to run the race that is set before you without flagging in your course.

Above all, measure your progress by ^{Love en-} your improvement in love to God and ^{forced.} man. "God is love." This is the sacred prin-

ciple, which warms and enlightens the heavenly world, that blessed seat of God's visible presence. There it shines with unclouded radiance. Some scattered beams of it are graciously lent to us on earth, or we had been benighted and lost in darkness and misery; but a larger portion of it is infused into the hearts of the servants of God, who thus "are renewed in the divine likeness," and even here exhibit some faint traces of the image of their heavenly Father. It is the principle of love which disposes them to yield themselves up without reserve to the service of Him, "who has bought them with the price of his own blood."

Base nature
of the religion
of the bulk
of nominal
Christians.

Servile, and base, and mercenary, is the notion of Christian practice among the bulk of nominal Christians. They give no more than they *dare* not withhold; they abstain from nothing but what they *must* not practise. When you state to them the doubtful quality of any action, and the consequent obligation to desist from it, they reply to you in the very spirit of Shylock, "they cannot find it in the bond." In short, they know Christianity only as a system of restraints. She is despoiled of every liberal and generous principle: she is rendered almost unfit for the social intercourses of life, and is only suited to the gloomy walls of that cloister in which they would confine her. But *true Christians* consider themselves not as satisfying some rigorous creditor, but as discharging a debt of gratitude. Theirs, accordingly, is not the stinted return of a constrained obedience, but the large and liberal measure of a voluntary service. This principle, therefore, prevents a thousand *practical* embarrassments, by

which they are continually harassed, who act from a less generous motive; and who require it to be clearly ascertained to them, that any gratification or worldly compliance, which may be in question, is beyond the allowed boundary-line of Christian practice.* *This* principle regulates the true Christian's choice of companions and friends, where he is at liberty to make an option; *this* fills him with the desire of promoting the temporal welfare of all around him, and still more, with pity and love, and anxious solicitude for their spiritual happiness. Indifference, indeed, in this respect, is one of the surest signs of a low or declining state in religion. *This* animating principle it is which, in the true Christian's happier hour, inspirits his devotions, and causes him to delight in the worship of God; which fills him with consolation, and peace, and gladness, and sometimes even enables him "to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

But this world is not his resting-place: here, to the very last, he must be a pilgrim and a stranger; a soldier, whose warfare ends only with life, ever struggling and combating with the powers of dark-

* "Neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord my God," says David, "of that which doth cost me nothing," 2 Sam. xxiv. 24.

"They" (the apostles) "departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus," Acts v. 41. See also 1 Thess. i. 6. Heb. x. 34. James i. 2. 1 Peter iv. 13, 14.

Such are the marks exhibited in scripture of a true love to God: and though our regard for our common Lord is not put to the same severe test, as that of the apostles and first Christians was; yet, if the same principle existed in us also, it would surely dispose us to act in the *spirit* of that conduct; and prompt us rather to be willing to exceed in self-denials and labours for Christ's sake, than to be so forward as we are to complain, whenever we are called upon to perform or to abstain from any thing, though in an instance ever so little contrary to our inclinations,

ness, and with the temptations of the world around him, and the still more dangerous hostilities of internal depravity. The perpetual vicissitudes of this uncertain state, the peculiar trials and difficulties with which the life of a Christian is chequered; and still more, the painful and humiliating remembrance of his own infirmities, teach him to look forward, almost with outstretched neck, to that promised day, when he shall be completely delivered from the bondage of corruption, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. In the anticipation of that blessed period, and comparing this churlish and turbulent world, where competition, and envy, and anger, and revenge, so vex and agitate the sons of men, with that blissful region where love shall reign without disturbance, and where all being knit together in bonds of indissoluble friendship, shall unite in one harmonious song of praise to the Author of their common happiness, the true Christian triumphs over the fear of death: he longs to realise these cheering images, and to obtain admission into that blessed company. With far more justice than it was originally used, he may adopt the beautiful exclamation—“*O præclarum illum diem, cum ad illud divinum animorum concilium cœtumque proficiscar, atque ex hâc turbâ et colluvione discedam!*”

Falsehood of the objection, that we make religion a gloomy service.

What has been now remarked, concerning the habitual feelings of the real believer, may suggest a reply to an objection common in the mouths of nominal Christians, that we would deny men the innocent amusements and gratifications of life; thus causing our religion to wear a gloomy for-

bidding aspect, instead of her true and natural face of cheerfulness and joy. This is a charge of so serious a nature, that although it lead into a digression, it may not be improper to take some notice of it.

In the first place, religion prohibits no amusement or gratification which is *really* innocent. The question, however, of its innocence, must not be tried by the loose maxims of worldly morality, but by the spirit of the injunctions of the word of God; and by the indulgence being conformable or not conformable to the genius of Christianity, and to the tempers and dispositions of mind enjoined on its professors. There can be no dispute concerning the true end of recreations. They are intended to refresh our exhausted bodily or mental powers, and to restore us, with renewed vigour, to the more serious occupations of life. Whatever, therefore, fatigues either body or mind, instead of refreshing them, is not fitted to answer the designed purpose. Whatever consumes more time, or money, or thought, than it is expedient, I might say *necessary*, to allot to mere amusement, can hardly be approved by any one, who considers these talents as precious deposits, for the expenditure of which he will have to give account. Whatever directly or indirectly must be likely to injure the welfare of a fellow-creature, can scarcely be a suitable *recreation* for a Christian, who is "to love his neighbour as himself;" or a very consistent *diversion* for any one, the business of whose life is to diffuse happiness.

But does a Christian never relax? Let us not so wrong and vilify the bounty of Providence, as to allow for a moment that the sources of innocent

amusement are so rare, that men must be driven, almost by constraint, to such as are of a doubtful quality. On the contrary, such has been the Creator's goodness, that almost every one, both of our physical, and intellectual, and moral faculties, (and the same may be said of the whole creation which we see around us,) is not only calculated to answer the proper end of its being, by its subserviency to some purpose of solid usefulness, but to be the instrument of administering pleasure.

Not content
 With every food of life to nourish man,
 Thou mak'st all nature beauty to his eye,
 And music to his ear.—

Our Maker also, in his kindness, has so constructed us, that even mere vicissitude is grateful and refreshing; a consideration which should prompt us often to seek, from a prudent *variation of useful pursuits*, that recreation, for which we are apt to resort to what is altogether *unproductive and unfruitful*.

Yet rich and multiplied are the springs of innocent relaxation. The Christian relaxes in the temperate use of all the gifts of Providence. Imagination, and taste, and genius, and the beauties of creation, and the works of art, lie open to him. He relaxes in the feast of reason, in the intercourses of society, in the sweets of friendship, in the endearments of love, in the exercise of hope, of confidence, of joy, of gratitude, of universal good-will, of all the benevolent and generous affections; which, by the gracious appointment of our Creator, while they disinterestedly intend only happiness to others, are most surely productive to

ourselves of complacency and peace. Oh! little do they know of the true measure of enjoyment, who can compare these delightful complacencies with the frivolous pleasures of dissipation, or the coarse gratifications of sensuality. It is no wonder, however, that the nominal Christian should reluctantly give up, one by one, the pleasures of the world; and look back upon them, when relinquished, with eyes of wistfulness and regret: because he knows not the sweetness of the delights with which true Christianity repays those trifling sacrifices, and is greatly unacquainted with the *nature* of that pleasantness which is to be found in the ways of religion.

It is indeed true, that when any one, who has long been going on in the gross and unrestrained practice of vice, is checked in his career, and enters at first on a religious course, he has much to undergo. Fear, guilt, remorse, shame, and various other passions, struggle and conflict within him. His appetites are clamorous for their accustomed gratification, and inveterate habits are scarcely to be denied. He is weighed down by a load of guilt, and almost overwhelmed by the sense of his unworthiness. But all this ought in fairness to be charged to the account of his past sins, and not to that of his present repentance. It rarely happens, however, that this state of suffering continues very long. When the mental gloom is the blackest, a ray of heavenly light occasionally breaks in, and suggests the hope of better days. Even in this life it commonly holds true, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy."

Neither, when we maintain, that the ways of religion are ways of pleasantness, do we mean to

deny that the Christian's internal state is, through the whole of his life, a state of discipline and warfare. Several of the causes which contribute to render it such have been already pointed out, together with the workings of his mind in relation to them : but if he has solitudes and griefs peculiar to himself, he has "joys also with which a stranger intermeddles not."

"Drink deep," however, "or taste not," is a direction full as applicable to religion, if we would find it a source of pleasure, as it is to knowledge. A little religion is, it must be confessed, apt to make men gloomy, as a little knowledge to render them vain : hence the unjust imputation often brought upon religion by those, whose degree of religion is just sufficient, by condemning their course of conduct, to render them uneasy ; enough merely to impair the sweetness of the pleasures of sin, and not enough to compensate for the relinquishment of them by its own peculiar comforts. Thus these men bring up, as it were, an ill report of that land of promise, which, in truth, abounds with whatever, in our journey through life, can best refresh and strengthen us.

We have enumerated some sources of pleasure which men of the world may understand, and must acknowledge to belong to the true Christian ; but there are others, and those of a still higher class, to which they must confess themselves strangers. To say nothing of a qualified, I dare not say an entire, exemption from those distracting passions and corroding cares, by which he must naturally be harassed, whose treasure is within the reach of mortal accidents ; there is the humble quiet-giving hope of being reconciled to God, and of enjoying

his favour; with that solid peace of mind, which the world can neither give nor take away, which results from a firm confidence in the infinite wisdom and goodness of God, and in the unceasing care and kindness of a gracious Saviour: and there is the persuasion of the truth of the divine assurance, that all things shall work together for good.

When the pulse indeed beats high, and we are flushed with youth, and health, and vigour; when all goes on prosperously, and success seems almost to anticipate our wishes; then we feel not the want of the consolations of religion: but when fortune frowns, or friends forsake us; when sorrow, or sickness, or old age, comes upon us, then it is that the superiority of the pleasures of religion is established over those of dissipation and vanity, which are ever apt to fly from us when we are most in want of their aid. There is scarcely a more melancholy sight to a considerate mind, than that of an old man, who is a stranger to those only true sources of satisfaction. How affecting, and at the same time how disgusting, is it to see such a one awkwardly catching at the pleasures of his younger years, which are now beyond his reach; or feebly attempting to retain them, while they mock his endeavours and elude his grasp! To such a one, *gloomily* indeed does the evening of life set in! All is sour and cheerless. He can neither look backward with complacency, nor forward with hope: while the aged Christian, relying on the assured mercy of his Redeemer, can calmly reflect that his dismissal is at hand; that his redemption draweth nigh: while his strength declines, and his faculties decay, he can quietly repose himself on the fidelity of God: and at the

very entrance of the valley of the shadow of death, he can lift up an eye, dim, perhaps, and feeble, yet occasionally sparkling with hope, and confidently looking forward to the near possession of his heavenly inheritance, "to those joys which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive."

Never were there times which inculcated more forcibly, than those in which we live, the wisdom of seeking a happiness beyond the reach of human vicissitudes. What striking lessons have *we* had of the precarious tenure of all sublunary possessions! Wealth, and power, and prosperity, how peculiarly transitory and uncertain! But religion dispenses her choicest cordials in the seasons of exigence, in poverty, in exile, in sickness, and in death. The essential superiority of that support which is derived from religion is less felt, at least it is less apparent, when the Christian is in full possession of riches, and splendour, and rank, and all the gifts of nature and fortune. But when all these are swept away by the rude hand of time, or the rough blasts of adversity, the true Christian stands, like the glory of the forest, erect and vigorous; stripped, indeed, of his summer foliage, but more than ever discovering to the observing eye the solid strength of his substantial texture:

Pondere fixa suo est, nudosque per aëra ramos
Attollens, trunco non frondibus efficit umbram.

SECTION II.

Advice to some who profess their full Assent to the fundamental
Doctrines of the Gospel.

IN a former chapter, we largely insisted on what may be termed the fundamental practical error of

the bulk of professed Christians in our days; their either overlooking or misconceiving the peculiar method, which the gospel has provided for the renovation of our corrupted nature, and for the attainment of every Christian grace.

But there are mistakes on the right hand and on the left; and our general proneness, when we are flying from one extreme to run into an opposite error, renders it necessary to superadd another admonition. The generally prevailing error of the present day, indeed, is that fundamental one which was formerly pointed out. But while we attend, in the first place, to this; and, on the warrant both of scripture and experience, prescribe hearty repentance and lively faith, as the only foundation of all true holiness; we must, at the same time, guard against a practical mistake of another kind. They who, with penitent hearts, have humbled themselves before the cross of Christ; and who, pleading his merits as their only ground of pardon and acceptance with God, have resolved henceforth, through the help of his Spirit, to bring forth the fruits of righteousness, are sometimes apt to conduct themselves as if they considered their work as now done; or, at least, as if this were the whole they had to do, as often as, by falling afresh into sin, another act of repentance and faith may seem to have become necessary. There are not a few in our relaxed age, who thus satisfy themselves with what may be termed *general* Christianity; who feel *general* penitence and humiliation from a sense of their sinfulness *in general*, and *general* desires of universal holiness; but who neglect that vigilant and jealous care, with which they should labour to extirpate every *particular* corruption, by

studying its nature, its root, its ramifications, and thus becoming acquainted with its secret movements, with the means whereby it gains strength, and with the most effectual methods of resisting it. In like manner, they are far from striving with persevering alacrity for the acquisition and improvement of every Christian grace. Nor is it unusual for ministers, who preach the truths of the gospel with fidelity, ability, and success, to be themselves also liable to the charge of dwelling altogether in their instructions on this *general* religion: instead of tracing and laying open all the secret motions of inward corruption, and instructing their hearers how best to conduct themselves in every distinct part of the Christian warfare; how best to strive against each particular vice, and to cultivate each grace of the Christian character. Hence it is, that in too many persons, concerning the sincerity of whose general professions of religion we should be sorry to entertain a doubt, we yet see little progress made in the regulation of their tempers, in the improvement of their time, in the reform of their plan of life, or in ability to resist the temptation to which they are particularly exposed. They will confess themselves, in general terms, to be "miserable sinners:" this is a tenet of their creed, and they feel even proud in avowing it. They will occasionally also lament particular failings: but this confession is sometimes obviously made, in order to draw forth a compliment for the very opposite virtue: and where this is not the case, it is often not difficult to detect, under this false guise of contrition, a secret self-complacency, arising from the manifestations which they have afforded of their acute-

ness or candour in discovering the infirmity in question, or of their frankness or humility in acknowledging it. This will scarcely seem an illiberal suspicion to any one, who either watches the workings of his own heart, or who observes, that the faults confessed in these instances are very seldom those with which the person is most clearly and strongly chargeable.

We must plainly warn these men, and the consideration is seriously pressed on their instructors also, that they are in danger of deceiving themselves. Let them beware lest they be nominal Christians of another sort. These persons require to be reminded, that there is no *short compendious method of holiness*; but that it must be the business of their whole lives to grow in grace, and continually adding one virtue to another, as far as may be, “to go on towards perfection.”—“He only that doeth righteousness is righteous.”—Unless “they bring forth the fruits of the Spirit,” they can have no sufficient evidence that they have received that “Spirit of Christ, without which they are none of his.” But where, on the whole, our unwillingness to pass an unfavourable judgment may lead us to indulge a hope that “the root of the matter is found in them;” yet we must at least declare to them, that instead of adorning the doctrine of Christ, they disparage and discredit it. The world sees not their secret humiliation, nor the exercises of their closets, but it is acute in discerning practical weaknesses: and if it observe that they have the same eagerness in the pursuit of wealth or ambition, the same vain taste for ostentation and display, the same ungoverned tempers, which are found in the generality of mankind; it

will treat with contempt their pretences to superior sanctity and indifference to worldly things, and will be hardened in its prejudices against the only mode which God has provided for our escaping the wrath to come, and obtaining eternal happiness.

Let him, then, who would be indeed a Christian, watch over his ways and over his heart with unceasing circumspection. Let him endeavour to learn, both from men and books, particularly from the lives of eminent Christians,* what methods have been actually found most effectual for the conquest of every particular vice, and for improvement in every branch of holiness. Thus studying his own character, and observing the most secret workings of his own mind, and of our common nature; the knowledge which he will acquire of the human heart in general, and especially of his own, will be of the highest utility, in enabling him to avoid or to guard against the occasions of evil: and it will also tend, above all things, to the growth of humility, and to the maintenance of that sobriety of spirit and tenderness of conscience, which are eminently characteristic of the true Christian. It is by this unceasing diligence, as

* It may not be amiss to mention a few useful publications of this sort:—Walton's Lives, particularly the last edition by Mr. Zouch; Gilpin's Lives; the Lives of Bishop Bedell and Bishop Bull; of Archbishop Usher; Fell's Life of Hammond; Archdeacon Hamilton's Life of Mr. Bonnel, Accomptant-General of Ireland, recommended by the Archbishop of Dublin, the Bishops of Meath, Derry, Limerick, Clogher, and Downe; some Extracts from Burnet, of the Life of the incomparable Leighton, prefixed to a volume of the latter's Sermons; Passages of the Life of Lord Rochester, by Burnet; the Life of Sir Matthew Hale, of the excellent Doddridge, by Orton; of Henry, father and son; of Mather; of Halyburton; Hamson's and Whitehead's Life of Wesley; Life of Baxter, by himself, &c. &c. &c.

the apostle declares, that the servants of Christ must make their calling sure. Their labour will not be thrown away; for "an entrance shall" at length "be ministered unto them abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

SECTION III.

Brief Observations addressed to Sceptics and Unitarians.

THERE is another class of men, an increasing class, it is to be feared, in this country, that of absolute unbelievers, with which this little work has properly no concern: but may the writer, sincerely pitying their melancholy state, be permitted to ask them one plain question: If Christianity be not in their estimation true, yet is there not at least a presumption in its favour, sufficient to entitle it to a serious examination; from its having been embraced, and that not blindly and implicitly, but upon full inquiry and deep consideration, by Bacon, and Milton, and Locke, and Newton, and much the greater part of those, who, by the reach of their understandings, or the extent of their knowledge, and by the freedom of their minds, and their daring to combat existing prejudices, have called forth the respect and admiration of mankind? It might be deemed scarcely fair to insist on churchmen, though some of them are among the greatest names this country has ever known. Can the sceptic in general say with truth, that he has either prosecuted an examination into the evidences of revelation at all, or at least with a seriousness and diligence in any degree proportioned to the importance of the subject? The

fact is, and it is a fact which redounds to the honour of Christianity, that infidelity is not the result of sober inquiry and deliberate preference. It is rather the slow production of a careless and irreligious life, operating together with prejudices and erroneous conceptions concerning the nature of the leading doctrines and fundamental tenets of Christianity.

Progress of infidelity.

Take the case of young men of condition, bred up by what we have termed nominal Christians. When children, they are carried to church, and thence they become acquainted with such parts of scripture as are contained in our public service. If their parents preserve still more of the customs of better times, they are taught their catechism, and furnished with a little farther religious knowledge. After a while, they go from under the eyes of their parents; they enter into the world, and move forward in the path of life, whatever it may be, which has been assigned to them. They yield to the temptations which assail them, and become, more or less, dissipated and licentious. At least, they neglect to look into their bible; they do not enlarge the sphere of their religious acquisitions; they do not even endeavour, by reflection and study, to turn into what may deserve the name of knowledge and rational conviction, the opinions which, in their childhood, they had taken on trust.

They travel, perhaps, into foreign countries; a proceeding which naturally tends to weaken their nursery prejudice in favour of the religion in which they were bred, and, by removing them from all means of public worship, to relax their practical habits of religion. They return home, and com-

monly are either hurried round in the vortex of dissipation, or engage with the ardour of youthful minds in some public or professional pursuit. If they read or hear any thing about Christianity, it is commonly only about those tenets which are subjects of controversy: and what reaches their ears of the bible, from their occasional attendance at church; though it may sometimes impress them with an idea of the purity of Christian morality, contains much which, coming thus detached, perplexes and offends them, and suggests various doubts and startling objections, which a farther acquaintance with the scripture would remove. Thus growing more and more to know Christianity only by the difficulties it contains; sometimes tempted by the ambition of shewing themselves superior to vulgar prejudice, and always prompted by the natural pride of the human heart to cast off their subjection to dogmas imposed on them; disgusted, perhaps, by the immoral lives of some professed Christians, by the weaknesses and absurdities of others, and by what they observe to be the implicit belief of numbers, whom they see and know to be equally ignorant with themselves, many doubts and suspicions, of greater or less extent, spring up within them. These doubts enter into the mind at first almost imperceptibly; they exist only as vague indistinct surmises, and by no means take the precise shape or the substance of a formed opinion. At first, probably, they even offend and startle by their intrusion; but, by degrees, the unpleasant sensations which they once excited wear off; the mind grows more familiar with them. A confused sense (for such it is, rather than a formed idea) of its being desirable that their doubts

should prove well founded, and of the comfort and enlargement which would be afforded by that proof, lends them much secret aid. The impression becomes deeper ; not in consequence of being reinforced by fresh arguments, but merely by dint of having longer rested in the mind ; and as they increase in force, they creep on and extend themselves. At length they diffuse themselves over the whole of religion, and possess the mind in undisturbed occupancy.

It is by no means meant that this is universally the process. But, speaking generally, this might be termed, perhaps not unjustly, the *natural history* of scepticism. It approves itself to the experience of those who have with any care watched the progress of infidelity in persons around them ; and it is confirmed by the written lives of some of the most eminent unbelievers. It is curious to read their own accounts of themselves, the rather as they accord so exactly with the result of our own observation. We find that they once perhaps gave a sort of implicit hereditary assent to the truth of Christianity, and were what, by a mischievous perversion of language, the world denominates *believers*. How were they then awakened from their sleep of ignorance ? At what moment did the light of truth beam in upon them, and dissipate the darkness in which they had been involved ? The period of their infidelity is marked by no such determinate boundary. Reason, and thought, and inquiry, had little or nothing to do with it. Having for many years lived careless and irreligious lives, and associated with companions equally careless and irreligious ; not by force of study and reflection, but rather by the lapse of time, they at length attained to

their infidel maturity. It is worthy of remark, that where any are reclaimed from infidelity, it is generally by a process much more rational than that which has been here described. Something awakens them to reflection. They examine, they consider, and at length yield their assent to Christianity on what they deem sufficient grounds.

From the account here given, it appears plainly that infidelity is generally the offspring of prejudice, and that its success is chiefly to be ascribed to the depravity of the moral character. This fact is confirmed by the undeniable truth, that in *societies* which consist of individuals, infidelity is the natural fruit, not so much of a studious and disputatious, as of a dissipated and vicious age. It diffuses itself in proportion as the general morals decline; and it is embraced with less apprehension, when every infidel is kept in spirits by seeing many around him who are sharing fortunes with himself.

To any fair mind, this consideration alone might be offered, as suggesting a strong argument against infidelity, and in favour of revelation. And the friends of Christianity might justly retort the charge, which their opponents often urge with no little affectation of superior wisdom; that we implicitly surrender ourselves to the influence of prejudice, instead of examining dispassionately the ground of our faith, and yielding our assent only according to the degree of evidence.

In our own days, when it is but too clear that infidelity increases, it is not in consequence of the reasonings of the infidel writers having been much studied, but from the progress of luxury, and the decay of morals: and, so far as this increase may be traced at all to the works of sceptical writers;

it has been produced, not by argument and discussion, but by sarcasms and points of wit, which have operated on weak minds, or on nominal Christians, by bringing gradually into contempt, opinions which, in their case, had only rested on the basis of blind respect and the prejudices of education. It may therefore be laid down as an axiom, that *infidelity is in general a disease of the heart more than of the understanding*. If revelation were assailed only by reason and argument, it would have little to fear. The literary opposers of Christianity, from Herbert to Hume, have been seldom read. They made some stir in their day: during their span of existence, they were noisy and noxious; but, like the locusts of the east, which for a while obscure the air, and destroy the verdure, they were soon swept away and forgotten. Their very names would be scarcely found, if Leland had not preserved them from oblivion.

Unitarians. The account which has been given, of the secret, but grand, source of infidelity, may perhaps justly be extended, as being not seldom true in the case of those who deny the fundamental doctrines of the gospel.

In the course which we lately traced from nominal orthodoxy to absolute infidelity, Unitarianism* is, indeed a sort of half-way house, if the expression may be pardoned; a stage on the journey, where sometimes a person indeed finally stops, but,

* The author is aware, that he may perhaps be censured for conceding this term to the class of persons now in question, since orthodox Christians equally contend for the unity of the Divine Nature: and, it perhaps may hardly be a sufficient excuse, that, it not being his object particularly to refute the errors of Unitarianism, he uses the term in its popular sense rather than give needless offence. He thus guards however, against any false construction being drawn from his use of it

where, not unfrequently, he only pases for a while, and then pursues his progress.

The Unitarian teachers by no means profess to absolve their followers from the unbending strictness of Christian morality. They prescribe the predominant love of God, and an habitual spirit of devotion: but it is an unquestionable fact, a fact which they themselves almost admit, that this class of religionists is not in general distinguished for superior purity of life; and still less for that frame of mind, which, by the injunction "to be spiritually, not carnally, minded," the word of God prescribes to us, as one of the surest tests of our experiencing the vital power of Christianity. On the contrary, in point of fact, Unitarianism seems to be resorted to, not merely by those who are disgusted with the peculiar doctrines of Christianity, but by those also who are seeking a refuge from the strictness of her practical precepts; and who, more particularly, would escape from the obligation which she imposes on her adherents, rather to incur the dreaded charge of singularity, than fall in with the declining manners of a dissipated age.

Unitarianism, where it may be supposed to proceed from the understanding rather than from the heart, is not unfrequently produced by a confused idea of the difficulties, or, as they are termed, the impossibilities, which orthodox Christianity is supposed to involve. It is not our intention to enter into the controversy:* but it may not be improper

* The author of this treatise has, since its completion, perused a work entitled, "Calvinism and Socinianism compared, by A. Fuller," &c.; and, without reference to the peculiarities of Calvinism, he is happy to embrace this opportunity of confessing the high obligation

to make one remark as a guard to persons in whose way the arguments of the Unitarians may be likely to fall; namely, that one great advantage possessed by deists, and perhaps in a still greater degree by Unitarians, in their warfare with the Christian system, results from the very circumstances of their being the assailants. They urge what they state to be powerful arguments against the truth of the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and then call upon men to abandon them as posts no longer tenable. But they, who are disposed to yield to this assault, should call to mind, that it has pleased God so to establish the constitution of all things, that perplexing difficulties and plausible objections may be adduced against the most established truths; such, for instance, as the being of a God, and many others both physical and moral. In all cases, therefore, it becomes us, not on a partial view to reject any proposition, because it is attended with difficulties; but to compare the difficulties which it involves, with those which attend the alternative proposition which must be embraced on its rejection. We should put to the proof the alternative proposition in its turn, and see whether it be not still less tenable than that which we are summoned to abandon. In short, we should examine circumspectly on all sides; and abide by that opinion which, on carefully balancing all considerations, appears fairly entitled

which, in common with all the friends of true religion, he owes to the author of that highly valuable publication for his masterly defence of the doctrines of Christianity, and his acute refutation of the opposite errors.

to our preference. Experience, however, will have convinced the attentive observer of those around him, that it has been for want of adverting to this just and obvious principle, that the Unitarians in particular have gained most of their proselytes from the church, so far as argument has contributed to their success. If the Unitarians, or even the deists, were considered in their turn as masters of the field; and were in their turn attacked, both by arguments tending to disprove their system directly, and to disprove it indirectly, by shewing the high probability of the truth of Christianity, and of its leading and peculiar doctrines, it is most likely that they would soon appear wholly unable to keep their ground. In short, reasoning fairly, there is no medium between absolute *Pyrrhonism* and true Christianity: and if we reject the latter on account of its difficulties, we shall be still more loudly called upon to reject every other system which has been offered to the acceptance of mankind. This consideration might, perhaps, with advantage be more attended to than it has been, by those who take upon them to vindicate the truth of our holy religion; as many, who, from inconsideration or any other cause, are disposed to give up the great fundamentals of Christianity, would be startled by the idea, that on the same principle on which they did this, they must give up the hope of finding any rest for the sole of their foot on any ground of religion, and not stop short of unqualified atheism.

Besides the class of those who professedly reject revelation, there is another, and that also, it is to be feared, an increasing one, which may be called the class of half-unbelievers.

lievers, who are to be found in various degrees of approximation to a state of absolute infidelity. The system, if it deserve the name, of these men, is grossly irrational. Hearing many who assert and many who deny the truth of Christianity, and not reflecting seriously enough to consider that it must be either true or false, they take up a strange sort of middle opinion of its qualified truth. They conceive that there must be something in it, though by no means to the extent to which it is pushed by orthodox Christians. They grant the reality of future punishment, and even that they themselves cannot altogether expect to escape it; yet, "they trust it will not go so hard with them as the churchmen state:" and though disbelieving almost every material doctrine which Christianity contains; yet, even in their own minds, they by no means conceive themselves to be enlisted under the banners of infidelity, or to have much cause for any great apprehension lest Christianity should prove true.

But let these men be reminded, that there is no middle way. If they can be prevailed on to look into their bible, and do not make up their minds absolutely to reject its authority; they must admit that there is no ground whatever for this vain hope, which they suffer themselves to indulge, of escaping but with a slight measure of punishment. Nor let them think their guilt inconsiderable. Is it not grossly criminal to trifle with the long-suffering of God, to despise alike his invitations and his threatenings, and the offer of his Spirit of grace, and the precious blood of the Redeemer? Far different is the scripture estimate; "how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" "It

shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment," than for them, who voluntarily shut their eyes against that full light, which the bounty of Heaven has poured out upon them. These half-unbelievers are even more reprehensible than downright sceptics, for remaining in this state of careless uncertainty, without endeavouring to ascertain the truth or falsehood of revelation. The probability which they admit, that it may be true, imposes on them an additional and an undeniable obligation to inquiry. But both to them and to decided sceptics it must be plainly declared, that they are in these days less excusable than ever, for not looking into the grounds and proofs on which is rested the truth of Christianity; for never before were these proofs so *plainly, and at so easy a rate*, offered to the consideration of mankind. Through the bounty of Providence, the more widely spreading poison of infidelity has in our days been met with more numerous and more powerful antidotes. One of these has been already pointed out: and it should be matter of farther gratitude to every real Christian, that in the very place on which modern infidelity had displayed the standard of victory, a warrior in the service of religion, a man of the most acute discernment and profound research, has been raised up by Providence to quell their triumph.* He was soon taken from us; but, happily for him and for ourselves, not till he had

* It is almost superfluous to state, that sir William Jones is here meant, who, from the testimony borne to his extraordinary talents by sir John Shore, in his first address to the Asiatic Society of Calcutta, appears to have been a man of most extraordinary genius and astonishing erudition.

announced, that, like the Magi of old, he had seen the star of Christ in the east, and had fallen down and worshipped him. Another should be mentioned with honour, who is pursuing the track which that great man had pointed out.* Henceforth let all objectors against Christianity on the ground of its being disproved by the Oriental records, be put to silence. The strength of their cause consisted in their ignorance, and in our own, of Oriental learning. They availed themselves for a while of our being in a state of darkness; but the light of day has at length broken in, and exposed to deserved contempt their superficial speculations.

The infatuation of these unbelievers upon trust would be less striking, if they were able altogether to decline Christianity; and were at liberty to relinquish their pretensions to its rewards, on condition of being exempted from its punishments. But this is not the case; they must stand the risk of the encounter, and their eternal happiness or misery is suspended upon the issue.† What must be the emotions of these men, on first opening their eyes in the world of spirits, and being convinced, too late, of the awful reality of their impending ruin? May the mercy and the power of God awaken them from their desperate slumber, while life is yet spared, and there is yet space for repentance!

* Mr. Maurice.

† This argument is pressed with uncommon force in Pascal's "Thoughts on Religion," a work highly valuable, though not in every part to be approved; abounding in particular with those deep views of religion which the name of its author prepares us to expect.

SECTION IV.

Advice suggested by the state of the times to true Christians.

To those, who really deserve the appellation of true Christians, much has been said incidentally in the course of the present work. It has been maintained, and the proposition will not be disputed by any sound or experienced politician, that they are always most important members of the community. But we may boldly assert, that there never was a period wherein, more justly than in the present, this could be affirmed of them; whether the situation, in all its circumstances, of our own country be attentively considered, or the general state of society in Europe. Let them, on their part, seriously weigh the important station which they fill, and the various duties which it now peculiarly enforces on them. If we consult the most intelligent accounts of foreign countries, which have been recently published, and compare them with the reports of former travellers; we must be convinced, that religion and the standard of morals are every where declining, abroad even more rapidly than in our own country. But still, the progress of irreligion, and the decay of morals at home, are such as to alarm every considerate mind, and to forebode the worst consequences, unless some remedy can be applied to the growing evil. We can depend only upon true *Christians* for effecting, in any degree, this important service. Their system is that of our national church: and in proportion, therefore, as their system prevails, or as it increases in respect and estimation, from

the manifest good conduct of its followers ; in that very proportion the church is strengthened in the foundations, on which alone it can be much longer supported, the esteem and attachment of its members, and of the nation at large. Zeal is required in the cause of religion ; they only can feel it. The charge of singularity must be incurred ; they only will dare to encounter it. Uniformity of conduct, and perseverance in exertion, will be requisite ; among no others can we look for those qualities.

Let true Christians then, with becoming earnestness, strive in all things to recommend their profession, and to put to silence the vain scoffs of ignorant objectors. Let them boldly assert the cause of Christ in an age when so many who bear the name of Christians are ashamed of him : and let them consider as devolved on them the important duty of suspending for a while the fall of their country, and, perhaps, of performing a still more extensive service to society at large ; not by busy interference in politics, in which it cannot but be confessed there is much uncertainty ; but rather by that sure and radical benefit of restoring the influence of religion, and of raising the standard of morality.

Let them be active, useful, generous towards others ; manifestly moderate and self-denying in themselves. Let them be ashamed of idleness, as they would be of the most acknowledged sin. When Providence blesses them with affluence, let them withdraw from the competition of vanity ; and, without sordidness or absurdity, shew by their modest demeanour, and by their retiring from display, that, without affecting singularity, they are not slaves to fashion ; that they consider it as their

duty to set an example of moderation and sobriety, and to reserve for nobler and more disinterested purposes, that money, which others selfishly waste, in parade, and dress, and equipage. Let them evince, in short, a manifest moderation in all temporal things; as becomes those whose affections are set on higher objects than any which this world affords, and who possess, within their own bosoms, a fund of satisfaction and comfort, which the world seeks in vanity and dissipation. Let them cultivate a catholic spirit of universal good-will, and of amicable fellowship towards all those, of whatever sect or denomination, who, differing from them in non-essentials, agree with them in the grand fundamentals of religion. Let them countenance men of real piety, wherever they are found; and encourage in others every attempt to repress the progress of vice, and to revive and diffuse the influence of religion and virtue. Let their earnest prayers be constantly offered, that such endeavours may be successful, and that the abused long-suffering of God may still continue to us the invaluable privilege of vital Christianity.

Let them pray continually for their country in this season of national difficulty. We bear upon us but too plainly the marks of a declining empire. Who can say but that the Governor of the universe, who declares himself to be a God who hears the prayers of his servants, may, in answer to their intercessions, for a while avert our ruin, and continue to us the fulness of those temporal blessings, which, in such abundant measure, we have hitherto enjoyed.* Men of the world indeed, however

* Vide, some exquisitely beautiful lines in the last book of Cowper's *Task*, wherein this sentiment is introduced.

they may admit the natural operation of natural causes, and may therefore confess the effects of religion and morality in promoting the well-being of the community; may yet, according to their humour, with a smile of complacent pity, or a sneer of supercilious contempt, read of the service which real Christians may render to their country, by conciliating the favour and calling down the blessing of Providence. It may appear in their eyes an instance of the same superstitious weakness, as that which prompts the terrified inhabitant of Sicily to bring forth the image of his tutelar saint, in order to stop the destructive ravages of Etna. We are, however, sure, if we believe the scripture, that God will be disposed to favour the nation to which his servants belong; and that, in fact, such as they have often been the unknown and unhonoured instruments of drawing down on their country the blessings of safety and prosperity.

But it would be an instance in myself of that very false shame which I have condemned in others, if I were not boldly to avow my firm persuasion, that *to the decline of religion and morality our national difficulties must both directly and indirectly be chiefly ascribed; and that my only solid hopes for the well-being of my country depend not so much on her fleets and armies, not so much on the wisdom of her rulers, or the spirit of her people, as on the persuasion that she still contains many who, in a degenerate age, love and obey the gospel of Christ; on the humble trust that the intercession of these may still be prevalent, that for the sake of these, heaven may still look upon us with an eye of favour.*

Let the prayers of the Christian reader be also

offered up for the success of this feeble endeavour in the service of true religion. God can give effect to the weakest effort; and the writer will feel himself too much honoured, if, by that which he has now been making, but a single fellow-creature should be awakened from a false security; or a single Christian, who deserves the name, be animated to more extensive usefulness. He may seem to have assumed to himself a task which he was ill qualified to execute. He fears he may be reproached with arrogance and presumption for taking upon him the office of a teacher. Yet, as he formerly suggested, it cannot be denied, that it belongs to his public situation to investigate the state of the national religion and morals; and that it is the part of a real patriot to endeavour to retard their decline, and promote their revival. But, if the office, in which he has been engaged, were less intimately connected with the duties of his particular station, the candid and the liberal mind would not be indisposed to pardon him. Let him be allowed to offer in his excuse a desire not only to discharge a duty to his country, but to acquit himself of what he deems a solemn and indispensable obligation to his acquaintance and his friends. Let him allege the unaffected solicitude which he feels for the welfare of his fellow-creatures. Let him urge the fond wish he gladly would encourage—that, while in so large a part of Europe, a false philosophy having been preferred before the lessons of revelation, infidelity has lifted up her head without shame, and walked abroad boldly and in the face of day; while the practical consequences are such as might be expected, and licentiousness and vice prevail without restraint:

here, at least, there might be a sanctuary, a land of religion and piety, where the blessings of Christianity might be still enjoyed; where the name of the Redeemer might still be honoured; where mankind might be able to see what is, in truth, the religion of Jesus, and what are its blessed effects; and whence, if the mercy of God should so ordain it, the means of religious instruction and consolation might be again extended to surrounding countries and to the world at large.

THE END.

ETC.

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