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TWO SERMONS

ON EZEKIEL xxxiii. 11.

THE FIRST

Containing an earnest Exhortation
to REPENTANCE,

OR

A pressing Invitation to return unto G O D.

THE SECOND

Afferting, and by reasons fairly deduced from plain
Scripture evincing, that G O D has not, by an ar-
bitrary DECREE, predestin'd any one to inevitable
RUIN and ETERNAL DEATH.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED

Two supplemental Enquiries

THE FIRST,

Concerning the Sentiments of the Church of Eng-
land, respecting the Extent of the Christian Re-
demption, or the Efficacy of the Death of CHIRST.

THE SECOND,

Concerning *St. Peter's* Meaning in what he saith in
the 3^d Chapter of his 2^d Epistle, respecting the
Writings of *St. Paul*.

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AND, Translated from the ANCIENT BRITISH
BY THE REV. E. OWEN, Curate of STUDLEY
IN WARWICK-SHIRE.

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P R E F A C E.

TH E instruction and pleasure, which the perusal of the following sermons in the Original afforded me, made me very desirous to see them in an English dress, that they might be diffusive as they are useful. The arguments they contain, in support of that most scriptural and comfortable doctrine of Universal redemption, appear to me unanswerable----. And perhaps the attempt I have made to translate them, will be deemed neither unnecessary, nor unseasonable, by any of those who consider, and lament, how greatly sound and rational
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onal piety is on the decline, and how deplorably the loud and empty roar of wild *Enthusiasm* overpowers, and captivates the affections of multitudes; who, for the most part, mistake overbearing noise for solid sense, and vehement assertions for conclusive arguments. And the imagination being in a high degree of inflammation, is it to be wondered at that they will vent their rage against the most important Gospel-truths, and brand them with the name of CARNAL REASONS, while they swallow with avidity the grossest absurdities, when the delivery of them is attended with frantic zeal? Rom. x. 2.

To be averse from rectifying mistakes, -- to be ashamed to renounce errors, is the alone property of little minds: but to "prove
all

all things," as St. Paul enjoins, and to be ready to say "I have erred," as soon as the error be discovered, is a quality inseparable from true greatness of soul, and a sure evidence of a Philosophic, noble turn of mind. An eminent Writer observes, that "there is but
 "one article in which wise men
 "and fools differ; a wise man re-
 "forms his mistakes, the fool per-
 "severes."

And the celebrated author of the *Rambler* makes honorable mention of Mr. BAXTER, as an example worthy of imitation in this respect. His words are these;
 "Baxter in the narrative of his
 "own life has enumerated several
 "opinions, which, tho' he thought
 "them evident and incontestable
 "at his first entrance into the
 world

“ world, time and experience dis-
 “ posed him to change.” But *religious Frenzy* (as Sir HARRY TRELAW-
 NEY styles the extravagant fervor of
 furious bigots) inculcates principles
 of a quite opposite tendency. It
 demands implicit faith ; and has
 for its Motto, NON AUDIAM ALTE-
 RAM PARTEM, I will not hear the
 other side of the question. The
 indocility and obstinacy of its way-
 ward votaries it applauds as the
 sublimest virtues, and christens
 them “ steadiness and perseve-
 rance ” ! Indeed there is scarcely
 any system or notion so absurd,
 which does not find some strenu-
 ous advocates ; and the greater its
 abstrusity and absurdity are, the
 greater degree of fervor goes to sup-
 port it. The absolute decree is, not
 only an absurd, but a horrid theme
 (HORRIBILE DECRETUM!
 even

able any longer to see with old CALVIN'S eyes, or to derive any comfort from a System so replete with dire reflections upon the divine benevolence. *Moderation*, being inimical to their Creed, makes no part of their procedure; even to mention it is construed *want of zeal*, altho' we are commanded in holy Writ to "let our moderation be known unto all men." I once asked a sensible Predestinarian, What sort of a Being a moderate Calvinist is; Why, replied he, certainly no Calvinist at all!

Respecting the very worthy and learned Author of the following Discourses, I need say but little. His celebrated English Dissertation on the Ancient British Tongue, so highly and deservedly admired by every learned and ingenuous

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Cambro-Briton, sufficiently evinces his skill and judgment in such curious researches.

His Quarto English-Welsh Dictionary, which evidences no small degree of Philology, and exhibits a vast variety of very curious and interesting articles relating to the Antiquities of this Kingdom, cannot fail of transmitting down his name, with applause and honor, to the latest posterity.

In character of a parish Priest, he shines with pure tho' modest lustre, enforcing those holy doctrines, which he teaches with unremitted assiduity and zeal, by a mild and regular display of their influence in a life devoted to religion and virtue; an example highly deserving the admiration and imitation of his Flock! Nor has his merit escaped the notice of

a discerning and judicious Patron, exalted in mind and fortune, by whose Favor he hath been promoted to such preferment as is comfortable, and suitable to his elegant simplicity of life and moderated desires.

E. OWEN.

Studley,

March 26th 1783.





S E R M O N I.

EZEKIEL XXXIII 11.

Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

IN order to arrive at a full and thorough understanding of these words, it will not be found unprofitable to enquire into, and point out, the occasion upon which they were spoken.

In the beginning of this Chapter the Lord shews, that it is the indispensable duty of watchmen (or ministers) in general to warn the people. And then he reminds Ezekiel in particular of his duty towards the house of Israel, unto whom the Lord had set him a watchman, "So thou, Son of man, &c. warn them from me." It was the undoubted duty of the prophet

phet to warn his nation of the danger they were in, whilst they persisted in their rebellion against God by sinning against him; to urge them to a total renunciation of all the sins, in which they delighted; and to invite them to return by unfeigned repentance unto the Lord their God, so that iniquity might not prove their ruin; that their transgressions might neither reduce them to temporal adversity, nor plunge them in everlasting perdition. To furnish the prophet with a motive of the most powerful nature, to continue faithful and indefatigable, in cautioning the ungodly against the destructive consequences of walking in the paths of vice and irreligion, he expressly acquaints him that whosoever perished in his iniquity, un instructed and unforwarned by him; That his blood should be required at the hand of the prophet, for not delivering to him timely admonition. On the other hand, to encourage and support him in the faithful discharge of the
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the duties of his important function, his divine master assures him, that upon his warning the ungodly of the danger of his case, to shun the crooked paths of sin ; if, after this, the sinner hardened his heart still more, refusing to return from his wickedness, and perished in his guilt ; yet that the prophet should fully deliver his own soul, for his having faithfully discharged his duty, altho' his endeavours failed of the desired Success, and proved ineffectual to the conversion of the sinner.

The Lord foreseeing the obstinacy of the Jews, and the objections they would urge against the divine warnings delivered to them by the mouth of the prophet, saith *ver.* 10. " O thou, son of man, speak unto the house of Israel, Thus ye speak, saying, if our transgressions and sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live ? " In Chap. xxiv. *ver.* 23. He had threatened this people, " that they should pine away for their iniquities ;

“ ties ;” and the very recollection of so unwelcome a Message determined them to affirm, that the divine Decree was the cause of their continuing in their sins ; just as if they had said, How is it possible that any promises of life can belong unto us, when God hath fore-ordained us, by an unalterable decree, to pine away in our sins and misery ? These are the words of persons, who, thro’ delusive notions, were deprived of all hope in the divine Mercy, and from thence form a resolution, dreadful to mention, of continuing in their sins.

THE Lord, foreseeing this groundless plea of the Jews, mercifully provides against it, by previously instructing the prophet how to answer it : for, saith he, “ Say unto them, as I “ live saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure “ in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked “ ed turn from his way and live : turn ye, turn ye, &c.”

HAVING

HAVING thus far advanced by way of introduction, I now proceed more immediately to consider the words of my Text. In the first part of my Text we find a most earnest and pathetic dissuasion from sin, and a most importunate and affecting exhortation to repentance and amendment of life; "Turn ye, Turn ye." This repetition of the words is addressed to us with no less important a view, than to convince us that the Lord hath nothing more at heart than to gain our serious attention to his call, and our sincere obedience to his commands. "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways!" Sin and Irreligion have a thousand ways, all terminating in one great Gulph, even endless woe: but to Life and Glory there is but one way. There is abundant room for people to chuse their way to perdition; one makes choice of the path of pride; another prefers that of drunkenness; another fixes upon that of lust, &c. But, he that

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will enter into Life hath, in *one sense*, no room to chuse his way, for to carry us safely thither there is but *one*; and this is the Lord Jesus Christ as himself assures us, (a) " I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." And by walking in the narrow way which leadeth unto life is doubtless intended, that we are to make it our incessant study, to regulate our conduct by the only perfect pattern of rectitude, which the Gospel exhibits to our view; that it is no less our undeniable privilege, than our indispensable duty, to strive to live in imitation of the irreproachable and immaculate life of the adorable Son of God, who hath left us an example, that we should follow his steps; and, " He that saith he abideth in him (that is, that he is in this way) ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." (b) And so important, and perfectly correspondent with the dictates

(a) John xiv. 6. (b) 1 John ii. 6.

of right reason, is the duty here commanded; namely, their turning from their evil ways; that the Lord, in whom it is infinite condescension to deign to look even upon Angels, mercifully humbles himself to confer with them upon the subject, and most affectingly urges them to assign a reason "why would they die?" which clearly implies, they had no true reason to produce, or cause in the world to plead, why they should precipitately conclude themselves irrevocably doomed to destruction. -- "Why will ye die?" As life generally signifies all that hope, confidence, and felicity, which can flow from no other source, but an interest in the divine favor; so does death usually imply all those tremendous judgments, inflicted by the divine wrath upon impenitent nations, and individuals in this world; but more particularly, those unalterable and endless torments, which are the portion of the

(b) 1 John ii. 6.

ungodly

ungodly beyond the grave; and which are impartially distributed to every one, as his own works have deserved, totally irrespective of the demerits of his ancestors and parents, (c). The words *die*, and *death*, are frequently used in the New Testament, to express the punishments of the world to come: instances of which we find *Rom. viii. 13, &c.*: and in *Rev. xx. 14.* they are called, "the second death." And this is also a mode of expression used even by the Jews themselves, as might be easily shewn.

HAVING thus far explained the words, I proceed,

I. To consider the importunate and pathetic exhortation to repentance, and returning unto God, addressed to all impenitent sinners, in these very affecting and pressing words, "Turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways!"

II. I shall endeavor to shew, that men have no valid reason to offer, nor any sufficient

(c) Ezek. xviii.

cause to plead for their conduct, in treating with disdain an invitation so expressive of the divine benevolence; and in refusing to comply with an exhortation so abundantly mild and pressing. And this I shall do in speaking to the latter part of my Text, "Why will ye die?"

I. I am to consider the importunate and pathetic exhortation, &c.

Men, thro' every sin of which they are guilty, estrange themselves from God. Thro' every evil action they commit, every prophane and idle word they speak, and thro' every corrupt and wanton thought they indulge, they recede so many steps from him, who is the alone source of life and felicity; who sustains the breath of life in their nostrils, and incessantly supplies them with all the mercies they enjoy.

O! how wide, therefore, the breach!
How immense the distance! between those
thrice hardened sinners and an incensed Deity,
whose

whose life he hath so long spared, that hoary hairs, and all their attendant train of infirmities, have overtaken them, and yet have lived to no other purpose but to reject his counsel, and infringe his laws! All whose thoughts, words, and deeds, unite in one continued effort to establish impiety and infidelity in the world, and banish true religion out of it!

By his fall in Adam, man hath departed from his God; and, consequently, is by nature not only remote from him, but a stranger to him. But as if this were not enough, he continues his rapid recession from him, by daily repetition of actual sins; by conforming to the ungodly examples, with which the world abounds; and by listening to the suggestions, and complying with the temptations, of his spiritual foe, who is ever vigilant to avail himself of every opportunity that will contribute to entice him to sin, and to have recourse to every stratagem, of which he is master, to involve him in ignorance and
error;

error ; in hopes, at length, to plunge him in endless perdition.

Thus it appears that man, in his natural state, is at an immense distance from God, and, by consequence, an utter stranger to him. Men, while in this state, as St. Paul affirms, "are alienated from the life of God," (a). Yea, that they "are without God in the world;" (b) Our blessed Lord himself tells us in a parable, that the prodigal son took his journey into a far country; thereby alluding to that deplorable strangeness, that inconceivable distance, subsisting between God, the centre of all perfection, and all impenitent, unconverted sinners.

Men, while they remain in this impenitent, miserable condition, being utterly averse from devotion, can have no fellowship with God, but like lost sheep, they naturally wander still farther and farther from him. But O ! stupendous

(a) Eph. vi. 18. (b) Chap. ii. 12.

philanthropy

philanthropy ! unspeakable goodness ! the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth, who needeth neither them nor their services, condescends to commiserate their case ; the blessed Jesus, the glorious shepherd and bishop of souls, deigns to view them in their straying state, with an eye of unparalleled mercy ; proposes to them the most beneficial terms of reconciliation ; lays before them the most endearing expressions of his unquestionable readiness to pardon and accept them ; makes them the most satisfactory overtures of peace and salvation ; affectionately persuading them to turn from their evil ways, and graciously inviting them to come to him for life. Under this head I proceed

1. To point out to those, who wander in the pernicious paths of vice, the way or method they are to pursue in returning unto God, so as to ensure a gracious reception with him.

2. I shall propose several considerations, which,

which, if duly weighed, will excite them to return without delay, agreeably to the exhortation in the text.

I. I am to point out the best manner of proceeding we can have recourse to, in order to ensure success in this momentous work. And while I am doing this, several instances will appear, where serious reflection proved the principal means of sound conversion:

THE Psalmist saith, "I thought on (or considered) my ways, and turned my feet unto "thy testimonies," (a). When he summoned together his roving thoughts, that each faculty might assist in taking a retrospect of his past conduct; to scrutinize the state of his soul, and strictly to examine into all his springs of action, and seriously to consider how erroneous they

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were;

(a) Psal. cxix. 59.

were; behold the blessed result! He instantly betakes himself to a religious course; he confers not long with flesh and blood; for saith he, "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments;" *ver.* 60. --- What, but a mature consideration of the infelicity and danger of his case, aroused the prodigal son to think about returning home? When he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father have bread enough, and to spare, and I perish with hunger! From deep remorse and self reproach, he now exclaims, "I will arise, &c."

DUE reflection upon the ignominy and peril of his condition having brought him to himself, he forms a noble resolution to continue in it not a moment longer. When once a sinner suffers conscience to demand an audience within, O! what pangs his heart will feel at the sight and remembrance of those sins, in which
 he

he hath placed his whole delight! When he permits reflection to have its natural, and abiding, influence on his heart, Satan himself can no longer lull him to confide in the safety of his state; he dares no longer to number him among his wretched retainers; reflection having illuminated the dark recesses of his soul, and given a bias to his will, he sees thro' the delusions of the fiend, and deserts from him.

HAVING thus discovered how slippery and perilous the paths of Irreligion are, he hastens into the way of Holiness. With contrition and hope in his soul, he returns unto the Lord his God, from whom he had unhappily departed.

FOR want of due reflection upon their dangerous state, and a proper feeling of the misery in which sin hath involved them, it comes to pass that many persons, after what might be deemed

deemed a good beginning in the ways of God, yet fall vastly short of a thorough conversion, and fatally turn into some devious path, where they engage in such pursuits as cannot fail to erase entirely all their remaining impressions of piety. Our blessed Lord intimates thus much when he says, "Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Left, haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, this man began to build, and was not able to finish." (a)

SOME very sudden and precipitate conversions, which for a while make a blaze, and as suddenly disappear, are to be compared to the seed that fell upon the stony ground, which, because it had

(a) Luke xiv. 28, &c.

had no depth of soil, presently sprang up, and, having no root, soon withered away. Of such conversions it may be said, as Inspiration saith of Jonah's gourd, they come up in a night and perish in a night. Hence the necessity of a serious consideration of our ways, in order to render our conversion lasting; to cause it to take a deep root downwards, grow up into ripeness, and bear fruit to perfection. Schemes hastily laid seldom produce lasting benefits. What is the reason that so many professors begin in the spirit and end in the flesh? How are we to account for so deplorable a change? Certainly thus; being destitute of a proper sense of the guilt and misery their iniquities brought upon them, they are not sufficiently in earnest in commencing their religious course; they do not solemnly ponder the cause in which they embark, nor maturely consider that it is an undertaking, which requires the utmost patience and perseverance. Wildness and precipitance, in
begin-

beginning so momentous a work, portend great future unsteadiness and wavering.

O! may the omnipotent Author of our being, who commanded the light to shine out of primeval darkness; vouchsafe the light of his grace to accompany the ministry of his holy word, that we may so maturely consider our ways, and become so thoroughly sensible of the misery inseparable from a state of impenitence, as to be excited to pray fervently to him to "lighten our darkness," and assist our endeavors to return unto him in such a manner as he will approve.

MEN, while they suffer themselves to be influenced by divine grace, are always upon their return to God; are ever advancing on their journey heaven-wards; but their progress in a holy life is never found so great, that it will not admit of higher degrees of perfection.

BUT

BUT some there are, who begin their conversion in a very hopeful manner, and run rapidly for a while ; but ere they reach their journey's end ; ere they arrive in glory ; they grow tired by the way. They forsake their sins, and extricate themselves from various snares, but leave the work unfinished, being again encompassed by their former besetting sins, and entirely overcome ; and their latter end proves worse than their beginning. Or, if Satan's wiles prove unequal to the task of enticing them to return to their former sins, he will not fail to set before them new ones, suggesting they are calculated to yield the most exquisite felicity ; he will, out of his vast variety, produce fresh obstacles, and unsuspectedly place them across their way : for such is his diligence, such his craftiness, that he leaves no means untried to find out the most effectual method of hurrying
immortal

immortal souls into the horrid cavern of eternal woe!

O! how indefatigable and earnest, therefore, ought we to be, in our addresses to the throne of Heaven for divine assistance to trace his wiles, and frustrate his intentions! When any one, thro' the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, is enabled to avoid drunkenness, Satan will spare no pains to entangle him in the snare of covetousness; when, by the divine blessing upon his pious endeavors, any one renounces his vain conversation, and escapes the corruption that is in the world thro' lust, Satan will try every possible device to beguile him into hypocrisy, or puff him up with spiritually pride; when a person shuns an error on the left hand, Satan will exercise all his subtil to inveigle him into a more dangerous one on the right.

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It is not unfrequently that he raises broils and contentions amongst men, and blows the fire of discord between brethren, with the sole view to prevent their returning unto God, and to obstruct their progress heaven-wards. What a hopeful state we find *Demas* once in! How gloriously did he begin to renounce his vicious course! But the moment the love of money invaded his soul, O! what a dreadful havock it made of his pious resolutions! Satan no sooner presents the charms of riches to his view, and inspires him with an inordinate thirst for worldly consequence, than he bids adieu to religion; for the melancholy account St. Paul gives of him runs thus, “*Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.*” (a) In a manner similar to this, persons frequently disentangle themselves from one besetting sin, but, thro’ the superior craftiness

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of

(a) 2 Tim. iv. 10.

of Satan, are presently overtaken by another; while others take their rest under the shadow of their duties (as tho' of themselves sufficient to save them,) and are thereby prevented from returning unto God; resting upon their high-flown conceits of their own righteousnesses, they deprive themselves of heaven. O! let us duly consider these things, and not deceive ourselves! No other species of conversion will avail us, than a thorough returning unto God, without forming any undue dependence upon our religious duties, or fondly hoping that our devotional exercises are all-sufficient. If we return, as God requires of us, we must be diligent and conscientious in the discharge of every duty, and careful to avoid an improper reliance upon any; but press forward through them all, in order to obtain, and rely upon, the
 grace

grace of God. " If thou wilt return, O Israel, " saith the Lord, return unto me." (a) Many there are, who no sooner forsake one sin, than they turn to another; and many others renounce their grosser external vices, and then rest all their hope of salvation upon the sandy merit of a few negative virtues; but they are comparatively but few, who sincerely and devoutly return unto the Lord. It is no uncommon thing with some to draw nigh unto God with their mouths, while their hearts are far from him; and of such the prophet thus speaks, " Thou art near in their mouths, and " far from their reins." (b) Nearly of the same complexion are those professors, whom St. Paul characterises thus; " They profess that " they know God, but in works they deny " him,

(a) Jer. iv. 1. (b) Jer. xii. 2.

“ him, being abominable and disobedient, and
“ unto every good work reprobate.” (a) And
respecting professors of the same stamp, Ezekiel
also adds, “ With their mouth they shew much
“ love, but their heart goeth after their covet-
“ ousness.” (b) But they, who return unto
God with their mouths only, shall find it in the
end a very unprofitable conversion ; while they,
whose hearts engage in the work, shall not be
disappointed in their hope of acceptance. And
in order to strike conviction into all those,
whose religion has no deeper foundation than
the mouth, our blessed Lord makes this strik-
ing declaration, “ Not every one that saith unto
“ me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom
“ of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my
“ Father

(a) Tit. i. 16. (b) Chap. xxxiii. 31.

“ Father which is in heaven.” (a) If, in returning unto God, we hope to be accepted of him, let us duly affect our hearts with a sense of the importance of the work, do it heartily, and confide not wholly in the externals of devotion.

Most affecting is the complaint we find upon record respecting *Judah*, namely, that she did not return unto God with her whole heart, altho' she had been an eye-witness of his heavy judgments upon stiff-necked *Israel*; “ and yet for
“ all this her treacherous sister *Judah* hath not
“ turned unto me with her whole heart, but
“ feignedly, saith the Lord.” (b) All sham conversions are abomination unto him, but the heart is no sooner sincerely engaged in returning,

(a) Matt. viii. 21. (b) Jer. iii. 10.

ing, than its pious efforts meet with both the divine assistance and approbation. He, who prays with his whole heart, is honored with an audience from the King of Kings; for the service, which flows from that source, is the only service acceptable to him: "And ye shall seek me" (saith he), and find me, when ye shall search "for me with all your heart." (a) If ever we return, let us scrutinize our motives, and be careful that our penitence spring from the heart; for it cannot but be the greatest mockery and absurdity imaginable to present unto God our lip-service, while we reserve our hearts for the world and sin; "If I (saith the Psalmist), "regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will "not hear me." (b)

BUT

(a) Jer. xxix. 13. (b) Psal. lxvi. 18.

BUT that those, who are desirous of returning unto God, may know what method to pursue in duly performing so momentous a work, let them consider that as, by the commission of sins, they have departed from him, so, by the exercise of the opposite virtues and graces, they are to return to him. Let him, who departed by pride, return thro' humility; let him, who hath erred through inordinate self-love, return thro' self-denial; let him, who went astray in pursuing vanities, return by solemn prayers; and let him, who hath bidden defiance to Heaven by acts of unmercifulness and oppression, with a relenting heart return by shewing mercy to the poor, in feeding the hungry and clothing the naked; in relieving the oppressed, and restoring what he hath taken thro' fraud or rapine from any one. Thus acted *Zacheus* at his conversion;

sion; saith he, "Behold, Lord, the half of my
 goods I give to the poor; and, if I have taken
 any thing from any man by false accusation,
 I restore him fourfold." (a) Altho' the world
 abounds with those, who daily depart from
 God, through covetousness and oppression, like
Zacheus; yet where can we find those, who
 evidence the sincerity of their repentance like
 him? Let the habitual drunkard then evidence
 the soundness of his conversion by constant
 sobriety; let the riotous reveler steadily pursue
 abstinence, chastity and temperance: in a
 word, let him, who hath unhappily forsaken his
 God by evil doing, steer the contrary course in
 doing good; and let him, who, through the
 power of vice, is become an enemy to Holiness,
 return thro' the influence of divine grace, and
 he shall find acceptance with God.

THUS

(a) Luke xix. 8.

THUS much respecting the method we are to pursue in returning to God.

I proceed now to offer some serious considerations, to excite those, who wander in the pernicious paths of vice, to return without delay, agreeably to the exhortation in the text.

AND 1st. Let such consider that the God, who calls them to return to him, is their Creator and Supporter; that he made them at first, and fashioned them in the womb; preserved them in the great danger of child-birth; upheld them by the multitude of his mercies, from that critical juncture to this hour; and daily sustains in their nostrils the breath of life, altho' they so ungratefully and inconsiderately depart from him, by multiplying their sins. This is he who addresses them in my text, in the very emphatic words, "Turn ye, turn ye!" And shall we
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then continue a moment longer, so inattentive, so blind to our real interest, and so utterly unreasonable as to refuse to return, in compliance with an invitation so wonderfully benign? God forbid! "Turn ye, turn ye!" saith the King eternal and immortal: "Turn ye, turn ye!" saith the great Sovereign of the Universe unto his rebellious subjects; and shall we remain so foolish and inconsiderate, as to refuse to obey the heavenly calling? God forbid! Though, like the Prodigal Son, we are all gone into a far country, yet, out of his unspeakable tenderness and mercy, our Heavenly Father most affectionately invites us to return. O! therefore let us deem it the greatest madness to spurn at his calling; the most consummate folly, to contemn so gracious an invitation! Let us consider the words of Inspiration, primarily addressed by *Moses* to the obstinate and rebellious

rebellious *Israelites*; apply them to ourselves, lament the hardness of our own hearts, and return; “ Do ye thus requite the Lord, O “ foolish people and unwise? Is not he thy “ Father that hath bought thee? Hath he not “ made thee, and established thee?” (a)

BLIND *Bartimeus*, who cried after our blessed Lord as he passed by, when he heard the words, “ Be of good comfort, rise; he calleth “ thee.” O! with what alacrity and joy he cast away his garment, and came to Jesus! (b) But, O! how distressing to observe the shameful indifferency and listlessness, which the greater part of the hearers in our days, evidence at hearing this most comfortable and loving invitation, addressed to them by his ministers, “ Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways!”

2. LET

(a) Deut. xxxii. 6. (b) Mark x. 46.

2. LET us consider God's readiness to receive the vilest sinner, that truly turns to him. Altho' some ungodly men (as the Apostle affirms), turn the grace of God into lasciviousness; altho' some are so deplorably inconsiderate and foolhardy, as to make their knowledge of God's readiness to pardon the truly penitent serve to encourage them to persist in sinning; altho', I say, some are so astonishingly infatuated, as to proceed courageously in an evil course, because God is merciful; yet this is by no means the effect which this consideration ought to have upon any one; neither has it this dangerous influence upon any considerate rational persons. *St. Paul*, in reasoning with the inconsiderate impenitent sinner, sharply rebukes his folly, by this cutting interrogation; "Despiseest thou the riches of his
 "goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffer-
 "ing, not knowing that the goodness of God
 "leadeth

“leadeth thee to repentance?” (a) Now, if the consideration of God’s goodness, his long-suffering, and readiness to forgive, prove insufficient to melt the obdurate hearts of sinners, what can effect it? Hath God spared us, when we deserved punishment? Hath he surrounded us with his abundant mercies, while we affronted him with our manifold sins? Doth he still continue most pressing and lovingly to invite us to himself, saying, “Turn ye, turn ye?” O! the astonishing obduracy of that heart! the egregious madness of that soul, who will not comply with so interesting and affectionate an invitation! “Let the wicked forsake his way, (saith the Prophet), and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” (b)

WHEN

(a) Rom. ii. 4. (b) Isai. lv. 7.

WHEN a merciful God invites ----- when a long-suffering Redeemer calls us to return to him, shall we procrastinate any longer? Shall we requite goodness so immense, with stubborn refusals? Ye greatest sinners, notwithstanding the multitude and magnitude of your sins, if you sincerely and heartily turn from them, a most welcome reception awaits you: the Father of mercies waits to cancel all your sins. And we need no stronger proof of this than what the Lord saith to the Prophet, "Hast thou seen
 " that which backsliding Israel hath done?
 " She is gone up upon every high mountain,
 " and under every green tree, and there hath
 " played the harlot. And I said after she had
 " done all these things, Turn thou unto me."^(a)
 This fully evinces that a sinner of the greatest magnitude, who unfeignedly, and timely returns
 unto

(a) Jer. iii. 6, 7.

unto God, shall find favor. “ And him that
“ cometh unto me (saith our blessed Lord), I
“ will in no wise cast out.” (a) That you may
entertain right apprehensions, respecting the
readiness of God to pardon returning sinners,
consider the parable of the Prodigal Son: there
you will behold the son returning with fear and
trembling, and the Father seeing him afar off,
and having compassion on him; running, and
falling upon his neck, and kissing him: the
Father commandeth the best robe to be pro-
duced, and to be put on him, and a ring to be
put on his finger, and shoes on his feet: he
commandeth the fatted calf to be killed, that
they might eat and be merry. “ For (saith he),
“ this my Son was dead, and is alive again;
“ he was lost, and is found.” (b) Such is the
astonishingly kind and gracious reception, which
the returning prodigal meets with at his Father’s
house,

(a) John vi. 37. (b) Luke xv.

house, as his heart could scarcely hope for; and better he could not desire. And seeing all unfeigned returners meet with so cordial and benign a reception from our Heavenly Father, O! therefore, " Turn ye, turn ye, from your " evil ways !"

3. CONSIDER this you, who refuse to return; that he, who now so lovingly invites and persuades you to it, will hereafter drive you from his presence, pressed under the tremendous weight of the Divine malediction, saying, " Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting " fire, prepared for the devil and his angels !"

O! how terrible will it be to see the LAMB of GOD, assuming the appearance of an exasperated Lion! I say, an exasperated Lion, against all those unrelenting wolves, who will not now be persuaded to turn from their evil ways,

and

and behave towards him like the sheep of his pasture. They who now despise the meekness of the LAMB, shall ere long be crushed by the violence of the Lion's wrath. They, who will not have the adoreable JESUS to reign over them in mercy in this world, shall suffer the direful inflictions of his vengeance for ever, in the regions of Eternity. They, who will not permit him to save them from their sins, shall ere long suffer him to tear them in pieces, when none can deliver them. They, who will not now return from their evil ways, shall shortly be led by them thro' the chambers of death, into the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched. O! therefore, "Turn ye, turn ye! for why will ye die?" Why will ye permit sin to be your destruction, and iniquity to be your ruin?

H

E Z E K.

E Z E K. xxxiii. II.

Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O House of Israel?

IN the preceding discourse I have expounded these words, by pointing out the occasion on which they were spoken, which was the principal thing requisite to give us a view of their primary application: and this being done, I then proposed and promised to perform two things;

I. To consider the importunate and pathetic exhortation to repentance and returning unto God, addressed to all impenitent sinners in these very affecting and pressing words, "Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways."

II. To shew that men have no valid reason to offer, nor any sufficient cause to plead for their conduct, in treating with disdain an invitation

tation so expressive of the Divine benevolence, and in refusing to comply with an exhortation so abundantly mild and pressing. And this I promised to do in speaking to the latter part of my Text, " Why will ye die ?"

UPON the first of these heads I have discoursed at large in the preceding Sermon. I now proceed, pursuant to my promise, to shew that men have no valid reason to offer, &c. And this, by the assistance of Divine grace, I shall endeavor to do by explaining the latter part of my Text, " Why will ye die ?"

THE author Almighty of our being, whose goodness is equal to his power, mercifully condescends to reason with the work of his own hands : He lovingly intreats the disobedient and obstinate *Jews* to assign a reason, " Why they " would die," (i. e.) why they would prefer extreme misery to unspeakable felicity ? And
because

because it is an incommunicable attribute of the Deity to be unchangeable, his mercy is therefore the same now as in the ages past : he now graciously asks all impenitent sinners, “ Why will ye die ? ” Produce now your strongest reasons, and answer this question if you can.

YOUR answering it at all will involve you in this dilemma, either you will impiously affirm that you can do no otherwise, or you will madly plead that it is your own choice to act no other part than to persist in your vicious course, and thereby prepare yourselves for eternal woe ; which dreadful portion is intended by the word *die*, in the Text. If the first you will return for answer, you ascribe the whole of your perdition to the will and decree of God ; but if the second, you attribute it entirely to your own will and free choice.

I now proceed to reason a little upon these two so very absurd and unreasonable answers.

SOME persons there are so shockingly ignorant, or so strangely infatuated, as to ascribe their eternal destruction to the unconditional predestination or absolute decree of God ! Thus did the *Jews* in *Ezekiel's* time, as plainly appears from the context, where the language of their hearts is sufficiently exposed in these words, " If our transgressions and our sins be upon us, and we pine away in them, how should we then live ?" Just as if they said, if God hath irreversibly predestined us to this hard fate, how can we remedy ourselves ? It is lamentable to think that many persons in our days are known to reason in this inconsiderate manner ; not only they who join the notoriously profane in every excess of riot, but also many of those, who, in some measure, have reformed their lives ; and more particularly those who
aspire

aspire to the character of possessing a superior portion of religious knowledge and sanctity, and pretend that their title to the Divine favor is so durable and unalterable, that even their own wills, and their own sins, cannot separate them from the love of Christ; but to prove this, we have only their own word. Persons of this last description usually profess to have so completely penetrated into the secret purposes of God, to have so deeply fathomed his eternal decrees, that they even aver and boast that eternal life is secured for them, by an *ante-mundane* irrelative election, beyond all possibility of their falling short of it. Hence they maintain, that, let the multiplicity and enormity of the crimes of Saints be what they will, yet at the same time, they are in a state of the most perfect safety. But on the other hand they assert,---O! horrible assertion!---that God hath passed by, (i. e.) reprobated, others (by far the
greater

greater number of mankind), leaving them hopeless in chains of misery, without a possibility of their ever escaping from the jaws of death, into which they fell, without their own consent, wholly through the disobedience of their first parents.

BUT is there any truth in this doctrine? so far from it, that there is not a shadow of reason in it. Is it agreeable to the scriptures? so far from it, that it is entirely repugnant to them. Altho' some men are so hardily absurd as to father this doctrine on God, attributing the endless torments of myriads to the will and pleasure of our merciful Creator, yet he utterly disclaims it, and for this we have his own word. And as the word of every upright, unequivocal person, is credited among all reasonable men; how much more ought the word of Him, who summoned the Universe into being with a word,

word, to be credited by us? "I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord God. Wherefore turn ye yourselves, and live ye." (a) If any one were so far deprived of common reason, as to attempt to muster up objections, in order to cast a veil over this no less apparent than important truth, after the Lord hath made so glorious a display of his most gracious will and purpose, respecting the Salvation of sinners; might not I, with the greatest propriety, exclaim with the Apostle, "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" But lest any one should ungenerously insinuate that I cut the knot for want of ability to untie it; and that I may give all possible fair play to the *sticklers* for absolute predestination, the avowed adversaries of that evangelical system, which exhibits an abundant

offer

(a) Ezek. xviii. 32.

offer of Grace, and a possibility of Salvation to every man; I say, to give all these every fair advantage, I beg your serious attention to a few more passages, which I shall cite for the further confirmation of the truth.

WHEN a doubt is entertained of a person's veracity, if matters of importance be transacting, men require an oath of him, and then they believe him; for (as the Apostle says), "An oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife;" so God, willing more abundantly to shew unto mankind the immutability of his good will towards them, confirmed it by an oath; that by two immutable things (viz. his word and oath), in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have the strongest assurance of his benevolent designs towards the human race, and the most incontestable proof of his most gracious purposes respecting every individual

individual sinner; and because he could swear by no greater, he swears by himself, "As I live, faith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live: Turn ye, &c."

Now we shall find four things presenting themselves to our notice for the confirmation of this truth; (1) that which the Lord hath no pleasure in, namely, "the death of the wicked;" (2) that which the Lord hath pleasure in, even, "that the wicked turn from his evil ways and live;" and these two points he equally confirms by an oath, the most grand and solemn conceivable, "As I live:" (3) "an important exhortation to repentance or returning unto God;" (4) an anxious and affectionate enquiry, "Why would they die?" Now, if the serious consideration of these four points hath not sufficient weight to convince men that
the

the Lord earnestly desireth the Salvation of the wicked, that he unfeignedly willet the conversion of every sinner, it is labor utterly lost to attempt to prove or confirm any truth by the scriptures. If a man be not believed upon his bare word, yet it rarely happens that he is not believed upon his oath; but if his oath be deemed insufficient, he hath no further assurance or confirmation to give. But so unreasonable and impious are some men, that they will believe the Lord God of truth, neither upon his word, nor upon his oath; and they highly value themselves upon being proof against conviction: and this folly they fondly cherish, and usually christen it, *steadiness, perseverance, &c.* Having fixed upon some irrational, incongruous, monstrous tenets, they constantly strain every nerve to defend them in spite of the plainest scriptures, and in defiance to any thing which either God or man, by word of oath, can

can prove against them. Instead of having recourse to the scriptures, and deriving their tenets from the principles which Inspiration hath furnished them with, the very reverse is their manner of proceeding: in the first place, they frame for themselves a set of opinions, and then recur to the word of God, with no other view than to force it to quadrate with their preconceived notions and ideas. To what end think ye, doth God make this solemn declaration of his earnest desire of the conversion of the wicked? Is it to make us believe what he doth not intend? God forbid that so unbecoming a thought, respecting the supreme Being, should ever find a place in our hearts!

If we believe not that the Lord is sincere in this striking declaration, we have no grounds to believe that he is so in any declaration, or promise he hath given us in his holy word. The
consideration

consideration of this most solemn declaration of God, will, at the first view, evince that he hath not, by any unconditional, irrelative decree, excluded any sinner from the possibility of Salvation ; therefore, “ Why will ye die ? ” while God, not only hath no pleasure in your perdition, but taketh pleasure in, and earnestly desireth, your Salvation ?

Secondly, let us consider what the Lord hath done for the Salvation of sinners in general ; and in particular, what he hath done for the Salvation of the *Jewish Church* ; altho', entirely thro' her own obstinate attachment to her beloved vices, it hath proved ineffectual for her conversion ; which was the only reason of his avenging himself, by pouring upon her the bitter vials of his heavy judgments. He appeals to them, respecting the manifold instances of goodness he had shown them ; and upbraids them thus in the
parable

parable of the vineyard, " And, now, O inhabitants of *Jerusalem*, and men of *Judah*, judge
 " I pray you betwixt me and my vineyard. What
 " could have been done more to my vineyard,
 " that I have not done in it ? Wherefore, when
 " I looked that it should bring forth grapes,
 " brought it forth wild grapes ?" (a) Every
 thing consistent with his own attributes had
 God done to effect their conversion. He had
 sent to them all his servants the Prophets, rising
 up early and sending them ; whose mouths he
 sometimes filled with promises, gently to allure
 them ; sometimes with threats, on purpose to
 terrify them ; sometimes he showered down
 upon them his tender mercies, like the dew of
 Heaven ; at other times he commissioned his
 judicial inflictions to descend upon them, like
 dreadful storms : in a word, he made use of all
 means,

(a) *Isai.* v. 3, 4.

means, most suitable and likely to influence rational beings to consider what course to prefer, and to abandon their vicious practices for the way of Holiness; but all this did not prevail: neither exhortations nor chastisements, promises nor threats, could separate them from their sins; in direct defiance of God, they proceeded still more rapidly in their evil course. But God, finding all these powerful means unequal to the effecting of their conversion, gives them up to their own destruction. Was the fault in the Vine-dresser? It is incontestibly evident it was not, but in the vineyard itself: it was not thro' defective cultivation it failed to produce good fruit, no, for thus saith the Vine-dresser, "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?"

Now I appeal unto all men of reason, whether such language as this could possibly have sprung
from

from the Fountain-head of truth, had he created them on purpose to damn them; had he decreed their eternal perdition before ever they were born! What could have induced him to speak thus, if he did not sincerely desire their Salvation? Why, and to what end, would he use any means at all to convert them, if, before the foundation of the world, by an irreverfible decree, he had predeftined them to inevitable perdition? What can reflect greater difhonor upon all the attributes of the Deity, particularly upon his wifdom, than the infinuation that he giveth exhortations and invitations to men to return unto him, when, at the fame time, it is his fixed purpofe they fhall prove utterly ineffectual? Can it be to the glory of God that we fhould fay, he damns his creatures for rejecting the offers of his grace, when he had never intended they fhould receive it?

SOME

SOME men are so unreasonable as to affirm that God giveth a call, and offereth his grace, to all men, but not with an intention that they shall accept it and be saved, but purely to deprive them of every possible excuse in the last day. But it is extremely difficult to conceive, how such procedure can rob them of a valid plea, or, how their damnation can appear just, for refusing that which they could not receive, yea, that which was never sincerely offered to them with a view to their Salvation.

OTHERS, to avoid these monstrous consequences, tell us, that all the subjects of damnation are damned purely for the sin of *Adam*. And thus by striving to shun one difficulty, they run headlong into a greater. They tell us, that God made a covenant with *Adam*, by virtue of which our first parent was constituted the federal head of all his posterity (but before

we proceed farther, I would have you consider that this covenant derives its origin entirely from the imagination of these men, for we find not a single word respecting this covenant in all the word of God: and therefore, let the authors of such fanciful inventions beware, lest they bring upon themselves that curse pronounced by Inspiration, against all those who presume to make any addition to the sacred volume). After *Adam* fell, and all his posterity inevitably in him, God (say they) chose a select number of the human race, and left, or passed by, the rest in their fallen state, to be unspeakably miserable, without the least hope of deliverance for ever; and upon this they laud and magnify the love of God for electing them and passing by others; just as if there were infinitely greater mercy in that, than if he had restored all men together to a possibility of
Salvation;

Salvation; and this sounds just like the supposition that food must prove more savory to one hungry person, because he beholds a multitude of wretches around him perishing with hunger.

BUT to be short, I may venture to affirm, that, whatever the *first Adam*, by his voluntary transgression, hath deprived us of, the *second Adam* hath made us ample amends for it; for, saith *St. Paul*, "as by the offences of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so, by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." (a) The Lord Jesus hath purchased for us all a possibility of Salvation; "No one shall bear the iniquity of his father;" O! therefore let us look to ourselves, lest any of us should be in danger of falling short of it, while

(a) Rom. v. 18.

while the door of mercy is open to the greatest of returning sinners.

If it were true that God, from all eternity, hath irrevocably fixed the condition of every man, it were as reasonable to have recourse to sorceries and enchantments to convert sinners, as to make use of scriptures, reasons, exhortations, threats, promises, &c.

THE scripture represents the *supreme Being*, as “gracious and merciful, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, waiting that he may be gracious to sinners, and exalted that he may have mercy upon them.” But the doctrine of the absolute *decree* represents him as a terrible Being, delighting so much in wrath, that he even created a world to furnish himself with objects to pour it forth upon.

THIS

THIS doctrine naturally raises in us hard thoughts respecting the attributes of God; for what can we think of his *wisdom*, if he predestinated some to life eternal, without considering their future faith and obedience as the condition of it? What can we think of the *justice* of God, if he hath fully determined to punish others for disobedience to those laws, which they had no power to obey? What can we think of the *holiness* of God, if he leave the greater part of mankind in such a state, that they are under a necessity of sinning in it, altho' their own disobedience was by no means the cause of the unhappiness of their condition? This doctrine, instead of exciting and encouraging sinners to pray for, and confide in, the mercy of God, fills their minds with gloomy thoughts of his cruel purpose against them, and renders him an object of constant terror to them.

This

This doctrine represents God, not as a good and merciful King, whose unremitting care is, universally to promote the welfare and prosperity of every individual among his subjects, but like an inexorable tyrant, whose sole end, in all his actions, is his own exaltation, while the good of his subjects has no place in his thoughts; who raises some to honors without respect of any service performed, any attachment or fidelity shown to him, and without any reason in the world, but that the happy condition of such elevated persons may excite tormenting envy in all his other enslaved subjects, and double their misery; who most severely punishes some, merely because their grandfather had broken his laws; while he sets others at liberty, equally obnoxious to the same treatment: and this very extraordinary conduct cannot be accounted for, but by supposing that his barbarous heart is infinitely gratified to behold

hold the felicity of a few of his subjects, enhancing the misery of all the rest. This is the horrible point of view, in which the doctrine of the absolute decree represents unto us the supreme God, the fountain of all mercy. But is this the unamiable view, which the scripture exhibits of him? certainly no; for therein he is set forth as full of purity and truth, infinite in compassion and mercy; and therein also we are urged to imitate him in all those sublime perfections. Through-out those sacred pages, he is represented as an unerring pattern, by which alone we are to form our conversations; and we must, through the Divine assistance, do so, if we are desirous of his Salvation.

CAN it be consistent with the purity and sincerity of God, to make such a show of urgency and sollicitude in his calling upon sinners to repent; and to ask from a seeming deep
concern,

concern, "Why will ye die?" if he himself had previously passed the horrid sentence of reprobation upon them; which irrevocable doom would render it impossible for them, either to repent, or turn from their evil ways; and therefore impossible for them to live?

Thirdly, consider how graciously the mercy of God arrests the hand of his justice from cutting sinners down in the midst of their sins, by urging him to give them time, where-in they may repent; and in this sense Mercy rejoiceth against Judgment. Justice exclaims concerning some resolute sinner, "cut him down!" but Mercy cries, "let him alone this year also!" Justice is urgent for judgment, but Mercy intercedeth for time for him to repent in; and the voice of Mercy, thus suing for an extension of the day of grace, is heard in behalf of many
 who

who refuse to repent----O distressing reflection !
---who refuse to repent at last ; namely, they
who refuse to avail themselves of the gracious
interposition of Divine mercy for the purpose
of repentance, persist in their sins ; and----O
painful thought !---are at last arrested by Divine
justice, cut down under the tremendous guilt of
hardness of heart and final impenitency, and so
perish for ever. “ I gave her space to repent
“ of her fornication (saith the Holy Ghost),
“ and she repented not.”(a) But if we believe the
abettors of the absolute decree, it was not space
to repent, but space to fill up the measure of
her iniquity, the Lord gave her. O how de-
testable ! how cruel the tender mercies of some
are ! But let God be true, and these men liars ;
no one better knew the end for which that space
was allowed her, than the merciful God, the
giver of it. Therefore, if God saith that in
L mercy

(a) Rev. ii. 21.

mercy it was given her, why will man venture to affirm it was bestowed by way of judgment? What! are the eyes of these men evil, because God is good?

God, out of the immensity of his mercy, vouchsafes you time to repent in; O! therefore, assiduously improve every moment of it to promote the important end, for which it is bestowed upon you; "Why will ye die?" This also most clearly evinces, that God hath not made an irrevocable decree, in consequence of which any kind of sinners must inevitably perish for ever; for, had he from eternity irreversibly predestined their eternal death, to what end would he, during their existence here, bless them with admonitions, and time to repent in? O! therefore, solemnly ponder this momentous question, which the Lord submits to your consideration, "Why will ye die?"

No

No person, who knows the use of reason, hath room to say that the Lord is the author of his perdition ; for, “ the long suffering God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance ;” i. e. God our preserver is sincerely desirous that every man should come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved: he spared not his own Son, his beloved, his only-begotten Son, but delivered him up for us all ; the Son of his love voluntarily came to accomplish all his will, and by the grace of God to taste death for EVERY MAN : Our Divine Redeemer, out of his transcendent love, and unspeakable compassion, towards lost sinners, laid down his life for their sins ; and died the most painful and ignominious death for their sake: so that they have now the privilege and power of arriving at eternal glory. Having thus died for their sins, he rose again for their justification,

justification, and ascended into Heaven to prepare a place for those that obey his call, believe in his name, and keep his commandments. With the most ardent importunity, the most affecting kindness, he now, by his word, invites them to return to him: he commissions his Ministers to persuade them to repent; these at his command advise, instruct, beseech them for Christ's sake to be reconciled to God. He, by his Spirit, standeth and knocketh at the door of their hearts, desiring to find entrance, in order to bless them with new and holy dispositions, and make his abode in them. The Divine Spirit daily stirs them up to awake to righteousness, and to abandon their evil ways; but they quench his heavenly motions, and grieve him, at being forced to depart from them, after having used in vain so many gracious means, designed to effect their conversion; saith he,

“ O

“ O that they were wise, &c. (a) O Jerufalem,
“ Jerufalem, &c.” (b)

IF, notwithstanding all this, any one should be so absurd, as to affirm that God doth not unfeignedly desire the Salvation of every sinner ; but that he hath, before the creation of the world, irreversibly decreed the endless woe of some ; I have nothing farther to offer, but the words of *Solomon* ; “ Tho’ thou shouldst
“ bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a
“ pestle, yet will not his foolishness depart
“ from him.” (c)

ETERNAL life is purchased for you by the Lord Jesus, who hath laid down his life for your’s. The adorable Mediator, with the tenderest affection, now calls you to accept it, upon terms not difficult to perform ; “ Why then
“ will ye die ?” Divine Mercy hath opened
her

(a) Deut. xxxii. 29. (b) Luke xiii. 34. (c) Prov. xxvii. 22.

her door, why will ye refuse to enter into bliss? the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us is cancelled, why not take possession of your inheritance? The flaming sword of Justice is now removed, why will ye not come and partake of the fruit of the tree of life? "O! how shall we escape, if we neglect so great a Salvation?"

THE reflection that life and Salvation have been purchased for all mankind, at so immense a price, cannot but infinitely enhance the torments of *Gehenna* to the wretch that despised them.

THE sting of conscience, O how piercing will it be! its agonies how severe! when it reminds the subject of Divine wrath, how often the benign overtures of saving grace and endless glory have been made to him; but that he preferred his sins before them. The remembrance of the many Sermons he hath carelessly and ind devoutly

devoutly heard ; the many pathetic exhortations to turn to God he hath spurned at : will then, in the dungeon of eternal woe, afflict the wretched soul beyond the sting of scorpions, or the fang of lions. O what tongue can express !—what heart conceive ! the writhing sorrow, the excruciating pangs, that will convulse the soul in the regions of Misery, when conscience shall incessantly reproach him in language like this ; “*Thou* also hast had many a gracious offer of felicity, and numberless faithful warnings to shun this place of black despair, but thou hast despised them all !”

I am not without hope that I have sufficiently proved that the Almighty parent of good, the inexhaustible spring of all true felicity, is not—cannot be—the author of the fatal decree, that lays any man under an unavoidable necessity to perish everlastingly ; and that to one, when asked, “*Why will you die ?*” can fairly answer that

that it is owing to God's irreverfible purpose, who predefined him thereunto.

It, therefore, the Divine decree is not the prime caufe of the finner's perdition, the caufe of this horrible confequence muft be the finner's own free choice; which is the fecond folution of the queftion in the Text, I promifed to confider.

MAN'S perdition is totally of himfelf; but **O** heart-rending thought! that a rational being fhould make a choice fo repugnant to reafon; but it is fo in fact, notwithstanding all its egregious folly. "Why will ye die?" faith *God*. Sinners, now urge your plea!--but you have no anfwer founded in truth to give, but this--that you voluntary chufe the confequence infeparable from a wicked courfe. What in a literal fenfe was faid by *Job* in his trouble, in a fpiritual fenfe

fense every impenitent finner asserts, though not with the mouth, yet by his actions, even, " that his soul chuseth strangling, and death rather than his life." (a) It is true that men do not chuse perdition by that name, but they chuse to persist in gratifying their vices, the inevitable consequence of which is eternal death. Religion with them is a theme for ridicule, and the practice of sin they prefer to the service of God. Servants can expect their wages from no one but him, whom they serve; and the wages of sin is death: this is the horrible reward Satan hath to bestow upon all his vassals, and the very best he hath amongst all his treasures. O sinners awake! open your eyes, and contemplate your wages! Consider where a life of impiety will terminate! For the great Redeemer's sake----for the sake of your own immortal part, make not a choice so mad; " Why will ye die?"

M.

Altho',

(a) Job vii. 15.

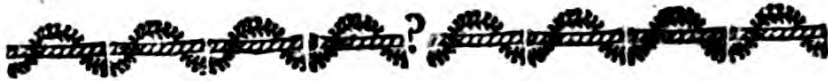
Altho', at first sight, the pleasure of vice appear alluring, and yield a transient delight, yet it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder. Sin is in the mouth like a sweet morsel, yet in the stomach it turns to gall, and in the bowels to the poison of asps ; to the sinner it is sweet in the commission, but bitter in the recompense. O ! that men would reflect that, by sinning against God, they forfeit eternal glory, without gaining any thing in exchange but eternal misery ; that they forego the fellowship of God, of Angels, and of Saints, for the execrable society of fiends and the souls of the sons and daughters of perdition !-----O that the son of ebriety would reflect that, by gratifying his worse than brutish appetite, he deprives himself for ever of the water of life, proceeding from the Throne of GOD and the LAMB ; but on the other hand, what doth he gain ? Not so much as a single drop of water to cool his parched tongue

tongue in unquenchable flames. O that the oppressive miser would consider that his devotion to Mammon is unprofitable-----that his anxiety to accumulate the perishing dross of this world inevitably deprives him of the real, and durable riches, in the celestial mansions!----O that the profaners of the Lord's Day would reflect, that they forfeit all possibility of ever arriving to the rest, which remaineth for the people of God, without any other compensation for their unspeakable loss, than a portion with Satan, where hope never comes!-----O that the wanton and voluptuous tribe, who entirely devote themselves to sensual gratifications, would pause and consider, that, as they banish piety from all their thoughts, they neglect to acquire an indispensable qualification for a participation of the exalted, and everlasting joys, which are in God's presence;
and

and the pleasures, which are at his right hand for ever more : and all this for the dire alternative of mourning, lamentation, and woe for endless ages !

[O infatuated mortals ! shall considerations like these make no impressions upon you ? What then can arouse you to reflect ?----Let me intreat you to make a true estimate of your loss and gain ; and then, for Heaven's sake, resolve me this question, " Why will " ye die ?"





T W O

SUPPLEMENTAL

ENQUIRIES.



I.

An E N Q U I R Y

*Into the Sentiments of the Church of England,
respecting the extent of the Christian Redemp-
tion, or the efficacy of the Death of CHRIST.*

SOME affirm that the Church of *England* doth not maintain that Christ hath shed his blood for all men in general, or tasted death for every individual of the human race; but for a select company, a chosen number, whose Salvation hath been unconditionally fixed, and unalterably secured, from all eternity; at the same time over-looking all the rest of our species, and leaving them hopeless in their inevitable misery, to wander on helplessly in devious paths, and to end their
course

course in everlasting perdition. If this were true, if it could fairly be made apparent that this is the opinion of the Church of *England*, respecting this important Article, it might be justly said of her, that, "As the Church of *Jerusalem, Alexandria, &c.* have erred;"^(a) so also hath the Church of *England* in matters of faith. If we could have an incontestable proof -----a clear demonstration-----that our Church holds such a doctrine, it were much more becoming in her sons to bewail her imperfections, and lament her errors in secret, than to boast of her Orthodoxy. For it cannot but appear to all men of feeling and judgment, that to boast of such a tenet, as this, is to point out the weakness, and to unveil the deformity of their mother, and to glory in them. Most certain it is, that a doctrine so incompatible with the natural attributes of God, so absolutely repugnant to the reason,

and

(a) Article of Religion, XIX.

and so shocking to the best feelings of mankind, cannot fail of bringing abundant dishonor and reproach upon any Church whatsoever, that would broach and abet it; and of giving occasion much too favorable to the Infidel and Free-thinker to blaspheme revealed Religion, without giving themselves the trouble of any farther examination. But leaving so narrow and partial a doctrine to stand upon its own fallacious foundation, namely, the bare assertion of its abettors, let us take the judgment of our Church from her own mouth. In her Catechism, she asks her Pupil this question, "What dost thou chiefly learn by these Articles of thy belief (i. e. in the Apostles' Creed)?" And then instructs him to give this answer, "I learn to believe in God the Son, who hath redeemed me and all mankind." Now what shall we say to this point? Shall we own that our Church maintains the Doctrine of universal
N Redemption?

Redemption? Or, shall we insinuate that She casts a mist upon the eyes of her disciples, and poisons their minds with false principles, by instilling into them erroneous notions in their tender years, by "darkening counsel by words without knowledge?" (a) It is not hard to say which of the two tends most to her praise and honor. What respect ----what honor----can be due to that Church, which, while she affirms one thing, means quite the contrary? That makes open profession of one tenet, while she hides in her bosom another of an opposite tendency, or delivers it to her disciples in ambiguous terms, on purpose to lead them to a misapprehension of her meaning.

IN the Consecration-Prayer in her Communion-Service, our Church affirms that our Blessed Redeemer on the Cross hath made "a

" full,

(a) Job xxxviii. 2.

“ full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world.” If these words do not amply convey the idea of universal Redemption, and a possibility of Salvation to every man, it is impossible, in my opinion, to find out what is meant by them. Shall we think that our Church recommends and enjoins honesty of behavior, purity of life, and plainness of speech, to all her sons and daughters, as a condition indispensably necessary to obtain Salvation; while she herself sets them a most shameful example of duplicity and imposition in her Doctrine; by hiding her monstrous sentiments, her preposterous uncomfortable opinion, under a veil of plausible words, and equivocal ensnaring expressions? If the case were really so, it would not be worth any one’s while to make any enquiry at all into her sentiments. But
God

God forbid that such a mean, uncharitable thought, respecting so glorious and praiseworthy, so pure and candid a Church, should ever be harbored in our hearts. A Church of which it will be no presumption to say, as *St. Peter* said of her glorious Head and Founder, "neither is guile found in her mouth;" a Church of whose words it might be fairly attested, that they are the words of truth and soberness; a Church, whose spirit is charity, and let her enemies be judges!

It were easy to multiply instances, out of the Book of Common Prayer, to point out the judgment of the Church of England, respecting the above point; but, doubtless, those already quoted are sufficient to give abundant satisfaction to any enquirer, whose mind is unprejudiced, and open to conviction: but as to the narrow-minded and self-sufficient, "who is wiser in his own conceit than seven
 " men

“ men that can render a reason,” what hope is there of convincing or refuting him, by any farther testimonies that might be produced? If a man, under the dominion of bigotry, take it into his head to dispute or assert that there is no heat in the fire, that the snow is not white, the water not liquid, and the like (and there is scarce any man who doth not know him to be capable of such assertions, it being his whole delight to thwart the reason of mankind), to argue with such were a silly wasting of time, and to spend fair reasoning upon his obstinacy and ignorance, labor utterly lost; for, be it ever so conclusive and convincing, he will not hear it, but esteem it his enemy, and a disturber of his peace. Of all the opposers of reason, the most inveterate and perverse is the spiritual Mad-man (or *Enthusiast*); he, who is not ashamed to assert, and avow to the world, respecting

respecting some foolish and absurd Doctrine,
“ That he believes it because it is repugnant
“ to his reason, or merely because he cannot
“ understand it.” We have just the same
degree of hope to convince a natural madman
of the folly of his wild freaks and effusions,
as we have, by dint of arguments, to open
the eyes of the spiritual madman, to behold
the monstrous absurdity, and evil tendency
of his tenets; yea “ there is more hope of a
“ fool than of such a person.”

THOSE, who assert that the Church of
England does not hold universal Redemption,
&c. have no plea so plausible, or that appears
at first sight so strong and difficult to be re-
futed, as that which they endeavor to derive
from her XVIIth. Article. But most certain
it is, that the sentiments of this Article are
perfectly consistent with the Doctrine of uni-
versal

verfal Redemption; unless we fuppofe the reformers, thofe learned and pious men, to have been like little children, one hour building, and the next hour demolifhing what they had built. But we find no traces of fuch glaring inftability in the conduct of thofe venerable men; for they all fteadily perfevered in their profeflion, and firmly maintained the ground of their hope, through the whole courfe of their lives; and, as many of them as were there-unto called, fealed their testimony with their own blood, encountering death itfelf with unshaken conftancy, altho' they met it armed with all its terrors.

EVERY candid and impartial enquirer, verfed in the fcriptures, and acquainted with the Doctrines of Grace, will eafily fee the tenor of this Article: he will difcover, with the firft glance, that its main defign is to comfort,

fort, support, and to urge forward the timid and self-denying believer, on his journey thro' the dreary wilderness of the present evil world to the Heavenly Canaan; he will sufficiently perceive that the drift of this Article is to quicken the affections, and cheer up the drooping spirits, of the obedient and humble Christian, who from the heart obeys the Heavenly calling; who willingly submits to the yoke of the Gospel, and, through the assistance of the Spirit of God, purifies himself from all pollution of flesh and spirit, perfecting Holiness in the fear of God. Such is the man, who hath been fore-ordained to eternal life by the eternal decree of God; this is he, who was chosen in Christ out of mankind, and shall be brought by Christ to everlasting Salvation, as a vessel made to honor. The serious consideration here-of has a noble tendency to excite in the heart love
towards

towards God, and to cause the elect person diligently to keep his commandments, and daily grow in grace, and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior JESUS CHRIST.

IN a word, the only design of our Church in this Article (if I know any thing of her design in it) is to administer strength and consolation to the meek and lowly in heart; and also to reduce the lofty looks and towering thoughts of the presumptuous sinner, that being brought, through serious reflection, to a sense of his danger, he may, by the assistance of Divine Grace, betimes set about working out his own Salvation with fear and trembling.

NOTE here, that there is not one word in this Article, signifying---“ that the eternal
“ state, or end of every man, hath irrever-
“ sibly been fixed by God from all eternity;”

○

---there

---there is not here a single word about
 “irresistible” or “unconquerable” Grace
 ---not one word can be found in it about---
 “once in Christ, and for ever in Christ, &c.”
 which, together with many other phrases of
 the same complexion, compose the peculiar
 tenets of those who oppugn the Doctrine of
 “universal Redemption, or, that Christ hath
 “died for every man.”

METHINKS, I hear a cavilling objector
 exclaim, “You blaspheme the Doctrine of
 “Free-Grace!” and laboring to nonplus
 me with this very profound interrogatory,
 “What! do you think that Christ hath shed
 “a single drop of his Blood in vain? I
 “never will believe that!” O the thick
 darkness of ignorance! Just as if the Chris-
 tian Religion wholly consisted in our Blessed
 Savior’s shedding a drop or two of his pre-
 cious Blood for every one of us in particular!

○

O bungling, preposterous, unworthy thought respecting so sublime a mystery! But in this, as well as in other points, some persons greatly err, "because they know not the Scriptures, nor the power of God."

It is true that our Church, whose genius is Charity, whose disposition is to blend Orthodoxy with benevolence, thro' her ardent desire to unite the two contending parties, and comprise them all in love in her Communion, hath allowed herself great latitude of speech in the construction of this Article; the words of which have, for the most part, been taken from the Scriptures, without either addition or explanation; but the earnest caution, given us in the close of it, clearly shews to any intelligent, considerate reader, that her composers would have us by no means to understand it in a sense inconsistent with

with universal Redemption, and the possibility of Salvation to every man; if otherwise, I freely own, that I am at a loss to comprehend, what is meant by, or what can be the use of, this solemn caution.

IN this Article there is mention made of a Predestination to life; but this Predestination is founded in the foreknowledge of God, who, from all eternity, in a manner incomprehensible by the imperfection of human nature, foreseeth the conduct of the sons of men; i. e. the faith and obedience of *one*, and the unbelief and disobedience of *another*; and who, in consequence of his wonderful prescience, counts the one *elected*, and the other *reprobated*, long before they were actually so, “by calling those things which be not, as though they were.” (a) In the golden chain of man’s Salvation described to us in

Rom.

(a) Rom. iv. 17.

Rom. viii. 29, 30. the first link is God's foreknowledge, "For whom he did foreknow, he
" also did predestinate to be conformed to
" the image of his Son, &c."

" ELECTION in Christ" is also mentioned in this Article; which "election," when spoken of, as a thing done or finished from all eternity, is always founded in God's pre-science----"Elect (saith St. Peter) according
" to the foreknowledge of God the Father,
" through sanctification of the Spirit." (a)
-----Note-----"through sanctification of the
" Spirit!"

WHO-EVER holds, that the eternal state of every man is irreversibly and inevitably ordained and fixed by God from all eternity, ought also to maintain (if he desire to be consistent with himself) that the elect are called,
justified,

(a) 2 Pet. i. 2.

justified, and glorified from all eternity ; for these acts are spoken of, as having been already finished. (a) And indeed, so they are in God's foreknowledge, " who calleth those " things, which be not, as though they " were." But let the reader beware that he mistake not this point, by supposing that God's foreknowledge hinders or destroys the freedom of man's will, by making the eternal felicity of *one*, and the eternal misery of *another*, fatal, necessary, and inevitable ; for we have no more reason to think so, than we have to think that the Astronomer's foreknowledge is the sole cause of an eclipse of the Sun, or that an eclipse of that luminary would never have happened, had not the Astronomer, by the aid of his art, foreseen it.

If, in this enquiry, I have mistaken the Judgment or Doctrine of the Church of
England,

(a) Rom. viii. 30.

England, let any one point out friendly, and prove clearly my mistake, and I shall freely own it: for notwithstanding the greatness of my love for that Church, into whose Communion I have been Baptized, yet, if I am not greatly deceived in the movements of my heart, my love for the Truth is greater.



II.

E N Q U I R Y

Concerning St. Peter's Meaning in what he saith, in the Third Chapter of his Second Epistle, respecting the Writings of St. Paul.

UPON an attentive perusal of this Chapter, it will appear to any intelligent, unprejudiced person, that the end and design of the *Apostle* in it was to confirm the faith, and support the hope, of the Christians in his day, respecting the coming of Christ to Judgment, against certain scoffers, mentioned therein, who made it their diversion to speak against, and ridicule that tremendous event.

IN

IN order to support the faithful under their severe persecutions, and to rejoice their souls under signal tribulations, there was no subject more usual and common in the mouths of the *Apostles*, than the coming of Christ to Judgment; when the persecuted should be crowned with a glorious reward, but their persecutors condemned unto unutterable torments.

THIS is the soul-reviving Doctrine, which the scoffers of *St. Peter* oppose; this is the evangelical theme which these infidels would fain have disproved, overturned, or have banished out of the world. Their contemptuous objection, against the certainty of the coming of our Lord to the general Judgment, they take from his seeming delay or slackness in coming; scoffingly insinuating that Christ had forgotten his people, nay, impiously charging the MAJESTY of HEAVEN with

P

neglect

neglect and slackness in fulfilling his promise; perverting his slowness to wrath into an argument against his power; and construing his forbearance and patience into reasons against the fidelity of his promise, and the truth of his Revelation. *St. Peter* refutes this objection, by shewing that God's infinite goodness is the cause of his delaying his coming to Judgment; for saith he, "the Lord " is not slack concerning his promise (as some " men count slackness) but is long-suffering " to us-ward, not willing that any should " perish, but that all should come to repen- " tance." (a) Just as if he had said, in other words, It is not owing to any natural slowness of temper, nor the want of feeling for the uncomfortable state of his elect, nor to deficiency of compassion towards those who have suffered persecution for his name sake; it is not for want of a peculiar regard and
attention

(a) Ver. 9.

attention to the good and pious, that he delays his coming to judge the world ; no, not one of these is the cause of his slackness in fulfilling his promise, respecting this event (as some through scoffing infidelity, and others through despair, alledge), but the infinity of his long-suffering and patience towards sinners in general, truly willing, and ardently desiring the Salvation of all names, degrees, and stations ; all, even the vilest of men, and chief of sinners, by their coming all to repentance, and newness of life, that their sins may be blotted out, before the arrival of the day of their appearance before him.

IN the next verses the *Apostle* proceeds to shew, and set forth the end or dissolution of the world, by urging them all to holiness of life and conversation, while they daily expected that awful period, and “ hastened
unto

“ unto the coming of the Lord.”----In *ver.*
 15. he instructs them to think and consider,
 that through an ardent wish, and longing
 desire for their Salvation, the Lord bears so
 long with sinners, because “ he is not willing
 “ that any should perish, &c.” which
 Doctrine, if we believe *St. Peter*, may be
 read also in the writings of his beloved bro-
 ther *Paul*; because “ in all his Epistles he
 “ speaks of it; in which Epistles (saith he)
 “ are some things hard to be understood,
 “ which they that are unlearned and un-
 “ stable wrest, as they do also the other
 “ Scriptures, unto their own destruction.”(a)
 ----Now, the enquiry is, What is *St. Peter's*
 meaning in these words?

FROM what hath been advanced it is very
 plain, that the Lord (in *St. Peter's* opinion)
 “ is] willing that all should come to repen-
 “ tance;”

(a) *Ver.* 16.

"tance;" or in other words, "that all should
"be saved;" unless we say with *E. C.* of the
last Century, that God hath "two wills,"
namely, his revealed will, and his secret
will; that by his "revealed will" he appears
willing that "all men should be saved," (a)
and by his "secret will" he is unalterably
desirous of the eternal perdition of those,
whom he hath ordained from all eternity to
this condemnation: or something much to
this purpose; for it is a long while since I
have read the rhapsodical pratings of that
incoherent Author.

THE rational and impartial enquirer will
clearly perceive, "that a possibility of Salva-
"tion to every man, or, that the Lord is
"willing that all men should come to re-
"pentance," is the Doctrine, which *St.*
Peter saith, "his beloved brother *Paul*, ac-
"cording to the wisdom given unto him,
"in

(a) 1 Tim. ii. 4.

“ in all his Epistles speaks of ; in which
 “ (Epistles) are some things hard to be un-
 “ derstood,” in respect to this glorious truth,
 (i. e. hard to be understood, by the narrow-
 minded and ignorant, by reason of the depth
 of the wisdom of him who wrote them), which
 the unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do
 also the other Scriptures, to their own de-
 struction ; *that is*, in other words----“ And
 these Epistles which contain this Doctrine
 (even “ That God our Savior is willing that
 “ every man should be saved, &c.”), together
 with other Scriptures containing the same
 Doctrine, “ the unlearned and unstable
 “ wrest,” by their perverse and irrational
 comments, unnaturally forcing them to speak
 a language diametrically opposite to their
 true and proper meaning, and drawing upon
 themselves eternal destruction by their cruel
 unchristian Doctrine, because (as much as
 depends upon them) they violently contract
 their

their intent and purpose, and diminish the efficacy of the Christian Redemption, and exclude men from a possibility of Salvation." ---If this be not the meaning of the above words, I should be glad to know what other meaning they can possibly have? I make no doubt but every one, whose assiduity and concern are much greater to hold fast and vindicate his own pre-conceived opinion, than to pursue and find out the truth (and have we not great reason to fear that the world abounds with such?)---I say, I make no doubt but every such person will be ready to fabricate some other meaning for these plain words of *St. Peter*: but let such beware, lest it should prove no better conduct, than to reject the light, in order to grope in darkness---lest it should prove no better exchange, than to abandon the truth to embrace error---no better result, than to wrest the Scriptures to his own destruction.

If this short, and imperfect, enquiry should happily prove the means of inclining any one to examine his erroneous principles, which he hath imbibed, probably, during the infancy of his reason; and thoroughly to convince him that he is in an error; I intreat him to give God the glory, by freely avowing his mistake, and not to suffer unreasonable and false shame to deprive him of that invaluable Treasure, a good Conscience. But let him nobly evince the greatness of his spirit, by generously offering up his heterodox opinion, as a willing sacrifice to the love of Truth; for nothing shews true greatness of mind so much, as such a degree of self-denial: on the other hand, there can be no plainer proof of a narrow, illiberal spirit; no surer sign of a base, ignoble turn of mind, than that he, who is fully convinced of the error of his tenets, should obstinately persist in it, and suffer false shame to prevent him from saying, "I have erred."

F I N I S

ERRATUM.----P. 20 l. 18, for subtil r. subtilty.