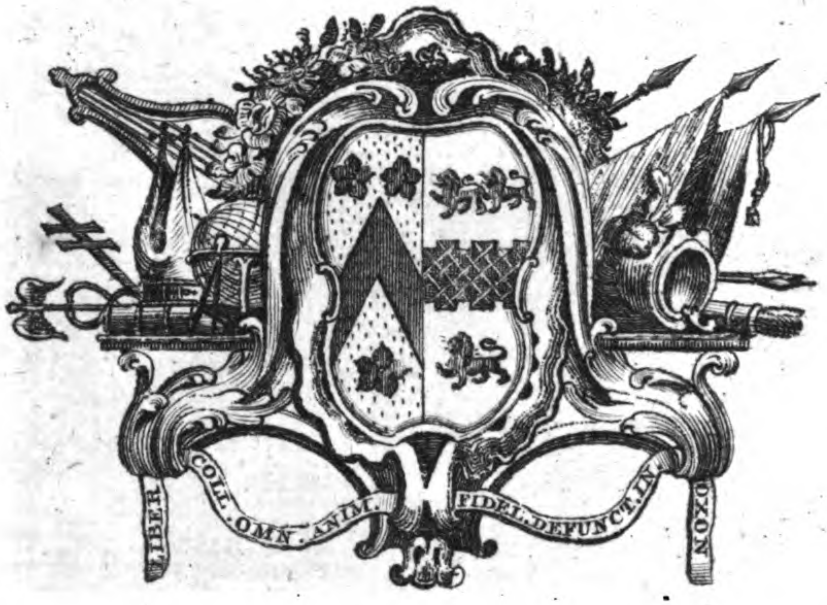

SERMONS

ON THE

PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

Seminis modo ſpargenda ſunt, quod quamvis ſit exiguum, cùm occupavit idoneum locum, vires ſuas explicat, et ex minimo in maximos auctus diffunditur. SENECÆ Opera, p. 134. Edit. Gronovii. 1672.

SERMONS

ON THE

PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

BY

E. HARWOOD, D. D.

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TO

THE REVEREND

PHILIP FURNEAUX, D.D.

IN TESTIMONY OF

HIS LEARNING AND ABILITIES,

AND IN COMMEMORATION OF LONG

ESTEEM AND FRIENDSHIP,

THESE SERMONS

ON THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

ARE INSCRIBED

BY HIS SINCERE FRIEND AND OBLIGED SERVANT,

EDWARD HARWOOD.

PREFACE.

THE following Set of SERMONS was originally written in BRISTOL, and preached to a ſmall Church in that City. The favourable acceptance they met with, and the greatneſs of the Object I had in view when I compoſed them, have encouraged me to deliver them to the Public. I wrote them with this deſign: To inſtruct and edify my Auditors, and to evince the Character of JESUS CHRIST as a Divine Moraliſt, from his perfect knowledge of the human heart, and his accurate deſcriptions of a variety of characters.

E. HARWOOD.

Great Ruſſel Street,
Bloomſbury, London,
May 16, 1776.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

MATTH. XIII. 3——9.

And he ſpake many things unto them in parables, ſaying, Behold, a Sower went forth to ſow: and when he ſowed, ſome ſeeds fell by the way-ſide, and the fowls came and devoured them. Some fell upon rocky places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they ſprang up, becauſe they had no deepneſs of earth. And when the ſun was up, they were ſcorched, and becauſe they had not root, they withered away. And ſome fell among thorns, and the thorns ſprang up and choaked them. But others fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, ſome a hundred-fold, ſome ſixty, ſome thirty-fold. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

SERMON I.

MATTH. xiii. 3.

And he ſpake many things to them in parables, ſaying, Behold, a Sower went forth to ſow.

THE Evangeliſt introduces this inſtructive apologue with obſerving, that parable was the uſual vehicle, in which our Lord conveyed his doctrines to the multitude. *He ſpake many things to them in parables* It was the beſt method of communicating inſtruction he

could have chofen. For thefe concife moral ftories would make indelible impreffions upon the minds of his audience. They would be infinitely better remembered, be more eafily recollected, than all the beft didactic precepts of a formal morality. The memory for ever retains a fhort inftructive moral hiftory, while philofophic reafoning and fpeculative argumentation, however juft and agreeable when we heard them, are foon loft to our remembrance.

Befides, this method of teaching by parable was not only the happieft that could have been felected, but it was the fafeft. Had our Lord communicated his doctrines in an open undifguifed manner, and without referve affured them, that he was the heavenly Inftructor, whom God had repeatedly promifed to the world—that he was the great Meffiah

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and Lawgiver of mankind—and they muſt receive theſe truths as the doctrines and diſcoveries brought from heaven to men by this commiſſioned Inſtructor: the conſequence of theſe open and avowed declarations would have been, that the Jewiſh nation would unanimouſly have made him King—diſcarded immediately all ſubjection to the Romans—would have erected that temporal kingdom under the Meſſiah, which had been ſo long the object of their fondeſt expectations: conſequently this rebellion would have given umbrage to imperial Rome, who would by force of arms have attempted to recover a loſt province—every thing would immediately have been thrown into infinite confuſion, the death of the Meſſiah would have been accelerated, the prophecies would have been defeated, the great ends of his coming fruſtrated, and, without a ſpecial interpoſi-

tion of Providence, all the ſpiritual bleſſings of the Meſſiah's kingdom would have vaniſhed for ever. Our Lord therefore, to prevent what one of the Evangeliſts tells us, *the people's taking him by force, and making him a King*, veiled his ſacred truths in the pleaſing ſhade of moral fable and fiction. One of the writers of his life aſſures us, that *without a parable he never ſpake* to his audience. It was his cuſtomary and uniform method of inſtruction. It was the ſafeſt in the preſent ſituation of things, and it was the propereſt and beſt adapted to the moral ſtate and diſpoſition of his hearers. For all the virtuous and well-diſpoſed, thoſe who came ſolely with a view to grow wiſer and better, would clearly underſtand theſe Parables, would clearly ſee the heavenly truths they couched: while they would be entirely loſt upon all who came merely out of curioſity,

or

or with all their Jewiſh prejudices and bad diſpoſitions about them.

Moreover, public inſtruction by Parables was attended with another happy advantage with reſpect to the hearer. It would immoveably fix his attention. All the time of the recital his ſagacity and penetration would be employed to unravel the fable, and find out its great moral. It was paying a compliment to the underſtanding of the Auditor, in ſuppoſing him capable, by the exerciſe of his abilities, of diſcovering the latent truths, and ſeeing through the artful interpoſing ſhade.

With what fixed, eager attention may we juſtly ſuppoſe the innumerable crowds muſt liſten to theſe Parables! With what inexpreſſible ardour muſt they hang on the lips of the Divine Speaker! While our Lord

was delivering theſe Parables with an air, and dignity, and ſolemnity, that beſpoke his miſſion from God, all theſe vaſt immenſe crowds would be all ear, all attention. All would be huſhed and loſt in thought—one ſtill, ſilent ſcene, not diſturbed by a word, hardly interrupted by a breath. With what avidity may we conceive them ſuſpended on his inſtructive accents, and imbibing the truths that flowed from his ſacred lips—eager not to loſe a ſingle ſtep, a ſingle word of the Parable—all their faculties and powers all the while in vigorous glowing exerciſe, to explore the meaning he intended, and diſcover the moral he deſigned to convey.

I cannot enter upon the explication of this Parable of the Sower, without making another remark. This relates to the *place* and *manner* in which our Saviour delivered it—and you will

will agree with me, that the *ſcene* and *place*, both for *hearing*, and for *ſpeaking* to ſuch an infinite number of people as were then aſſembled, was the happieſt poſſible. Our Lord went into a boat, and the multitudes formed themſelves upon the riſing beach. The regular declivity of the ſhore would have the appearance, and the ſame convenience for ſeeing and hearing, as the ſloping ſeats of an Amphitheatre. Almoſt every one, by the advantage of the ground, might *ſee* him, and *hear* him, as he diſcourſed to them from the ſhip on the lake below them.

When they were all convened together in one vaſt aſſembly — one rank uniformly above another—all fixed in the moſt deep and profound attention — he addreſſed himſelf to them in the following manner:

Behold a Sower went forth to ſow: and when he ſowed, ſome ſeeds fell by the way-ſide, and the fowls came and devoured them. Some fell upon rocky places, where they had not much earth, and forthwith they ſprang up, becauſe they had no deepneſs of earth. And when the ſun was up, they were ſcorched; and becauſe they had not root, they withered away. And ſome fell among thorns, and the thorns ſprang up and choaked them. But others fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, ſome a hundred-fold, ſome ſixty, ſome thirty-fold. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

I intend to make ſome reflections on the ſeveral parts of this inſtructive Parable, in the order they occur, and beg of God, that the heavenly doctrine it contains, and the great moral it reads to us all, may be written in living

living characters on your hearts and my own.

A Sower went forth to sow.

The Character of Jesus Christ, as our Divine Instructor, is here beautifully represented under the image of a Sower. How many agreeable and affecting ideas does this suggest! The first image it presents to our mind is that of a laborious and anxious Husbandman, scattering his seed around him in every direction. It beautifully intimates to us, that this heavenly Sower dispenses the good seed of the word of God with a liberal and undistinguishing hand. It is indiscriminately thrown upon every human heart, high and low, rich and poor, good and bad—it is freely lavished upon all, without exception—and it is fruitful or unfruitful, according to the quality of the soil that receives

it. The ſeed this great Sower ſcatters upon the world, is as munificently imparted to every rational creature, as the common light of the ſun, and the common bleſſing of air and water. For God and Chriſt, who have opened, for the benefit of the world, theſe inexhauſtible treaſures, would have all men to be ſaved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. It is not the fault of the Sower, when this ſeed is blaſted, and fails of arriving at its deſigned maturity. This is entirely owing to the badneſs of the ſoil to which it is committed, and to the bad diſpoſitions, depraved affections, and corrupted and corrupting paſſions that are ſuffered to blow, and blaſt, and kill it. The nature and quality of the ſeed diſperſed by this great Sower upon all hearts, good and bad, without diſtinction, is originally and uniformly the ſame—of the ſame intrinſic excellence

and

and eſſential goodneſs—the fertility, or infertility, is entirely owing to the principles which are in that heart that receives it. If its principles and diſpoſitions are bad, they choak the good ſeed of the word of God, and render it unfruitful. If the heart is bad, it loſes all its moral principles of vegetation—it has neither the love of God to warm and foſter it, nor the love of virtue to animate and quicken it. Upon ſuch an heart the dews of heaven diſtil in vain—the ſhowers of heavenly grace and truth ſpend their virtue ineffectually—it has no principles in it to animate this ſeed, or that in the leaſt conſpire to carry it to its maturity. The ſeed therefore, that is graciouſly ſown by an almighty hand, periſhes, finding nothing to fructify and fertilize it. It is ſown in vain upon ſuch a bad heart, where either the flames of luſt ſcorch and ſhrivel it, or the floods of intemperance drench

drench and drown it. The ſeed which Jeſus ſows into the human heart will not ſtrike root, and ſhoot forth in all its native lovelineſs and beauty, unleſs it have the ſunſhine of the divine life to enliven and invigorate it, and the gentle gales of meekneſs, mildneſs, and love, to fan, agitate, and mature it. Think how odious in the ſight of God that heart muſt be, that receives the good ſeed of the word from the impartial hand of our Redeemer, but diſappoints all the hopes of the great Huſbandman. Think how deteſtable in the ſight of the great Searcher of our hearts that mind muſt be, whoſe adamantine hardneſs neither the ſhowers of heaven can ſoften, nor all the beams of divine grace and love form and mellow into fertility and uſefulneſs. How beautiful are the words of the Apoſtle upon this head—his language is highly figurative, and truly inſtructive and ſublime.

ſublime. *The earth*, ſays he, *which drinketh in the rain, which often falls upon it, and bringeth forth herbage fit for thoſe for whoſe uſe it is cultivated, receiveth bleſſing from God; but that which beareth thorns and thiſtles is rejected, and nigh unto curſing, whoſe end is to be burned.* Both the good and the bad heart equally receiveth, you ſee, the friendly rain of heaven, *that often comes upon it.* That often comes upon it—in what form and mode doth it often come—in ſermons, in prayers, in public worſhip, in reading the Scriptures and good books, in returning Sabbaths, and all the various means we all enjoy for religious inſtruction. What could the bleſſed God have done more for his vineyard, than he hath done! He hath ſent his prophets, one after another, to dreſs and cultivate this vineyard—he, at laſt, cauſed the Sun of Righteouſneſs to riſe upon it, with healing under his

his wings, to dispel the noxious mists in which it was enveloped, to chase away every thing unpropitious to its cultivation and utility, and is now deputing his ministers, the fellow-labourers of Christ and his Apostles, to dress and till it, and render it a delectable scene of distinguished beauty and happiness. God hath done every thing, consistently with his perfections, and the freedom and liberty of the human will, to render the good seed, which he hath sown, a vital principle, productive of the fruits of holiness and happiness. If we suffer this principle to be choaked in secular pursuits, to be corroded away by avarice, to be drowned in intemperance, to be entombed in selfishness, to perish through sloth, and idleness, and negligence, and thus render it unfruitful, God is clear—the blame is ours—God implanted this heavenly seed in our hearts, to be the principle of

our

our highest felicity for both worlds—it was we who killed it by our lusts, suffered it to languish and die through our fatal inattention, and voluntarily forbore to heap around it those good affections and dispositions, which, under the blessing of God, would have caused it to take root, and spring up to life everlasting.

Moreover, it is to be observed, that the *field*, in which this Sower went forth to sow, is the world. This is our Saviour's own interpretation of this part of the parable. *The field*, says he, *is the world*. The soil, into which the seed is cast, is the human heart. That is a beautiful figurative description which the Apostle uses concerning Christians; *Ye are God's husbandry*; or, as the Greek word signifies, Ye are God's *cultivated field*. The great God hath previously prepared your hearts for the reception of the

the ſeed he ſows—he hath endowed you with every diſpoſition and affection proper for enlivening and perfecting that divine principle, which was intended to conſtitute your happineſs, and, both by reaſon and revelation, hath put your minds in the beſt ſtate for producing a copious harveſt of eternal happineſs. Let me then ſeriouſly put the queſtion to you; Will you fruſtrate the deſign of God in carrying you to the perfection and happineſs of your natures? Are you, can you be ſo loſt to all ſenſe of your welfare and intereſt, as to ſuffer all the culture of the bleſſed God, all the indefatigable pains of the divine Jeſus, all the unwearied labour of the holy Apoſtles, all the means the Goſpel employs for the improvement and eternal happineſs of your immortal ſouls, to be loſt upon you? Hath the breaſt of any of my audience contracted ſuch an hardneſs as to be unſuſcep-

ſuſceptible of all impreſſion—ſo callous by impenitence and a courſe of wickedneſs, as that even the Word of God is ſown in vain, is incapable of ſtriking root, is blaſted, ſickens, languiſhes, dies, for want of what—Why only of goodneſs of heart to cheriſh and inform it with life. Depraved creature! how wickedly doſt thou counteract the goodneſs of thy God, and defeat the compaſſion of thy Redeemer, art the executioner of thine own happineſs, I might ſay, by ſhutting thy heart againſt the reception of that ſeed which the hand of God profuſely ſcatters—ſuffering it to lie floating upon the ſurface, for every airy pleaſure to pick it up, and for every ravenous luſt to devour it, and all thy happineſs with it. Let me aſk thee, Will God forgive thee for letting thy heart, which he hath ſtocked with ſuch an amiable variety of the nobleſt and beſt prin-

principles, grow, through thine own wilful neglect, into a ſteril, dreary, inhoſpitable, uſeleſs waſte? Doſt thou convert the paradiſe of God into a wilderneſs, and ſuffer the ample field of thy heart, which God deſigned ſhould be embelliſhed with an amiable variety of uſeful virtues, to be overgrown and choaked with noxious and baleful weeds. O what an enormous perverſion is this of the goodneſs of God—what an ignominious degradation of our natures—what infamous ſloth, not to ſtrike a ſingle ſtroke to eradicate a luſt, not to have the power to ſtrike a ſingle ſtroke to kill a *root of bitterneſs* that begins to ſhoot its luxuriant branches, and ingroſs all the virtuous nutriment left in our hearts. To what baſe and abject impotence does ſloth and idleneſs reduce a man, that a rational being can ſee ruin before him without exerting a ſingle effort to eſcape it? Do you ever think

what

what confuſion will cover you, if it be found at laſt, that you have ſitten ſo many years under the Goſpel and are altogether unfruitful—that the good ſeed of God's holy Word was indeed ſown into your hearts, time after time, ſabbath after ſabbath, but it would never ſo much as ſtrike root—for what reaſon—it could never ſo much as ſtrike root in a heart that was nothing but one wild region of fantaſtic pleaſures, ſenſual deſires, and ſordid ſecular principles.

God is infinitely merciful. He watcheth with great patience over impenitent obdurate ſinners. It is with great reluctance he gives them up to an impenetrable hardneſs of heart. *He ſpeaks to them once, yea, twice,* but man regardeth him not. It is a tender affecting deſcription, and ſhould have all its weight with us, where the bleſſed God is repreſented as coming year

year after year, reaſonably expecting fruit when ſo much had been done for his vineyard, but finding none. But think of thoſe aweful words, God grant they may never be fulfilled in any of you: *Cut it down immediately: why cumbereth it the ground any longer?* One would really think that common ingenuity, that common gratitude, would make men tear from their hearts every principle inconſiſtent with their obligations to God and Chriſt, the beſt and greateſt of all benefactors. One would think that a ſenſe of duty, a ſenſe of intereſt, would induce men to bring their hearts under the influence of theſe ſaving truths, and carry an irreſiſtible force with them, to prevent them from fruſtrating the gracious deſigns of God, and loſing an immortal ſoul—for ever wilfully loſing an immortal ſoul. But thoſe, alas! who are determined to ſlight the Goſpel, to ſlight their miniſters, to

ſlight

ſlight good books, to ſlight the ſabbath, will never be convinced of the worth of the ſoul, the value of the Goſpel, and the neceſſity of holineſs—I mean, will never be convinced in this world—the puniſhments which God will inflict in another world will fully convince them of the worth of theſe things. Let us enter upon every new week, month, and year, with ſolemn reſolutions, avowed in the preſence of God, that we will improve our time better, that we will ſuffer the good ſeed of the word of God to take deeper root in our ſouls, that we will cultivate our powers with greater aſſiduity than we have yet done, ſpend our fleeting moments to better purpoſes, take more pains to improve ourſelves in knowledge and holineſs, and, by our induſtry, with the bleſſing of God, gain a greater meetneſs and preparedneſs for an eternal world.

Permit me to make another general remark upon this parable, before I deſcend in ſome following Diſcourſes to diſcuſs the particulars of it. One cannot but obſerve how beautifully the nature and progreſs of religion in the ſoul are repreſented by ſeed ſown in the ground. Religion, grace, the principle of holineſs, the divine life, call it by what names you will, is ſmall in its beginning—when it is depoſited in the genial ſoil of the human heart, it ſtrikes deep root—it receives increaſing vigour from the good diſpoſitions in which it is implanted—it grows up and flouriſhes in all its native beauty—it diffuſes ſhowers of fragrance round the whole ample extent of all the ſoul's capacities—and, when arrived at its maturity, is a great, and glorious, and divine ſpectacle, which God, Chriſt, and angels, view with a peculiar ſatisfaction. *The kingdom of God is like a grain of muſ-*

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tard-ſeed, which a man took and ſowed in his field. Which indeed is the leaſt of all ſeeds: but when it is grown, it is the greateſt among herbs, and becometh a tree: ſo that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. We ſee the nobleſt of the works of men riſe to the greateſt grandeur from ſmall beginnings—empires, commonwealths, cities, a contemptible handful of men—nothing but an obſcure town or village, at firſt, perhaps—yet in length of time, by a ſeries of ſucceſs, by the dint of induſtry, and a continual indefatigable attention to the arts of peace and war and commerce, have at laſt attained to an immenſe glory, and to the higheſt pinnacle of terreſtrial greatneſs. So it is with the divine life in the ſoul of man. At firſt the principle of it is weak and inconſiderable—by culture and improvement it gains greater and ſtill greater ſtrength—the dews of heaven,

heaven, the grace of God, co-operate with human endeavours to promote and forward its growth—'till at laſt it breaks forth in all its immenſe loveliness, in all its rich variety of divine beauty, and gladdens the eye of every ſpectator. *So is the kingdom of God*, ſays our Lord—the *kingdom of God*, that is, religion in the ſoul—*is as if a man ſhould caſt ſeed into the ground, and ſhould ſleep, and riſe night and day, and the ſeed ſhould ſpring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of itſelf, firſt the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.* Mark how gradual the progreſs of the divine life is—firſt the ſeed ſown—then the blade—next the ear—and at laſt full corn in the ear. From this progreſſive nature of perſonal religion it is, that we are ſo frequently exhorted to *grow in grace*, to *add to our faith virtue*, not to be continually laying the firſt prin-

principles of the doctrine of Jesus, but to go on to perfection.

APPLICATION.

This is a subject which greatly concerns us all—the declension or the progress of Religion in our souls. Let us then solemnly put the question to our own hearts—Is the good seed of the Word of God, which the great Sower hath freely scattered over my heart, a vital principle? Have I suffered it to fix deep root and flourish in my soul, or suffered it to languish and die? Do I suffer piety to God to animate and quicken this seed, and holy and virtuous dispositions to promote the great principles of its vegetation?—or do I permit every airy pleasure to pick it up, and every secular pursuit to choak and kill it? Do I ever gratefully acknowledge the merciful hand that dispensed this good seed—or have I duly pre-

pared my heart for the reception of it? Do I find it ſpringing up in my ſoul to everlaſting life—or is its growth and progreſs checked and ſtopped by the baleful weeds I have ſuffered to take deep root in my mind, and intercept its nutriment? Let me earneſtly implore every one of you carefully to examine the ſtate of his mind, and impartially aſk his conſcience—Conſcience will faithfully tell—whether he is gradually going on towards perfection, or gradually relapſing into a cold inactivity and careleſs indifference. Lord, by thy bleſſed Spirit quicken our induſtry in the divine life, and excite every one of us, by the ſedulous cultivation of our minds, to be continually making a happy progreſs towards perfection; that the good ſeed, which by thy bleſſed Son thou haſt ſown in our hearts, may receive its full and final completion in a glorious harveſt of immortal bleſſednefs!

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SERMON II.

MATTH. XIII. 4.

And as he he ſowed, ſome ſeeds fell by way-ſide, and the fowls came and devoured them.

IN the former diſcourſe I ſhewed the wiſdom of our Saviour in preferring this method of inſtruction before every other, and repreſented the many happy effects with which it would be accompanied. I ſhewed you that by the Sower who went forth

to ſow, our Lord intended himſelf—that the field, into which this good ſeed is promiſcuouſly thrown, is the human heart—and that this good ſeed of the Word of God flouriſhes or languiſhes, lives or dies, according to the goodneſs or badneſs of the moral ſoil to which it is committed. I repreſented to you alſo, how happily and beautifully the principle of the divine life in the ſoul is adumbrated by ſeed ſown in the ground—ſmall in its beginning, but, by the dint of conſtant culture and improvement, and the well-diſciplined affections of the human heart, attains its deſtined glory and greatneſs, fills the whole ample extent of the ſoul with ſacred and divine fragrance, and affords a moſt delightful ſpectacle both to angels and men. Having made theſe preliminary obſervations, which I thought requiſite and neceſſary, as a proper introduction to this moſt beautiful and inſtructive parable,

rable, I now proceed to discuss the several particulars of it. God grant that the important truths it conveys, and the lessons of useful instruction it reads us all, may leave indelible impressions on our hearts!

A Sower went forth to sow: and as he sowed, some seeds fell by the wayside, and the fowls of heaven came and devoured them. Our Lord here fitly represents a heart rendered obdurate and callous with sensual pleasures, by a hard beaten path, which nothing can penetrate. The word of God, which hath been liberally thrown upon such a mind, lies naked and exposed upon its surface, incapable of entering, and unable to exert its active vital principles and genial qualities. It lies upon the beaten surface, a prey to every roving passion, to be picked up and devoured by every wandering lust. For by the fowls of the air, which, col-

lected in large companies, and, urged by insatiable hunger, light upon it, and, with ravenous eagerness, instantly devoured it up, are meant the airy pleasures, the fantastic follies, and the ever-craving, unsatisfied appetites of men, which, if permitted to rage and act the vulture, quickly devour every thing that is excellent, amiable, and virtuous in the mind. All good instructions, all useful admonitions, all the salutary calls to repentance, all the cogent persuasives to a good life, all the friendly advice of parents and ministers, all the tremendous denunciations of Almighty God—all these heavenly seeds are sown ineffectually—rebound from its hard, impenetrable surface—lie useless upon it, without being able to infix the least impression. The heavenly seed, which the gracious Redeemer dispenses, is not able to strike root in a soil so unsusceptible of all moral life and vegetation, impregnated

nated with ſo many noxious principles, the bane of every thing excellent and good—a thouſand luſts ſtarve it in its birth, prevent and check its growth, or ſwallow it up the moment it is ſown. It is impoſſible that vital Religion, the principle of the divine life in the ſoul, can grow and flouriſh, and attain its proper maturity, when it is implanted in a heart where ſo many ſenſual paſſions are permitted to riſe in all their baneful greatneſs, to throw their luxuriant branches around, and cauſe every ſeed, which a divine hand can plant, to languiſh, wither, and die. Serious ſermons, pious inſtructions, virtuous admonitions, loſe all power to affect and impreſs. They fall in all their heavenly mildneſs and ſelecteſt influence, upon ſuch an hardened mind, upon a mind ſo hacknied in the corrupt ways of men—they fall, but leave no trace behind. What impreſſions can be made on a ſoul that

breathes nothing but pleaſure, ſenſual fantaſtic pleaſure. What impreſſions can be fixed on a covetous, ſordid, ſelfiſh, groveling heart, that is incruſted with a ſurface hard and impenetrable as adamant! What impreſſions can the love of God, and holineſs, and heaven, make on a mind that is one univerſal region, inhabited by no better ſpirits than the fiends of ſenſuality, luxury, diſſoluteneſs, and debauchery, with the great Demon of luſt preſiding over them, ſaying to one, Go, and he goeth, and to another, Do this, and he doeth it! What impreſſions can holineſs and goodneſs ſeal upon a ſoul, that ſeems to live for no end but the gratification of its worſt paſſions—which knows, and which is determined to know, no pleaſure, but what levels it with the brutes—I ſhould rather ſay, degrades it infinitely below the brutes! What impreſſions can be made on a ſoul, whoſe waking and whoſe ſleeping hours

hours are employed in fondly contemplating the glare and glitter of pomp and ſplendour—who knows no pleaſure, no happineſs of life, but while it treads a giddy round of trifling amuſements, is ideally for ever preſent in ſoft, deluſive, idle ſcenes, that diſſipate every thing ſerious and virtuous, and running an eternal circle of the moſt abandoned gratifications that the moſt abandoned of mankind ever invented! Can the heavenly ſeed, which God, and Chriſt, and weeping parents, and faithful miniſters ſow, find a reception in that boſom that is *hardened by the deceitfulneſs of ſin*—poſſeſſed with a fatal perſuaſion that ſuch and ſuch a purſuit is the only road that leads to true happineſs—ridiculing every argument, and every perſon, that *ſternly pronounce the rigid interdiction*—and deliberately reſolved to regard nothing that would ſour and leaven their miſerable joys, or debar and avert them from their

groveling and wretched indulgences. Virtuous inſtruction, affectionately thrown upon ſuch a mind, is beautifully deſcribed by our bleſſed Saviour, as good ſeed, caſt upon a hard beaten path—incapable of penetrating it—lying naked and uſeleſs upon it—the food of every devouring paſſion—the prey of every inſatiable deſire. With all the celeſtial qualities with which it is endowed, it is unable to impregnate ſuch a worthleſs ſoil with any moral fertility—its ſurface, beaten by the light fantaſtic foot of ſuch an infinite tribe of gay, airy pleaſures, for ever prevents its reception—its growth is precluded—it finds nothing in a region, trampled by ſuch a vain and viſionary group, to enliven it, and unfold its vegetating principles—and the good Being, who ſowed it, with ſorrow and regret ſees it picked up by every unclean bird, and gradually devoured by every ominous and ill-boding fowl.

Moreover, the ſeed, that fell by the way-ſide, which the fowls of heaven inſtantly devoured, beautifully repreſents thoſe who hear the word of God with negligence and careleſſneſs, with no previous well-formed diſpoſitions at all to receive inſtruction and improvement from it. By this part of the Parable thoſe are aptly deſcribed, who attend public worſhip without bringing, or deſigning to bring, its ſacred tranſactions to their immortal ſouls, or thinking themſelves at all intereſted in its great concerns. Alas! what unhappy numbers are there of this unhappy claſs of hearers! How many are there, who regard the ſabbath rather as a wiſe political eſtabliſhment, as a happy political relaxation from the drudgery of life, than as a divine inſtitution appointed by our Maker to preſerve through all ages of the world, in the minds of his creatures, a ſenſe of their dependence,

ence, and of the worth of their immortal ſouls. How many are there, who ſeem to think that Religion is rather the buſineſs of a particular ſet of men, than the great concern of all men. In the preſent age Public Worſhip ſeems to be looked upon as a ſort of Theological Entertainment, that agreeably or diſagreeably returns once in ſeven days, to chequer and diverſify the dull ſcene of life—and people attend upon this ſingular amuſement with pretty much the ſame diſpotions as they do upon other amuſements—to make their remarks upon the delivery of the public ſpeaker,—upon the propriety or impropriety of his ſtyle—upon the elegance or inelegance of his manner—upon the juſtneſs or unjuſtneſs of his ſentiments—forgetting all the while that they have either minds to be improved, or ſouls to be ſaved. How juſtly is the moral ſtate of theſe perſons characterized by the

the *ſeed falling on the beaten path, and the fowls of the air devouring it*—who enter the doors of a Chriſtian Church from no other motive, with no other view, but an idle principle of curioſity—to exerciſe their critical penetration—to applaud or condemn the language, the diction, the elocution, the opinions of the preacher—eagerly catching every thing that will feed this moſt unſeaſonable and criminal vanity—ſuffering their paſſions to be titillated and inflamed, but their reaſon and underſtanding to remain unenlightened, unimproved—not once regarding how ſeriouſly, and holily, and devoutly the worſhip of God is conducted, but only how elegantly, and pleaſingly, and charmingly it is performed. The Scriptures well deſcribe this idle and worthleſs diſpoſition, by *itching ears*, that pay more regard to ſound than ſenſe—whoſe vanity and falſe taſte is ſoothed and gratified

tified by flowers of rhetoric, a gaudy pomp of ſtyle, and the empty jingle of ſuperficial declamation. No wonder, if the good ſeed of the Word of God remains unfruitful, for it cannot penetrate a mind, whoſe ſurface is only affected by the impulſe of empty ſound and light fantaſtic ornament and decoration—entirely regardleſs of the native worth and divine excellence of the ſeed that is ſown—ſolely attending to the *manner* in which it is ſown. Such diſpoſitions are not fitted to retain good inſtruction—it is totally loſt upon ſuch a vitiated taſte—a depraved imagination, a falſe erroneous judgment, prevent it from entering into the intimate eſſence of the ſoul—the heavenly truths, which are diſpenſed by the preacher to render immortal ſouls wiſe and happy, lie naked and uſeleſs upon the ſteril uncultivated ſurface, and a troop of airy fantaſtic paſſions, imagination, fan-

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cy, taſte, faſhion, with their light pinions deſcend upon it, and inſtantaneouſly pick it up.

The ſame deplorable effect, rendering the Word of God unfruitful, ariſes from another unhappy cauſe—when men enter a worſhipping aſſembly with their hearts full of religious controverſy—full of ſpeculative ſyſtem and ſentiment—environed by prejudice—held faſt in the adamantine fetters of bigotry and party-ſpirit—diſpoſed not ſo much to receive edification and improvement, to have good principles fixed in their minds, to have their hearts inflamed with the love of God and their Redeemer, as to judge of the ſoundneſs or unſoundneſs of the preacher's Creed. I do not know a more wretched abuſe of the worſhip of God than this—perſons coming into a Chriſtian congregation of worſhippers with no other view than

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to pick up phrases—to treasure up in their memories such and such obnoxious expressions—not once considering how many serious and practical things were said—forgetting those truths in which all men are agreed; and consequently all men most concerned—intending to forget them—but hoarding up in the mean, narrow, gloomy cell of a controversial spirit every thing spoken that does not exactly suit with their particular opinions. How much hath practical religion suffered by controversy, by the miserable Shibboleth of a party spirit! How vainly, how ineffectually, is the good seed of God's Word sown upon an heart, full of religious discord, and religious controversy! What a shameful, what an impious perversion of Christian Worship, to bring with us into the house of God our irritable passions, a litigious, captious spirit, lying at catch for words and expres-

expreſſions, when our hearts and thoughts ought to be employed on far different ſubjects than theſe! What an inſult is ſuch a temper as this to the bleſſed God, who preſides in every religious aſſembly, and who ſees and knows from what principles our devotions flow. Are our fond prepoſſeſſions, our doubtful opinions, our miſerable controverſies about particular points of no conſequence to the cauſe of vital Religion, an acceptable ſacrifice, think you, to God—or is ſuch an inflammable ſpirit in a proper ſtate for approaching the ſacred preſence of a pure and holy Being. Theſe things are the bane of true Piety—theſe unhappy prejudices with voracious greedineſs light upon every thing that is ſerious and devotional, and devour every thing they find in the heart, that is holy, heavenly, and good.

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With these very dispositions the Jews in our Saviour's time attended his public ministry. They came with all their Jewish prejudices and Rabbinical notions about them. They heard his heavenly doctrines with minds inveloped in all the darkness of system, and with understandings fettered in the strongest chains that superstition ever forged. What was the consequence, and what will ever be the consequence of persons hearing the Word of God with such unhallowed dispositions as these? Did they receive any benefit even from the personal instruction of the Son of God? Were they affected by the *gracious words that proceeded from his mouth?* Could the blessed Jesus, with all his heavenly mildness, grace, and love, soften their obduracy, overcome their prejudices, and subdue their system? O the force of prejudice! O the invincible power of long-conti-

continued habits—of a long-continued ſuperſtition! Even the beloved Son of God, who ſpake as man never ſpake, who wrought ſuch miracles as mere man never wrought, and publiſhed ſuch diſcoveries as no human teacher ever before delivered, could not, you ſee, impreſs the hard obdurate heart of a Jew—could not convince him of the folly and falſhood of his ſyſtem—could not diſſolve thoſe chains which riveted his heart to his beloved Rabbies and his beloved Temple, and bring him to the acknowledgment and conviction of the truth and divinity of his miſſion and doctrines. Hear our bleſſed Lord's complaint: *The heart of this people is waxed groſs*, quite callous, quite unſuſceptible of all impreſſions; *their ears are dull of hearing, their eyes they have cloſed, leſt they ſhould be converted, and I ſhould heal them.* Alas! this hath ever been the caſe in all the ages of the Chriſtian

tian Church. The very ſame cauſe hath rendered, and, I am afraid, will ever render, in a great meaſure, the Word of God unfruitful. How can the grace of God, the principle of the divine life, ſtrike its roots in a mind that pays a greater regard to *words* than things—that has only a form of Godlineſs, but is a ſtranger to the power of it—that conſiders Religion rather as an art or ſcience, full of technical words and learned phraſes, which he muſt learn—and is more ſolicitous to fill his head with notions, than his heart with holineſs. Can any thing correſpond more exactly to the *ſeed that fell by the way-ſide*, on an hard beaten, unimpreſſible path, an eaſy delicious morſel to the greedy hungry fowls, than the unhappy mind of that Chriſtian, who reads and hears, and worſhips, and yet ſuffers his prejudices to ſtop all the avenues that lead to his heart? How can the

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fair harveſt of holineſs, the glorious harveſt of eternal life, ſpring from a ſoil that is poiſoned by party-ſpirit, and totally contaminated with the itch of controverſy? When the heavenly ſeed falls upon ſuch a hard and beaten highway, as ſuch an heart is, a thouſand paſſing and repaſſing prejudices trample it under foot, ſully and ruin its celeſtial beauty and worth, and immerſe its divine excellence in the ſink and filth of the moſt abject and ignoble paſſions.

Do reflect for one moment, how much the intention of God, in the inſtitution of public worſhip, is defeated by our harbouring ſuch unworthy principles as theſe. By our unholy diſpoſitions we convert that into an houſe of contention, which God deſigned ſhould be the houſe of devotion. By bringing a controverſial ſpirit with us to the divine altar, we extin-

tinguiſh thoſe very affections which God intended ſhould be cheriſhed and inflamed. We ſubſtitute theory for practice, form for godlineſs, opinion for piety, and appearance for reality. What God originally intended ſhould inſpire us with ſentiments of love and gratitude to him, ſhould fix in our hearts good principles, ſhould conciliate us to each other, and unite us in the moſt engaging, endearing friendſhip, one to another; we, by a moſt unnatural and impious perverſion, make it a public day of uncharitable diſputation, the Pulpit is unworthily converted into a ſtage of railing and invective, and immortal ſouls reſort to our worſhipping aſſemblies, not ſo much for improvement in holineſs, as for improvement in the arts of religious altercation. Thus it is that the good ſeed of the word of God periſhes through the badneſs of the ſoil to which it is committed. Thus it is

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that we abuſe and defeat the gracious deſigns of Almighty God in appointing the Sabbath, in continuing a Goſpel miniſtry, and putting into our hands the ſacred Volume, by voluntarily turning our mercies into miſeries, and our liberty into licentiouſneſs. Thus it is that we pervert the grace and goodneſs of God and Chriſt, by ſuffering every vain pleaſure to devour the good principles they have ſown in our hearts, by allowing our luſts, and appetites, and bad habits, firſt to ſtarve, at length to kill it, and, by our own folly and madneſs, moſt wretchedly ſuffering that to wither and die, which, by timely prudence, care, and improvement, might have been reared into a goodly plant, and bleſſed us with the immortal fruit of eternal life.

APPLI-

APPLICATION.

I ſhall cloſe this Diſcourſe with the following Reflections.

Let none of us frequent the worſhip of God as a matter of mere form and cuſtom, and diſcharge it in a careleſs, negligent, and perfunctory manner. Many people attend public worſhip becauſe it is the cuſtom of the country in which they live—or the faſhion of the place in which they reſide. But I muſt recall theſe words—alas! In the preſent age it is neither cuſtomary nor faſhionable to attend divine worſhip. Men ſeem to think as if they could be ſaved as well without it, and live as if that great Being, who hath ſolemnly ſaid, *Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy*, would never call them to account for their wilful violation of it. The command

mand to keep holy the Sabbath-day was the very firſt command that God enjoined upon man. Let us ever reverence this *firſt and great commandment*. Let us count our Sabbaths a delight, make conſcience of attending public worſhip, and attend with a Chriſtian temper, with a holy and devout diſpoſition. Let us on this day be open to conviction, never bring our worſt paſſions with us, rankling in our breaſts, to the Divine Preſence: but let our ſpirits be calm, our minds compoſed, and all our affections and powers in a fit diſpoſition for receiving inſtruction and edification. *Take heed how you hear*, ſays our Lord. And we read of perſons, whom the word of God did not profit—why—what prevented—becauſe it was not mixed with faith in them who heard it. O Sirs, better we had never entered the doors of a worſhipping aſſembly, if it do not find us more holy, and charita-

ble, and leave us ſo. *Keep thy foot when thou goeſt to the houſe of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the ſacrifice of fools.* To the ſame purpoſe the Apoſtle: *Therefore we ought to give the more earneſt heed to the things that we have heard, leſt at any time we ſhould let them ſlip.* For a creature to ſtand in the preſence of its Maker, praying to him, hearing his word, and chanting his praiſes, is a ſolemn tranſaction. Let not our hearts be endowed with ſuch principles, and hardened with ſuch depraved diſpoſitions, as that this good ſeed of God's word, which Miniſters diſpenſe, falls upon it, but is not able to penetrate its ſurface, and the dews of heaven, the grace of God, and the influences of his Spirit, diſtil upon it, but cannot ſoften its obduracy, cannot ſeal any impreſſion upon it. It is a beautiful deſcription of a devout and holy hearer of God's word, which the A-

poſtle James gives us.—May its importance ſtrike and affect us all—*Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own ſouls. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glaſs: for he beholdeth himſelf, and goeth his way, and ſtraightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoſo looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a faithful doer of God's word, this man ſhall be bleſſed in his deed.*

SERMON III.

MATTH. XIII. 5, 6.

Some fell upon ſtony places, where they had not much earth; and forthwith they ſprang up, becauſe they had no deepneſs of earth: and when the ſun was up, they were ſcorched, and becauſe they had not root, they withered away.

THE Parable of the Sower is intended to repreſent the different diſpoſitions of thoſe who hear the word of God. Its variety of ſucceſs in the

world, the different fate it meets, according to the good or bad ſtate of the heart that receives it, is beautifully deſcribed in apt and ſtriking images. This is a ſubject in which we are all intimately concerned. A faithful picture of the heart of every Chriſtian is here portrayed, and held up to his ſerious and impartial contemplation. Every one, who now hears me, falls under the denomination of one or other of theſe different hearers, who are in this moral picture ſo accurately delineated.

Our Divine Maſter had a perfect knowledge of the human heart. He knew all the paſſions by which it was agitated—all the principles by which it was governed—all the various affections and diſpoſitions by which it was actuated. He had an infallible diſcernment of the ſpirits of men, and knew how perſons of ſuch and ſuch affections and habits would act in ſuch

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and ſuch circumſtances. He was acquainted with the moral ſtate of every perſon with whom he converſed—was conſcious of the motions of his mind, the principles of his actions, and the temper and frame of ſoul with which he attended. Thus St. John obſerves, that our bleſſed Saviour *needed not that any ſhould teſtify of man*, that is, that ſhould give him an atteſtation of any man's character, for *he knew what was in man*, he had a perfect, diſtinct, and infallible knowledge of the hearts of men. This appears from the whole of his Hiſtory. How often does this expreſſion occur in the four Evangeliſts, *Jeſus knowing their thoughts!* How often does he diſcover to his Diſciples things which they had ſtudiouſly concealed from him, and openly ſhow them the folly and unreaſonableneſs of deſigns, and ſchemes, and deliberations, which they had privately agitated among themſelves, and

to which they never imagined he could be witneſs! And how ſtupendouſly does this divine knowledge of Chriſt appear, in the moſt accurate and exact deſcriptions of the various tempers and diſpoſitions of mankind! How very differently different men ſtand affected towards the word of God, and what different effects divine and heavenly things have on different diſpoſitions, is moſt beautifully and inſtructively ſhown in the various Parables he rehearſed. If we attend to theſe Parables, we ſhall diſcover in them a knowledge of mankind that was more than human. They are faithful pictures of life, in which all the various features of the human heart, ſo to ſpeak, are minutely traced out, and exhibited in the moſt ſtriking light.

In the Parable we are now conſidering, our Saviour, in the moſt apt and expreſſive

expreſſive images, repreſents how differently men are affected by the word of God, and the reaſons which preclude or promote the moral fertility of the divine life. He holds up this faithful picture to our eyes, that we may judge for ourſelves, how far ſuch and ſuch a particular figure in it repreſents our own ſtate, and is a copy of that original we carry in our own hearts. By theſe faithful repreſentations he leads us to judge by compariſon—that is—to paſs a true verdict upon the ſtate of our own ſouls, when compared with ſuch and ſuch a character as drawn by him, and puts the queſtion to our own heart: How far do I reſemble this deſcription—in what rank of theſe different hearers does my conſcience claſs me—is my heart like the beaten path on which the word of God is able to make no impreſſion—or 's it like the ſtony ground, covered with a ſlight and ſcanty ſoil, into which

the word of God falls indeed, but is not capable of arriving at its maturity, by reaſon of the impenetrable flint that lurks beneath—Or is my heart one univerſal wild and wilderneſs, in which the heavenly ſeed, ſown from time to time upon it, is ſtarved and choaked by the luxuriant weeds of ſecular care, ſordid covetouſneſs, and earth-born paſſions, which I have ſuffered for a ſeries of years to flouriſh there without controul, and to canker and kill every good ſeed which a divine hand hath planted. Theſe, or ſuch as theſe, are obvious reflections, which the various characters, drawn in this Parable, ſuggeſts. And this is the very uſe our Lord intended we ſhould make of it — to compare our hearts with his deſcription—to bring our affections and ſpirits to that ſtandard of holineſs and goodneſs he hath laid down—to examine our hearts by theſe rules, and impartially judge how

how far we conform to or deviate from them—to be often viewing our minds in that faithful mirrour he holds up to us, to rectify what is amiſs, and cheriſh and improve what is holy and good. May God of his infinite mercy grant that this may be the practical inſtruction which the heavenly doctrine of our bleſſed Redeemer may teach us all—and may the Spirit of God indelibly engrave theſe important and ſaving leſſons on the fleſhly tablet of our hearts.

The ſeed which fell upon ſtony places, ſlightly covered with mould, is a juſt and affecting repreſentation of the generality of Chriſtians. What numbers of men, who attend public worſhip, and read religious books, are here deſcribed! At the time they are hearing or reading, they are greatly affected, greatly impreſſed—but no ſooner do they mix in the active ſcenes

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of life, but all these slight impressions are totally obliterated. At the time they are hearing a Discourse upon such a subject, or reading a good book upon such and such Duties, their convictions are awakened, they see in the clearest, strongest light, the reasonableness and importance of such and such a course of life, and breathe some faint wishes, utter some ineffectual sighs, express, it may be, some momentary resolves, that they will follow such useful advice—behave better than they have done—that they will go and sin no more—that they will not be seduced by bad company, in the manner they have been, or, at least, so often as they have been—but will, for the future, direct their steps into such and such a path of life, which the Preacher, or the Writer, so faithfully tells them will lead them to true happiness. By the arguments addressed to them they are convinced, fully convinced, that

that the courſe they are purſuing is a ruinous and deſtructive one to their healths, their conſtitutions, and to their immortal ſouls—For a ſhort interval, a ſhort tranſient gleam, they have a ſtrong, full view of theſe momentous concerns—perhaps for a time they abhor and deteſt themſelves for the exceſſes and enormities they have fooliſhly incurred—they ſee, they manifeſtly ſee where theſe courſes will end—and for a few hours or days are greatly ſtricken, deeply penetrated with a ſenſe of their condition. One would think, from ſuch a warm and genial reception as this, which they give to the ſeed of God's word, that it would indeed not be ſown in vain, but would bring forth its fruit in due ſeaſon. One would conclude, but, alas, it would be a too haſty, a too precipitate concluſion, that the word of God, which falls into a ſoil ſo ſoft and ſo ſuſceptible, that generouſly, as

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one would think, opens all its powers to receive it, would find nutriment enough, would ſtrike its roots, ſpring up, and bleſs us with the immortal fruits of true repentance and holineſs—But alas! all theſe convictions are temporary—they laſt no longer than the Sermon—it is well if they laſt as long as the Sabbath. Theſe painful convictions of mind, theſe awakened terrors of conſcience, are indeed, as the prophet beautifully deſcribes them, but *like the morning cloud, or the early dew, that ſoon paſſeth away.* The Word of God is affectionately diſpenſed by Miniſters—the grace of God falls upon ſuch an heart in fertilizing ſhowers; but our preaching is vain, and the grace of God is repulſed, and falls in vain. The heart indeed with gladneſs receives it—fondly opens its boſom to receive it—it ſinks into it—but cannot ſink deep, for the adamantine rock that is but juſt, juſt beneath

neath its ſurface. The center of ſuch an heart is one entire maſs of hard impenetrable rock, which defeats all the moral principles of vegetation that there may be in the ſlight ſurface with which it is ſurrounded. For when the love of pleaſure is enthroned in the heart—hath erected its palace in the very center of its dominions, and ſways its abſolute, uncontroulable ſceptre—what power can a few tranſient good diſpoſitions have to ſubvert a monarchy that hath been ſo ſtrongly eſtabliſhed—what power can a few momentary virtuous affections have, which only hover round the boundaries of this empire, to weaken its foundation, and to demoliſh this impregnable fortreſs! Perhaps theſe very people, who are ſo affected with a particular Sermon, on ſuch a particular ſubject, that for a time comes home to their boſoms and conſciences, would be as much affected by a tender

der pathetic ſcene in a tragedy. And there is but too great a reſemblance betwixt the effects that follow the one and the other. A few tributary tears flow, perhaps we do not know well from what cauſe they flow—purely from mechaniſm—we are in both inſtances hurried away by our paſſions, while our underſtanding and reaſon remain unenlightened, unconvinced, not once conſulted. How is it poſſible but convictions muſt be fugacious, ineffectual things, when they flow from paſſion, not from reaſon. What laſting ſaving impreſſions can be made on a mind which is hardened by ſenſuality, and its whole internal ſubſtance petrified into ſtone, by a life of unfeeling debauchery and voluptuouſneſs—Such worthleſs creatures may be impreſſed by an affecting Sermon, or a good Book, juſt as they are impreſſed by reading an intereſting Novel, or the idle ſoothing

pages of an Eaſtern tale. But mark the conſequence, the never-failing conſequence—The Church is no ſooner diſmiſſed, or the book laid aſide, but the moment that pleaſure invites, the moment that ſcenes of amuſement call them, that the mercenary harlot ſpreads her net, and the importunity of company begins its ſoft compulſion, but theſe abject, miſerable ſlaves follow—all impreſſions are in a moment effaced—and the fair harveſt of reformation and amendment, which their late convictions pleaſingly gave us to hope—which ſprang up ſo inſtantaneouſly, and indeed ſo unexpectedly—is in one fatal moment ſcorched—its riſing beauty all ſhrivelled up—in one and the ſame hour, it may be, it bleſſes us with a thouſand opening beauties, but is immediately killed, and dies—and we turn our eyes from it as a loathſome, worthleſs ſpectacle.

Oh

O with what pleaſure do ſome people attend Public Worſhip—almoſt with as much pleaſure as they go to hear ſome celebrated actor, who hath the entire command of all their paſſions. O what ſatisfaction do ſome people expreſs on hearing ſuch a Preacher—almoſt the ſame ſatisfaction as they receive upon hearing a new Performer, who never trod the ſtage before—With what delight will they expatiate upon the propriety of his manner—the juſtneſs of his ſentiments—the ſublimity of his ſubject—the perſpicuity of his reaſoning—and the importance of the truths he delivered. They ſit impreſſed and affected—they go away ſerious and thoughtful—But the moment the ſun of pleaſure ariſes upon them—the moment the great never-ſetting Luminary of nocturnal and diurnal pleaſure throws his dazzling infatuating beams around them—it is ſcorched—and becauſe

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their light ſhallow minds did not afford it deepneſs of earth, it withers away.

It is not hearing many Sermons, or reading many books, that makes men religious and wiſe—but reflecting on what we hear and read. Repeatedly hearing great numbers of ſolid well-compoſed diſcourſes, and peruſing great numbers of inſtructive and uſeful books, is in itſelf of no more value, than any other amuſement we might happen to be fond of—unleſs we revolve and meditate what we hear and read—convert theory into practice—make our improvements in virtue correſpond to our improvements in knowledge—and cauſe the progreſſive acquiſitions of erudition and literature, we from time to time attain, to ſhine forth in a worthy, uſeful, unexceptionable converſation. Books hold up to us a faithful glaſs, in which we

may

may ſee, from a vaſt variety of examples, what we are to avoid, and what purſue. Sermons contain many an affectionate perſuaſive to our duty and happineſs, many an affectionate diſſuaſive from ſin and miſery—It is the uſe we make of theſe that determines our characters—that determines our wiſdom or our folly. If we forget the uſeful truths we read, if we ſlight the ſalutary admonitions we hear, the fault is not in the Preacher or Writer—they have delivered their ſouls—the defect is merely in our own hearts—there the obſtruction lies—there is the rock from which divine inſtruction rebounds. and which defeats all the culture that heaven beſtows. It is to little purpoſe that we were furniſhed with the faculties of underſtanding, the powers of improvement, and the means of holineſs, if we do not bring with us previous good diſpoſitions for making that ſacred

cred and virtuous uſe of them our Creator intended we ſhould make.

Our Saviour, in very lively images, ſets before us the conduct of ſuch perſons, on whoſe ſoft ductile minds impreſſions are ſoon made, and ſoon effaced. *When the ſun was up, they were ſcorched; and becauſe they had not root, they withered away.* The ſeed ſown in the thin mold, that environed the internal maſs of ſtone, appeared in a fair and flouriſhing ſtate, till the hot beams of perſecution aſſailed it—then, *for want of moiſture*, meaning for want of integrity and principle — it inſtantly ſhrank and ſhriveled, faded and died. What a true repreſentation is this of great numbers of profeſſors! What warm, zealous advocates are they for the intereſts of Religion, while they can but enjoy it unmoleſted!

lefted!—but the moment it is ſtricken at by the ſecular arm, they abandon and abjure it, and do not think the profeſſion of it of ſuch moment, as will juſtify their ſacrificing their temporal intereſt for the ſake of it. In the ſunſhine of national proſperity how fondly and indolently do men recline under the ſhade of their religious principles!—but let the ſtorms of perſecution ariſe—let but the ax of the bigot be laid at the root of the tree, under which they ſoftly repoſe, and they ſhake with unmanly terrors, baſely renounce the cauſe they had eſpouſed, and turn apoſtates with the utmoſt facility and unconcernedneſs. Let but their principles be in danger, and they publickly diſavow them. They deem it their duty to follow Chriſt, but will not take up their croſs to follow him. They are pleaſed with religious liberty, and the full poſſeſſion of the rights of conſcience—

ſcience — but if a ſudden torrent ſhould overwhelm theſe, they ſail ſupinely down its ſtream, without exerting a ſingle effort to check and ſtem it. In times of liberty and tranquillity they are all zeal and oſtentation—in times of diſtreſs and perſecution they relapſe into the meaneſt puſillanimity, and the moſt baſe and abject cowardice.

Hear our Lord's explication of this part of the Parable. *He that received the ſeed into ſtony places, the ſame is he that heareth the Word, and anon with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himſelf, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or perſecution ariſeth becauſe of the Word, by and by he is offended.* O how odious in the ſight of God and Chriſt and angels and good men, is ſuch a mean-ſpirited, cowardly, daſtardly ſoul—that would ſacrifice conſcience

and

and integrity to any man or body of men, who ſhould deſire and purchaſe ſuch a ſacrifice—that would make ſhipwreck of its faith and its religion, rather than riſk any part of its worldly intereſt in the ſacred cauſe. What muſt the great Searcher of our hearts think of our principles, when he knows we will adhere to them ſo long, and no longer—while we enjoy the quiet, undiſturbed fruition of them. How muſt we appear in the eyes of the great Spectator, when we make uſe of our Religion, juſt as an exterior badge, to put on and put off, juſt as will beſt ſuit particular times, and particular ſeaſons—to be any thing and nothing, according to the humours of thoſe with whom we converſe—and according to the emergencies that ariſe—and to give into every mean and baſe compliance, rather than in the leaſt endanger our dear perſons, and our dearer fortunes. Can

any

any thing be a greater proſtitution of the ſacred cauſe of religion, than to abjure and abandon it, whenever it comes in competition with our ſuppoſed reputation, and our ſecular intereſts. *He that loveth father and mother better than me, is not worthy of me*, and he, who in ſuch conjunctures, when his religion is ſtricken at by ſanguinary zeal, bigotted ſuperſtition, and erroneous principles—he who in ſuch conjunctures *doth not take up his croſs, and follow* his Redeemer, is not worthy to be called his Diſciple.

That is a very inſtructive Parable which our Lord addreſſes to us, the great moral of which is, That before we engage in religion we *ſhould ſit down and count the coſt*—impartially examine our hearts, whether we ſhall be equal to the difficulties to which we may be expoſed for the ſake of it—and whether we ſhall re-

nounce it, or ſupport it, if God ſhould call us to ſuch a conflict.

It is well known with what undaunted reſolution the primitive Chriſtians ſupported the heavieſt perſecutions, and endured the moſt cruel tortures. They went with a ſerene countenance, with a noble heaven-inſpired intrepidity, to the ſtake, to the racks and wheels of their heathen perſecutors—and thoſe of them, few and inconſiderable indeed, who made a public recantation of their Chriſtianity, rather than ſuffer for it—who, when the *ſun* of perſecution roſe upon them, *were ſcorched*, and *for want of moiſture withered and died* — theſe were ever treated by the whole body of Chriſtians as the moſt infamous and abandoned wretches — were univerſally ſhunned by them, and never admitted into the pale and communion of the Church.

The caſe is juſt the ſame with regard to any religious principles, of whoſe truth we have the firmeſt perſuaſion, and fulleſt conviction. If we ſurrender up theſe, whenever they are attacked—if we deſert thoſe principles which our conſciences and our Bibles tell us are true, whenever ſecular emoluments happen to interfere with the profeſſion of them—if we refuſe to countenance and ſupport thoſe Miniſters whom we know preach the truth as it is in Jeſus, and forſake thoſe Churches which are formed upon the baſis of religious liberty, and the rights of conſcience and private judgment, and are guilty of theſe mean and miſerable compliances, rather than be glorioufly ſingular in oppoſing the general torrent of corrupt principles, and riſk any thing, though it be in the cauſe of the unalienable rights and liberties of mankind—if this be our abject ſpirit, the repreſenta-

tion of our Lord in the text ſuits us as exactly as if we had ſat for the picture. *When the ſun is up*, when perſecution lights her fire, or lifts her ax, all our former principles are inſtantly no more.

Application.

Of what infinite concernment is it to every one of us, that our hearts be right with God. Think what integrity, what religious integrity is, and how uſeleſs and contemptible every thing is without it. Our religion is good for nothing if it will not bear the teſt of perſecution. It is a mere name, a mere external thing, a ſplendid outward badge, that has no connection with our hearts; it is a painted maſk, which we aſſume or drop as beſt ſuits the times. If our religion have not penetrated to the center of our hearts, have not occupied and poſſeſſed the whole

whole heart, it will be better for us to lay the profeſſion of it all aſide. What good will it do us to *have a form of godlineſs, and know nothing of the power of it?* If the internal maſs of our hearts be nothing but one entire adamantine rock of impenetrable flint, what ſervice will it be to us to have a thin ſlight ſurface of mould around it, in which nothing that is ſown can ever come to any maturity? *Be not deceived, God is not mocked. Whatſoever a man ſoweth, that ſhall he alſo reap.* The harveſt in the other world ſhall be according to the goodneſs or badneſs of every man's heart into which the ſeed is now ſown. *He that ſoweth to the fleſh ſhall of the fleſh reap corruption; but he that ſoweth to the Spirit ſhall of the Spirit reap life everlaſting.*

SERMON IV.

MATTH. XIII. 7.

And ſome fell among thorns: and the thorns ſprang up and choaked them.

OUR Saviour having, by various images, repreſented the reaſons which prevent or retard the riſe and progreſs of Religion in the ſouls of men, comes now to mention, among the principal cauſes which obſtruct its growth, a worldly covetous diſpo-

ſition. In his explanation of the Parable of the Sower to his Diſciples afterwards, he thus expounds the metaphorical expreſſions I have now read to you. *He that received ſeed among the thorns, is he that heareth the Word; but the cares of this world and the deceitfulneſs of riches choak the Word, and he becometh unfruitful.*

In diſcourſing, therefore, on theſe words, I will illuſtrate the beautiful ſimilitude here employed by our Saviour, will repreſent to you the truth of his obſervation, and ſhow how incompatible ſuch a mind, as is here deſcribed, is, with all the principles of moral culture and religious improvement. May God grant, that what at this time ſhall be delivered on this important ſubject may be uſeful in rectifying the diſorders of our minds, in expelling every thing from our ſpirits that is narrow and contracted, and engaging

engaging us to contemplate and to purſue the riches of eternity.

Before I enter upon the direct diſcuſſion of the doctrine of my text, ſuffer me to premiſe this obſervation. It was never the deſign of our Saviour and his Apoſtles to repreſent riches as abſtractedly evil, and to condemn the acquiſition of them. It is true, we meet with many paſſages in the ſacred Writings, where the very phraſes rich and wealthy are uſed as terms of the ſame import with profligate and abandoned, and the very expreſſion, riches, is ſynonymous with wickedneſs and guilt. Our Saviour declares it to be as morally impoſſible for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, that is, to become a profeſſor of the Goſpel, to embrace a Religion that was deſpiſed and outraged, as it would be for a cable, as ſome underſtand the paſſage, to be thruſt through the eye

of a needle. By the rich in this paſſage, as he afterwards explains himſelf to his Diſciples, who were alarmed at this harſh expreſſion, he meant thoſe who truſted in their riches, made them their great idol, the ſole object of their worſhip, and pronounced nothing great and good and happy, but what was ſplendid, oſtentatious, and magnificent. And in many other parts of Scripture, when we repeatedly read ſuch paſſages as theſe: *How hardly ſhall thoſe who have riches enter into the kingdom of God—Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for the miſeries that are coming upon you—Not many great, not many rich, not many noble, are called*—we are not to underſtand theſe paſſages in an abſolute, but a reſtrictive ſenſe—not as if riches of themſelves utterly diſqualified their poſſeſſor for holineſs and heaven, and the mere poſſeſſion of them neceſſarily excluded a perſon from all preten-

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ſions either to preſent virtue or future happineſs. For it is not the uſe but the *abuſe* which the Scripture condemns. It is not ſuperior wealth and opulence, but the bad diſpoſitions they too commonly produce, which the Scripture notes with marks of infamy. So far is the Scripture from prohibiting the acquiſition of wealth, that it excites men, of all profeſſions, by every incentive and argument, to a laudable induſtry, to be diligent in their reſpective ſtations, to adorn them by frugality, œconomy, and activity—the only road this, the only happy and worthy arts theſe to riches and honour. So far is the Scripture from repreſenting riches as ſimply and abſtractedly evil and unlawful, and neceſſarily productive of temporal wickedneſs and everlaſting perdition, that it repreſents them as the diſtinguiſhed bleſſings of Almighty God. It promiſes them as rewards, does not denounce

nounce them as punishments. It teaches us to regard them as blessings, which the Providence of God annexes to our sobriety, industry, and frugality—as signal benefactions, showered down upon us by his munificent hand—and as temporal retributions, divinely conferred upon us, to crown our active virtue, and reward our honest labours. Superior riches are superior blessings, bestowed by Providence as such—they are the means, the intended means of enjoying superior happiness—and there is not a happier being on the globe than a rich man with benevolent dispositions.

If we pervert this kind and merciful donation of God to us, we counteract the design of the donor—it is a most ungrateful, a most unnatural perversion—and it is not the fault of the giver, but of the receiver, if we convert those things into curses which he

he intended to be bleſſings. Riches are moſt to be envied, as they enable their poſſeſſor to do ſo much good—to diſſipate ſo much diſtreſs as there is in this world—to do ſo many friendly beneficent offices as the various occurrences and emergences of this life give him an opportunity of performing—I mean—of cloathing the naked, feeding the hungry, encouraging merit, and ſoftening the various rigours of human wretchedneſs. If happineſs is entirely a mental thing, can there be a nobler, purer, ſublimer happineſs enjoyed on this ſide Heaven, than what ariſes from the heart-felt conſciouſneſs of our having relieved a real object of compaſſion, or our having made a poor, indigent, numerous family a ſcene of joy and gratitude?- No pleaſure on earth like this. No happineſs on earth can be compared to the happineſs of doing good. And are we not, ought we not to be infinitely indebted to the

providence of God for enabling us, by bleſſing our induſtry, and granting us a happy ſeries of proſperity and ſucceſs, to enjoy this diſtinguiſhed felicity? *Does not every good gift, and every perfect gift, deſcend from the father of mercies?* And does not this ſignal bleſſing among others, which enables us to do ſo much good, and to enjoy ſo much happineſs from the conſciouſneſs of having done it? So that the obſervation of an ill-natured Divine hath more impiety and wit than truth and juſtneſs in it, who has this remark: "One may plainly ſee from "this," ſays he, "that the Almighty "accounts riches to be worthleſs things "from the worthleſs characters on "which he beſtows them."

It is not opulence and wealth, which, abſtractedly conſidered, are eminent bleſſings and ſuperior privileges; but the wretched abuſe and the ſiniſter miſim-

miſimprovement of them, which produce the fatal effects here mentioned by our Saviour. It is not gold, but the luſt of gold, which *chokes the Word of God, and renders it unfruitful.* Of all vices, avarice renders the human heart the moſt unſuſceptible of good impreſſions. A mind inflamed with other deſires is, comparatively, tender and impreſſible — but a ſoul centered in ſelfiſhneſs is abſolutely incorrigible. Beſides, a taſte for ſenſual exceſſes laſts not always — the paſſions and purſuits of youth are redreſſed and rectified by the ſolid reflections and deliberate judgment of manhood — or, at leaſt, ſometimes accompany us no farther than the cool and ſober evening of life—but covetouſneſs, when once it hath infuſed its poiſon in the heart, is ſeldom or never expelled—it gains freſh ſtrength in every ſtage of life through which we paſs, and in our ſad frail decline, when

when every other paſſion hath left us, this ſtill, ſtill binds our hearts to dirt and pelf in adamantine indiſſoluble fetters. One of the ancient Philoſophers ſomewhere ſays, That the love of fame is the laſt garment a good man lays aſide—I think it is equally true, that the love of money is the very laſt paſſion of which old age diveſts itſelf. Yet perhaps there is not a more ridiculous abſurd farce acted on the ſtage of human life, than extreme avarice in extreme old age. To be graſping at a periſhing world, that we muſt ſoon cloſe our eyes upon for ever—to be cheriſhing boundleſs deſires of hoarding and accumulating, while bowing under all the infirmities of frail mortality—to be ſpending anxious days and nights in planning projects, concerting meaſures, and weaving elaborate ſchemes to amaſs wealth, to dupe the incautious, to purchaſe ſuch an eſtate, to make up ſuch a ſum,

a ſum, when the ſhades of a long evening are ſtretching over us—what conſummate folly and diſtraction is this! How muſt Angels pity and deſpiſe us! pity our wretchedneſs, and deſpiſe our prepoſterous folly, to ſee a dying creature, juſt going to bid an eternal adieu to the world, clinging to it as if it were to ſpend an eternity in it? What muſt the bleſſed God and ſuperior Spirits think of our conduct, to ſee us, when juſt tottering over the brink of life, extending our hopes for many, many happy years yet to come—travelling in idea to ſuch and ſuch a *city, and continuing there a year, to buy and ſell, and get gain*—exulting perhaps over the ruin of our fellow-creatures—to ſee others ſo poor and ſo fallen, while we are ſo rich and ſo raiſed—and what is the moſt ridiculous circumſtance of avarice in old age, worthy the deriſion of all mankind, is, amidſt all the vaſt treaſures they

they have accumulated, to be haunted with the moſt dreadful apprehenſion, that they ſhall die for want of common neceſſaries!

Any paſſion whatever, that is exceſſive, hath reduced, and does and will reduce men to phrenzy and diſtraction—but ſooneſt of all will the inordinate, inſatiable love of the world do this. For young people to ſtudy and exerciſe the art of frugality, parſimony, and œconomy, I had almoſt ſaid for young people to be covetous, is comparatively commendable, laudable, and virtuous. They have many revolutions and viciſſitudes in life to encounter—many unexpected, unforeſeen emergencies with which to ſtruggle—and many ſad reverſes, it may be, to experience—but for old age, which hath now paſſed the troubled ocean of life, and is juſt within ſight of ſhore, inſtead of ſaluting

luting the wiſhed-for port, inſtead of entering it with ſhouts of triumph, and ſequeſtering themſelves in a calm and peaceful retreat—to put out again upon its dirty and dangerous waves, ſtill to ſtruggle with its ſtorms and tempeſts, and never ceaſe plowing its billows, and roaming for the wealth that lies beyond them—never ceaſe, even *when our body and ſtrength is conſumed*, conflicting with its winds and ſurges, till they fatally wreck us, and ingulph us in their boſom—Oh what deluſion and madneſs is this! Well might our bleſſed Lord, in his explanation of this part of the parable, ſtyle it, the *deceitfulneſs of riches.* For what a ſeries of egregious deceit do they practiſe upon us—luring us on inſenſibly, inſenſibly from one ſtage of life to another—duping, and for ever ruining us at laſt—by the glitter of this vain tinſel dazzling the eye of the ſoul, and preventing it from ſeeing the

the only true riches, the riches of eternity.

What miſerable ſlaves, and abject deſpicable vaſſals, does this DECEITFULNESS OF RICHES make of mankind—in time, perhaps in no great length of time, eſtabliſhing an empire over their minds, which, as long as they live, they never have the power to diſſolve—holding the underſtanding, and reaſon, and conſcience, in eternal chains, and letting looſe all the mean and mercenary paſſions to tyrannize without controul. *Love not the world*, ſays St. John, *neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Ye cannot*, ſays our Lord, *love God and Mammon.* One paſſion muſt predominate. The heart cannot equally be governed by two oppoſite principles—and where the

the love of money governs, it will take care to admit no competitor.

What an ignominious, what a deplorable degradation is this of an immortal ſoul! How is the glorious ſun, which God lighted up in the ſoul, eclipſed, totally obſcured and ſhrowded by theſe baleful ſhades! *If the light, that was in thee*, is thus darkened by this groveling earth-born paſſion, *how great is that darkneſs!* How can it be expected that the heavenly ſeed, which the hand of God ſows upon ſuch a heart, full of ſuch ſordid paſſions, ſhould he able to ſtrike root, and to come to any degree of beauty and maturity! How can it otherwiſe happen, but that when it falls, as frequently it does, in Sabbaths and Sermons and convictions, into a ſoil overgrown with ſuch poiſonous weeds, it muſt inſtantly be loſt and choked among them,

them, and die, for ever die, for want of the leaſt good affections, the leaſt warmth of benevolence to revive and foſter it! How can the good ſeed of the Word of God exert its divine principles, ſpring up in celeſtial beauty, and diffuſe around a ſhower of heavenly fragrance, when ſo many noxious thorns and luxuriant weeds overtop it, weave their thick peſtilent branches over it, excluding the ſunſhine of divine grace, and hindering the dews of heaven, the genuine influences of the Bleſſed Spirit from falling upon it, and inſpiring it with life and vigour!

The principles in the heart of a worldling are infinitely incompatible with the divine life. The love of God is a noble and generous paſſion: the love of the world a narrow, illiberal, and groveling one. The grand governing principle in a true Chriſtian's

tian's heart is univerſal charity: the ſole animating principle in a worldling's ſoul is a boundleſs rapacity. Religion is founded on the love of God and man: worldly-mindedneſs is founded on a baſe and miſerable ſelf-love.

Nothing can be more diametrically repugnant to the life and ſpirit of Religion than the canker of ſelf-intereſt. An avaricious ſelfiſh temper is totally oppoſite to that generous and beneficent ſpirit the Goſpel breathes. How infinitely abhorrent are the principles that lurk in a miſer's heart from the genius of a Religion whoſe diſtinguiſhing crown and glory is benevolence! What pretenſions can he have to the character of a Chriſtian, who is yet to feel the power of charity? There is ſomething in earthly-mindedneſs that is peculiarly ſubverſive of the great end and deſign of the Goſ-

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pel, and, of conſequence, infinitely deſtructive to our everlaſting interests. Well might our Lord obſerve, who had ſo infallible a knowledge of the human heart, that the ſeed of God's Word falling upon a ſpirit, overgrown with ſuch ſordid principles, *would be choked*, be inſtantly ſuffocated and overwhelmed by their uncontroulable predominance. For it is impoſſible that holineſs and heaven ſhould find any ſeat in a heart that is one vaſt gloomy dome ſacred to Mammon.

To prevent this ſordid and ignoble paſſion from gaining an aſcendency over us, let us frequently attend to thoſe pathetic diſſuaſives which the Scriptures are continually ſounding in our ears. God Almighty is alſo every day ſolemnly admoniſhing us againſt contracting and cheriſhing theſe earth-born paſſions. The language

guage addreſſed to us by every death we behold, by every funeral we attend, is this — *Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth: Lay up for yourſelves treaſures in heaven*, which are liable to no accidents and caſualties, which Time and Death will never wreſt from you. The conſtant mutability and tranſiency of life, the uncertainty and inſtability of human condition are perpetually warning us of the folly of idolizing the world, rivetting our ſouls and affections to objects that muſt be very ſoon torn from us, and which will be of no avail to us either on a ſick bed, and in the hour of death, or conſtitute any part of the happineſs of that eternal world into which we are juſt removing.

How many pathetic and inſtructive leſſons does our Redeemer affectionately read us, who was deputed by

Almighty God from Heaven to ſhew us the true path of happineſs, and to ſave our ſouls. His precepts, his example, his doctrines, promiſes, and diſcoveries, the whole ſyſtem of his religion is calculated to extinguiſh in our breaſts a paſſion for the world, to diſengage our affections from fugitive and tranſitory objects, and to turn the eye of the ſoul ſtrongly and intenſely upon the great and glorious realities of Eternity. One would think, if any thing would make us tear the world from our fond embrace, and repulſe it from us with Chriſtian diſdain, it would be the hopes, and views, and proſpects of our bleſſed religion—One would think, if any thing would prevent us from degrading and debaſing our original from God, from diſgracing and diſhonouring our glorious redemption by Chriſt, and inſpire us with a dignity and elevation of ſoul, worthy our Maker,

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worthy our Redeemer, and worthy that immortality after which we are taught to aſpire, it would be that aſſurance of an endleſs futurity, which God, by Chriſt, hath implanted ſo deeply and indelibly in the human heart. But if men will ſell their Chriſtian birth-right for the moſt frivolous and paltry conſiderations—if men will part with the things that are not ſeen, only becauſe they are diſtant and remote, for the things that are ſeen, and are but temporary—if men will give up all their glorious reverſionary hopes in futurity for acquiſitions and enjoyments that will very ſoon leave us, or we leave them, and think themſelves abundantly recompenſed—if men are determined to act in this fooliſh wretched manner, they muſt take the conſequences—Nothing will convince them—The voice of the Almighty is uttered in vain—the menaces of Scripture are

denounced in vain—the great work of Redemption hath been executed in vain, and through their ſecular principles, and abandoned avarice and worldly-mindedneſs, they put it out of the ordinary power of God to convert and ſave them. The ſordid filth and pelf collected about their hearts *choak the good ſeed, and render it unfruitful.*

With what pathetic vehemence does our Saviour caution his followers againſt ſuch a temper and ſpirit as this! How ſolicitous is he that the minds of Chriſtians ſhould be conſecrated to worthier and ſublimer purſuits than theſe! How affectionately doth he diſſuade us from harbouring ſuch ſordid diſpoſitions! And what cogent and engaging arguments does he addreſs to us, in order to kindle in our breaſts a more juſtifiable flame. Take no thought, ſaying, What ſhall we eat?

What ſhall we drink? What ſhall we wear? How ſhall we diverſify our meals, in order to make a change? Lay not up for yourſelves treaſures on Earth, where moth and ruſt do corrupt, and where thieves break through and ſteal: but lay up for yourſelves treaſures in Heaven. Labour not for the meat that periſheth, but for that which endureth to everlaſting life. To ſhew us moreover, by an affecting narrative, how miſerably this *deceitfulneſs of riches* deludes men to their everlaſting ruin, by fondly inducing them to make ſure of time and a long life, the moſt fatal of all deluſions, he recites for our benefit the following moſt ſtriking Parable, which, as it is applicable to my preſent ſubject, I will now conclude with rehearſing. And he ſaid to them, Take heed, and beware of covetouſneſs; for a man's life, the happineſs of his life, conſiſteth not in the abundance of the things

which he poſſeſſeth—IT HAPPENED that the immenſe eſtates of an opulent perſon proved uncommonly fertile, and yielded him an exceedingly rich and plentiful crop—His heart exulted when he viewed the waving golden harveſt—and as he looked over the wide-extended proſpect, he ſaid to himſelf—What ſhall I do with it all !—Where ſhall I depoſit it !—I have no place capable of containing half this immenſe crop !—After ſome time ſpent in anxious deliberations, he cried out in a ſudden tranſport—I am determined immediately to pull down my barns—and I will erect grand and magnificent ſtorehouſes, where I will amaſs all this copious and amazing produce of my fields—When I have piled it all up—I will then ſay to my ſoul—Happy ſoul ! diſtinguiſhed is thy felicity ! Thou haſt immenſe treaſures, from which thou wilt derive ſubſtantial bliſs for a long, long ſeries

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of many diſtant happy years—come, indulge thy ſoft envied repoſe—feaſt on the moſt delicious viands—taſte the moſt exquiſite liquors—and traverſe a circle of every amuſement and joy—But while he was brooding over this enchanting proſpect, and fondly anticipating all its happineſs—God ſaid to him, O thou unthinking mortal! this very night the lamp of thy vain life ſhall be extinguiſhed—and what advantage to thee will then all the immenſe treaſures be, which thou haſt accumulated!—Like to this vain wealthy ſenſualiſt is every one's end, whoſe heart is ſolely engroſſed by riches, and totally alienated from God.

SERMON V.

MATTH. XIII. 8.

But others fell into good ground.

OUR Saviour having ſpecified thoſe moral defects in particular characters, which either totally prevent the reception of Religion, or retard and blaſt its growth and progreſs, cloſes the Parable with deſcribing a good mind, and the fair and copious fruits with which it is adorned. *And others fell into good ground, and*

brought forth fruit, ſome an hundred fold, ſome ſixty, ſome thirty fold. Beautiful and ſtriking is the imagery—truely elegant and happy is our Lord's figurative repreſentation, characterizing a good heart, with all its well-cultivated affections, by a good ſoil, with all its genial influences.

The ſimilitude is apt and pertinent in ſeveral reſpects. For example—a ſoil, naturally good, is ſtrongly imbued and impregnated with the principles of vegetation, and anſwers the wiſhes of the huſbandman who improves and dreſſes it. In like manner, a good mind is eſſentially endued and deeply penetrated with the excellence of Religion and moral goodneſs, and, by the happy improvements it is continually acquiring, accompliſhes the ultimate end and deſign of its Creator—Good ground receives and cheriſhes in its fertile boſom the good ſeed which the hand of the huſband-

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man ſcatters upon it: a good heart is open to the reception of truth and virtue, and with tranſport receives all thoſe communications of light and knowledge, which, in ſucceſſive periods of the mind, the Providence of God imparts—Ground naturally good, in a happy expoſure, mellowed by froſt, warmed by ſnow, ſoftened by fertilizing ſhowers, ſaturated with the generous influences of the ſun, prepared by culture, and planted with good ſeed, bleſſes the tiller with an ample harveſt, bleſſes the paſſing traveller with infinite delight, when he beholds, in one vaſt extenſive proſpect, its golden ears, waving upon the ground—bleſſes the poor, if free from the curſe and canker of envy, with antedating views of plenty—and bleſſeth its proprietor with riches and diſtinction. The human ſoul alſo, naturally good, proceeding pure and unſpotted from the hand of its pure and ſpotleſs Former, if preſerved from the pollu-

pollution of vice, if carefully guarded from the defilement of animal paſſions, and the contagion of bad examples, it retain in a great degree its priſtine purity and honour inviolate, and, by the care of parents, by the good principles inſtilled in education, and its own convictions of the unrivalled importance of theſe things, it make them its ſtudy and purſuit, cautiouſly avoiding every thing that would contaminate its mind, and deprave its heart, ſolely intent upon religious and virtuous improvements, tranſported with a generous inſatiable paſſion for truth and uſeful knowledge, aſſiduous and indefatigable in the inveſtigation and purſuit of every thing that may embelliſh and ennoble the human mind; and in all this courſe of enquiry making the improvements of the heart keep pace with the endowments of the head — a mind that hath been bleſſed with theſe advantages in early life, that hath preſerved the tablet of its heart

heart unſtained by any great and flagrant crimes, that hath, by the dint of ſedulous culture, maintained its animal propenſities under proper and virtuous diſcipline, that cheriſhes the beſt diſpoſitions, that has all its powers poſſeſſed with the love of God, the love of mankind, the love of truth, the love of virtue, and that makes its ſupreme happineſs conſiſt in that beſt imitation of God, DOING GOOD—what an amiable ſpectacle is ſuch a mind, endowed with ſuch principles, both in the ſight of God and man! This is the moſt conſummate excellency and higheſt perfection human nature is capable of attaining. This is that ſuperlatively happy ſoil which produces the hundred fold, the ampleſt harveſt that the human mind, in this ſtate of imperfection, is enabled to produce.

Vaſt and almoſt unlimited are the capacities of the ſoul. It is impoſſible

ble to ſay what acquiſitions in literature cannot be attained. It is amazing to reflect what improvements in Arts and Sciences the preſent age hath made—what difficulties the genius and induſtry of men have ſurmounted—what infinitely diſſimilar and heterogeneous branches of learning!—for example—a profound ſkill in antient languages, and the ſtudy of the moſt abſtruſe parts of the Mathematicks, have united in one man—and what immenſe and aſtoniſhing attainments in Philoſophy and Erudition our intellectual faculties are capable of accumulating, by the dint of indefatigable diligence, and the habit of patient and ſedulous application! And the improvements that the human mind hath made, and is formed capable of making, in religion and virtue, that nobleſt, that divineſt ſcience, have been truly conſpicuous and illuſtrious. In the lives of eminent perſonages, whoſe virtues hiſtory tranſmits to us—

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Prophets — Apoſtles — Confeſſors — Philoſophers—and Divines—in theſe worthy characters, which ſo eminently adorned and dignified our common nature, are held up to us, and to all ſucceſſive ages, a faithful mirror, which reflects upon us the luſtre of their divine and human virtues, and ſtrongly repreſents to us thoſe vaſt attainments in religion and holineſs, of which, by the love and ſtudy of heavenly things, our ſouls are formed ſuſceptible. And the hiſtory of the lives of theſe great and good men in paſt ages and nations, as it affords us the moſt rational and uſeful inſtruction, ſo it ſupplies a pleaſing entertainment, as it is agreeable to the reflecting reader to ſee, in their reſpective characters, the happy ſoil that reſpectively produced, ſome the thirty, others the ſixty, others even the hundred fold, the higheſt ſummit of human attainment, according to the different abilities and different opportunities with

which

which they were favoured. Hiſtory, like our Lord's Parables, is moral Philoſophy teaching by example. Here we have a faithful exhibition what we are, and what we were deſigned to be; what a lovely and amiable thing human nature is, when adorned with religion, when diſplaying in the brighteſt manner that divine image which its good Creator hath impreſſed upon it, when carrying its rational and moral powers to the higheſt degree of perfection it is qualified to reach, and when aſpiring after every religious attainment and mental endowment that may exalt and adorn its nature, and accompliſh the wiſe and gracious intention of God, in furniſhing it with theſe enlarged capacities, for making theſe ſignal improvements, and enjoying this diſtinguiſhed felicity.

In diſcourſing on this part of the Parable of the Sower I ſhall conſider what conſtitutes the worthy and excellent

cellent character here represented: *Some fell into good ground.*

Goodness of heart comprizes the whole circle of the virtues. When we say, A person has a good heart, the idea conveyed is, that such an heart is a beautiful epitome of every thing that is amiable and laudable among men. It denotes probity, sincerity, honesty, integrity, benevolence, candour, piety, friendship, every generous and lovely quality. By the *seed* therefore *which fell among good ground* are signified those who are possessed with the principles of religion and virtue—who have docil, ingenuous, and well-disposed minds—whose actions and conduct flow from conscious integrity and inward goodness—who study to secure the approbation of their own hearts, rather than the applause of the world—whose ambition it is to *be*, rather than

than to *ſeem* good—and who cheriſh the beſt affections both towards God and man.

The love of God is a principal ingredient in this univerſal character. Indeed there cannot be any thing great and diſtinguiſhed in a character that is not formed upon the love and imitation of God. A principle of piety has the ſtrongeſt influence in framing and diſciplining the human heart. *The fear of God is the beginning of wiſdom*, and a reverence of the Deity, when habitually infixed in the ſoul, is the moſt powerful incentive to invigorate and eſtabliſh the active and ſocial virtues. He, who hath accuſtomed himſelf to contemplate the tranſcendently amiable character of the Divinity, with devout joy and ſacred rapture dwells on that inexhauſtible benevolence, that infinite compaſſion, that omnipotent power, that unerring wiſdom, and that

that boundleſs goodneſs which conſtitute the endearing character of the Being we call God, cannot but feel his heart irreſiſtibly attracted towards him—cannot but love a Being, in whom all theſe excellencies unite, with all the powers and affections of his mind—cannot but be powerfully induced to practiſe thoſe duties which will recommend him to the favour and acceptance of ſuch a Being—and be engaged to imitate the Deity in thoſe moral perfections which conſtitute the dignity and luſtre of his character, and which ſolely conſtitute the excellence and worth of the rational character. To form that virtuous and worthy character here repreſented, it will be uſeful to conſider the approbation of the Deity as the greateſt felicity and bleſſing we can enjoy, and to reflect, that the Being, who now is perfectly acquainted with our ſincerity and integrity, will one day moſt certainly re-

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ward it. He who by habitual reflection makes the thought of God's presence with him, wherever he is, familiar to him, cannot but have a good heart—for piety is the mistress of the virtues—they shine with inferior radiance around her, as the lesser constellations around the fair Regent of the night—Piety, devotion, and the reverence of God, are the noblest source of moral, practical virtue—have the greatest efficacy in harmonizing all the affections and dispositions of the soul, and inspiring them with their proper animation and vigour.

Representing to our minds, therefore, by serious contemplation, the presence of the great God as an approving Spectator of our sincerity and goodness—thinking how such kind affections, such benevolent desires, such a course of action, must recommend

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us to the friendſhip and complacential love of the bleſſed God, is an argument the moſt forcible and cogent of all others to make us in reality to be what God deſigned us to be, and is pleaſed to ſee us be, and to keep our hearts in that frame and ſtate which we *know* that God approves, and *feel* that conſcience applauds. Hence it was that the judicious Ancients impreſſed the tender minds of their children with the greateſt reverence of God, and inſtilled into them, with the firſt dawn of reaſon, the moſt venerable ideas of the Divinity—wiſely judging that the fear of God is the moſt prevalent and powerful principle that can be fixed in the human heart, and that the veneration of the Deity was the ſtrongeſt foundation on which they could rear the fair ſtructure of every perſonal, domeſtic, and ſocial virtue—and it will be found that the greateſt Characters that ever appeared in the

Heathen

Heathen world, were not leſs diſtinguiſhed for their devout adoration and reverence of the immortal gods, than they are ſignalized for their political abilities, their mental endowments, and their heroic atchievements.

I need not mention, in order to form the good man, what laudable care Jewiſh parents employed to poſſeſs the minds of their children with the moſt venerable ideas of the great God—eſteeming this the moſt compendious and efficacious rule they could give them to form their morals, and influence the heart—What pains alſo the primitive Chriſtians took to make their offſpring wiſe, good, and happy, by impreſſing the ſoft, ſuſceptible mind with the moſt reverential conceptions of the adorable Majeſty of God, appears from the whole hiſtory of thoſe times—and that the numbers of men in the preſent time

time are so comparatively few and inconsiderable, who pay a regard to principle and conscience, and think integrity, and virtue, and honour something too good to be sacrificed to worldly considerations, may perhaps in a great measure be attributed to the slight regard they were in early life taught to pay to the Deity—to the levity with which they were allowed to use his Name—and to the little concern those about them discovered to make them think and speak of God with any awe or reverence at all. Take away the fear of God from the heart, and you take away along with it all the other virtues. If the root of this most vigorous and all-animating principle be once subverted, all the branches immediately fade and die. Of such powerful energy and divine efficacy is the principle of religious Piety, and the reverence of God, to influence the human heart, to regulate and direct its affections, and

and eſtabliſh the foundation of all moral goodneſs and excellence.

But not Piety to God only, but all the moral and ſocial virtues, conſpire to form the character here denoted. It is not enough that ſome certain ſelect virtues, congenial, as it were, to our particular caſt of mind, predominate in the heart; but all the human virtues ſhould form a brilliant aſſembly there—humanity, benevolence, meekneſs, humility, integrity, and every moral endowment that can conſtitute a worthy and virtuous character.

Amidſt this fair train of virtues, Benevolence ſhould ſhine with diſtinguiſhed luſtre. There cannot be a good heart without it. A mind, that is adorned with every mental and moral accompliſhment, but is deſtitute of Benevolence, is uſeleſs to the world, and dark as Erebus. *If I give*

give my body to be burned, and all my goods to feed the poor, and have not a real vital principle of Benevolence and Charity actuating me, I am nothing. *Faith, hope, and charity: these three*, says the Apostle; *but the greatest of these is charity.—In nothing*, says CICERO, *do men approach nearer to the immortal Gods, than in doing good.* Benevolence, flowing from an imitation of God and love of mankind, is the highest perfection of the human character—it is the distinguishing glory of the Gospel—it is the distinguishing glory of the Christian. If I could speak with the tongues of angels and men, and could accumulate all the knowledge and erudition comprized in the whole circle of arts, sciences, and literature, and with all these splendid, ostentatious accomplishments, have not charity—benevolence of soul, and goodness of heart—I am of no more value in the sight of God than sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. Su-

perior knowledge and ſuperior abilities, when united with the amiable qualities of the mind, and illuſtrated with diſtinguiſhed goodneſs of heart, form a truly uſeful, venerable, and conſpicuous character—but ſeparate from goodneſs of heart, they are dangerous, and the deſerved objects of univerſal contempt.

This goodneſs of heart is what our Saviour in the firſt place enjoins his followers to acquire and cultivate. *Firſt make the tree good*, and the *fruit* will of conſequence be *good*, and partake of the genial nature of the tree that produces it. The heart is the great ſource of action—if it be pure, the inferior affections will be pure. *From the abundance of the heart the mouth ſpeaketh.* A man's language takes a tincture from the heart that prompts it. If the heart be chaſte and virtuous, the converſation will

will be decent and worthy—if the *inward* dispositions and affections be formed into virtue, the *outward* expression of them will be an amiable sanctity of manners. Hence our Saviour's infallible criterion—from the respective nature of mens actions and conduct, to judge of the true nature of the primary source from which they flow. *By their fruits you may* infallibly *know them.* A good tree bringeth forth good, a bad tree, bad fruit.

Simplicity and godly sincerity are the most shining parts of any character. *Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile,* was the amiable character of Nathanael, given him by a Person who perfectly knew the human heart, and all the virtues which adorned it. And why was this recorded, but to excite us to attain the same probity and candour of mind, to urge us, by this worthy ex-

ample, to acquire true ſincerity and genuine goodneſs of mind, and to let us ſee how integrity, and virtuous ſimplicity of manners, will entitle us to the applauſe and eulogy of the holy and divine Jeſus.

What the *good ground* in the Parable here means, and what thoſe fruits are with which it is adorned and crowned, you may ſee in the following faithful and minute repreſentation. *The fruit of the ſpirit*, or of a good mind, *is love, joy, peace, long-ſuffering, kindneſs, goodneſs, fidelity, meekneſs, continence.* Here you have, in delectable proſpect, the fair ample region of the human heart, embelliſhed with every moral grace and beauty that can charm our mind, and attract our love.

By the *good ground* is meant every one who has his heart formed upon the

the principles of the Gofpel—who maintains a vital, influencing fenfe upon his mind of the worth and excellence of religion—who chearfully conforms to the will of God—who keeps his fpirit under the moft virtuous difcipline, who by temperance preferves his intellects found and vigorous—and by the practice of goodnefs keeps his heart awake and fenfible to another's woe—has his paffions under good government—his reafon clear and unclouded, his undetftanding alert and active, his judgment impartial and unbiaffed, and his mind difciplined to every good word and work—How lovely that mind, in which thefe virtues flourifh! How amiable that character which anfwers this defcription in the parable, and whofe ftudy and ambition it is to implant a good mind with every Chriftian virtue and amiable quality that can decorate the fair and fpacious

field of moral life! How worthily is ſuch an one employed! What a laudable exerciſe it is, to be aſſiduouſly occupied in puſhing our faculties to their higheſt pinnacle—in cultivating thoſe rational powers which God gave us on purpoſe that we ſhould cultivate them—in embelliſhing the heart with thoſe virtues and principles, with which it was the original intention of our Former that we ſhould adorn it—and in carrying the enlarged faculties both of the head and of the heart, by the beſt improvement of our time and talents, to the higheſt degree of moral and religious perfection that humanity can reach.

Moreover, it is obvious to be remarked, that, as ground naturally good, will not produce any thing without the labour and culture of the huſbandman; ſo the ſoil of the human heart, though naturally good, will

will yield nothing excellent and uſeful, if the ſame care and diligence be not expended upon it. If a ſoil, compoſed of the beſt principles, and endowed with the moſt generous qualities, be left uncultivated, it will be overgrown with every noxious weed, and the richer it is by nature, if it be neglected, the more it will be choked with tall luxuriant thiſtles and rampant uſeleſs briars—a faithful picture of a mind neglected and uncultivated. Such a mind produces nothing but what is noxious and hurtful—and the better it is by nature, if it be ſuffered to lie undiſciplined and unimproved, it will yield qualities and principles and diſpoſitions, ſo much the more injurious, baleful, and deſtructive. No good to be done without pains and labour, either in natural or moral huſbandry. 'The immortal Gods,' ſays one of the ancients, 'give no bleſ-'ſing to mortals without labour. La-

'bour,' continues he, 'is the tax they 'pay for the happineſs they enjoy.' Let the huſbandman neglect the drudgery of agriculture for a few months, and what a wild and wilderneſs his fields appear—Let the fair region of the human mind remain untaught and untutored in the gay ſpring of life—let no culture be applied, no ſeeds of learning, morality, and religion ſown upon it—and what a dreary ſolitude, what a pathleſs, ſavage deſert it becomes! Great induſtry is neceſſary, great cultivation is neceſſary, before we reap the rich and copious harveſt. No progreſs to be made in knowledge and literature, without induſtry. No reputation and diſtinction to be gained without ſedulous application. Induſtry is that powerful agent that ſpreads fertility and plenty around us, which ſo agreeably diverſifies the face of nature—which covers the fields with verdure, and adorns them with flocks,

—and

—and whoſe magic omnipotent hand turns the vaſt machine of active and commercial life with all that infinite multiplicity of movements and wheels innumerable.

Upon Religion and Virtue induſtry has the ſame benign and friendly influence. Great culture is requiſite to form the morals, to direct the heart, and regulate the affections. Steady perſevering application is neceſſary for quelling unruly paſſions, for ſuppreſſing irregular deſires, and maintaining the harmony, liberty, and happineſs of the mind. It is no eaſy conqueſt to gain the victory over ourſelves, to have our propenſities and appetites in due ſubjection, to make reaſon rule, and the inferior deſires obey—But then ſuch a victory is attainable—by virtuous induſtry and virtuous reſolution it is attainable—and it ſhould ſtimulate us to attain it, whatever con-

flict and difficulties it may coſt us, to reflect, that we ſhall enjoy all the happy conſequences of ſuch a victory, in the undiſturbed peace, the unmoleſted tranquillity, the unviolable freedom and liberty, and in all the ſerene and divine ſatisfactions that virtue can yield. The glorious felicity of the *end* ſhould reconcile us to the irkſome ſeverity of the *means*— and the pleaſure and happineſs that will finally reſult, ought to inſpirit us in all difficulties, how rugged and arduous ſoever, the ſurmounting of which is indiſpenſably neceſſary for ſecuring the great ultimate object of all our hopes and wiſhes. *Make the tree good*, ſays our Lord; and how can we make it *bear fruit to perfection*, unleſs we carefully lop off its luxuriant ſhoots, clear it of every thing that would prevent the principles of vegetation, diligently and ſkilfully dreſs it, throw from time to time manure

nure about it, and preſerve it in a goodly ſtate of health and vigour.—And how can we maintain the good ſoil of the human mind in its original goodneſs, and conſtantly preſerve it in a beautiful and elegant condition, if we do not induſtriouſly repreſs every noxious paſſion that ſhoots, if we do not kill in its firſt riſe every baneful weed, before it blow and ſcatter its ſeed in every direction—and if we do not by the dint of moral culture and aſſiduity eradicate every bitter root of envy, malice, ſenſuality, intemperance, and every other carnal paſſion—Or how can we keep the region of the human heart in its moral health and ſoundneſs, in a beautiful ſimplicity and neatneſs, if we do not ſtrengthen every good diſpoſition, eſtabliſh and confirm every principle of humanity and benevolence, cheriſh every virtuous deſire, however weak at firſt, till we mature and perfect it, and,

by a life of moral induſtry and application, employed in the beſt purſuits, and the nobleſt cauſe, the cauſe of virtue, attain that amiable character here repreſented, and adorn our minds with all thoſe excellent fruits and virtues, which are the glory of our natures, and the diſtinguiſhed luſtre and perfection of the Chriſtian character.

APPLICATION.

To excite you to this, revolve the following Conſiderations.

This is what God requires. He, who formed the human heart with all its noble train of diſpoſitions and affections, requires you to cultivate this good ground he hath committed to your care. *You are God's huſbandry*, or, as the original ſignifies, You are God's cultivated field. It is his de-

ſire

ſire you ſhould work while it is called to-day, before the night come when no man can work. The materials he hath provided are good: it is your's by culture and improvement to make them what God intended you ſhould make them. The ſoil he hath formed is rich and generous; it is dependent on you, by moral culture and diligence, to prevent any noxious ſeeds from being ſown there—to prevent the fatal blaſts of ungoverned appetite, the poiſonous ſeeds of bad example, and the ſcorching ſun of ſenſual pleaſure from deſtroying every uſeful plant there—and to raiſe a copious harveſt of every lovely and uſeful virtue, to render you amiable both in the ſight of God and man.

This culture and preparation of your hearts will alſo ſecure to you the favour and acceptance of your Redeemer. Conſider with what complacency

cency muſt the holy Jeſus view a good heart! To have a good heart is to have the greateſt bleſſing the Goſpel can now give. To poſſeſs this, is to poſſeſs that for which Chriſt lived and died. This in the ſight of our Redeemer is of ineſtimable price. Holineſs of heart is the perfection of the Goſpel—the beſt imitation of its Great Author—and the only thing that will entitle us to his future approbation. *Well done, thou good and faithful ſervant.*

This is the deſign of Nature, and conſonant to all the powers and principles of human nature. Virtue is the only true happineſs—the ſole proper glory and felicity of a rational creature. When we begin, therefore, to cultivate this in early life, we begin where God and Nature deſigned we ſhould begin. Our noble powers were not formed to lie dormant and uſeleſs—

they

they were made to be improved—and amazing are the attainments at which they are capable of arriving both in literature and in virtue, by means of laborious and perſevering improvement. Let us then be incited to comply with the firſt dictates of Nature; and, agreeably to the will of God, the deſign of Chriſtianity, and the principles of reaſon, let us carefully improve and exalt thoſe mental and moral powers, which will yield us an ample produce of happineſs in this world, and in the world to come ſhine forth in a glorious harveſt of immortal unutterable bleſſedneſs.

SERMON VI.

MATTH. XIII. 8.

And others fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit: ſome a hundred-fold, ſome ſixty-fold, ſome thirty-fold.

WHEN our Saviour afterwards explained this part of the Parable, at the requeſt of his Diſciples, he thus deſcribes this happy claſs of hearers: *He, that received ſeed into the good ground, is he that heareth the Word,*

Word, and underſtandeth it; *who alſo beareth fruit.* In which interpretation our Lord particularizes three excellent qualities, which diſtinguiſh theſe worthy perſons, and conſtitute their amiable caracter.

They *hear the Word of God*—They make conſcience of attending divine Worſhip — regularly frequent religious Ordinances — do not abſent themſelves from public inſtruction, but eſteem it their duty and their privilege to join in the ſocial ſolemnities of public Devotion.—When preſent in a worſhipping aſſembly, they hear the Word of God with devout and well-diſpoſed minds—they ſit as humble, ingenuous, and virtuous diſciples at the feet of their divine Maſter—receive the Doctrines of Truth into good minds, and pay a ſerious, impartial, candid attention to the inſtructions that are delivered.

Conſe-

Consequently, he who brings with him to the house of God, or to the perusal of the Word of God, such docile and amiable dispositions, carries with him the very best qualifications for clearly discovering and *understanding* its truths. He that received seed into the good ground, is he that heareth the Word of God, and understandeth it. A virtuous disposition is best adapted for the reception of truth—it is a moral disposition that is congenial to truth—Sacred Truth smiles with a benign aspect upon such an amiable mind, makes it her temple, and fills it with glory. Vice in its nature is repugnant to truth—its native depravity and darkness cloud the soul, suffuse the mental eye with the baleful shades of passion and prejudice—it naturally shuns the light of truth—it cannot bear its heavenly beams to dart upon it—it is both averse to the study and investiga-

tion

tion of truth and virtue, and morally incapable of diſcovering and underſtanding it. The *natural man*, ſays the Apoſtle, or, as it ought to have been rendered, the *ſenſual man*, one who is under the dominion of his worſt paſſions and luſts, *knoweth not the things of the Spirit of God*—they appear fooliſhneſs to ſuch an one, who views them through ſuch a falſe medium—*and he cannot know them*: his ſenſual affections, his debauched imagination, his corrupt depraved heart, totally incapacitate him for the knowledge and perception of truth and virtue—becauſe theſe moral and divine things can only be *ſpiritually diſcerned*; can only be contemplated, diſcerned, and reliſhed by a good heart, by a virtuous ſpirit, which alone is propitious to ſuch ſacred enquiries.

What

What insuperable power vice and prejudice have to extinguish the light of reason, to put out the intellectual eye, and obstruct all the avenues that lead to the mind and heart, appears from that amazing incredulity and obstinacy of the Jews in our Saviour's time, who resisted all the flood of evidence he poured upon them, and remained unconvinced by all the heavenly discourses he delivered, and by all the astonishing miracles he displayed. And ever memorable are those words of our Saviour—a lesson to all future ages of the invincible malignity of vice and prejudice—*Seeing they see, but perceive not: hearing they hear, and understand not. The heart of this people is waxed gross; their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed*—meaning—that their inveterate prejudice against him, and the total depravity of their minds, held all their rational powers in adamantine

tine fetters, and effectually prevented them from either having eyes to ſee, ears to hear, or an heart to underſtand, the nature and moment of truth, virtue, and happineſs. Whereas he, who hath a ſincere, honeſt, well-diſpoſed mind, denoted by the *good ground* in the Parable, and brings with him to the contemplation of Nature, or to the ſtudy of the Scriptures, a paſſion for truth, will clearly ſee and underſtand every thing eſſential to his happineſs—for his mind is in the happieſt ſtate poſſible for ſuch enquiries, and the great and infinite Source of wiſdom will illuminate ſuch a mind, guide it into all neceſſary truth, guard it from every fatal errour, and by the influx of his light and truth irradiate and invigorate all its capacities. *You ſhall know the truth*, ſays our Saviour, *and the truth ſhall make you free.*

But

But our Saviour, to ſhew us that *hearing the Word* of God with good diſpoſitions, and in conſequence of theſe, *underſtanding it*, is far from being ſufficient to conſtitute the Chriſtian character, mentions, as the laſt indiſpenſable quality, in this happy claſs of men, their *bringing forth fruit*. He that received ſeed into the good ground, is he that *heareth the Word*, and *underſtandeth* it, who alſo bringeth forth fruit. Our Saviour ſpoke this, and the Evangeliſts recorded it, to aſſure us, that nothing without practice will be of any avail. He, who underſtands the Word of God, and perhaps values himſelf upon underſtanding it, muſt tranſcribe into his own heart and life the great principles and duties it teaches. *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, who is in heaven.* If you know

know theſe things, happy are you only when you do them. Then, and then only, is my Father glorified, when you bring forth much fruit, and upon this condition only are you intitled to the genuine character of my true Diſciples. Chriſtianity is wholly a practical inſtitution. Its great object is goodneſs of heart and holineſs of life. Its aim is not to make men acute metaphyſicians, or ingenious ſpeculatiſts, to teach men the art of reaſoning and the forms of philoſophical diſputation. It diſclaims the wiſdom of words, the elegance of diction and compoſition—and nothing could be farther from the mind of its ſacred Author and the ſacred Writers, than to fill mens heads and hearts with ſect and ſyſtem, and a paſſion for conteſt and altercation. The great deſign of Chriſtianity is holineſs of life. Its precepts, examples, and promiſes co-operate only to this one great

great end—If this be but ſecured, the intention of God and Chriſt and Apoſtles then is anſwered. To teach us to deny ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godlily in the preſent world—for this Chriſt lived, for this Chriſt died, for this Apoſtles wrote and ſuffered! He hath no pretenſions to the Chriſtian character, whoſe life is not a daily Commentary upon what he profeſſes. The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteouſneſs. The intrinſic goodneſs of the fruit is the only teſt of the true nature of the tree which bears it. A holy converſation is the grand diſcriminating badge of a Chriſtian. If a man leads a profane, covetous, libidinous, intemperate life, he is a bad man, and all the ſhowy zealous pretenſions of ſuch an one to Religion are hypocriſy and deluſion. Such a conduct is an inſult upon that ſacred Name by

which he is called. They are the actions that discover the heart. This is a criterion that is infallible. This is our Saviour's unerring standard, to whose certain determination we may bring our own and others sincerity. Let no man deceive himself; he that doeth righteousness, then only fulfils the Christian law. The Gospel is a scheme to promote real vital Religion, to inspire us with the love of God and the love of men, to excite us, by the most cogent and interesting motives, to the conscientious discharge of every social, domestic, and personal duty, to make men good princes, good magistrates, good parents, good children, good husbands, good masters, good servants, good neighbours, good members of society, good and virtuous, sober and conscientious in every station and relation of life, and connects men of all orders and degrees, the high and low,

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the noble and ignoble, the illuſtrious the obſcure, every one, who wears the human form, without diſtinction of perſons, to each other in the endearing ties of Chriſtian affection, benevolence, and love.

He therefore, and he only, whoever he be, rich or poor, parent or child, maſter or ſervant, who, in the ſituation in which Providence hath placed him, *bringeth forth the fruits* of holineſs, has then the ſole proper evidences of a Chriſtian. For alas! what does a mere national nominal profeſſion of the Goſpel ſignify! What will it avail to have had an external form of godlineſs, but to have been ſtrangers to the inward power of it! If we believe the Goſpel is true, we lay ourſelves under an indiſpenſable obligation to live as it directs — And if we believe it to be true, that its doctrines are moſt ſublime, its mo-

rality moſt pure, its promiſes moſt animating, and that it is a ſyſtem infinitely worthy of God, and perfective of the dignity and happineſs of men, yet, notwithſtanding this ſtrong conviction, live as if Jeſus was an Impoſtor, his Religion a fable, and futurity a dream, we are ſelf-condemned, and as miſerable hypocrites as ever believed one thing and practiſed another.

Our Religion is from God; let us live as thoſe who are convinced it is. The Goſpel is a Revelation from the God of truth, let its bleſſed fruits adorn our lives. The New Teſtament is a compleat rule of faith and morals; let its divine principles ſhine forth in our converſations. Let us be daily improving in every thing that is amiable and excellent, and if any calumnies ſhould be fixed upon any of us by the tongue of malice, let our lives

lives confute them. The beſt refutation of any injurious aſperſion is ſuch an unexceptionable life as no good perſon will believe it. A good life, in general, repels the envenomed ſhafts of detraction, and will ſometimes convert the moſt virulent rancour and acrimony into faint admiration and involuntary applauſe—This is the Apoſtle's rule—Having your converſation honeſt, ſays he, that he, who is of the contrary party, may be aſhamed, having nothing evil to ſay againſt you. Oh, what a lovely, amiable, and divine phænomenon does the Goſpel exhibit! the faireſt tranſcript and image of the divine, and the higheſt glory and perfection of the human nature, when its heavenly genius and principles are tranſubſtantiated into the intimate eſſence of the mind, actuating the heart, harmonizing the ſoul, transforming and modelling all its affections, and when all

its celeſtial fruits, in the moſt copious abundance, ſhine forth in all their radiance and beauty, to the ineffable delight, ſatisfaction and utility of all around. *Let your light ſo ſhine before men, that they ſeeing your good works, may glorify your heavenly Father.*

Thus it appears, agreeably to our Saviour's Parable and his explication, that as good ground then only merits that denomination when it bringeth forth, in ample abundance, its proper fruits to their maturity, ſo does he only fulfill the Chriſtian character, who hath tranſplanted into his heart the principles the Goſpel teaches, and exhibits to his family, and to the world, in his daily life, its fair, reſplendent, and uſeful virtues.

I ſhall now enquire what induced our Saviour to ſpecify the very different produce which the good ground

reſpec-

respectively yielded. *Others fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit; some an hundred fold, some sixty, others thirty fold.*

God hath infinitely diversified intellectual life. Very different are the abilities and capacities with which he hath endowed men. What an immense disproportion between the mental faculties, and degrees in intellectual discernment and judgment, in various rational and moral agents. In sagacity, penetration, and intellectual endowments there was a less interval between LOCKE, CLARKE, NEWTON, and the lowest orders of Angelic beings, than between one man and another. Nature, or rather the God of nature, hath lavished upon one talents and powers, which he hath seen fit to deny to another. One man seems to inherit, from propitious nature, a more subtil and exquisite texture of

mind, more delicate ſenſibilities, more acute diſcernment, a more elegant taſte and genius, a finer underſtanding, a more tenacious memory, a ſtronger, ſounder judgment, and far more alert and vigorous powers, than what we ſee another *born heir to*. The Ancients ſaid that *Melpomene*, one of the Muſes, ſmiled on diſtinguiſhed genius at its birth, and marked it for her own.

Great, undoubtedly, is the power of education in refining and poliſhing the mind, in unfolding and enlarging the mental powers, and giving them a generous advancement and diffuſion. But the materials which Nature offers to the plaſtic hand of Education are very different—to accommodate the Apoſtle's words—ſome being to honour, ſome to diſhonour, precious ſtones, gold, ſilver, braſs, lead—ſome fit for the Preceptor's uſe, others modified

dified but one degree above torpid and inanimate matter. Wiſe and providential this variety! The natural and moral world is harmoniouſly confuſed —we ſee order in variety—and partial evil is univerſal good. Superior intelligence is born to direct the machine—the loweſt degree of it is born to drudge in turning its wheels. Diſtinguiſhed genius is raiſed up for eminent uſefulneſs: thoſe who are not bleſſed with theſe talents are alſo fitted for uſefulneſs, though not for ſuch extenſive uſefulneſs. All the intermediate orders, from the loweſt up to the higheſt gradation of knowledge and diſcernment, are wiſely filled up—nothing but a divine hand could ſcatter ſo much beauty and elegance, ſo much happineſs and good over civil and moral life, chequer ſociety into ſuch a pleaſing and harmonious variety, and combine ſuch infinite numbers of men of different talents, dif-

ferent taſtes, different inclinations, into one uniform and conſiſtent whole— And it ought ever to be remembered, that him, whom it hath pleaſed God to ſignalize with diſtinguiſhed natural abilities, and to impart to him thoſe intellectual talents and endowments which few poſſeſs, he expects ſhould improve them in a worthy, creditable, uſeful manner, and, by the dint of aſſiduous culture and virtuous induſtry, ſhould render them peculiarly ſerviceable to the intereſts of mankind. Ten talents are put into their hand, for the improvement or miſimprovement of which they muſt one day be accountable. *Of him, to whom much hath been given, ſhall alſo much be required.* A great and ſacred depoſit is graciouſly committed to their truſt— and they are expected to be faithful ſtewards of the *manifold* grace of God. He who receives but one talent, if he improve it in the beſt manner Provi-

dence enables him to do, is an infinitely worthier character than he, who having received ten, a large ſplendid treaſure of the fineſt abilities, ſuffers it to ruſt away by ſloth and indolence. Now he, who hath been bleſſed with the largeſt portion of nature's ſelecteſt gifts, and employs theſe eminent talents in that nobleſt of all ambition, the godlike ambition of being extenſively uſeful, conſtitutes the higheſt degree of attainment mentioned by our Saviour—is the hundred fold, the moſt exalted ſummit of human virtue. Inferior abilities and inferior improvements correſpond to the inferior degrees of produce here ſpecified—the ſixty and the thirty fold.

But there is not only a vaſt diverſity in the original genius, abilities and talents of men, but there is as great a difference with regard to favourable opportunities for the culture and improvement

provement of their intellectual and moral powers. What a difference does a religious and liberal education make between one who hath enjoyed this blessing, and another, who has been deprived of it, though their mental abilities and powers by nature might have been originally equal! What an immense gradation between the acute philosopher and the untutored peasant, between cultivated civilized life, and savage uncivilized barbarism! The gem may originally be of the same intrinsic worth—the difference is, whether it be suffered to lie in its rude, rough, useless state, or whether the hand of education point and polish it, and make it beam forth in all its radiance and lustre.

I hardly know a stronger motive to humility of mind, than this consideration suggests. Do the superior advantages and improvements of any one

one lead him to look down on those below him with supercilious arrogance and proud disdain? What weakness and wickedness! These persons in the stations he so much despises, perhaps received from Nature's hand the same strong natural abilities he himself received—it may be, stronger—and would perhaps have made a greater proficiency in knowledge and goodness than he hath done, had Providence seen fit to have favoured them with the same opportunities. Many a POPE and MILTON, many a LOCKE and NEWTON, many a CLARKE and TILLOTSON, are now drudging in the menial occupations of life, who would have risen to their distinguished fame in the republic of Learning and Philosophy, had they been blessed with their education and advantages for the cultivation of their minds, the investigation of truth and science, and the advancement of Literature, The-

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ology and Ethics. But to whom fewer opportunities have been given, of him will less be required. He whose situation and station in life enables him only to bring forth the sixty fold, or the thirty fold, is equally acceptable to God with him who enjoys the greatest advantages, and makes but a *proportional* improvement.

God is not a rigorous and unreasonable master, reaping where he hath not sown, gathering where he hath not strown, and expecting the greatest improvements where he hath given the fewest talents. God only expects improvements in proportion to our advantages for improving. If we fill up those circumstances and relations of life, in which he hath fixed us, with their proper duties, this is all that is required of us. It matters little what part is assigned us—the great concern is, to execute that part well. Persons

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in the loweſt, obſcureſt ſpheres of life, if devout and virtuous, are as much the objects of the Divine approbation, as thoſe who adorn the moſt envied and illuſtrious. It ought to be the principal object, the ſolicitous concern of every man, to maintain an irreproachable character in every ſtate and ſcene of life—to be diligent and faithful, ſober and induſtrious—and to make thoſe improvements of his time and talents, which his ſtation admits, and God expects. *God is no reſpecter of perſons; but in every* ſtation, *he who feareth God,* and does his duty, *is acceptable with God.* The loweſt claſſes of life, thoſe who are obliged to ſupport themſelves and families by manual labour, are precluded from making any conſiderable improvements in Religion — theſe therefore ought to redeem that time which the compaſſion of God to man hath conſecrated and appropriated for public

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instruction and edification; and, instead of sleeping at home, rambling into the fields, or sauntering in public houses on the Lord's Day, God expects that they should frequent his House for the sacred purpose of obtaining that religious knowledge and instruction, which during the week they have so few opportunities of acquiring. Those, who are immersed in secular business, and engaged in care and commerce, are expected to be faithful and upright in their dealings, and to expend what few avocations they can redeem from their daily occupations, on improving their minds—but it is not required that they should make those advances in learning and erudition, in arts, sciences, or philosophy, or in the study of Morality and Religion, as the Nobleman, the Gentleman, and the Divine. From the former God expects, proportionally, the sixty fold and the

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thirty fold—from the latter he expects an hundred fold, as he hath placed them in ſituations ſo eminently propitious to diſtinguiſhed knowledge, public uſefulneſs, and extenſive good.

Here permit me to remark the very eminent advantages which they, whom God hath bleſſed with ſuperior opulence, enjoy for attaining the higheſt degree of virtue mentioned in the Parable. Your riches are the diſtinguiſhed bounty of a Divine hand—but they are talents, for the uſe or abuſe of which you muſt very ſhortly be accountable. Great are your advantages for doing good, and ſcattering bleſſings over human life—in relieving indigence, in raiſing the drooping head of ſuffering merit, in making poor diſtreſſed families the abode of happineſs and joy, in ſuccouring the fatherleſs and widow in their affliction, in contributing to the

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ſupport of charitable Inſtitutions, in encouraging learning and genius in neceſſitous circumſtances — by theſe beneficent diſpoſitions and actions, being a kind of Vicegerents and tutelar good Spirits under God, in making the ſphere, in which you act, happy. Remember, where God in the courſe of his Providence hath ſown with ſo bountiful and capacious an hand, he expects a proportionably rich and ample harveſt. The produce of an hundred fold he expects from you—and you diſappoint his reaſonable expectations, when his generous ſoil and generous ſeed only yield the ſcanty, diſproportionate pittance of twenty or thirty fold —Much more do you fruſtrate his Providence, and blaſt his deſigns, when, inſtead of making his diſtinguiſhed bounty to you ſhine forth in the fair and heavenly fruits of public beneficence and uſefulneſs, you ſteal

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away from the view of the world with thoſe ſplendid talents that have been entruſted to you—tie them up in a napkin—depoſit them in a mean miſerable hole of your own digging, whether it be your own congenial dirt, or in the public funds—then live as ſome have lived, and will live, on the intereſt of the intereſt of their immenſe fortunes—not the heart to give a poor ſtarving wretch, or a poor ſtarving family, the leaſt mean pittance to cover their nakedneſs, and buy them a morſel of bread—or, what is *almoſt* as bad as this—but is a *comparatively happy* perverſion, as it circulates wealth—to keep a magnificent table ſpread with every thing that opulence can purchaſe, imagination fancy, or art modify—to live in luxury, ſenſuality, epicuriſm, pampering a frail dying body, and gratifying a palled faſtidious appetite with every delicacy that ranſacked nature

ture can ſupply—and yet all this while have the heart to repulſe a poor wretch that only ſolicits for the crumbs that fall from the luxurious board, but is denied.

To the honour of the preſent age there are very few ſuch characters. The preſent age is diſtinguiſhed above all preceding ages for that ſpirit of humanity, beneficence, and charity, which is become generally faſhionable—and this opulent City is deſervedly illuſtrious, for its chearful and generous contributions both to public and private charities. This is the proper uſe of riches—this is a way of improving them, which redounds to the glory of the original Donor, to the happineſs of mankind, and returns by a reflex act upon ourſelves in the nobleſt and divineſt ſatisfactions.

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This it is which conſtitutes this bringing forth fruit, reſpectively, from twenty to an hundred fold, or any of the intermediate gradations, according to the proportionate advantages with which God hath ſeverally bleſſed us—the rich being expected to *abound* in good works, to be generous in their diſtributions—perſons in the middle claſſes of life to live and act agreeably to their ſphere—the poor to be ſober, honeſt, and induſtrious—and all ranks and orders of ſociety to adorn the doctrine of God their Saviour, and, by a patient continuance in well-doing, ſeek for glory, honour, and immortality.

Finally, we may clearly infer from theſe different gradations of religious and moral improvement here noted in the Parable, that there will be different degrees of future happineſs, accommodated to the different improvements which men have made in this pro-

probationary ſtate. This is agreeable to the nature of things—to the equity and juſtice of the divine moral government—and to the expreſs declarations of the holy ſcripture. Thoſe happy perſons, whom not the pleaſures of youth, the temptations of mankind, and the weakneſs incident to old age have drawn aſide from the paths of virtue—who have overcome great temptations — diſplayed illuſtrious worth—and have ſteadily through life perſiſted in a regular undeviating tenour of religion and goodneſs, ſhall be advanced to a very exalted degree of celeſtial bleſſedneſs, and be diſtinguiſhed with an *exceeding great* and eternal weight of glory. While others of inferior attainments ſhall be proportionally entitled to inferior degrees of felicity. A juſt and good God will ſurely advance thoſe higheſt who loved him the ſooneſt, and ſerved him the longeſt. Thoſe who ſpent their

their youth and riper years in ſenſual courſes, and afterwards repented and reformed—for example, at thirty, or forty, or fifty—will not enjoy the ſame eminent degrees of bliſs as ſhall ſignalize thoſe who have expended the bloom and prime of their days in worthy and laudable purſuits, and who have maintained a ſpotleſs irreproachable character through all the ſucceſſive ſtages and changing ſcenes of life.

Virtue riſes in proportion to the oppoſition it overcomes, and to the inviolable principles and active goodneſs it diſplays. Many a virtuous Heathen will be advanced many degrees above infinite numbers of Chriſtians, who were bleſſed with fewer advantages for religious and moral improvement, yet made a much better uſe of the little light and knowledge

ledge they enjoyed, than Christians do of their singular privileges.

In my Father's house, says our Lord, *there are many mansions*—many apartments fitted up for the reception of persons of different improvements. The prophet Daniel, describing future happiness, says: *Those who are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, but those who*, besides their personal virtue, turn *many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever*—And the Apostle Paul expressly assures us, that the beatified spirits shall have as striking gradations of glory as we observe between the splendour of the sun and moon, or between one star and another.

APPLICATION.

How should this consideration fire us with Christian ambition! How should these glorious prospects stimulate

late us to excell, and ſo to run that we may obtain. Heaven hath rewards equal to the moſt conſummate virtue we can diſplay. The greater our virtue here, the greater our felicity hereafter. The nearer we approach God here in doing good, the nearer we ſhall be ſtationed to his celeſtial throne in the regions of immortality. Having therefore theſe animating promiſes, let us be ſtedfaſt and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord; foraſmuch as we know, that our labour in the Lord ſhall not be in vain.

I conclude with this one important ſentiment, which I leave to your ſerious conſideration; and I beg of God, that none of the pleaſures, follies, and cares of life may ever eraſe it from your remembrance: Strive not merely to ſecure future happineſs, but to ſecure eminent degrees of future happineſs.

SERMON VII.

MATTH. XIII. 9.

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

WITH great vehemence and the moſt pathetic earneſtneſs one may juſtly ſuppoſe our Saviour to have pronounced theſe words at the concluſion of this inſtructive Parable of the Sower—and of this circumſtance St. Luke, in recording

the ſame Parable, informs us: *When he had ſaid theſe things, he* CRIED, *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.* This is a form of ſpeaking which often occurs in the Evangeliſts, and which we frequently find our Saviour importunately uttered after the delivery of the moſt ſolemn and momentous truths. I ſhall endeavour in this diſcourſe minutely to illuſtrate our Lord's deſign in this addreſs, and offer to your ſerious attention ſuch remarks as the words obviouſly ſuggeſt.

In the firſt place, they appear evidently calculated to excite and fix mens attention to what our Saviour delivered. Such a laconic, awakening ſentence, vehemently pronounced and addreſſed to the audience, after the recital of an inſtructive Parable, or at the end of one of his heavenly diſcourſes, delivered by a Perſon, who aſſumed a divine authority, and with

with a ſolemnity, that ſpoke his own dignity, and the ſublimity and moment of the doctrines he taught, muſt have all its effect—awe every power—rouſe every faculty—and ſtrike every heart. With what irrefragable force muſt ſuch a warm, pathetic, ſententious concluſion ſeal the inſtruction delivered, impreſs it on the heart, and powerfully excite the mind to revolve the truths it had juſt heard, and make them the ſubject of its moſt ſerious and deliberate regards. They were a ſolemn appeal to the underſtanding of his audience, carefully to examine his pretenſions to the character he aſſumed as a Teacher ſent from God, and to conſult their own hearts, whether the doctrines and morals he taught were worthy ſuch a commiſſion, or, if believed and practiſed, would be perfective of the glory and happineſs of human nature.

The ſolemn pauſe, that enſued after the empaſſioned pronunciation of this ſtriking ſentence, would make the hearer diſtinctly and deliberately go over again the ſeveral particulars of the Parable or Diſcourſe—ſeriouſly weigh their importance—fix his ideas to their ſacred moment—and bring home to his boſom their great end and deſign. It would be a ſolemn interval, in which all the hearer's thoughts would be deeply engaged—for example—in conſidering the reaſonableneſs of the doctrines he had heard—in tracing their correſpondence to the law of truth—in reflecting how much his happineſs was intereſted in them—in comparing the ſublimity of the doctrines with the heavenly authority of the Perſon who delivered them—in ſummoning all his mental and moral powers to retain theſe celeſtial inſtructions—deliberately reſolving in the mean time to carry home

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a warm, affecting ſenſe of theſe things, and give a circumſtantial detail of every particular to their parents, their wives, their children, their brothers, their relations—charging their memory to engrave theſe divine truths in living characters on their hearts—and determining that nothing, nothing ſhould ever efface them from their remembrance.

From this conciſe, vehement addreſs, one may infer the ſpirited manner in which our Saviour preached. One may conclude from this, that our Lord delivered his public inſtructions with a warmth and pathos equal to the dignity and moment of the truths they contained. With what holy rage and divine indignation does he tear off the hypocrite's ſpecious maſk, and ſhew the world the turpitude and deformity that lurked behind! With what ſpirited declamation does he pro-

nounce his woes upon the Scribes and Pharifees, and upon the moft dignified and illuftrious among that abandoned people, fatirizing their diffimulation, avarice, oftentation, pride, fuperftition, and unfeeling inhumanity, with the moft facred zeal and fervour, and in the warmeft ftrains of heart-infpired eloquence remonftrating againft their abominable corruptions in doctrine, and abominable profligacy in practice, expofing their little trifling ceremonious obfervances to palliate their vices, and atone for the want of perfonal holinefs—to excite deteftation and horror, publickly recounting the flagrant enormities of this demure race of hypocrites, as the Jewifh nation in that age moft certainly was, with a vehemence which the orators of Greece and Rome never furpaffed. Let any perfon read the twenty-third chapter of St. Matthew's Gofpel, and judge whether

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our Saviour ſuffered men to ſlumber in their vices—whether he tamely ſuffered the manners and principles of thoſe abandoned times to paſs uncenſured—or whether his public diſcourſes were delivered in a dull, ſpiritleſs, unanimated manner. Our Saviour was in earneſt—Would to God all the Preachers of his Religion were inſpired with the ſame holy fervour and ſacred earneſtneſs! It was his meat and drink to do the Will of God, to exterminate errour, and eſtabliſh truth, to pluck the hoary venerable tyrant Superſtition from that throne he had uſurped ſo long, and to erect an everlaſting empire of true Religion—and ſuch a commiſſion as this he would not execute in a careleſs, negligent, perfunctory manner. It was his ſacred ambition to emancipate the human mind from that cruel ſlavery in which it had been detained ſo long, to free it from the ignominious fetters of falſe ſyſtem

and prejudice, to vindicate it into the glorious liberty of truth and virtue, to diſſolve mens ſanguine attachment to ſecular intereſt, to inflame their minds with the glorious proſpect of immortality—and can it be ſuppoſed that he, who was purpoſely delegated from heaven by the Supreme to reform the world, to publiſh theſe ſacred truths, and to execute this great commiſſion, would deliver it with unfeeling coldneſs, neither affected himſelf, nor deſirous to affect others?

How proper is the animated language in my text, *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*, from the lips of one who appeared among men inveſted with a divine authority, and who challenged the world's attention to the meſſage which God Almighty deputed him to proclaim? Who could ſuffer ſupine negligence and liſtleſſneſs to ſeize his ſpirit, and be-

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numb his powers, when the great God was ſpeaking to him by his Ambaſſador and Apoſtle. Who could be an inattentive hearer, when one, who exhibited the ſtrongeſt proofs of the dignity of his perſon, the authority of his pretenſions, and the credibility of his doctrines, was affectionately expoſtulating with him, by all the authority of his commiſſion, and with all the energy that truth can inſpire, to relinquiſh errour, abandon vice, and embrace Religion?—And muſt not theſe exhortations to repentance, amendment, and holineſs, be urged with an importunate and ſacred ardour that no well-diſpoſed mind could reſiſt?—muſt not ſuch ſpirited addreſſes as this in the text flow with a warmth and fervency which ſpoke them the genuine dictates of an heart that felt their importance, and was painfully conſcious what depended on mens' wilful rejection

tion of them. The flame of devotion and piety, which was kindled in our Saviour's bosom, animated all his discourses. *From the abundance of his heart his mouth spoke.* His language received its spirit and force from the zeal which prompted it. His soul was penetrated with the love of God and of mankind, and his pathetic discourses shew us the strength of these divine principles. Language is but the expression of the heart—the overflowings of a person's inward sensibilities. It is the heart which gives animation to the diction and to the manner of a public speaker. The heart appears visible through the interposing veil, and leads us to judge of the degree in which it is actuated to do good. This rule applied to our Saviour's discourses, will make his heart appear in a very amiable light. We shall see from what sincerity his expressions flowed — how dear our

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everlasting interests were to him—with what sacred love of truth and holiness his bosom glowed—what genuine compassion and love engaged him to reason and expostulate with men—and what holy ardour caught his spirit and wrapped his powers, when he was publickly delivering his divine discourses, and affectionately urging men, by all the persuasive arguments that could affect their understandings, or strike their passions, and with all the vehemence that truth could inspire, or a messenger from God employ, to repent, to reform, and embrace that Religion, which had the great God for its Author, and would infallibly put them in possession of everlasting blessedness. From such a mind, inspired with the dignity of such a subject, flowed the animated expressions of the text—and they solemnly call upon every rational mind deliberately to consider the authority which

which ſpoke them, the principles which dictated them, the pathos which diſtinguiſhes them, and the importance and moment of thoſe preceding diſcourſes, to which they are ſubjoined.

This is a very ſtrong and emphatical appeal to the reaſon and underſtanding of men. Our Lord reſts the truths he publiſhed upon the impartial deciſions of reaſon. He appeals to its tribunal, and refers men for the nature and excellence of his Religion to its ſovereign verdict. Chriſt does not force and obtrude his doctrines upon us. He puts no coercive reſtraint upon the native freedom and liberty of our minds. The ſacrifice of our underſtanding is not a victim, which our great High-prieſt requires us to immolate at the foot of his altar. It was never the intention of our Lawgiver, that we ſhould reſign

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our underſtanding in matters of Religion—ſhould exerciſe our rational and intellectual powers in every thing except in matters of Religion. It is the unrivalled glory of Chriſtianity, that it is a rational Religion—worthy that great Being to give, who is pure and perfect Reaſon—and worthy the reception of ſuch a creature as man, whoſe diſtinguiſhing glory it is to be endued with reaſon. Chriſtianity never contradicts right reaſon—it illuſtrates and confirms it. Its truths and principles are conſonant to its genuine dictates—and they mutually corroborate and elucidate each other. Chriſtianity is a rational inſtitution — its precepts and doctrines are ſuch as reaſon approves—it lodges the appeal for its reaſonableneſs and credibility to our own heart—it can be vindicated and demonſtrated upon the unerring principles of reaſon—and ſo long as man continues capable of exerciſ-

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ing his rational powers, so long will Christianity approve itself to every virtuous, well-disposed mind, to be *the wisdom of God and the power of God*, and to have every internal evidence that can evince it to be an explicit revelation from the God of truth. How often do we find our Saviour and his Apostles appealing to men for the *reasonableness* of what they deliver—suspending the decision upon the faithful genuine dictates of their own breasts—using no compulsive, violent, arbitrary methods, but openly exhibiting the evidences of Religion before the human mind, and generously leaving it to draw the conclusion.

Our Saviour's miracles were wrought without any ostentatious parade. They were accompanied with no vain-glorious rhodomontade, or with that fulsome pomp and vociferation, with

which impoſtors, in all ages, diſplay their falſe, fictitious miracles, and impoſe upon the credulity of the deluded multitude. The miracles of our Saviour were performed with modeſty and ſilence—and the facts were left to ſpeak their own language—And ſuch amazing operations, making the lame to walk, the blind to ſee, and the dead to live, would ſpeak, in reaſon's ear, in more ſtrong and emphatic accents, than all the declamations of all the orators in the world, had they been all aſſembled upon the occaſion.

The public diſcourſes alſo of our Saviour were addreſſed to the human heart, to the principles of mens reaſon and underſtanding—the doctrines, duties, and diſcoveries were fairly and openly propounded, and they were left to reaſon concerning them, to bring them to the native ſtandard of their judgment

ment and moral diſcernment—Chriſt being deſirous that men ſhould be the rational believers of his Goſpel—converts from principle and mental conviction—fully perſuaded in their own minds that Chriſtianity was founded upon argument and evidence, and was a revelation from the infinite Source of truth and wiſdom, in every reſpect worthy its great and good Author, and perfective of the higheſt dignity and glory of the rational character. Take away reaſon, and you ſink man to a level with the brutes below him—to a level, did I ſay—you degrade him many degrees below the beaſts that periſh—many degrees below the ſagacious horſe and the *half-reaſoning* elephant. How do we know that the Scripture is a divinely-inſpired Book but by our reaſon? Extinguiſh the light of Reaſon, and with profane, irreverent hands you extinguiſh that Lamp, which the great Father

Father of lights hath fixed and kindled in your breasts. Vilify and depreciate Reason, and you revile and vilify the noblest emanation that reaches you from the supreme Source of wisdom. God is dishonoured, when you dishonour that which makes you what you are—a creature highly exalted in the scale of being, the lord of the creation, dignified with many vast and enlarged capacities, impressed with the image of God, and distinguished with faculties capable of receiving greater and greater improvements in knowledge and happiness through all the revolving ages of an endless immortality.

The reason I carry in my bosom is as much an emanation from God as any external system of divine truths can be. God does not give one light to extinguish another, but to aid, improve, and strengthen it.

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When the eye of Reaſon had been obſcured by vice, and it was found inſufficient to reform and reclaim a corrupt and depraved world, God interpoſed, and in this *fulneſs of time* ſent his Son to ſeek and to ſave that which was loſt, and to recover men to liberty, virtue, and happineſs. Though human reaſon could of itſelf never have contrived and planned ſuch a ſcheme as the Goſpel, and after all its moſt generous exertions could never have furniſhed ſuch a ſyſtem of Religion and Morals, ſo clearly delivered, enforced by ſuch an authority, embelliſhed with ſo many ſhining examples, illuſtrated with ſuch a ſublimity of doctrine, replete with ſuch animating encouragements, and recommended to the love and acceptance of mankind by the beautiful united aſſemblage of every argument and evidence that can win our aſſent and eſtabliſh our belief of it—though

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human reaſon, after all its efforts, could never have contrived and executed ſuch a plan, yet, when diſcovered, it appears perfectly congruous and analogous to all the dictates and principles of Reaſon—it approves itſelf to all the rational and moral powers, and inſtead of overwhelming the light which God by nature poured upon the mind, and rendering it worthleſs and uſeleſs, it only contributes to make it break forth with ſuperior radiance, directs its enquiries with greater certainty, purges the mental eye more effectually from the films of errour, and, by the additional rays ſhed upon it, makes it to ſee its duty and happineſs in a clearer, ſtronger point of view, than ever before it beheld it. Chriſtianity is the perfection of all Religion, becauſe it is the perfection of Reaſon—and becauſe it hath improved and exalted the human mind infinitely beyond

yond any other Religion the world ever ſaw. The pathetic language therefore of our Saviour in the text, which is of ſuch frequent occurrence, is an appeal to the reaſon, underſtanding, and judgment of mankind in regard to the nature and genius of the Chriſtian Religion.—Whether it be founded upon Reaſon, or whether it be an inſult and outrage upon Reaſon—he holds up before the virtuous well-diſpoſed mind a faithful picture of his Religion; and as ſuch a mind is qualified to judge, leaves it to its *natural* ſentiments and reflections on the fair and perfect piece.

This phraſe further implies, that we ſhould diligently employ our rational and moral faculties in the ſtudy of Truth and Virtue. The true meaning of this ſtrong, figurative, oriental expreſſion, *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear*, in modern language is this:

this: Let him, that is endowed with rational and intellectual powers, carefully cultivate and improve them in the inveſtigation of Truth, and the acquiſition of ſacred Knowledge. It was never the deſign of our Creator, when he furniſhed us with ſuch abilities, capable of ſuch vaſt attainments, that we ſhould ſuffer them to lie dormant and neglected, uſeleſs to the world and to ourſelves.

God in his Providence hath opened before us a boundleſs field of ſcience, and he hath given us the power of ranging its ample circle, and culling its ſelecteſt flowers. The excurſions of the mind are unlimited—it tranſports itſelf in a moment to the remoteſt regions and kingdoms of the world—is a ſpectator of their government, manners, and cuſtoms—and ſits as judge on their religion, polity, and various regulations. It traverſes the

pathleſs fields of ſpace, attends the ſun, moon, and planets, in their revolutions, fixes and determines their periods, and by the amazing dint of philoſophical ſpeculation, for many years to come, accurately predicts the various changes that will affect theſe immenſe bodies. The ocean it explores, inveſtigates the nature of the tides, the laws of gravity, the properties of the animal and vegetable creation, the principles of the human mind, and in every direction traverſes thoſe moſt extenſive regions, which Hiſtory, Philoſophy, and Theology ſpread before it. God hath opened before us the two great volumes of Nature and Revelation, replete with inexhauſtible treaſures of knowledge and wiſdom of the moſt uſeful kind, and beſt adapted to adorn and exalt the mind—and he expects that we ſhould carefully peruſe the fair and heavenly pages of theſe books, and that

that we ſhould embelliſh and enrich our minds with a ſplendid, uſeful fund of ſacred inſtruction. We ſhould be unjuſt to the great and good Author of our intellectual powers, if we did not aſſiduouſly cultivate and improve them, and carefully exerciſe them, according to our reſpective opportunities, in the ſtudy and purſuit of every thing that may gain us the reputation of being ſenſible and intelligent, as well as virtuous and good. In all our enquiries Truth ſhould be our great object and aim. To this all our ſtudies ſhould be directed. When we read the book of Nature, or the book of Revelation, this is the one great ſcope to which we are to tend—this is the ſacred paſſion, with which our breaſts ſhould be incurably ſmitten. —the love of truth ſhould animate and inſpirit us through all the difficulties that lie in the road to it.

And what ought to have infinite weight with us, and ſtimulate us in all our reſearches, is, That God will illuminate a mind thus worthily employed, will aid and direct it in its enquiries, will guard it from every deſtructive errour, and irradiate it with the clear perception and knowledge of every thing conducive to its preſent felicity and future bleſſedneſs. What can be a greater encouragement to us, to animate us in the ſtudy of the Scriptures, and in the ſearch of Truth, than the conſideration that there is a Being of infinite wiſdom ever prompt and diſpoſed to enlighten our imperfect minds, who with paternal ſmiles ſtands ready from his uplifted hand to throw upon the labouring mind ſuch heavenly light as will diſpel the darkneſs of prejudice and ignorance—who will ſtrengthen the mental eye to ſee TRUTH in all her celeſtial form and infinite attractions—and if honeſt in

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our enquiries, and ſolely intent upon the improvement of our minds in every thing amiable and laudable, will invigorate our intellectual powers with his divine influence. He, who pervades the ſpirit, can enlighten it—he, who has immediate acceſs to the mind, can irradiate its powers, and fortify and direct its abilities. *If any lack wiſdom, let him aſk it of God.*

In all our enquiries after Truth, therefore, let us never forget our abſolute dependence upon the Deity, to whoſe goodneſs we are indebted for all the knowledge we are capacitated to acquire—who originally gave us our faculties, and all the means and opportunities we enjoy for improving them—and above all, in the purſuit of religious knowledge, let our application conſtantly be made, with the devouteſt homage and reverence, to the great indefectible Source of light

and Fountain of truth, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not. Let us make the wiſeſt and beſt uſe of our fugitive moments. Let us conſtantly be occupied in purſuits that are honourable, decent, and laudable. Let us diligently improve the powers, which God hath given us on purpoſe that we ſhould improve them. Let us cheriſh an inſatiable paſſion for ſacred Truth and uſeful Knowledge, and a fortitude and firmneſs in profeſſing and publiſhing the truth. Let us make the Holy Scriptures our delight and our ſtudy. Let us eſtabliſh and confirm every moral principle and virtuous diſpoſition—and by this worthy employment of our reaſon, by this reputable improvement of our time and talents, and by the aſſiduous, unwearied cultivation of every thing amiable and excellent, let us maintain the dignity of our ſtation as men, the dignity of our characters as Chriſtians, and

and effectually accomplish the grand and glorious design, for which God endowed us with reason, inspired into us the principle of immortality, and called us into being amidst such distinguished advantages.

The language of my text is commanding and authoritative. After our Saviour had delivered his Sermon on the mount, it is observed that the people were *astonished at his doctrine*—and the reason assigned for the effect his instructions produced, is, because he *taught* them as one *having authority*—he delivered his instructions with an air of Divine dignity, which inspired reverence, and commanded attention—*and not as the Scribes*—not in that careless, indolent, unaffecting manner in which the Jewish Clergy taught the people. Our Saviour spake with a majesty that shewed his commission from God—by the awful so-

lemnity of his manner, diction, accent, air, action, he reigned over the audience, and ſtruck them with the laſt aſtoniſhment. The powers he diſplayed were irreſiſtible—they penetrated through all the folds of the heart, and awed every power and paſſion into admiration and reverence. The thunder and lightning of DEMOSTHENES's eloquence, as the ancients characterized it, were nothing to the wonderful effects of our Saviour's authoritative, heaven-inſpired oratory. It ſubdued every virtuous heart, captivated every virtuous affection, piercing to the *dividing aſunder of the joints and marrow*, and intimately pervading the thoughts and intents of the heart. He came from heaven, cloathed with a divine authority—and he ſpake and taught as one inveſted with this dignity. His diſcourſes did not perplex and embarraſs the auditors with philoſophical difficulties,

culties, curious ſpeculative reſearches, elaborate metaphyſical diſquiſitions, and with ſolutions of ſuch arduous ſubjects in Philoſophy and Morals, that raiſed more objections than they removed. He brought PHILOSOPHY from heaven, dreſſed in a plain, artleſs, undiſguiſed manner, and exhibited her divine form to the world, to ſtrike men with the moſt ſacred paſſion and love for her. His Philoſophy is not replete with infinite ſubtilties and inane refinements — it is a ſimple, clear, intelligible ſyſtem, ſtamped with the moſt venerable and ſacred authority.

You have an example of the commanding, authoritative manner, in which our Saviour delivered his diſcourſes, in ſeveral parts of his Sermon on the mount. *You have heard that it was ſaid in old time*, &c.—*but I ſay unto you.*

A well-atteſted *divine* authority was greatly wanting to give the precepts of *human* philoſophy their proper ſeal and ſanction. Philoſopher contradicted philoſopher, and one ſchool of wiſdom taught ſect and ſyſtem quite repugnant to another. The Platonic, the Peripatetic, the Stoic, the Epicurean philoſophy widely differed. Where muſt the common people of Heathen countries go for inſtruction? Their wiſe and eminent ſages were divided—their aſſertions and names did not give their ſyſtems any proper authority. Some of their ſyſtems were atheiſtical and deteſtable—ſome viſionary and romantic. What power had they to reclaim and reform the world? What authority could they plead, except the authority of their idle ſpeculative dreams and ideal reveries, to enforce their doctrines, and gain them a general reception among men? What good effects did the Philoſophy of *Plato* or the

the Offices of *Cicero* produce on the lives and morals of the bulk of mankind? We find that moſt of the Philoſophers and Lawgivers of antiquity were obliged to have recourſe to pious frauds, and to falſify and counterfeit the authority of ſome of their Deities, in order to give their laws and injunctions a proper moment and weight with the *people*.

How infinitely therefore hath the Chriſtian Religion the advantage of theſe motley heterogeneous bodies of human Philoſophy, which is ſealed with the ſignet of the great God, and ratified and confirmed by the moſt venerable and ſacred authority of him, who is the image of the inviſible God.

Well might our Saviour, therefore, who was delegated to this lower world to publiſh the Will of God, and appeared among us inveſted with this

moſt illuſtrious office and character, with an air of authority, with heavenly majeſty beaming from his looks, in every geſture dignity and love, ſtretch forth his hands over the world, raiſe his voice, and utter this commanding language: He who is formed capable of hearing and receiving ſacred truth, let him attend to the inſtructions of my Religion. He that deſpiſeth me, deſpiſeth not me, but HIM who ſent me. I am come in my FATHER'S Name. The Doctrine is not mine, but HIS that ſent me. A Religion therefore that hath GOD for its Author, and was publiſhed under the ſanction of his Name and Authority, claims our reverence—and the dignity of its illuſtrious Publiſher ſhould moſt powerfully enforce its great Truths and Principles upon our hearts.

APPLI-

APPLICATION.

Theſe words are alſo expreſſive of the infinite moment and importance of thoſe things to which we are commanded to give this diligent and ſerious attention. Death and Judgment, Heaven and Hell, are before us. Everlaſting happineſs, or everlaſting deſtruction, depends on our attention or inattention to theſe great concerns. Who would allow himſelf to trifle when his happineſs to all eternity, or the total loſs of it to all eternity, is at ſtake? Who would not be all ear, all attention, when God is ſpeaking, Chriſt expoſtulating, and Angels waiting to ſee whether we embrace or reject theſe friendly admonitions? Our everlaſting welfare is here ſuſpended. Happineſs or miſery are propoſed to our choice. According as we improve or miſimprove this

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tranſitory uncertain life, ſo will our everlaſting condition be unalterably fixed. Chriſt and his Apoſtles do not mean to ſooth us in our ſoft falſe dreams of ſenſual joy—to ſpeak peace to us, while we are traverſing a circle of every gay amuſement and folly. They mean to awaken us from theſe deluſive, fatal ſlumbers, by ſounding in Reaſon's ear, Repent and reform: obey the Goſpel: *Awake, thou that ſleepeſt, and ariſe from the dead, and Chriſt ſhall give thee light*: The night of life is far ſpent, the day is at hand; the morning of the reſurrection begins to dawn: now is the accepted time, behold, now is the day of ſalvation: He, that hath ears to hear, let him attend to the inſtructions of Jeſus, and the doctrines of eternal life, while God gives him an opportunity of attending to them.

Eternal

Eternal life is no poetic fiction. The Chriſtian's Heaven is no Pagan Elyſium, or Mohammedan Paradiſe. It is a great and glorious reality—no ideal world — no region of ſenſual ſoftneſs and voluptuouſneſs inſatiable. It is as pure and undefiled, as ſacred and holy, as the preſence of God and Chriſt and Angels and good Spirits can make it. Nothing but holineſs ſhall ever be admitted within its ſacred precincts. It will require all the care we can employ, all the time we can improve, and all the virtue we can cultivate and attain, to fit us for its bleſſed manſions.

Let us attend to theſe truths—let nothing ever eraſe them from our remembrance. It is at our peril we reject them. The blame, if we repulſe them, is only ours. Our guilt, and our loſs of immortality—theſe only can be charged upon ourſelves. We

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were acceſſary to it, if ever ſuch a dire event ſhould ever happen to any of us, which God of his infinite mercy avert.

While Chriſt therefore is ſpeaking to us, warning us of our danger, expoſtulating with us, addreſſing himſelf to our reaſon, underſtanding, and heart, let us hear, obey, and live. Let us not conſider the Book, which contains theſe admonitions, as merely a Book of ancient Hiſtory—a Book of amuſement to kill a vacant hour on a Sunday evening—but let us reflect that theſe things are written that we ſhould believe on the Name of the Son of God, and that believing, and acting as if we believed, we might through his Name be wiſe, and happy to all eternity.

Finally, Let us impartially examine and compare our hearts with the de-

ſcriptive repreſentations, which our Saviour in the preceding Parable hath given of its various ſtates. In our moments of retirement, in an hour of cool reflection, let us lay our hand on our heart, and in the preſence of the great Searcher of them, ſolemnly aſk ourſelves theſe queſtions: Is this heart, like the hard, beaten, impenetrable ſurface, on which the word of God fell, but could make no impreſſion, and which the fowls of the air, every vain, fantaſtic, airy pleaſure, with voracious greedineſs picked up as moſt delicious prey, the moment it fell—Is this heart covered with a ſlight mold, with impenetrable rocks lurking juſt beneath its ſurface, capable of bringing no virtuous reſolution, no deſigns of amendment and uſefulneſs to any maturity—Is this heart choked with the baleful weeds of covetouſneſs and worldly-mindedneſs, and will ſuffer nothing holy or heavenly

heavenly to grow and flourish under its poisonous shade—Or can I say, that I enjoy the greatest of all blessings, GOODNESS OF HEART—that I have an heart disposed to every good word and work—disposed to cherish every kind affection, cultivate and perfect every Christian virtue, and, by the fair and heavenly fruits that flourish in its genial soil, blessing me with the delectable prospect of reaping a rich harvest of eternal glory. Let it be our principal concern to govern our passions, to rectify our heart, to improve our time, to extirpate every evil, to cherish every good disposition; and in the uniform, undeviating course of a virtuous, useful, and truly Christian life, prepare for death and eternity, and God will be with us and bless us in all the changing scenes of this life, and finally crown us with eminent degrees of happiness in the realms of immortality.

THE

THE

NATURE AND DESIGN

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE three following Sermons having an intimate connection with the ſubject of the preceding Diſcourſes, I hope the Reader will receive them with candour, and peruſe them with edification.

EDWARD HARWOOD.

SERMON VIII.

GAL. v. 22, 23.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

CHristianity is the perfection of all Religion. The best interest of mankind hath this divine system consulted. Its ultimate design and tendency is apparently to carry human nature

nature to the higheſt ſummit of happineſs. All its precepts, doctrines, and ſanctions, are calculated to produce the higheſt virtue and felicity of human kind, and to ſpread an amiable and delectable ſcene of univerſal harmony, concord, and love among all its profeſſors. It is ſuch a Religion, as is infinitely worthy of a Being to give, whoſe darling attribute is Benevolence and Love—and ſuch a Religion, as is infinitely worthy the reception of a creature, whoſe higheſt happineſs reſults from the cultivation of benevolence and love.

When our bleſſed Saviour was uſhered into this ſcene of being, the heavenly choirs, in rapturous and accordant ſtrains, repeated, PEACE, PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARDS MEN. This ſhort triumphal Ode, ſung by theſe angelic hoſts at our Saviour's nativity, is deſcriptive of the genius and

and nature of this Divine Religion, which is by way of diſtinction ſtyled, THE GOSPEL OF PEACE—and whoſe cardinal characteriſtic virtue is good will and univerſal charity.

When our Lord's Diſciples, tranſported with a furious zeal againſt the inhabitants of a Samaritan village, which had refuſed their Maſter the rites of hoſpitality, and prohibited his entrance into the town, importunately deſired him by a miracle to command fire from heaven to conſume theſe ſtubborn aud abuſive wretches—our Lord reproved them for the ſanguinary ſpirit they diſcovered—he turned and rebuked them, ſaying, *Ye know not what manner of ſpirit ye are of* — You are perfect ſtrangers to the genius of my Religion, and the ſpirit it breathes. The Son of God came not to inſpire men with principles of malevolence, cruelty,

elty, and revenge; but to fill the human bosom with sentiments of love, amity, mutual forbearance, affection, harmony, and charity.

The intention of this blessed Religion is best seen by contrasting it with other Religions, which have made pretensions to a Divine Revelation. Read the Turkish Koran—every page is stained with blood. Murder and bloodshed are the means which this *divine* volume, the Koran, sanctifies in propagating its doctrines. Mohammedism is founded in conquest and empire, and justifies its professors in wading through oceans of human blood to its erection and establishment in the world. God, says this Impostor, commissioned Jesus Christ to give men a system of Divine Laws, which he endeavoured to spread and promulgate among mankind by the dint of their intrinsic amiableness, and

by means of moral ſuaſion, mildneſs, and lenity—but when theſe gentle methods were eventually found to be ineffectual, God authoriſed me to propagate his Religion by compulſion, by conqueſt, and to uſe more cogent arguments with mankind, ſince pacific perſuaſions were totally inadequate and fruitleſs. In conſequence of which the Religion of Mahomet, which hath been propagated to ſuch a prodigious extent, hath entirely reverſed the words of my text—for the fruit of that ſpirit, which the Koran breathes, is rage, rancour, fury, animoſity, revenge, devaſtation, murder, the infernal paſſion of making converts by fire and ſword.

How diametrically oppoſite to ſuch a temper and diſpoſition are the amiable and godlike principles of the Religion of Jeſus!—What a ſtriking contraſt this to the character of the

benevolent Jesus, who was meek and lowly in heart, the friend of all mankind, in whose bosom every thing dwelt that was humane, benevolent, and divine, and who left this ever-memorable Sentence as a Lesson to all his followers, in all future ages: BY THIS SHALL ALL MEN KNOW THAT YOU ARE MY DISCIPLES, IF YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

It is greatly to be lamented, and the thought cannot fail to inspire a serious mind with generous pity and indignation, That Christians, in all ages of the Church, should have so miserably departed from the spirit of the Gospel. I am sorry to make the following remark; but, alas! it is but too just and obvious—That there is no species of history, which a benevolent, humane well-wisher of mankind reads with less pleasure than Ecclesiastical History. It is very disagreeable,

agreeable, when a perſon hath read the hiſtory of our Lord, and obſerves, as every one muſt do, what ſtrict injunctions our Redeemer again and again urges upon all his followers—repeating theſe admonitions in every diſcourſe—upon every occaſion—*to love one another—A new commandment I give unto you, That you love one another*—It is very unpleaſing and ungrateful, when one conſiders theſe uſeful directions, to turn one's reflections to the *ſubſequent* times, and ſee how theſe moſt ſolemn admonitions of our great Maſter were fulfilled by thoſe who valued themſelves upon being the profeſſors of his Religion. Had our bleſſed Saviour left this precept on record to all his followers: *A new commandment I give unto you, That you hate one another*—how could it have been better fulfilled than what it hath been—than

what it hath been from the third Century to the preſent day?

One ſhudders to think what ſeas of human blood have been ſpilt in what are called *Religious Wars*. What dreadful maſſacres did the various and diſcordant ſects and parties of Chriſtians alternately exerciſe one upon another in the reſpective reigns of CONSTANTINE's Succeſſors—burning villages, ſtorming towns, pillaging rich and fertile countries, and putting all, without diſtinction, to the ſword, who did not think exactly as they did in certain metaphyſical, ſpeculative controverſies, which they themſelves, who exerciſed theſe cruelties, freely acknowledged to be incomprehenſible and unintelligible.

The evident deſign of the Goſpel is to unite men one to another—and mutual charity was deſigned to be the great

great bond and cement of this union. But different profeſſions of Chriſtians have, in general, lived and acted, as if their common Religion was intended to ſet men at irreconcilable variance and the remoteſt diſtance one from another. The Goſpel's great aim is, to conciliate mens' affections one to another—if one might judge of its nature and tendency from the reciprocal conduct of its ſeveral denominations towards each other, one would conclude, its purpoſe and end was to inſpire men with black reſentment, implacable diſcord, and uncharitable animoſities againſt each other.

One would think that our bleſſed Saviour and his Apoſtles had theſe unhappy ſcenes in view, which afterwards happened in the Chriſtian Church, when they ſo earneſtly and importunately entreated and conjured Chriſtians, by every affecting argu-

ment and motive, to cultivate mutual affection, concord, and love, one towards another—And there is hardly any thing that ſhews the amiable Religion of Jeſus in a more engaging, endearing light, than that it is by no means chargeable with thoſe dire diſcords and uncharitable controverſies its profeſſors have kindled—that it is by no means chargeable with thoſe deſtructive flames of war and ſcenes of bloodſhed which the worſt paſſions of men have raiſed—that theſe are unhappy events it never deſigned, but, on the contrary, was publiſhed to mankind to ſuppreſs and extinguiſh—and that, inſtead of inflating men with arrogance and oſtentation, and of blowing up their worſt paſſions into fury, envy, bitterneſs, malice, and mutual diſſenſion, its ſole ſtudy, and grand, capital, primary deſign is, to reconcile men one to another, by means of *one* common union, *one* common

mon Religion, *one* common Redeemer —and to inſpire all, who name the ſacred Name of Jeſus, with the moſt generous benevolence, with mutual concord, and univerſal charity and love. *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-ſuffering, goodneſs, faith, meekneſs.*

The bleſſed effects of the Goſpel are here diſtinctly enumerated. By the *fruits of the Spirit* are meant the genuine product of Chriſtianity. Theſe amiable virtues are the very eſſence and ſpirit of the Goſpel—they are its ſupreme, unrivalled excellence and glory—they are the pure and ſacred ſtreams, which flow from this divine fountain. When the Goſpel is imbibed and cordially embraced, it produces theſe fair and bleſſed fruits as naturally as any Cauſe produceth its Effect. Peace and love and meekneſs and gentleneſs and charity are the

fruit by which the nature of the tree is eminently diſtinguiſhed. *A good tree bringeth forth good fruit.* Virtuous, benevolent principles ſhine in virtuous, benevolent actions. There is an inſeparable connection betwixt them. If the heart, the fountain of goodneſs, be virtuous, the inferior affections will be virtuous. If that Religion, which is the rule and guide of a man's life and conduct, be founded in the happineſs of ſociety and the holineſs of individuals, wherever it is cordially received and adopted, it will beam forth in all its native ſplendour and divine luſtre, in the diſpoſitions, affections, and morals of thoſe who believe it to be divinely authenticated.

There were great numbers, I believe, of devout, holy, and virtuous Heathens—but the public Religion, which they eſpouſed, had a flagrant tendency

tendency to render them to the laſt degree depraved and corrupt. For what were their Gods, whom they adored? what were the grand objects of their worſhip?—Monſters of cruelty, luſt, and drunkenneſs. Had many of the Heathen, whoſe diſtinguiſhed virtues are recorded, followed the example of their Gods, inſtead of being objects of our admiration and deſerved imitation, they would now be juſtly eſteemed by us as a reproach to human nature, and a diſgrace to every thing that was decent and laudable among men.

Inconceivable was the detriment, which the falſe Religion and ſhocking Superſtition of the *Greeks* and *Romans* did to the morals of the world. All their Gods are repreſented as inſtigated by envy, diſcord, revenge—by the worſt paſſions and moſt deteſtable vices, that can debaſe a frail

mortal. No wonder, therefore, when their religious Syſtem itſelf breathed this ſpirit, that thoſe, who eſpouſed it as divine, as tranſmitted down to them from venerable and hoary Antiquity, ſhould imbibe it, and act from principle. It is natural to imitate the great Objects of our worſhip in any qualities, which diſtinguiſhed them, and transfuſe into our ſpirits the ſame principles and diſpoſitions which actuated them. Their Religion was corrupt, their lives conſequently were corrupt.

This cannot be ſaid concerning our Divine Religion. It is a Syſtem of Holineſs and Charity, and the examples of thoſe, who founded it, are conſummate patterns of every diſtinguiſhed virtue it recommends. None can be betrayed into errours in conduct by copying too cloſely the great examples it exhibits for our imitation,

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as the Heathens might be, and, alas! often were. In the life of Jesus Christ we see every fair and godlike virtue shine, with which we are commanded to adorn our own minds. He was a most amiable and perfect pattern of that meekness, benevolence, and charity his Gospel breathes. Exhortations to mutual affection, harmony, and love, would come with infinite force and energy from a person, who displayed these before the world in all their divine lustre by a most engaging conversation. He, who was meek and lowly in heart, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, threatened not, who bore the greatest indignities and abusive treatment with invincible meekness, and a greatness of soul truly heroic and unexampled, must assuredly give, by the charms of such a personal conduct, a great additional force to virtues

tues which ſhone ſo conſpicuous in his own temper and affections.

He never can teach others Religion and Morals with any ſucceſs, whoſe daily life contradicts his precepts. He, who inculcates the duties of patience, and candour, and lenity, and peaceableneſs, the government of our paſſions, and the cultivation and improvement of every generous, humane, and benevolent diſpoſition, and yet whoſe life is known to be an inſult upon his inſtructions, is eaſily provoked, is apt to kindle into violent outrageous paſſions, perhaps upon very trifling occaſions, is petulant, cenſorious, malicious, malevolent, fond of ſcandal, and defamation, and detraction, malignant in his temper, and uncharitable in his reflections on his fellow-men — what efficacy can rules of duty have from ſuch a character?

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It is not ſo much what men ſay, as how they live, that is the grand object of enquiry. Now the bleſſed Religion of Jeſus will bear this ſcrutiny. There is no defect in his life. He exemplified every religious and moral precept he enjoined upon others. His Religion, you know, is moſt of all diſtinguiſhed for the duty of charity and benevolence—and the life of Jeſus was moſt of all diſtinguiſhed for this divine virtue—for not only was the whole tenour of his life one uniform ſeries of beneficence to the ſouls and bodies of mankind, but his love for the world was ſtronger than the love of life—for he voluntarily ſurrendered his life for the happineſs and ſalvation of the world. Nay, ſo unconquered was his divine benevolence, that with his expiring breath he even prayed for his implacable, bloodthirſty murderers—making, in that moſt affecting petition he addreſſed to God,

God, the only apology, which their aggravated crimes were capable of admitting: *Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do.*

As was the life and temper of Christ, so is the genius and spirit of His Religion. It has the peace of societies and kingdoms, and the happiness of families and individuals for its great object. It labours to secure this great end by exterminating from the human breast all rancour, malice, bitterness, and malignity—principles destructive of all true happiness, subversive of the true glory and dignity of our nature, and, whenever cherished, necessarily productive of public and private misery and wretchedness. This divine Religion, which descended to us from the Father of lights, and bears the impress of the God of love, tends to make us like the God we serve and the Redeemer we acknow-

knowledge, in purifying and ſanctifying our natures, in rectifying our diſpoſitions, in healing the moral diſorders of our ſouls, and carrying us to the higheſt degrees of holineſs and virtue we are capable of attaining. This Divine Religion engages us to look upon our fellow-creatures and fellow-Chriſtians in the moſt endearing point of view—to make all candid, generous allowances for their frailties and imperfections—to do every thing in our power to alleviate their ſorrows, mitigate their ſufferings, and take off the preſſure of human ſorrows and calamities. This bleſſed Religion ſtrives to extirpate from our boſom every root of bitterneſs, which, ſuffered to grow, might have a baneful influence both upon our own happineſs and the happineſs of thoſe around us. The Religion of Jeſus tranſforms men into a divine nature, exalts their views, dignifies and ennobles

bles their heaven-born ſpirits, moderates and regulates the inferior affections, brings the animal paſſions and propenſities under a proper ſubjection and controul, ſpreads a ſcene of peace and harmony and ſatisfaction in the ſoul, fills it with the kindeſt affections and ſocial benevolent diſpoſitions towards all, reſtores the image of God, which ſenſual paſſions had obſcured, to its original luſtre, and ſtamps upon it, in deep and indelible ſignatures, that wiſdom that comes from above, that is firſt pure, then peaceable, gentle, eaſy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocriſy.

The Maker of our frame and the Divine Jeſus knew that the moſt pure, ſublime, elegant, ſubſtantial, and permanent happineſs, which man could taſte on this ſide heaven, would reſult from the mutual culture and

practice of charity, love, beneficence, kindneſs, gentleneſs, meekneſs, candour, lenity, and univerſal good-will, — ſolely from a benevolent regard, therefore, to our own happineſs, he made theſe virtues the grand, fundamental indiſpenſable duties of his laſt and beſt diſpenſation to mankind—moſt mercifully, you ſee, connecting our intereſt with our duty, and our nobleſt happineſs with the nobleſt duty.

What a happy world ſhould we ſee, if Chriſtians lived but up to the rules of their common Religion! What harmony and concord would reign among different denominations and diſtinctions of Chriſtians, if their hearts and lives were but formed upon the charitable principles of the Goſpel of peace and love! What diſcords, and diſſentions, and animoſities, and uncharitable feuds and controverſies would now be unknown, had the ſeveral

ſeveral parties of Chriſtians agreed to live up to our Lord's NEW COMMANDMENT—and comparatively diſregarding other things, as of an inferiour and ſubordinate ſignificancy and importance, had all ſhewed a virtuous and holy ſolicitude to tranſcribe into their hearts the true features of the Goſpel—to make their own perſonal conduct a beautiful Copy of the Divine Original—to exhibit before the world and one another, its divine form, to regulate their temper and diſpoſition by the laws it preſcribes—and had all been unanimouſly agreed, whatever their other differences might be, to be kindly-affectioned one towards another, forgiving one another, as God, for Chriſt's ſake, had freely forgiven them all.* Happy world and happy age, in which the true ſpirit of the Goſpel ſhould revive with all its fair fruits and bleſſed effects—and all different Societies of Chriſtians learn

learn to ſpeak well and think favourably and candidly one of another.

This is what the Goſpel aims at—this is what it is fitted in its nature to produce—and the Scripture Prophecies clearly inform us, that theſe glorious and delectable ſcenes in ſome ſubſequent happy period it will produce. May God Almighty accelerate thoſe happy times, and by his overruling Providence revive amongſt us, in the preſent age, more of the Chriſtian Temper and Chriſtian Spirit!

But let us not paſſionately wiſh and antedate this happy æra of the Church without doing every thing in our power, in thoſe ſeveral ſtations and ſituations in which Providence hath fixed us, to promote and advance it. Let us ſuffer the Goſpel to have its full power upon our hearts and diſpoſitions—let us, according to our abilities

lities and capacities, read it carefully with prayer to God, that we may know it better, and practiſe it better—let us imbibe its true ſpirit, which is a ſpirit of love and charity—let our benevolence be as boundleſs and unlimited as the creation of God—whatever we may err in, let us take care not to err by cheriſhing a narrow, contracted, cenſorious, uncharitable diſpoſition and ſpirit. Let the love of God and of Chriſt, which ſhine with ſuch ſignal luſtre in this diſpenſation of grace and truth, inſpire us with love towards one another. Let us baniſh every thing that is mean and illiberal from our ſouls, as being a diſgrace to our natures, and a diſcredit to our Religion; and let us make it our ſtudy and ambition, it is a moſt noble and laudable ambition, if it be poſſible, as much as lieth in us, to live peaceably with all men. He who hath his paſſions under the

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beſt government, is the happieſt man; and he, who has a heart moſt inflamed with the love of God and Chriſt, and mankind, who has the moſt charitable, benevolent affections, is the beſt Chriſtian. He that is a true Chriſtian, will ſhew to the world what Chriſtianity is by his daily practice—by doing all the good he can to thoſe who are around him, of all parties without diſtinction, will faithfully exhibit to the world in his own temper and ſpirit what an amiable and divine ſyſtem the Goſpel is, when reduced to practice, how perfective of human nature and human happineſs, and will give the faireſt evidence of its divine veracity and beneficial tendency, by the ſteady conſcientious improvement of that fair train of virtues, which characterize it, which eminently diſtinguiſh it above every other religion the world ever ſaw, and which will for ever conſtitute its con-

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ſummate excellence and matchleſs glory and perfection. *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-ſuffering, gentleneſs, goodneſs, faith, meekneſs.*

I will offer a few practical obſervations on theſe ſeveral particulars according to the order in which they occur.

Amongſt the bleſſed effects and fruits, which the true ſpirit of the Goſpel produceth, the firſt, which the Apoſtle mentions, is LOVE. *The fruit of the Spirit is* LOVE. This is the diſtinguiſhing glory of the Chriſtian Religion, and conſequently the diſtinguiſhing glory of every Chriſtian.

The profeſſors of other religions have been diſtinguiſhed from the reſt of mankind by ſome diſcriminating tenets,

nets, or by ſome outward badges. The Chriſtian alſo was intended to wear publickly and privately his characteriſtic mark, by which he was to be univerſally known and contradiſtinguiſhed from the profeſſors of all other religions: *By this*, ſays our Saviour, *ſhall all men know that you are my diſciples, if you love one another.* This was ever deſigned to be the great teſt and peculiar characteriſtic of a Chriſtian. One of the early Fathers informs us, that nothing was more common in the primitive ages of the Church than for Heathens, who were witneſſes of that mutual affection, harmony, and love, which then reigned among Chriſtians, to utter this exclamation: *See how the Chriſtians love one another!*

The ſpirit of the Goſpel is not a moroſe, reſerved, narrow, illiberal, uncharitable ſpirit. The Goſpel is

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an enemy to every thing mean and contracted, abject and groveling. Its aim is to exterminate from the heart every ignoble paſſion, every partial, ungenerous diſpoſition, and to expand it to its utmoſt capacity with the principles of univerſal benevolence and love. He, who never felt the power and force of theſe principles, never knew what it was to be a Chriſtian. He, who is a ſtranger to the influence of Charity and Love, is yet a ſtranger to every thing that is peculiarly evangelical. Let his abilities be what they will—let his mental endowments, and literary attainments be what they will—let his acquiſitions of hiſtorical and philoſophical knowledge, the improvements he hath made in polite learning, in modern arts and ſciences, or even in theological ſtudies and reſearches, be what they will—if he have not, with all theſe ſhining treaſures of erudition and knowledge, a chari-

charitable heart, he hath not the heart of a Chriſtian—he is yet to learn what it is to be a Chriſtian—what the Goſpel is—what is its genius and tendency—what it was deſigned to make men—for what end it was that Chriſt lived and died. For Chriſtianity is entirely a practical inſtitution—entirely calculated by infinite Wiſdom to mend the heart, to meliorate our diſpoſitions, ſweeten our affections, and to inſpire us with ſympathetic pity, tenderneſs, and love one to another, in this common ſcene of human frailty, errour, and mortality.

One would think our common ſufferings in this vale of tears would unite us one to another in the bonds of one common Religion. One would think a promiſcuous ſtate of undiſtinguiſhed frailty, in which we are all expoſed to ſo many ſorrows and miſeries—the common lot of humanity—

in which we are obnoxious to ſo many painful diſeaſes, fatal diſtempers, and unforeſeen caſualties and diſaſters—in which we feel and are deſtined to feel the incumbent preſſure of ſo many evils and ſufferings, which we can neither avert nor ſoften—one would think, ſtrangers and ſojourners as we all are in a tranſitory life—vulnerable, as we all are, every moment, by the ſhafts of death—fellow-ſufferers and fellow-travellers in a world which is not our home—in an imperfect, fugitive ſcene of imperfect being—one would think theſe common calamities would endear us to each other, engage us, by ſocial converſation and an intercourſe of friendly offices, to alleviate the tedium of life's rugged road, and, by a mutual endeavour to be as agreeable to each other as poſſible, to ſuſpend and ſoften thoſe miſeries we cannot ſhun. Humanity requires this—

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Chriſtianity requires this. *Be kindly-affectioned one towards another. You yourſelves*, ſays the Apoſtle, *are taught of God to love one another*. God teaches this—Chriſt teaches this—Nature teaches and prompts us to this, with all its generous powers and affections. *He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love*, ſays St. John. By the culture of this we have communion with God, who is pure benevolence—When under its generous, benign influence, the ſame attributes govern us which actuate the Deity. This is the brighteſt reflection of the Divine Image upon our ſouls—this is the neareſt and beſt aſſimilation to the character of the bleſſed God, who is good to all, who makes his ſun to riſe and his rain to fall upon juſt and unjuſt without diſtinction. He who cheriſhes the divine principle of benevolence participates the nature of God and the happineſs of God. The only

thing we know of heaven is, that harmony, concord, benevolence and love reign amongſt all its bleſſed inhabitants—and he, who has his heart dilated with charity and love, begins his heaven here—for heaven is nothing more than the preſent ſtate carried on and afterwards compleated. Its commencement is in this world. Here we are to acquire ſuch diſpoſitions as are indiſpenſably requiſite to our future fruition of its bleſſedneſs—And theſe diſpoſitions, which we are commanded to cultivate and improve, give us, in their acquiſition and culture, a vigorous foretaſte and perception of that more perfect and conſummate felicity that awaits us in a happier ſtate of future being. He, therefore, who has the principle of love and benevolence in the greateſt perfection, diſplays the neareſt imitation of God, and the brighteſt aſſimilation to the joys of the bleſſed—for

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this virtue yields the moſt refined, elegant, heart-ennobling felicity that the ſoul is capable of ſenſing.

Hence it appears how perfective of human nature and human happineſs the Goſpel is, which is founded in the love of God and the love of mankind, and which, by the injunction of charity as its capital article, engages us to live the life of God, to begin our heaven on earth, and to antedate the joys of glorified ſpirits. *He that loveth not his brother, whom he hath ſeen, how can he love God, whom he hath not ſeen? He that ſaith, he loveth God, and hateth his* Chriſtian *brother, is a liar*—all his pretenſions to the Chriſtian character are hypocritical and falſe. *This commandment have we from him, that he that loveth God, ſhould love his brother alſo.*

All the privileges and bleſſings, with which the Goſpel Covenant hath inveſted us, are urged as ſo many incitements to mutual affection and Chriſtian love. All the diſtinguiſhing advantages, with which Chriſtians are bleſſed, are recounted and alledged as ſo many cogent arguments and motives to conciliate our affections one to another, to unite our hearts indiſſolubly one to another, and to induce them to coaleſce as one regular, harmonious ſociety, cemented by the ſtricteſt ties, and endeared to one another by the moſt tender and affecting bonds of union. *Beloved, if God ſo loved us, we ought to love one another.* That this is the primary deſign and ultimate end of the Goſpel inſtitution is apparent from every part and page of its ſyſtem. It univerſally repreſents charity and love as a compleat epitome and comprehenſive ſummary of the whole moral law. *He that loveth his*

his brother, hath fulfilled the law: love is the fulfilling of the law: if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The end of the commandment, the Apostle means, the end of the Christian Law, *is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.*

That Christian, therefore, who hath a good heart, and good dispositions to do good, who is in charity with all the world, who hath a heart too enlarged for the narrowness of party, and who embraces in the ample circle of its affections all mankind, this is a Christian—he hath the heart of a Christian—and shews what the true meaning and spirit of the New Testament is, better than all the Commentaries in the Vatican.

Suffer me to ſuggeſt a few thoughts upon the next particular mentioned by the Apoſtle among the effects of Chriſtianity. *The fruit of the Spirit is love*, JOY—And who hath ſuch cauſe of joy—equal pretenſions to joy—as a good Chriſtian?—He, who is bleſſed with ſuch privileges, endowed with ſuch immunities, and inveſted with the fœderal character and diſtinguiſhed title of *Sons of God* and *Heirs of God.* Can there be a happier being in the whole circle of the creation than a ſincere Chriſtian, who is conſcious he is an object of the divine love, a ſubject of the mediatorial kingdom of Jeſus, and not only an expectant, but an heir of immortality.

With what devout and ſacred joy did the privileges of the Goſpel inſpire the Apoſtles in all the dreadful ſcenes of ſorrow and perſecution, with which they conflicted? In all the diffi-

difficulties and trials they ſuffered, their *rejoicing* was this, the teſtimony of a good conſcience. They ſpeak of themſelves as ſorrowful, yet always *rejoicing*. Among the duties they enjoin upon Chriſtians, this was a diſtinguiſhed one—a devout joy, a ſacred exultation in the bleſſings and privileges of the Goſpel. *Rejoice evermore.* There is nothing gloomy and melancholy in the Goſpel—nothing to overwhelm us in penſive dejection and ſullen deſpair. The Goſpel is full of joy unſpeakable, and comfort ineffable. It opens to its virtuous believer all the ſources of the divineſt joy. The Apoſtle exclaims in a flood of holy rapture, and in all the exceſſes of a moſt tranſporting joy: *Bleſſed be the God and Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, who hath loved us, and given us everlaſting conſolation.*

Thoſe are objects of my ſincre pity, who can ſee nothing chearful and delectable in the Goſpel: The Goſpel was given to ſmooth and ſweeten our paſſage through this world—to fill us with joy and peace in believing—to ſoothe and ſuſpend the miſeries of human life—to mitigate and alleviate the various difficulties and ſorrows we meet—and enable us to look, with filial confidence and joyful hope, to the God and Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, aſſuring ourſelves, that he, who ſpared not his Son, but delivered him up for us all, will alſo freely beſtow every inferior bleſſing.

Who, that conſiders what immortality is, can indulge to chearleſs, deſponding gloom and melancholy? How delightful is it, what a theme for ſacred joy, to have a world aſſured to us, in which we ſhall exiſt for ever—in which our natures will be perfected—

perfected—and our happineſs prove commenſurate to its endleſs duration? What an inexhauſtible ſubject of Chriſtian joy is the proſpect of glory, honour, and immortality!

APPLICATION.

Let theſe animating, theſe exhilarating truths, call forth all our ſacred paſſions and devout affections. Let the privileges of the Goſpel Covenant excite the moſt rapturous emotions, and awaken in our hearts the moſt pure and elegant ſenſibilities. Let us not affront and inſult the good Being, who freely gave us this profuſion of bleſſings, by a heart cold and languid and torpid and inſenſible—but let us entertain and cheriſh the quickeſt ſenſe and moſt lively perception of them by *rejoicing* in that God who beſtowed them—beſtowed them to make us happy in the fruition

tion of them—and by indulging that Chriſtian joy and chearfulneſs which is ſo friendly to our nature and ſo friendly to our Religion. Let us ſhew to the world, that the Goſpel has produced in our hearts the happy fruits of love, joy, peace, and tranquillity—and by cheriſhing in our boſoms theſe delightful principles here on earth, let us prepare for that bleſſed world, where the moſt triumphant joy dwells and reigns for ever.

SER-

SERMON IX.

GAL. v. 22, 23.

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

HAving shewn at large the nature of the Gospel, and the excellent fruits and blessed effects, of which it is productive—that its design

ſign is to rectify the human heart, to regulate the affections, to inſpire us with the moſt generous benevolence—by the culture and exerciſe of theſe worthy diſpoſitions manifeſtly tending to carry us to the higheſt degree of moral perfection and happineſs—having propoſed, in my diſcourſe on this ſubject, to expatiate on the ſeveral particular virtues here diſtinctly enumerated as the genuine offspring of the Goſpel, and having already offered ſome practical remarks on the two firſt mentioned—I now beg leave to turn your reflections to a few thoughts on another happy product of the Chriſtian ſpirit, and that is PEACE. *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,* PEACE.

The Goſpel infuſes into the mind the trueſt peace, for it frees it from the tyranny of turbulent paſſions, extinguiſhes the wild flames of irregu-

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lar, exorbitant affections, and composes all its powers into harmony and order. The principles of the Christian Religion are the most sovereign and effectual antidote against immoderate grief and sorrow—against all anxious, tormenting fears—and disconsolate, desponding thoughts. The Religion of Jesus fills the heart with divine tranquillity, with calm, serene satisfaction—gives the human mind the noblest possession of itself—gives us the truest relish of our existence—makes every thing around us wear a friendly and grateful aspect—and exhibits human life, through its medium, in the most pleasing and agreeable colours, in the most amiable point of view, as an inconsiderable, minute part of one grand, stupendous Whole, and as a scene introductory to an everlasting duration.

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The Gospel, you know, is by way of distinction called the *Gospel of Peace*—because it imparts the most pure, sacred, and permanent peace—and is, in its nature, fitted to communicate to the mind the noblest peace and the noblest happiness. Must not that Religion infuse the most chearing, soothing satisfaction into the soul, that enables us to look up to the blessed God with filial affection and with liberal confidence—firmly persuaded of his constant guardianship and protection of us and ours—pleasingly assured that this good Being will finally make all things work together for our good, and that our several stations, conditions, and circumstances in this scene of being, are his all-wise appointment. Must it not fill the mind with serene tranquillity, composure, and peace, to regard ourselves under the superintendence of infinite Power, Wisdom, and

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Goodneſs—to conſider the ever-bleſſed God, as our moſt indulgent and affectionate Parent, ſolicitous for our happineſs for both worlds, and regulating all the meaſures of his government and the diſpenſations of his Providence to us in this world in ſuch a manner, as appears to his infinite wiſdom beſt calculated to promote our temporal welfare and everlaſting felicity. To view God in Chriſt as reconciling the world to himſelf, not imputing their treſpaſſes to them—as deſirous that none of his creatures ſhould finally periſh, but be all happy in the fruition of himſelf and the enjoyment of endleſs happineſs—as freely offering to all the conditions and terms of ſalvation by Jeſus Chriſt—and taking every method, but what is inconſiſtent with the law of our nature and the liberty of human actions, to engage them to comply with theſe conditions — to conſider the

the bleſſed God, from a principle of compaſſion and benevolence for the human race, ſending his Son to redeem the world, *that every one that believeth in him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life*—what ſacred pleaſure and ſacred peace do theſe grateful, pleaſing thoughts inſtil into all our rational and intellectual powers—how happy do they make us in our exiſtence, conſcious of the love and friendſhip of the God and Father of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt—conſcious that we are the objects of his love, and that our beſt intereſts for time and eternity are his care.

Theſe evangelical truths ſhed their ſelecteſt influence over human life—they ſhed their ſelecteſt influence over every human boſom, infuſing joy and peace and conſolation *unſpeakable and full of glory.* The conſcious ſenſe of the pardon of my paſt ſins upon

upon ſincere repentance and genuine remorſe—the conſcious ſenſe that my happineſs is the care of God—that myſelf and all my concerns are in the hands of a faithful Creator, who will never deſert me, who formed me for immortality, and will as aſſuredly beſtow it as he hath promiſed it—a deep, affecting, penetrating, conſcious ſenſe of theſe TRUTHS, ſmooths our ſhort paſſage through this life—makes us pleaſed with ourſelves and every thing around us—ſpreads the moſt delectable proſpects before us—converts this wilderneſs into a paradiſe—converts apparent irregularity, diſorder, and confuſion, into a delightful, tranſporting ſcene of beauty, harmony, and order.

What can invade the peace of that mind, that is under the influence of theſe truths? *If God is for us*, ſays the Apoſtle, ſpeaking on this very ſubject,

ject, *who can be against us?* If we have peace of conſcience, and the approbation of our Maker, no evil can hurt us. We read of a PEACE, *which the world can neither give, nor take away.* This is that *peace* which the principles of the Goſpel inſpire. It is called, elſewhere, *the* PEACE *of God, which paſſeth all underſtanding*—that is—ſuch a mental happineſs, ſuch pure, ſacred, divine, heart-ennobling ſatisfactions flow from this *peace of God*, as ſurpaſs all the moſt enlarged ideas, and tranſcend all the moſt elevated conceptions of the human mind.

Almoſt the laſt words our bleſſed Saviour addreſſed to his diſconſolate Diſciples were theſe: *My* PEACE *I give you, my* PEACE *I leave unto you: not as the world giveth*—Alas: the *peace* and happineſs which reſult from worldly acquiſitions are liable to many cruel interruptions—continually lie at the

mercy

mercy of ten thouſand accidents and diſaſters—will not ſupport us in an hour of pain and diſtreſs—much leſs in the hour of death. But that peace of mind, which is the *fruit of the ſpirit of the Goſpel*, is founded on a baſis which nothing can ſubvert—is eſtabliſhed on a rock, which the ſtorms of life's tempeſtuous ocean aſſail in vain—it is a peace that is liable to no interruptions from things external—it fluctuates not with every fluctuating ſcene—it is a peace, which continues with us, chearing and conſoling us when every thing elſe hath abandoned us—and, what enhances and endears this divine peace moſt to us is, that it throws out the moſt conſolations and ſupports in an hour of ſorrow, and in the article of death. For he, who hath this peace of mind, a peace, ariſing from a ſenſe of the complacential favour of God, and the applauding teſtimony of a good conſcience, is

enabled

enabled to ſupport all the trials of this world with heroic firmneſs and Chriſtian magnanimity, to leave the world without regret, without a ſigh; and to meet death with ſerene compoſure, with undaunted fortitude, as being only an introduction to the happy regions of eternal peace. *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is* PEACE.

Thus it appears, that the Goſpel is calculated to impart to us the trueſt PEACE of mind—that PEACE is one of the happy fruits of this amiable ſpirit—and that its principles, doctrines, and promiſes have the nobleſt tendency to inſpire us with *joy and* PEACE *in believing*.

I proceed to offer a few remarks in the next particular mentioned in the text; which is LONG-SUFFERING. *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,*

LONG-

LONG-SUFFERING. This relates to the proper government of our ſpirits, and the virtuous diſcipline, in which we ought to have our minds—not burſting into a wild flame of paſſion with every provocation that is offered us: not inſtantly kindling into rage and fury with every mean ſpark that happens to light upon us. Self-government is one of the moſt uſeful leſſons we can learn. He, who hath not his paſſions under proper regulation—he, who hath not power over his own ſpirit, is liable to have his peace of mind violated, and his happineſs diſturbed and broken, by every trifling inſult, which is unavoidable in this world. Calumny, abuſe, and ill treatment, we cannot eſcape—we live in a cenſorious, malevolent world—the greateſt integrity and innocence are not ſafe—the beſt Chriſtian is not privileged from the ſhafts of malice and detraction—and the more conſcientious

tious and upright, consequently the more singular, and consequently the more aspersed and scurrilized—Amidst these scenes, what is our conduct, what is our support, what temper and disposition does the Gospel require—O blessed, celestial system! O sacred, divine volume! it teaches this heavenly lesson: *Love your enemies; bless them that curse you: do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you.*

The Gospel was intended to curb our exorbitant passions, to restrain and moderate our animal propensities, and to bring them in subjection to the law of reason and of God. Neither the principles nor the examples of the Gospel justify a retaliation of injuries, and our returning abusive treatment with any malignant recriminations. The reverse it insists upon as our duty—to retaliate injuries with kindness,

to return evil with good, to requite abuſe with bleſſing, and malice with prayer. Bleſſed Religion! which conſpires to make a paradiſe in our boſoms, to transform human nature into divine, to exalt us above the reach of ſublunary evils, and to ally us to angels and happy ſpirits in the temper and diſpoſition of our minds.

What conduct does the Goſpel enjoin us to obſerve towards thoſe, who are inſtigated by implacable reſentment againſt us? Hear the words of the Apoſtle: *If thy enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirſt, give him drink: for in ſo doing thou ſhalt heap coals of fire upon his head.* This is the true ſpirit of the Goſpel, which it is your duty and mine to acquire—to *put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies, kindneſs, humbleneſs of mind, meekneſs, long-ſuffering; forbearing one another, if any man have a quarrel againſt*

any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

The example of Christ is here proposed as a model for our imitation—and what an affecting, endearing pattern hath he exhibited in his conduct! He was brought, you know, as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. Who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself—who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not, but committed himself to him who judges righteously.

Let us think of this divine Example in similar circumstances, and act as our Divine Master did under injurious treatment and unprovoked abuse. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am MEEK.

One

One would think ſuch an example as this might check and for ever ſuppreſs all our riſing reſentments, would diſarm rage and paſſion, and make all our worſt affections ſubſide into Chriſtian meekneſs, lenity, and long-ſuffering. Shall I ſuffer my paſſions to be inflamed with every petty injury, when my Saviour calmly endured the greateſt?—Shall I ſuffer my reſentment to kindle into a wild furious flame at this real or ſuppoſed provocation, when my Saviour patiently ſupported the laſt indignities?—How unlike ſhall I render myſelf to my bleſſed Redeemer, if, when I am reviled, I revile again; if when I ſuffer, I threaten; and return every abuſe and injury with an acrimony, virulence, and temper, O how unworthy a diſciple of the meek and lowly Jeſus!

Our Religion hath taught us nothing, if it have not taught us the

government of our paſſions. He hath little pretenſions to the Chriſtian ſpirit, who can load the objects of his reſentment with odious names and ſcurrilous expreſſions. This is a language no Chriſtian ever learned in the ſchool of Jeſus. *The wrath of man worketh not the righteouſneſs of God*, or the promotion of truth. He is to learn what it is to be a Chriſtian, who is yet to learn patience and peaceableneſs. An inflammable ſpirit, an unforgiving temper—what a contraſt this to the temper and ſpirit of the inoffenſive Jeſus! What a wretched and miſerable creature is he, who is the ſport of every paſſion—who is continually moroſe, fretful, irritable—hath a heart perpetually gnawed and corroded by the dæmon of paſſion and peeviſhneſs—who pours the overflowings of his own infelicity upon every object around him—who is inceſſantly tormented with inward inquietude

quietude—diſtracted by the tumultuous conflict of a thouſand raging and contending paſſions—loving no one, beloved by no one—all perſons cautiouſly ſhunning and avoiding him, leſt they ſhould inadvertently happen to ſay or do ſomething that might kindle his paſſions into a flame.

One cannot conceive of a more compleatly wretched being than he who is tyrannized over by his paſſions, and whoſe whole ſoul is under the abſolute dominion of malice, diſcord, pride, and reſentment. The Goſpel, therefore, ſtudies and conſults human happineſs by reſtoring the mind to itſelf, by repreſſing this lawleſs diſorder, quelling this tumultuous uproar, and poſſeſſing it with calm compoſure and unruffled tranquillity. Well-governed paſſions, well-diſciplined, regulated affections, a ſerene mind, a calm, undiſturbed bo-

ſom—theſe are the bleſſed effects of the Chriſtian ſpirit, where Chriſtianity is cordially imbibed, aſſiduouſly cultivated, and diligently exerciſed and improved. The principles of the Goſpel will enable us to ſuſtain reproachful treatment with invincible compoſure, to ſupport abuſe and calumny without any querulous invectives and bitter recriminations, to bear our ſorrows without any murmuring words or repining expreſſions, to requite evil with good, and with placid reſignation to ſubmit ourſelves to that God, who will one day judge between us.

GENTLENESS is the next virtue that occurs in this diſtinct enumeration of the various bleſſed fruits of the Spirit. *Gentleneſs* denotes a mild, meek, modeſt, diſpaſſionate frame of mind—a prudent, cautious temper, ever afraid of giving unneceſſary offence. Such a temper

temper is extremely worthy a Chriſtian, and above all, a Chriſtian Miniſter. A fear of diſpleaſing by any thing unguarded—a cautious, virtuous timidity of diſguſting mens' paſſions without cauſe—an amiable attainment this—a moſt lovely and Chriſtian endowment this; highly ornamental of our nature, highly ornamental of the Goſpel. To converſe with perſons of different tempers and various diſpoſitions, and yet pleaſe—pleaſe, but not at the expence of either truth or conſcience—pleaſe, merely by a prudent, diffident, humble, offenceleſs carriage—is no vulgar acquiſition.

It requires great care, great prudence, great diſcipline, to be maſter of ourſelves on all occaſions—to acquire the knowledge of ourſelves: it is the moſt uſeful of all kinds of knowledge, and to maintain our ſpi-

rit under an equal, regular ſubjection and government. I never knew a perſon, and believe I never ſhall know any one, that was ever convinced by ſupercilious airs, by dogmatical aſſertions, by contemptuous expreſſions, by banter and deriſion, and treating an opponent with ſovereign diſreſpect, by pronouncing the emphatical words, *abſurd* and *ridiculous*, in a diſdainful manner. I do not know how others are affected—but I own I always diſtruſt thoſe arguments, and ſuſpect that cauſe that is forced upon me by imperious, poſitive aſſertions, and obtruded upon my underſtanding and reaſon by the dint of clamour, aſſurance, and compulſion. Truth is a calm, cool, diſpaſſionate thing, and requires not any thing boiſterous and oſtentatious to make it appear to advantage. Mildneſs and gentleneſs are the moſt pleaſing vehicles, in which to convey it to the underſtanding and heart.

heart. Modesty greatly prepossesseth us in favour of any principles it diffidently recommends. Modesty and diffidence are powerful enough to prejudice us in favour even of principles that are erroneous and fallacious. I am sure that he, who maintains a temper calm, mild, unruffled, is in the best frame for the investigation of truth, and hath vastly the advantage of an adversary in any debate and disquisition.

There is hardly any virtue so frequently recommended to Ministers of the Gospel, as this amiable temper of mind. *Be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. Let your moderation be known to all men. The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle towards all men: in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves.* The greatest infelicity a Minister can labour under with regard to the advancement

of truth and ſecuring the ends of his miniſtry, is a violent temper. Violence is like pride—it always defeats itſelf.

It is a lamentable conſideration to think, how many learned perſons never learned the art of governing their paſſions. He is very unfit to be an inſtructor of others in morals, who is yet to learn one of the principal branches of Ethicks, I mean, ſelf-knowledge, ſelf-government. With what force and ſucceſs can precepts and directions to meekneſs, gentleneſs, moderation, candour, diffidence, prudence, diſcretion, inoffenſiveneſs, come from a perſon, who is known to be eaſily tranſported into paſſion upon frivolous pretences, to be moroſe, proud, arrogant, ſupercilious, reſentful, of an implacable, haughty, arbitrary, unforgiving ſpirit. Sweetneſs of diſpoſition, uniformity of temper, mild-

mildneſs of carriage, a ſpirit calm, ſerene, tranquil, not irritable by trifles, not ruffled, as ſome unhappy, ſelf-tormenting tempers are, even by the moſt diſtant appearance of an inſult, is a moſt engaging, amiable ornament to every Chriſtian and to every Miniſter.

If there was any virtue, that predominated in our Lord's character, it was his MEEKNESS. All the provocations he met with never extorted from him a ſingle unguarded expreſſion. One would think his harmleſs inoffenſiveneſs would have diſarmed their rage, and converted the tongue of malice and detraction into admiration and praiſe. His gentle, placid, placable ſpirit forgave them, and prayed that God would forgive them— His conduct towards his Diſciples is very obſervable, and highly worthy our imitation. Though he poſſeſſed

all

all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, yet what kind, generous allowances did he make for their Jewish errours and prejudices—how compassionately candid was he to their imperfections, not disclosing the whole system of heavenly truths all at once, but communicating them gradually, as their minds were capable of bearing them—removing their former errours by gentle, insensible degrees—imparting his divine doctrines in larger and larger measures as their powers enlarged—not offending them, not disgusting them by any harsh, unseasonable truths, by any positive overawing, despotic assertions, but insinuating his sacred instruction into their minds by every engaging, endearing method, that could win their affections and attract their love. Blessed pattern for us to copy! He is the best Christian, who attains the nearest resemblance to it. It was his character,

a noble

a noble and divine character it is. God grant we may make it the worthy object of our imitation, That *he was holy and* HARMLESS.

Of the next virtues, GOODNESS, FAITH, MEEKNESS, the first denotes goodness of heart—a heart disposed to do good—full of love of God and love to man—a kind, benevolent disposition, prompt to relieve indigence and penury, and to make all happy around it. Such a heart and such a disposition are particularly the *fruit of the Spirit*—the offspring of the Gospel, which is wholly a scheme of benevolence, a system of universal charity, love, and goodness.

Our Saviour speaks of a *good tree bringing forth good fruit*, and of the *treasures of a good heart*. A beneficent heart, whose affections breathe universal benevolence, whose dispositions

are replete with kindneſs, ſympathy, pity, and compaſſion, is truly evangelical—is ſuch a heart as the Goſpel requires, and its principles produce. A heart full of charity and goodneſs bears the faireſt impreſſion of the Divinity, whoſe favourite Attribute is infinite Goodneſs—bears the neareſt, happieſt reſemblance to the humane and benevolent Jeſus, whoſe character it is—that he went about continually doing good.

The *ſecond* of theſe, which we tranſlate *faith*, ought to have been rendered *fidelity*. It denotes a punctual, conſcientious fidelity in our words and actions—faithfulneſs to our promiſes—a ſcrupulous juſtice and honour in our dealings—and a ſtrict, inviolable probity and integrity in the whole of our conduct. He, that falſifies his word, forfeits his character—he, that violates his promiſe and betrays his truſt,

truſt, weakens his reputation, loſes his credit, and renders himſelf an object of contempt.

One of the moſt amiable characters I ever remember to have met with in the whole courſe of my reading, is that given by our bleſſed Saviour to Nathanael—*Behold an Iſraelite indeed, in whom there is no guile*—that is, a man of ſtrict probity, of conſcientious integrity. Sincerity is a moſt amiable virtue, and commands univerſal love. Every other good quality, every other virtuous attainment, without ſincerity, ſeparate from ſincerity, is a worthleſs, uſeleſs acquiſition. Sincerity of heart, ſimplicity of life—how lovely are theſe both in the ſight of God and man!—What ornaments are they of human nature and of the Goſpel! If our Religion have not produced ſincerity, it hath produced nothing of any avail to our final ſalvation.

tion. God requires the heart. *My son, give me thy heart.* If this be not devoted to God and holineſs, no other ſacrifice we can offer in lieu of it will be accepted. We cannot elude the Divine inſpection. Hypocriſy will be of no avail to us. We cannot impoſe upon the great Spectator of our hearts by any ſpecious artful diſſimulation. *Be not deceived, God is not mocked.* He, who can make an appeal to the great God with the Apoſtle, that in *ſimplicity and godly ſincerity he hath had his converſation in the world,* may look up to heaven with confidence. One of the characters given of God in the Scriptures is, that he is *true and faithful, and cannot lie. God, who cannot lie.* How greatly then, let the hypocrite tremble, how greatly muſt falſhood, and artifice, and diſſimulation, and inſincerity, be the deteſtation and abhorrence of that Being, who is truth and veracity itſelf! How unlike is he

to

to God, who is unfaithful to his promiſes, and inſincere in his profeſſions! Let the divine Spirit of our divine Religion then produce this bleſſed fruit in us, to make us act at all times from principles of integrity and probity, and to render us conſcientiouſly upright and ſincere in all our dealings and tranſactions with the world.

MEEKNESS hath been ſufficiently explained and urged under ſome of its kindred virtues here enumerated.

I proceed therefore to the laſt particular in the Apoſtle's minute deſcription of the *fruits of the Spirit.* TEMPERANCE cloſes this fair and ſplendid liſt—and amidſt theſe reſplendent jewels of the Chriſtian's crown ſhines with diſtinguiſhed luſtre.

I know

I know of no virtue productive of happier conſequences than TEMPERANCE. Both the *body* and *mind* eminently ſhare the benign effects of this moſt ſalutary virtue. The *mind* of a temperate man is always alert, chearful, and vigorous—free in its intellectual operations—in the true poſſeſſion of itſelf—at perfect liberty for concerting and executing any meaſures — unimpeded, unembarraſſed with any obſtacles from impure, unſatiated appetites — is the happieſt frame for acquiring knowledge, for exploring truth, and for purſuing any thing that can enhance the dignity, honour, reputation, and happineſs of our natures.

The *body* too ſignally participates the happy conſequences of this excellent virtue. It enables all the parts to perform their reſpective functions with liberty, freedom, and expedition

tion—prevents that fatal train of diſeaſes occaſioned by intemperance and voluptuouſneſs—prevents the ravages of that deſtructive monſter which hath ſlain more of the human race than ever the ſword did. An ancient writer informs us, that during that dreadful plague, which almoſt unpeopled *Athens*, in the firſt year of the *Peloponneſian* war, and by which ſeveral thouſands were cut off, *Socrates* enjoyed uninterrupted health; and the writers, ſays he, who mention this incident, aſcribe the Philoſopher's preſervation ſolely to his temperance.

How many have deſtroyed their health, and for ever ruined their conſtitutions, by intemperance—ſuffering in the flower and prime of life all the miſeries of old age? You and I can alledge many unhappy inſtances. *The wages of ſin is* untimely *death*—and above all ſins the wages of intemperance

rance is death. Young men need not, they cannot have, a ſtronger motive to ſobriety and virtue, than the ſight of thoſe many miſerable and ſhocking ſpectacles, who have reduced themſelves to this wretched condition by the vicious courſes they purſued. We have ten thouſand living proofs to convince us, were we diſpoſed to learn that wiſdom they read us, that it is for no man's intereſt to overleap the bounds of temperance. He, who once wilfully tranſgreſſes them, knows not to what lengths he may proceed—knows not where his career may ſtop, if by the grace of God his vicious career ever ſtop at all on this ſide eternity. It is very uſeful advice which our bleſſed Saviour gives us; would to God we ever kept it impreſſed on our hearts. *Take heed, leſt at any time your hearts ſhould be overcharged with ſurfeiting and drunkenneſs, and ſo that day ſhould come upon you unawares.*

Dread-

Dreadful beyond deſcription for a bad man to be cut off in a fit of intemperance, as thouſands have been, and in this condition to be ſummoned before the tribunal of their Judge.

It is commonly ſaid, that profane ſwearing is the only ſin that hath no temptation to it, either from worldly profit or ſenſual pleaſure. Really I cannot ſee what temptation there is for a man to put a force, a violence upon his nature, and ſtupefy and deluge himſelf in a flood of intemperance. The brutes do not this. They ſatisfy their cravings within the law of their natures, and the ſtandard and meaſure of their deſires. Man is the only being, who without any temptation does injury to reluctant Nature—forces it involuntarily into a compliance, and degrades himſelf far below the brutes that periſh—And what is the conſequence, the natural, neceſ-

neceſſary conſequence—The violation of the laws of our being is the bane and ruin of our being—all ſuch violations impair the health, undermine the conſtitution, and cut ſhort the thread of life, long, long before it hath attained its full maturity—long before it hath reached that period which God aſſigned as the ultimate limits of mortal duration.

By the injunction of temperance, therefore, our Religion hath conſulted the true welfare and happineſs of our natures, and contributes to render life a real bleſſing to us. It cautions us againſt thoſe *fleſhly luſts that war againſt the ſoul*, at the ſame time that they ruin and deſtroy the body—and aſſerts that *our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghoſt*, and conſequently that they ought to be conſecrated to purity, ſanctity, and temperance.

After

After diſtinctly recounting theſe Chriſtian virtues, *the fruits of the Spirit*, the Apoſtle obſerves, that *againſt ſuch there is no law*—that is—all law is founded upon them. All the laws, that ever were enacted in every age and nation enjoin theſe virtues, and ſtamp their intrinſic excellence and worth by their authority and ſanction. There never was any body of laws compiled by any legiſlator in any country, that preſcribed duties contrary to theſe—the reverſe of theſe. Theſe virtues have a natural, inherent amiableneſs in them, and have been approved by all the wiſe and good that ever lived. All divine and human laws are erected upon theſe as their baſis, and eſtabliſh them as perfective of the true honour, dignity, and happineſs of human-kind. The Chriſtian Law, by ratifying theſe virtues by its authoritative ſanction, and enforcing the obſervance of them by

the moſt cogent motives and animating incentives, hath approved itſelf to be the perfection of all Religion, a Scheme, worthy the infinite goodneſs of God to communicate, and worthy the reception of ſuch beings as mankind. How often are we exhorted to give all diligence to add to our faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, piety, brotherly love, charity—to adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour by a life of univerſal Holineſs, and to make the genuineneſs of our faith in Jeſus Chriſt ſhine forth in an amiable life and converſation.

The moſt uſeful ſyſtem of morals, that ever was publiſhed to the world, is the New Teſtament. All the virtues, that can adorn our natures, fit us for the acceptance of God, and the future enjoyment of heaven, are there recommended, and urged upon its profeſſors by the moſt coercive and affect-

affecting conſiderations. The Goſpel was deſigned to carry our virtue and holineſs to the higheſt pitch of perfection, to the higheſt, nobleſt improvement that human nature can attain—and if the Goſpel will not make us holy, it were better for us if we had never known it.

APPLICATION.

Let us then review our paſt lives, explore our hearts, and examine ourſelves by the plain rules and directions it lays down. What progreſs have I made in holineſs—What good have I done—What effect hath the Goſpel produced in my heart and upon my diſpoſitions—Hath it made me more like God in his purity and holineſs, more like my Redeemer in his meekneſs, patience, piety, and peaceableneſs—Hath it transformed my ſoul from the love and practice of ſin

to the love and practice of goodneſs—Have I that ſpirit and temper the Goſpel requires—Do its bleſſed fruits adorn my daily life, and ſhine forth in my converſation before my family and the world—Or have I, as yet, an heart inſenſible of the value of the Goſpel—Do I ſeldom, or but tranſiently, think of my privileges and bleſſings as a Chriſtian—Am I negligent and careleſs about *walking ſo as to pleaſe God*, and fulfil my Chriſtian duties—Is my heart affected and influenced, when I read the great things my Redeemer hath done for me—Do I make his directions the rule of my life—Am I ſolicitous to embelliſh the Chriſtian life with theſe bleſſed *fruits of the Sperit*, with *love*, *joy*, *peace*, *long-ſuffering*, *meekneſs*, *temperance*—How far have I anſwered the diſtinguiſhing character of a Chriſtian in doing works of charity, and adminiſtering

ſtering relief to real objects of compaſſion?

Theſe are uſeful enquiries—ſhould be often repeated—ſhould be fixed upon the mind by ſerious meditation—and the moſt deliberate reſolutions ſhould be formed in conſequence of them. Did we habituate ourſelves to this uſeful duty, SELF-EXAMINATION, in our moments of retirement, we ſhould know our hearts better, make a greater progreſs than we do in the divine life, be more upon our guard againſt temptations, be more careful to pleaſe God and to adorn the Chriſtian Profeſſion.

May God endow us with the Chriſtian Spirit, and enable us to bring forth its bleſſed fruits! May he grant of his infinite mercy, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord, that after we have conducted this mortal life in a manner

worthy the vocation wherewith we are called, we may be introduced into that bleſſed world, where human frailty and mortal imperfections are unknown, and where perfect holineſs and perfect happineſs reign triumphant for ever.

THE

THE

SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY.

SERMON X.

LUKE IX. 55.

But he turned and rebuked them, and ſaid, Ye know not what manner of ſpirit ye are of.

IF you conſult the context, you will find the incident which gave occaſion to the remarkable paſſage I have read to you. Our Lord, intending to viſit Jeruſalem, deſpatched a number of perſons before him on the

road to provide the neceſſary accommodations, as was uſual in thoſe days, when there were no inns and houſes of public entertainment for travellers. Theſe meſſengers accordingly entered a village belonging to the Samaritans —intending here to prepare what was proper againſt our Saviour's arrival. Between the Samaritans and Jews there ever ſubſiſted the moſt implacable enmity. The Jews could never forgive the Samaritans for deſerting the Temple Worſhip, and erecting a ſeparate Church on Mount Gerizim. And the Samaritans, as is uſual with all religious controverſialiſts, cheriſhed the blackeſt hatred and deadly animoſity againſt the Jews for building their Temple on Mount Moriah, contrary, as they imagined, to the divine preſcription. Differences about theſe frivolous and ridiculous trifles were kindled by their mutual diſcords to ſuch a flame, and had

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tranſported, as, alas! is cuſtomary, the diſputants on both ſides, to ſuch dreadful uncharitableneſs, as to diſſolve all the mutual ties of humanity, break all the bands of friendſhip and ſociety between the two nations, and totally extinguiſh, in the boſom of both parties, every ſpark of affection, kindneſs, and love for one another. On account of theſe religious differences they carried their reſentment againſt each other to ſuch deplorable lengths, that they at laſt mutually agreed only in this, to do one another all the ill offices in their power, to ſeize every opportunity to injure one another's perſons and properties, to load each other with the moſt odious and reproachful names their malice could invent, and to break off all friendly intercourſe one with another.

Hence it was that the woman of Samaria was aſtoniſhed that our Sa-

viour, being a Jew, ſhould ſo far depart from the national pride, ſhould ſo far forget the national antipathy, as to ſolicit even ſo trivial a favour as a cup of cold water to ſlake his thirſt —for, as one of the Commentators upon this paſſage obſerves, a Jew would infinitely rather die with thirſt, than receive his life from the hand of a Samaritan.

When the Jews were exaſperated beyond all bounds at our bleſſed Saviour, the bitterest name their rage launched againſt him was, SAMARITAN—*Thou art a* SAMARITAN, *and haſt a devil*—and even now a Samaritan is the firſt odious term that a modern Jew's reſentment dictates.

Our Saviour's meſſengers entering into a village belonging to this people, its inhabitants denied their Maſter the common rites of hoſpitality, and

and peremptorily refuſed to admit him into the place. The reaſon of this unuſual and unheard-of refuſal in a nation and age, where the rites of hoſpitality were univerſally accounted ſo ſacred and inviolable, appears from the words immediately following—They denied him admiſſion into the town, merely becauſe *his face was ſet towards* JERUSALEM—becauſe his deſign apparently was not to worſhip in *their* Temple, but in Jeruſalem—merely to paſs ſwiftly through their territories without giving a ſanction to their Temple, and recommending their national worſhip by his prophetic authority. This they deemed an unpardonable inſult from one, who aſſumed a divine character; and took this imaginary inſult ſo heinouſly, as publickly to refuſe him that hoſpitality, which in thoſe times was never refuſed.

Two

Two of his diſciples, James and John, fired with indignation at this moſt outrageous and diſreſpectful treatment of their Maſter, inſtantly flew to Jeſus, and glowing with virulence and rage at the indignity offered him, immediately thus accoſted him —Will you, Sir, give us leave to deſtroy theſe inhoſpitable wretches with fire from heaven, as Elias did his enemies?—

In this ſanguinary requeſt all the *Jew* appears. Nothing but torrents of fire, miraculouſly called from the ſkies, would glut a *Jew*'s revenge. You ſee, from this ſignal inſtance, how the diſciples of our Lord were actuated by Jewiſh principles—how they were inſtigated by that perſecuting ſpirit, which nothing will ſatiate but the blood of the delinquent. You have here a ſtriking proof, to what lengths the rage of perſecution will

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transport men, to the utter extinction of all humanity—that superstitious zeal and bigotry is an unfeeling thing—and that those, who are under the unhappy influence of religious rage and frenzy hesitate not, scruple not to satisfy their inflamed passions with the destruction of those, who have provoked their indignation.

Blessed God! what, the disciples of the meek and holy Jesus call for fire from heaven to consume *their* adversaries, as some of the Jewish prophets did *theirs!*—Was it possible, was it indeed possible that such unhallowed passions could dwell in bosoms, which had been so long under the influence of the heavenly instructions of the benevolent Jesus! Anger, says the poet, is a temporary madness. Anger overleaps all the bounds of common decency and common humanity—especially anger that is kindled,

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I am ſorry to remark it, from religious diſputes.

One cannot but expreſs one's ſurpriſe at ſuch a requeſt, when we conſider the *character of the perſons* who made it—JAMES and JOHN—*James*, that excellent, amiable Apoſtle, who has left us ſuch a divine Epiſtle, full of ſuch uſeful inſtructions, breathing in every line of it a temper and ſpirit very different from what its author diſcovered on this occaſion — The other perſon, who was for deſtroying a number of his fellow-creatures by fire from heaven, aſtoniſhing to reflect, aſtoniſhing to reflect, was that Diſciple, whom Jeſus loved, whom he diſtinguiſhed above all the other Apoſtles with particular, endearing marks of his affection and friendſhip, who leaned on his boſom, and who is no leſs than four times characterized by that *diſciple whom Jeſus loved.* The perſon,

perſon, who was for conſigning to dire deſtruction the unhappy objects of his anger, was the Apoſtle JOHN, whoſe writings are replete with love, are embalmed with love, if I may uſe the expreſſion, and diſcover a tenderneſs of Chriſtian affection, and a diffuſion of benevolence and charity, which infinitely endear his temper and diſpoſition to every one who peruſes them.

But the Diſciples were now, alas! in a great meaſure ſtrangers to the genius and ſpirit of our Saviour's Religion. They had all their Jewiſh prejudices and prepoſſeſſions about them, which our Lord choſe to remove, not abruptly, nor precipitately, but with a gentle, lenient hand, in a gradual, inſenſible manner. Even after our Saviour's Reſurrection it apappears, that the Apoſtles knew ſo little of the true nature of the Chriſtian

tian Diſpenſation, that they even then imagined, with the bulk of the Jewiſh nation, that it was to be a temporal monarchy. The queſtion they then addreſſed to him was this: *Lord, wilt thou at this time reſtore the kingdom to Iſrael?*—Wilt thou now, ſince thou haſt miraculouſly burſt the barriers of the grave, erect a grand, magnificent empire, reſcue thy native country from the ſervitude of the Romans, and make Jeruſalem the proud ſeat and center of a vaſt, opulent, and invincible kingdom?

This inquiſitorial requeſt therefore of theſe two Diſciples to wreak their vengeance on theſe poor deluded villagers proceeded from a Jewiſh, not a Chriſtian ſpirit—proceeded from a deplorable ignorance of the genius of that Religion, in which their Divine Maſter came from heaven to inſtruct men. One may look upon this in-

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ſtance before us as the firſt *beginning of perſecution* in the Chriſtian Church —as the date and commencement of all thoſe bloody ſcenes, with which the pages of Eccleſiaſtical Hiſtory are ſo diſgracefully polluted. Here is the *firſt inſtance* on record of the followers of Jeſus intimating an ardent deſire that even gracious heaven would interfere to extirpate, and by a miraculous infliction to conſume the objects of their worſt paſſions. And this ever-memorable paſſage ought to be an ever-memorable leſſon to all future ages, how averſe our bleſſed Redeemer was to perſecution, with what deteſtation and horror he regarded every attempt to hurt the perſons of men from a motive of injudicious, miſtaken zeal, and how infinitely contrary and repugnant he deemed a furious, uncharitable ſpirit to be to that temper and ſpirit, with which his Religion

gion was primarily designed to inspire all its professors.

Why was this passage in our Saviour's history recorded by the inspired historian?—Undoubtedly to read the Christian Church, in every age and nation of the world, a lesson of useful instruction—that it was never the design of our Lord, that errors in Religion should be confuted by showers of fire rained from heaven, or by the sword of the civil magistrate—that different parties and denominations of Christians should not be instigated against each other by uncharitable feuds and malignant discords, but be ever disposed to tolerate one another, forgive one another, if any one have a quarrel against any, and to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of Christian peace, concord, and love.

Our

Our Saviour, upon hearing expreſſions breathing ſuch cruelty and revenge, turned to the perſons from whom they proceeded, in the laſt amazement, aſtoniſhed at ſuch a public requeſt from the public Preachers of his Religion. He then ſeverely reproved them for ſuch a raſh, wicked, intemperate petition—He ſolemnly rebuked them for the cruel perſecuting ſpirit they diſcovered on this occaſion, and concluded with ſaying, YE KNOW NOT WHAT MANNER OF SPIRIT YE ARE OF. —A ſentence that deſerves to be written in letters of gold on the walls of the Vatican—A ſentence, that deſerves to be written in letters of gold on the doors of every Inquiſition in Europe—A ſentence, that deſerves to be written in the faireſt characters in the ſtudy of every Chriſtian Miniſter who is fond of temporal power—and, permit me to add, a ſentence, that deſerves to be written in indelible characters

racters on the heart of every Chriſtian. *Ye know not what manner of ſpirit ye are of*—You are unhappy ſtrangers to the real temper, genius, and ſpirit of my Goſpel. You are as yet to learn what it is to be a Chriſtian. Alas! you know not with what diſpoſitions towards each other it was the great deſign of my Religion to inſpire all who profeſs it.

From this paſſage we learn what principles it was our Saviour's intention that Chriſtians ſhould cultivate, and what is the characteriſtic badge and glory of his Religion. We are here taught what it is that peculiarly diſtinguiſhes a profeſſor of the Goſpel from the profeſſor of any other Religion, namely, his temper, his diſpoſition, his ſpirit. *By this ſhall all men know that ye are my diſciples, if you love one another.* The Goſpel is a ſyſtem of benevolence and charity, calculated

culated to inſpire men with the kindeſt, beſt affections towards each other.

What diſpoſitions we ſhould all acquire, appears from that amiable example our Lord hath exhibited before us in his own conduct. He did not propagate his Religion in the world, as ſome impoſtors have done, by the dint of force and compulſion, by conqueſt and victory, and obliging nations of reduced, miſerable captives to embrace his Doctrines. It was not his deſign that any violent meaſures ſhould be employed in forcing the human will, enſlaving the human mind, in laying any cruel embargo upon our liberty—methods which, inſtead of making men ſincere converts, have only made them inſincere hypocrites; and inſtead of probity and integrity, have only propagated diſſimulation and chicane. Read the four

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Evangeliſts, and from the life of Chriſt, there plainly recorded, judge whether it was the intention of our divine Inſtructor, that fines, impriſonments, confiſcations, excommunications, and corporal puniſhments, ſhould be employed by its profeſſors as irreſiſtible arguments to refute errour, and eſtabliſh truth. Read the life of Chriſt, and judge whether it was his deſign that any ſuch infernal court as the Popiſh Inquiſition ſhould ever be erected among Chriſtians—that any pecuniary mulcts, any deprivation of property, any penal inflictions, ſhould ever take place in order to maintain an unity of Faith, and to keep the peace of his Church unmoleſted. Doth the Goſpel, or the life of its Author, give a ſanction to any violent, ſanguinary methods of promulgating its truths —forcing men by coercive reſtraints to think all alike in matters of Religion—adjuſting their opinions to a

certain fixed ſtandard—obliging them to reſign their underſtandings, to reſign their liberty—on pain of forfeiting any ſecular privileges, on pain of impriſonment, confiſcation, and diſgrace, embracing ſuch a particular ſet of principles—adopting ſuch a number of articles—and ſubſcribing to ſuch and ſuch a particular creed. Nothing like this in the Goſpel. The Goſpel, like its Author, receives all into its boſom that are holy and ſincere, whoever they are. The ſacrifice, whirh the Goſpel requires, is a free-will offering. Here there is no compulſion, except the compulſion of reaſon, argument, and good ſenſe. The evidences in favour of the truth of the Goſpel are fairly laid before men, and they are freely left to judge of their credibility. There are no ſiniſter arts made uſe of to gain converts. Our Saviour wrought his beneficent miracles, and delivered his heavenly

venly Doctrines before vaſt crowds, and they were all left to form a judgment of his pretenſions to be a divine Teacher from the proofs he produced. The Miracles and the Doctrines were left to ſpeak for themſelves. They carried to every ingenuous, well-diſpoſed mind their own conviction with them. That man, or that body of men, who ſtudy to eſtabliſh any Religion by worldly emoluments, or puniſh the diſbelief of it by ſecular penalties, may make a number of hypocrites, but can never make a number of converts.

In the Hiſtory of the Conqueſt of Mexico by Cortez, we read that the prieſts of the Spaniards converted five, ſix, or ten thouſand Indians every week. A number infinitely greater than what we read of in the Acts of the Apoſtles. But what ſort of converts were theſe, of whom theſe Spaniſh

niſh prieſts boaſt ſo extravagantly?—Not one of them underſtood a ſyllable of the Chriſtian Religion, or knew ten words of the Spaniſh language. But they were baptized by hundreds at a time into the belief of the Chriſtian, I ſhould rather ſay, of the Popiſh Religion, and were obliged to embrace the Goſpel of which they did not know a word; were obliged to be baptized, or be put to the ſword. That was the alternative—To either the one or the other they muſt ſubmit—So that by this ſhort and compendious method of converſion the vaſt and infinitely populous country of Mexico became in a few weeks a Chriſtian country—as wiſe and rational converts to the Chriſtian Faith as thoſe who had the honour of converting them.

The Goſpel is a perfect ſtranger to ſuch procedures as theſe. Our Savi-

our, who had all power given him in heaven and in earth, did not exercise his unlimited power in converting the human race to his Religion in this violent, uncontroulable manner. The Gospel appeals to our reason—lays its proofs before our understanding—exhibits its evidences before our minds—and leaves the event with us. If we wilfully reject its evidences, it leaves us, not to the secular arm, but to the future retributions of the Almighty—If we admit these, it leaves us to the rational conviction of our judgment and the conscious approbation of our intellectual powers. The Gospel disclaims all external restraint upon the understanding, all external violence offered to the judgment, leaves men entirely to their moral liberty, leaves them to the operations of their own faculties, would have them the converts of reason, converts from principle

principle—ſuch alone will be virtuous, ſuch alone will be ſincere.

We find that the Apoſtles, who were endowed with ſuch miraculous powers and ſpiritual gifts, did not exerciſe theſe amazing endowments in overpowering, in overwhelming mens reaſon, and forcing them unconvinced into the Chriſtian Church—No, far, far from it—They delivered to them the moſt excellent and heavenly Doctrines, and left the auditors to reaſon coolly and deliberately concerning them—They worked miracles, and left the ſpectators to draw the concluſion.

Would to God their example had ever been followed by thoſe, who have valued themſelves upon being their ſucceſſors. Would to God none had ever uſurped any undue dominion in the Chriſtian Church, but had left it to ſtand upon the ſolid baſis of its in-

trinſic excellence, juſt as our Saviour and his Apoſtles left it.

But it ſupplies great, great cauſe of ſincere commiſeration, that this bleſſed Religion, which was deſigned to unite men to one anorher in the bonds of harmony, affection, and love, has, by a ſtrange, unnatural perverſion, been the very cauſe of mens irreconcilable enmity and implacable animoſity againſt each other. What a ſcene of confuſion and bloodſhed was the Chriſtian Church in the *fourth*, *fifth*, and *ſixth* centuries—from the time that Conſtantine mounted the throne, and intereſted himſelf in all the furious, uncharitable diſputes that were then agitated. How dreadfully did the Arians and their Opponents retaliate every calamity upon each other by turns, pillaging towns, depopulating countries, maſſacring with unſparing rage the

helpleſs infant and the tender ſex, and wading through ſeas of blood to eſtabliſh their own particular tenets and ſyſtems of faith.

One, who hath a ſincere value for the honour of the Goſpel, and knows what a mild inſtitution it is, cannot read theſe accounts without horrour —without a mixture of tumultuary paſſions, ſincere pity, and virtuous indignation. When our bleſſed Saviour ſo ſeverely reprehended his two Diſciples for the murderous diſpoſition they diſcovered—to practiſe in the face of the world thoſe very enormities he interdicted—What a proſtitution of the Goſpel is this, what a ſhameful contempt of his plaineſt and beſt admonitions! *A new commandment give I unto you, That ye love one another.*

How true have our Saviour's words proved! *I came not to ſend peace on the earth, but a ſword.* In what age and nation have not theſe words been fully verified? Have the profeſſors of the Goſpel been influenced, are they now influenced, by that mutual affection and love for each other, which are its grand fundamental principles? Do different denominations of Chriſtians in the preſent time know, and act as if they knew, what *manner of ſpirit* the Goſpel deſigned them to be of? Do different Churches of profeſſing Chriſtians cheriſh kind, benevolent affections towards each other; ſtudy to promote, though in different ways, the common advancement of the Goſpel and the common intereſts of practical Religion? Is there leſs cenſoriouſneſs, leſs uncharitableneſs in the preſent age than former ages of the Church have ſeen? Are profeſſors of the Goſpel deſirous to cultivate the Chriſtian temper and ſpirit, to make

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the life of Chriſt the great rule of their own; to make all candid, generous allowances for the different ſentiments of each other; to give others that liberty of judging, which they claim to themſelves?

Alas! I am afraid we are greatly departed from the true ſpirit of the Goſpel—I am afraid we have an external form of godlineſs without the inward power of it. We receive the grace of God in vain, if we do not ſuffer it to produce its proper fruits in our hearts and lives. If the Goſpel doth not make us kind in our diſpoſitions and charitable in our judgments, it will be better for us if we never had been born under its beams.

Conſider what obligations we are under to cultivate the Chriſtian temper and ſpirit towards each other. Are

we not all frail and fallible?—Is not the knowledge of the wiſeſt of us limited?—Is not the holineſs of the beſt of us defective?—Are not our intellectual faculties clouded and obſcured by neceſſary, unavoidable imperfection?—Are not our improvements in knowledge and virtue few and inconſiderable?—Doth not the intervention of a clay-formed ſyſtem clog and impede the operations of our minds?—Is not the memory, after the moſt aſſiduous culture, treacherous?—Is not our boaſted reaſon involved in a miſt of errour and darkneſs—not to mention a thouſand prejudices of education, cuſtom, and country, which ſurround the mind with their baleful influence, and prevent it from inveſtigating and exploring truth with unbiaſſed freedom and liberal impartiality? After all our efforts to throw off the incumbent load of earth and ſenſe, ſtill we find morta-

mortality weighs us down. *We ſee through a glaſs darkly*—our reaſonings are fallacious, our ſyſtems imaginary, our opinions prove erroneous, and better acquaintance with books and with men overturns the ſhadowy fabrics of thoſe fine theories and ſpeculations, which we had vainly erected. Great and good men have erred—the Fathers of the Church have erred—ſynods and aſſemblies of learned Divines have erred—How ſhould it be otherwiſe in this ſtate of imperfection, when different men ſee the ſame things in ſuch different lights, and form ſuch different judgments concerning them?

For men to erect themſelves to be the ſupreme ſtandards of infallibility in a ſtate and world ſo imperfect and erroneous as the preſent, is both conſummate weakneſs and conſummate wickedneſs—It is impiety againſt God

—a ſatire upon the Scriptures, which alone are infallible—an uſurpation of the rights of conſcience, and an invaſion of Chriſtian freedom and liberty. Had we judgment and abilities infallibly to decide in all controverſies, and to determine with clear and accurate preciſion in all diſputations, we might then have ſome pretenſions for adjuſting the religious tenets of others to our ſtandard. But ſuch an uſurped dominion over the faith of others is an undue and unſcriptural claim—and, if claimed, would only diſcover the ſhallowneſs of our underſtanding and the weakneſs of our judgment—and juſtly expoſe us to the deriſion and contempt of the world. Different educations as we all reſpectively have received—different prejudices as our minds have been tinctured with—different principles as we have been trained up in—different opportunities for reading and acquiring knowledge as we have en-

joyed—all these are so many arguments for our exercising Christian charity and forbearance one towards another, for making the most candid allowances for one another's imperfections, for judging favourably of each other for their differing from us, and for our exercising mutual lenity, meekness, kindness, benevolence, and love towards each other.

Of all men I can truly say from my soul, that I pity those most who are fond of religious disputes—who consider religion in no other view, but merely as it affords matter for disputation—who read the Word of God, not so much to improve their minds in holiness, as to furnish them with materials for captious controversies. Such disputes I am sure have ever been the bane of practical Religion. They have been fewel to feed the flame of unchristian discord and unchristian

christian uncharitableness. They have taken mens attention from the great *aim* and *end* of Religion. Vital Religion hath always suffered by these unhappy dissensions — they inducing men to attend more to *words* than *things*—to take up with a *form* of Godliness, and pay little regard to the inward *power* of it. I am sure they damp in the breasts of Christians that affection and love which is the glory of our Religion, and the perfection of the Gospel.

It hath ever been my opinion, that we are all agreed in the main fundamental points—that we differ from each other in things by no means essential to salvation—in things, which he, who disbelieves, may be as good a Christian, as much an object of the favour of God and Christ, as he, who believes them. All Christians of all denominations believe in the Being, Per-

Perfections, and Government of God —that his Providence is universal— that we receive all our blessings and enjoyments from him—that there is a future state of happiness or misery— that an holy life is indispensable to salvation; no happiness without it— that the Spirit of God assists and aids our nfirmities—that Jesus Christ is our Redeemer, Saviour, Advocate, Intercessor, Mediator, and final Judge —and that we are all pursuing one and the same happiness—all agree in these fundamental points of Christian Religion—and who does not see that all other points are, comparatively, trivial, frivolous, and indifferent?

With regard to myself, I lay no stress at all upon any particular speculative opinions of my own; and should detest myself if I thought any man a worse Christian, merely because he

he differs from me. The only thing I lay infinite ſtreſs upon, is the advancement of Holineſs and the Chriſtian temper both in myſelf and others, the improvement of my own mind, and the minds of you, my hearers, in the practical truths of the Goſpel. A good life and converſation is the ſum and ſubſtance of Religion—a heart full of love to God, to Jeſus Chriſt, and to all our fellow Chriſtians—walking before our families and the world in ſuch a manner as to please God and ſecure his bleſſing—keeping our tempers and ſpirits under good government—mortifying our corrupt affections—labouring to correct what is amiſs in our tempers and affections—living awfully mindful of God's preſence with us—ſtudying to promote the glory of God—making the Scriptures our ſtudy and comfort in this tranſient ſtate of our pilgrimage—ſtriving to know the Will of God, that

that we may conform to it—and by the regular courſe of an amiable, uſeful, charitable life, making the beſt preparation we are able for the hour of death, and our happy entrance into a better world. I would rather write ten pages to promote mens attention to theſe great, practical, vital, ſaving Truths, than ten thouſand volumes of the moſt learned and elaborate Controverſy the Republic of Theology ever ſaw.

Alas! thoſe who delight in ſouring their own minds and the minds of others with theſe unhappy, unedifying conteſts, *know not what manner of ſpirit they are of*, are unhappy ſtrangers to the genius and ſpirit of the Goſpel, and are yet to learn in what the true dignity and glory of it conſiſts.

If I underſtand the New Teſtament after ſeveral years intenſe ſtudy and impar-

impartial examination of it, with prayer to God to assist my imperfect mind in its enquiries, I am fully convinced it was never designed to fill our heads with useless speculations, but our hearts with practical principles—to make us good parents, good heads of families, good children, good neighbours, good members of society—to inspire us with the love of God and our blessed Redeemer—to make us useful to one another in this transitory scene of mortality—to fill us with joy and hope in believing—and by a holy life and a blameless conversation to engage us to prepare for that blessed world which it reveals. O what animating truths are these!—what encouraging, comforting, practical doctrines are these, worth all the useless loads of useless controversy that ever were written. Who, that believes these Truths, and acts suitably to such a belief, would not be powerfully

fully engaged to cherish the kindest affections towards all his fellow Christians, view them, together with himself, as blessed with the same evangelical privileges, as equally conversant with himself in the same vale of frailty and mortality, as endowed with immortal souls by the distinguishing privileges of their birth, and as swiftly travelling with him, and not in very different roads, through a vain, momentary scene, to those blessed abodes where sin and sorrow never enter. *He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.* Who would not, that hath these prospects, all this consummate happiness in view, study to bring his spirit under proper discipline, to regulate all his affections, to cherish and exercise the most benevolent dispositions, and by consulting the peace and tranquillity of his own mind, and the concord, unanimity, and

and happineſs of thoſe around him, prepare for that bleſſed world, where univerſal harmony reigns among all its various and innumerable inhabitants.

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