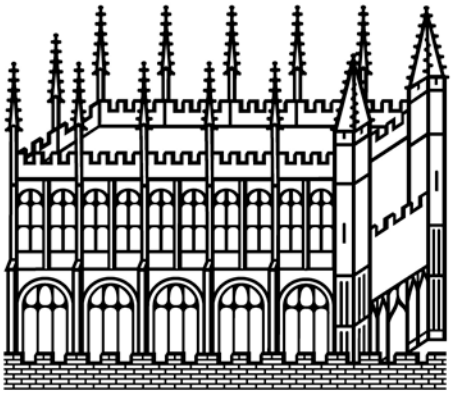

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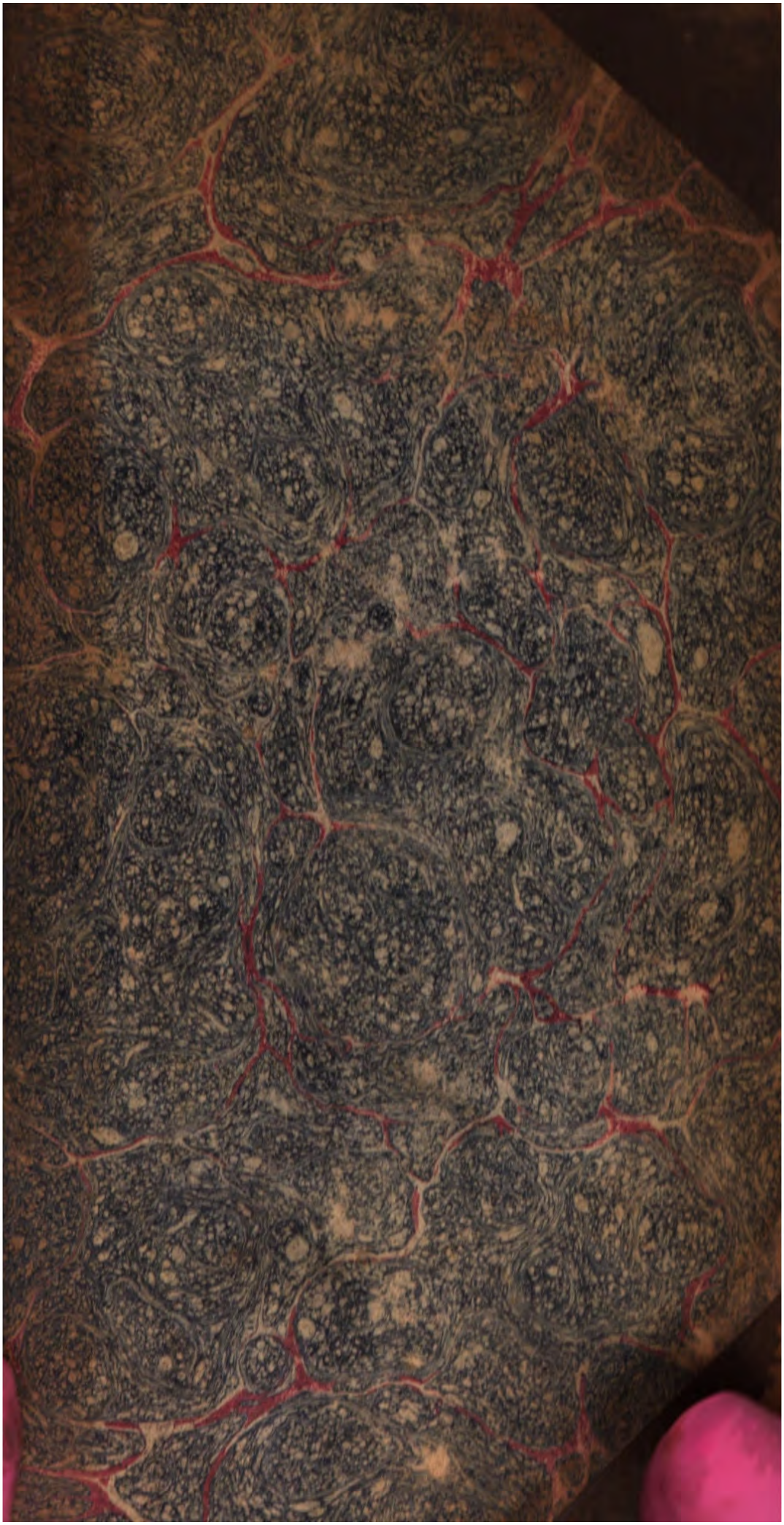

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ESSAYS

FOR

CHRISTIAN ENCOURAGEMENT AND CONSOLATION.

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PREFACE.

THE remarks prefixed to those "Thoughts on Private Devotion," for the acceptance of which the writer has been and continues grateful, are in great part so applicable to the contents of the present volume, that, for readers possessing the former, nothing prefatory may here be needful. The title implies, that this work is designed, principally, for such as endure distress, discouragement, or sadness; but it is well to add (what the brevity of a title could not distinctly indicate), that, *within* this large division of society, they will be found *most* appropriate, by those who, in prefacing that former work, were designated as "the reflective and questioning

class;" who might, with perhaps equal propriety, have been termed,—the *pensive, doubting*, and, in some sense, *speculative* class. Several modes, it is true, of adversity and disappointment, are both incidentally and expressly treated of, common in a great degree to every order of minds, and every rank of the community. Still it will be found that the prevailing character and drift of these papers is most adapted to the class now mentioned. "Distress, discouragement, or sadness," are, indeed, often the *effects* of such a mental constitution. Doubt and dejection on the great points where all real hope is at issue; and other pains or fears, of a quality which some minds can but conjecturally, and therefore but obscurely estimate, are among the "manifold temptations" which that class encounter. We should thank God that there are Christian writers, in our own as in former days, who think chiefly for *another* class; who possess that enviable energy and confidence, which breathe an eloquent vigour through their pages, and doubtless bear forward kindred spirits in the same high career, with a

power signally beneficial to the cause of piety. It may be permitted meanwhile to expect, that readers not allied to these in strength or in decision, may be aided by a companion not so firm and sanguine; who enters more into those difficulties and sorrows (real or imagined), which a stronger faith and a more ardent hope might boldly overleap or happily banish.

It will probably strike some readers that the topics of this volume are few; that, of these few, several have been treated in rather a prolix manner; that there are other diversities of distress which equally or still more require alleviation; and perhaps, that the author has strangely overlooked their *own*. I can only plead, that to do even imperfect justice to those subjects which have been selected, except with a far happier talent of compression than I have yet attained, very narrow limits would not suffice; and the restricted number, since limitation to a single volume appeared desirable, is a necessary consequence.

On this account, as well as to prevent confu-

sion from the abridged titles of the respective volumes, the name of Essays is adopted.

When it has been graciously ordained by the Author of all good, that Christian thoughts, whether communicated orally or in a permanent form, should conduce to influence, console, or animate other minds,—it is too certain, from the temper of fallen man, that sentiments not Christian will have mingled with our thankfulness and alloyed it. But it is not less certain, that just humiliation and wonder will often be excited, in the consciousness that an instrument so variously defective and so much offending, has been thus employed and favoured. An impulse will be also given to each previous wish and prayer, that yet a little *more* may be effected towards raising the hopes, obviating the doubts and dangers, or lightening the sorrows of our fellow-minds. Our continuance in life, ever unsure, and transient at the most, is sometimes, from various causes, made to appear in an unwonted degree doubtful; and such wishes thus acquire strength from the thought (if not presentiment)

that it may be ere long and unawares too late. New attempts, therefore, and the completion of them, may be prompted, not by an increased confidence, but by the more frequent monitory voice around us or within us, "the night cometh when none can work," and the desire to utter words of comfort to some surviving, when we may have been called to our unknown abode. In the anticipation of that change,—the hopes and fears which respect human opinion and criticism, ought to be "counted as the small dust of the balance:" but were these in reality discarded and forgotten, still would a weighty solicitude remain,—and one specially attaching to that kind of endeavour which is in itself most soothing to the heart engaged in it,—the endeavour to impart effectual consolation;—solicitude lest what is meant for the sincere should be perverted by the self-deceiver. This apprehension, as the discerning reader will easily judge, has been chiefly, if not exclusively felt, with respect to the *second, third, fourth,* and *seventh* pieces: which are certainly *not* meant or adapted

for those who cherish a false and worldly peace, or indulge unawakened ease or listlessness of mind respecting their eternal welfare; nor for such as (with more wakefulness of thought on these subjects) may secretly lean to the refuge of semi-antinomian delusions. The very titles of the papers in question denote that they are not intended for the former,—and the whole tenour of the volume, I trust, must indirectly show, that no cordial or solace is intended for the latter.

I am but too well apprised that delusions of both these kinds exist and even abound in our day; and that there are moreover professors of religion not subject precisely to either, —who with correct doctrinal views and (in the judgment of charity) a sincere mind, yet evince but very little discernment or fidelity as to the moral principles, bearings, and requirements of the gospel; some also who pervert its great doctrines when most "rightly" stated; and others whose notions, though both doctrinally and practically just in the main, seem much too easy and flexible in detail. All who compose these classes or

approach them, (and the writer as far as he may rank with either) need to be reminded solemnly of our Saviour's words, "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."—And they perhaps are more safely and faithfully, although less invitingly employed, who urge upon such minds the topics of self-suspicion and fear,—than he who chiefly attempts to console the dejected and the doubting.

Not that I am without hope (for the effect of a weak and erring aim is not always that which was primarily designed) that some reflections in *those* papers may tend, incidentally, to awaken the thoughtless or remiss, and induce some who have little self-knowledge to deeper self-inspection; and that others,—by observing the moral investigations of such as desire to be "altogether" Christians,—may derive a new and salutary impression how contrary and how secular is their own state of heart. But it is a distressing possibility, that *any* can misapply

the arguments of hope, to lull or indurate themselves in habitual carelessness, transgression, or hypocrisy. Nor is it a cheering relief, to recollect, that most, perhaps all, of those religious writings or discourses which embrace topics of evangelical comfort, are open more or less to the same hazard.

As far, however, as divine aid has been sought in our efforts, and a divine blessing implored on the result, it is both a duty and comfort to believe, that while evil effects cannot be precluded, the good shall at least largely preponderate.

I have cited, as freely as heretofore, the thoughts of distinguished writers, where they seemed adapted to confirm or illustrate my own; and still expect, as on former occasions, that there are no parts of the volume which the judicious "would less wish excluded."

There has been here no temptation to deviate from that catholic spirit which I should count it a great unhappiness really to lose,—but which yet, if induced to treat *directly* of controverted points, it is possible I might incur from some the charge

of having foregone. Most cordially, however, do I join with those who feel, that infidel hostilities, and national afflictions and dangers, as well as private sorrows, should combine with our Redeemer's strong injunctions, to bind all who "name" his "name" more closely "together in love;" and that the most blessed omen for that Redeemer's epiphany and triumph will be, when we rejoice to forget the differences which we cannot annihilate, and join in "strife" against our common foes;—"striving against sin,"—"striving together for the faith of the gospel."

I cannot refrain from subjoining—even at the risk of its seeming irrelevant—a far better expression of these wishes, (read with great pleasure since writing the above lines), which concludes an admirable exhortation to the members of different Christian churches on the blessings and advantages to be expected from "brotherly communion."

"In your separate condition you have all arrived at the same views as to saving truth: expect further agreement as the reward of fellowship.—

Love in the heart will become light in the intellect: you will feel yourselves perpetually approaching to greater uniformity :—in proportion as you have more of that visible oneness which will for ever be seen in the church in heaven, you will display less of that diversity of sentiment which hitherto has distinguished, and often distracted, the church upon earth."*

* "Two Letters by Fiat Justitia," on the Bible Society controversy. The whole passage, of which these sentences are but the conclusion, is truly excellent and important.

I.

ON THE VALUE AND CREDIBILITY OF "THE GOSPEL;" AND ITS ADAPTEDNESS TO OUR SORROWS, FEARS, AND MORAL NECESSITIES.

It is a current opinion among people of the world, that "serious Christians,"—"saints,"—(or by whatever synonyme they choose to designate the class,) have far gloomier views of human life than others. Nor can it, indeed, be questioned, that our estimate of its momentous design and consequence is far more distinct and grave. But with respect to the actual ills which human life includes, it would be scarce possible to view or state more darkly the greatness and severity of these, than lettered heathens had already done, in those scenes and ages which the world has most admired. Cicero quotes philosophers, poets, and dramatists, who commended death as greatly preferable; and gives, among others, this condensed expression of their sentiment:—"For man not to

be born is far the best, and the next best as soon as possible to die."* Nor were such feelings prompted by any lively or confiding expectation that death would introduce them to a new and happy existence. They wavered between faint hopes of a life which might be better, and the prospect of eternal unconsciousness. Sulpicius, condoling with the same distinguished Roman on the loss of his daughter Tullia, observes, "How often must you needs reflect, as I myself frequently do, that those cannot be said to be hardly dealt with, whose lot it has been in these times, without any special anguish, to exchange life for death;" and he afterwards adds, "Besides, *if* there be any sense in the dead, such was her love to you and pious kindness to all her connexions, that she assuredly would not have you so dejected.†" Thus in a letter which, the biographer of Cicero remarks, "is thought to be a masterpiece of the consolatory kind," the great evils of the present state, and the great uncertainty of that which is to come, are alike admitted.

It is certain also that those evils were, by the same powerful minds, ascribed in great part, if not chiefly, to moral causes—to the fallibility, if not original

* Tusc. Quæst. lib. i. § 48—Non nasci homini longé optimum esse: proximum autem quam primum mori.

† Epist. Fam. iv. 5. quoted in Middleton's Life of Cicero, vol. ii. pp. 169-171.

depravation, of our nature—to the corrupt and contagious state of society; that they considered vice the deepest source of pain, and remorse, or self-reproach, among the bitterest draughts which humanity partakes. Thus the same Tully remarks in his Treatise on Laws, "We do not rightly judge, Quintus, what Divine punishment is: we weigh the miseries of men by their incurring death, or pain of body, or grief of mind,* or judicial penalties; these things are the lot of humanity, and have befallen many good men; but the pain *of* wickedness is grievous, and, apart from all other consequences, in itself the greatest.†" Elsewhere he writes, "There is nothing which makes man so wretched as impiety and crime;"‡ and, in one of his orations, declares, that there need no "torches of Furies" to pursue the guilty. "Each one is most of all perturbed by his own iniquity and his inward dread, remorseful thoughts and an agitated conscience. These are the untiring and domestic furies of the guilty mind." § It is true that even the philosophic heathen, being not only unenlightened *spiritually*, but in some degree morally hardened by corrupt custom, may have ascribed

* Meaning grief which is occasioned by circumstances foreign to their own conduct.

† De Legib. lib. ii. § 17; et conf. lib. i. § 14.

‡ De Finib. lib. iv. § 24.

§ Pro Rosc. Amer. et conf. De Legib. lib. i. § 14.

such inward penalties only to flagrant crimes; but —the principle once granted—it is evident, that all sin, when discerned to be such, must induce suffering or uneasiness proportionate to its degree; and even when not clearly recognised as such by the seared or darkened mind, still a debasement and disquietude attend it, which mar all real peace. Quintilian has implied in one word the wretchedness of moral contamination, when he says, in reference to immoralities practised before the Roman children, "They are so *miserable* as to learn these before they know them to be vices."* If we take, therefore, not the view of human life with which "gloomy religionists" are charged, but that of those celebrated and prosperous heathens, whose character and institutions our sceptics have extolled, we shall still have ample reason to seek, and to propose to others, merely as *human beings,* some effectual consolation. It is not requisite that you should be under the present burden of peculiar distress, in order to render this appropriate: the very condition of being human makes it so; and if this, through levity or earnest occupation of the mind, be not considered to-day, it may yet be felt most poignantly and irresistibly to-morrow. But I shall presume that you have felt it already; and this so deeply, as to have sought unfeignedly for

* Instit. lib. i. cap. 2.

Christian consolations;—that the promises of "forgiveness of sins" through faith in Jesus Christ, of the purifying and consoling influences of the Holy Spirit, and of a heavenly life to come, have appeared to you "worthy of all acceptation," and have called forth sincere prayers that you may truly apprehend and enjoy them. At the same time, I suppose your views of these great things to be not distinct and unwavering, but mingled with much of unbelief, or of personal distrust and fear; yet with a growing desire to understand and embrace them in such a manner, as may lead you to "all joy and peace in believing." I shall conjecture also that this desire may be now deepened by the experience of severe afflictions, of declining earthly hopes, or of undisclosed anxieties; so that any thoughts which may tend to corroborate the importance, reality, and value of Gospel blessings, and present them to your mind as clear in their import and freely attainable, will be now, far more than at some former seasons, opportune and welcome. You are suffering, it may be, from disease; more acutely than any who have not been assailed by similar affliction can estimate; and this, while your period of life and previous flow of health seemed to promise long exemption. If the skill and soothing care around you sustain the hope of relief and restoration, yet is it not without mis-

givings; for while the uncertainties of continuance in life are always great, those which attend the issue of actual maladies must ever be far greater; but, should you regain that health which is itself enjoyment, still may its present interruption bring impressively before you a time not far remote, when the efforts of art, the resources of nature, and the aids of watchful affection will not so avail. Perhaps also that prospect acquires a threatening vividness and awful nearness from the recent or actual ravages of epidemic disease, which, by the sudden violence of its assaults and dreadfulness of its effects, arrays death with new terrors; whose existence or probable recurrence must therefore fasten on the thoughtful mind an afflictive sense of those calamities which may soon be, personally or relatively, permitted to invade us. Or, without adverting to such possibilities, you feel that at least *your* life is waning to its close—sensations as well as dates assure you of its swift decline—you are painfully admonished by growing infirmities—you feel that "the evil days draw nigh," if not already come, in which you must be conscious, "I have no pleasure in them:" the excitements and hopes of this world "are over and gone;" its prospects are become brief and cloudy, and the last shades of its evening are near. Or you have encountered, what the

world often describe, in a phrase borrowed from mythology, as reverses of fortune; disappointments and adversities have cast or led you down from a station of competence, perhaps of affluent enjoyments, to experience the diversified trial of reduced and straitened resources, to anticipate a struggle amidst penury through your remaining days, or to taste already the bitterness and humiliation of dependence. Or you have felt the sharpness of a bereavement, which, if it deject the heart less than pining sickness, and chill it less than poverty and the world's neglect, may wound and agonize it yet more. It has been torn by the rending of the dearest ties; your spirit is left in solitude; or, if some objects of its tenderness remain, they are such as must shortly be resigned, or such as must lean on you for that support and guidance, which you feel as if too enfeebled and disconsolate to give.

That mind must be indeed inert or insusceptible, which, by such evils, or by some others that may equal or surpass them, would not be impelled onward to muse on the final term of earthly sorrows, and look with expectation or with anxious doubt into the great unknown beyond. To have no such views even transiently, would seem, in any of those circumstances, scarcely possible. I could not, therefore, conceive myself to excite in *any* of the afflicted a sort of solicitude entirely novel and unfelt, though

perhaps to revive it in a season of its weakness or intermission. But in your own case I have presupposed a state of feeling contrary to this. I have assumed that spiritual interests are always or generally your ultimate object of concern; that you are conscious it is the want of more assurance as to those which sharpens every sorrow, and feel that this want leaves you unshielded against the brunt of evils that may supervene; so that each reverse will come with its shock unbroken—each bereavement with its keenness unallayed—every personal infliction with its pang unsoftened, except you can attain and exercise firm faith and lively hope in things eternal.

But to have such views, were they ever so infrequent and fleeting, is to need help and solace; for thoughts which apprehend, though but in wandering glimpses, the augmenting burdens of trouble and disease, the loneliness of the last great transit, and the awful newness of an untried being—these are the most appalling which can strike the imagination or invade the heart; except, indeed, such as would presage and realize in that solemn future a sure, and definite, and irremediable woe. These last, it may be, you have rarely, if at any instant known. Hopes, though too vague and general, in the mercy of God our Saviour, have been palliatives to your emotion, when that great question has sometimes rushed upon you,—whether the spirit, con-

flicting with ills which soon *must* terminate, be meanwhile pardoned; and truly prepared, or preparing, for an immortality of blameless joy. For it is certain, (on the supposition which I have made of your moral and evangelical light,) that the sense of sinfulness—the apprehension of unpreparedness for a pure and perfect state—the feeling of discordance between your character and the divine holiness, must be one great source of inward anxieties, and, at certain moments, of most painful forebodings.

It is even probable that this is by far the heaviest of your actual sorrows. The others, of a temporal character, previously referred to, which are perhaps combined with it, may have so powerfully conduced to urge your thoughts towards everlasting interests, as to be themselves not seldom forgotten or eclipsed in that remoter contemplation. The conviction of some recent sin, or the recalled apparition, as it were, of scenes of criminality long past, may haunt your memory, and render at times that futurity, which is our only refuge from the woes of time, a region of dark, though undefined and shadowy, omens, from which you shrink with secret disquietude, if not with dread.

The writer also himself would shrink, perhaps far more sensitively than he ought, from rendering those fearful doubts one degree more definite and alarming than may be needful to your final peace. He

would be loth, had he the power, to draw terrific flashes from the clouds that overhang and confront you. Conscience has given warning that such are shrouded in the gloom, and let its voice suffice. Most gladly would I be the happier instrument of rendering your mind more accessible to each intervening gleam of a true and heavenly sunshine; and with this aim I proceed to those sources of Christian hope, whither multitudes of the "weary and heavy laden" have earnestly resorted, and have there felt the sole relief of sorrows not less grievous than your own. You will perhaps, indeed, observe, that what I shall advance is often more adapted to the doubting than the afflicted mind. But it will be found, that although mere human knowledge is often quite barren of comfort to the sufferer, Christian knowledge is the essential basis of Christian consolation, without which it cannot subsist, and in proportion to which, if rightly used, it will commonly be satisfying and abundant. Do not suspect, therefore, that by inviting you to a fuller appreciation of the value, credibility, and suitableness of Christian doctrines, I take a too circuitous path for conducting you to the fuller participation of Christian comforts. No doubt this path should be at all times pursued, with a profound dependence, both for light and consolation, on the good Spirit of God. But knowledge is the appointed medium of consolation and

peace. It is remarkable, and has been often noticed, that the title "Paraclete," given by our Saviour to the Holy Spirit, signifies not only Comforter and Advocate, but Monitor or Teacher. The "comfort of the Holy Ghost" is to be attained by his "guiding us into all truth;" no otherwise, therefore, than by a right *apprehension* of divine truth; though our *com*prehension of it be necessarily imperfect, and in some who apprehend its most essential points with strong and clear discernment, remains very limited and partial. The comforts which will endure the test of sharp distress and abide in fiery trial, must be not of that slight and shadowy class which men of the world may offer: they must be direct and scriptural, built on that "knowledge of the truth," which is the portion of the docile, the earnest, and the humble,—who are "taught of God," and have "received the love of the truth that they might be saved;" comforts flowing from the revealed grace of God in Christ Jesus, sought and implored, discovered and embraced. Such, it is our "heart's desire" that you and we should amply and unalterably partake. Though the writer possess them but intermittingly, and even dubiously, he has at least this claim to press them on your regard, that he perceives their incomparable and exclusive worth.

On the more preliminary of those truths which

conduct or urge us to the gospel, it will indeed be in your case almost superfluous to enlarge. With a mind so awake and susceptible to its own moral condition, as I have presumed yours to be, I cannot need to argue or insist at large on the admitted truth, that we are fallen, and in the sight of an Omniscient Rectitude deeply and inexcusably offenders. Our "conscience of sin," though it may be quickened by solicitous feeling, is not to be dispelled or annulled by impartial reflection. Though friendship cherish, and tenderness excuse, and society may flatter, or at least not rebuke us, and all this because our transgressions of thought, and many both of our actions and omissions, are hidden from the eye of man,—though it may be also true, that education, social opinion, fear, prudence, and affection, and the direct or indirect influence of religion, have actually restrained us from very many evils, and engaged us in many duties, thus abating the edge of self-reproof, —yet who can take a scrutinizing retrospect of life, or even of any minuter portion of its course, without knowing, without feeling, that before this Omniscient Holiness which "looketh on the heart," we stand self-accused, reproved of "sin" and liable to "judgment?" We must also suspect, even if we would hope the contrary, that present or future conformity to the voice of conscience and the will of heaven, may not cancel or expiate past deviations; we know,

that, in their very nature, these acts or thoughts must be as powerless to undo or annul the former, as to recall effects which have already flowed from them: and we may judge besides, that since the full and pure obedience of each instant in our continued being, must be due for that same instant to Him who freely imparted and wholly sustains it, there would be nought *to spare,* even were it so available, toward the long reckoning of compensation or amends.

But *we* feel moreover, that were this otherwise, and *could* there be some redundancy of present or intended obedience to transfer to the great arrear, that which could vindicate to itself any compensatory worth, must be of a very different *quality* from what ours now is, and from what in this state we can hope it will ever be. We feel that our attempts at accordance with the inadequate standard of conscience (itself so unfixed and partial),—and this even in acts directly religious,—are at many times so defective, nay, so deeply intermingled with evil, as fearfully to augment in the very performance of present duty, the account of present offences.

Your anxieties, therefore, are not groundless but just. Most justly have they urged you to desire and seek some efficacious remedy for sin and sorrow. Without employing in the analysis of motives, tempers, and actions, any excessive refinement or rigour,—this is

our conscious position—a multiplied and complex record against us, a supreme and unerring tribunal before us. We hear, as did that upright and beneficent patriarch, who was far less enlightened by written revelation, the awful query of an inward witness, "How should man be just with God?"—and that stern whisper of the eternal law, urges us to listen to the proclamation of the glorious gospel. It forbids and disables you to be satisfied or even lulled by those faint echoes of its mercies, amidst which the careless are content to slumber. It prompts you to explore, with new and growing earnestness, the essence of Heaven's compassion towards offending man. Pray that you may be thus brought to "behold" with such concentrated interest as a vivid sense of personal necessity inspires, that supreme display of loving-kindness, "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world;" the one oblation of

> "unexampled love,
> Love nowhere to be found less than divine."

Thus has it been with all who feelingly believe the gospel. The consciousness of moral demerit and spiritual insufficiency,—not a nominal and listless assent to theological dogmas, but a genuine and deep conviction,—has prepared the heart to receive with adoring wonder and thankfulness that "unspeakable gift," the gift of remission, renovation, and eternal joy, procured by a Divine Redeemer, and for the

sake of his "one offering," freely and abundantly bestowed. It has been perceived and felt, even as with new light poured on this record and doctrine of scripture, that when a Saviour of immeasurable dignity, in whom our nature was mysteriously one with the divine, abased himself to the depths of vicarious suffering "to bring us unto God;" then was achieved an endless, boundless triumph and vindication, of the holy attributes and righteous reign of the Most High. All that shock to moral order through the universe—all that undermining of God's perfect government and of the stability of his responsible creation—which would else (as far as we can see) have necessarily followed from witnessing the full forgiveness of multiplied and great transgression, has by this stupendous expedient, by these "unsearchable riches" of love and condescension, been gloriously precluded. The patriarch's awful difficulty, already cited, "How should man be just with God?" receives its illustrious and joyful solution in the facts and proclamations of the new covenant, announcing to men and angels that God can at once be "*just*, and the *justifier* of him that believeth in Jesus." We perceive, and all beings who are spiritually awake must participate the thought, that the incomputable evil of sin, the sacred inflexibility of justice, the heavenly supereminence of mercy, are all displayed by this "one sacrifice," in language at

which the universe must "rejoice with trembling." Other writers, however, both of older times and of our own, have dwelt on the illustration of the divine perfections by the Atonement, with so much more both of argumentative and experimental strength than I could bring to this great subject, that I shall not dilate on it; and should, perhaps, have done still better by confining myself to some citations from them.* Let us rather turn to a point which, from the very strength of their faith and depth of their feelings, those writers have but more rarely and more lightly touched. I mean the credibility of this doctrine amidst its acknowledged inconceivableness.

By yourself it may not seldom be experienced, though seldom if at all acknowledged, that reason and faith are overwhelmed and dazzled by "the height of this great argument." And they have become so, perhaps, in proportion, strange as that may seem on the first view, to your increasing belief and interest in it. While you heard of the humiliation and sacrifice of the Incarnate Word coldly and thoughtlessly, as the mere statement of a formal creed or confession,—it may have excited little or no doubt, and even little or no surprise: for your mind may never have rested seriously on the idea, or tried to expatiate in its

* I subjoin some words of the late Dr. Samuel Johnson: not for the reasons above given, but because they are from the lips of a *layman* and a *moralist*.—See Note A.

vastness. But since you became in some degree awakened to its infinite moment, as a Divine Act on which, and on a belief of which, eternal interests hinge and are suspended, you may have begun to feel at times as if that which is "too wonderful" to grasp were also too wonderful to credit and rely on. In *this* likewise, as well as in that sinking of the heart which the distresses and presentiments of life induce, there are those who can deeply sympathize with you; who contemplate with a sort of bewildered feebleness these "deep things of God,"—like one who should gaze upwards at a mighty comet, or downwards into an ocean-whirlpool, till his giddy amazement almost questioned the reality of the scene. But let me remind you, that very much of this anxious, incredulous astonishment would be probably produced at facts far less "unsearchable" than those "deep things of God," if it could be once supposed that a great interest was connected with them and with our real belief of them. Take as an instance a familiar fact of modern philosophy. You at present may never question the annual and diurnal motion of the earth; but readily believe, without much attention, and with as little of hesitation or surprise, what certainly is not taught or confirmed by our senses, but the contrary, and therefore rests solely on scientific proof or testimony,—that we are hurried through enormous spaces hourly with

the planet upon which we dwell. But suppose an astrologer or prophet could *credibly* assure you, that your good health and longevity, or the fruitfulness of your fields, would much depend not only on the reality and permanence of this motion (which they actually *do*), but likewise on your continued genuine *belief* of its reality, you would thenceforth contemplate it, I cannot doubt, with altered thoughts and feelings. You would consider the great wonderfulness of this immense yet quite unperceived unfelt velocity, and the total absence of sensible proof for it, with a painful solicitude. Doubts would harass you whether the fact itself were credible and sure: and then (as a consequence of such incursive doubts) fears whether your belief in it were sufficiently genuine and steadfast; and that, therefore, if it were true, you must be more or less obnoxious to the disastrous penalties. Yet your faith in that fact, grounded as it then would be on the best examination which you could institute of philosophic proofs and testimonies, would be in its actual character far more genuine and prevalent, amidst all the anxious doubt and awakened wonder which invaded and disturbed you, than that slight, otiose, perhaps undoubting credence, which was given while you felt no personal interest either in the fact or the belief of it. And, which may be more directly to our point, not only would your faith, from having

been passive and unopposed, become active and prevailing, but the fact itself (of the earth's motion and our own) were not a whit the less true and certain, because it seemed grown *less credible* while it was really more *believed.* This fact of our amazing ceaseless journey through the heavens,—by which our reason and imagination (in the case supposed) are far more astounded now than they were heretofore, just because of our deep interest in and attention to it,—can surely lose no iota of its truth and certainty by this our new acquisition of astonishment, nor even by our encountering the incursion of doubts before unknown.

But if this kind of illustration should appear to you not well suited to our purpose, I would invite you to a different train of thought.

Remember that *whenever* we contemplate Deity, and the ways of Deity, we inevitably *must* contemplate attributes and manifestations "dark with excessive light." When we recognise the very basis of all religion, the one creating, protecting, and providing Godhead,—this, however elementary it may appear to minds that acquiesce, by a sort of passive habit, in doctrines early inculcated, without addressing to them any active exercise of thought, is in effect to acknowledge that which supremely and infinitely "*passeth* knowledge." It is to touch and lean upon the mystery which must remain inscru-

table by finite beings: somewhat as in directing our eye to a point of the blue heavens, or a star that beams across them, we inevitably turn it towards realms of which none can conceive either the infinitude or the boundary. To believe in God is to believe in a personal intelligence itself unoriginated; self-existing through a past eternity; itself the sole cause and support of all existence; an intelligence which knows simultaneously, at every point n the immensity of time and space, each thought and act of all the innumerable orders and individuals it sustains in being. But what less is this than a mystery unimaginable, and "past finding out,"—an abyss of grandeur which angels may despair to fathom? Yet this belief is the only true theism; the only theism that can avail us anything, inasmuch as no other can be in any proper sense religious, or inspire a solid hope from the divine perfection. And ought I then, while necessarily holding (except "without hope and without God") a belief so mysterious as this, to stumble at any revealed procedure of this Infinite Being, because it is "too wonderful for me," or so "high," that "I cannot attain unto it?" "He that cometh unto God must believe that He *is*." Meditate in the depths of that thought, and then ask yourself if you have any pretension to distrust Him when He records, "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself."

Consider further, that the organized earthly creatures, in all their vast diversity and inconceivable minuteness, have been formed and are sustained to exercise and evince the power, and wisdom, and beneficence of the Eternal Mind.* He whose "understanding is infinite"—who knows the thoughts and hears the praises of innumerable spirits that "excel in strength,"—has decreed, that not only

* "The course of Nature, truly and properly speaking, is nothing else but the *will of God* producing certain effects in a continued, regular, constant, and uniform manner; which course or manner of acting, being in every moment perfectly *arbitrary*, is as easy to be altered at any time as to be preserved." (Dr. Samuel Clarke on the Attributes, p. 377.) Mr. Dugald Stewart, after quoting these words from Dr. Clarke, declares his own adherence to "the simple and sublime doctrine" expressed in them, "which supposes the order of the universe to be not only at first established, but every moment maintained by the incessant agency of one Supreme Mind—a doctrine against which no objection can be stated, but what is founded on prejudices resulting from our own imperfections."[1] "The multiplicity of his operations neither distracts his attention nor exhausts his power; nor can we suppose him reduced to the necessity of abridging their number by calling mechanism to his aid, without imputing to him the imperfections which mark our own circumscribed faculties and dependent condition."[2] In the same manner, an able living physiologist speaks of "the Designing and Operative Cause," as "perhaps the sole real agent in every movement in the universe;" and remarks, that "the development of forms according to their generic, specific, and individual diversities, not less in the vegetable than in the animal world, can only be accounted for by ascribing it to the universal energy and wisdom of the Creator."[3]

[1] Act. and Mor. Powers, i. 366. [2] Ibid. 374.
[3] Dr. Prichard, Review of the Doctrine of a Vital Principle, pp. 140, 141.

stars, and suns, and seraphs, but microscopic insects, should illustrate His creative and upholding omniscience, and fulfil his purpose of diffusing that good which consists in sensation. Now, if the attributes of holiness, of equity, of moral kindness, be far more excellent than those of wisdom, and power, and even of a lower beneficence,—and if the order and felicity of the whole moral creation be a far higher end than the sensitive well-being of some inferior creatures,—then which, let me ask, would seem more fit, more congruous, that the Mind which comprehends eternity and grasps all minds, should at each instant be actuating the pulses in a sentient atom, impelling life through an invisible worm, or watching the motion and sustenance of "a sparrow;" or, that this same Infinite Mind should assume into union with itself, a nature, lowly, frail, and dependent like those, yet rational, spiritual, and sinless,—and dignify that nature into a capacity of meritorious suffering, in order to demonstrate, in all worlds and for ever, the infinitude of divine righteousness and love, by redeeming human millions to immortal joys, and confirming in holy blessedness the countless spirits unfallen?

Imagine for a moment that we inhabited a star, where, while apprized of the mysterious entrance of sin, and of all its dire effects, into this distant world, we had no knowledge at all of any organized natures

except the rational and spiritual; where all meaner and inferior forms of life, or semblances of it, were either in fact excluded, or kept entirely latent; so that the formation or sustentation of such by the Deity, could only be proposed to our reason as a thing possible, or to our faith as a thing actual in some other region.

Should we deem it less probable when *there* announced,—that the Infinite Spirit in whose love and holiness we saw unnumbered seraphs exulting, would deign to unite with himself a feeble, mean, and suffering humanity, in order to rescue honourably a race of immortals, and fortify the holy bliss of all the happy creation known to us; or,—that the same Infinite Spirit, full of glory and felicity, surrounded by innumerable spirits, emanations from his own exalted nature, should deign to call into being, and uphold through all the moments of their ephemeral existence, countless microscopic forms of animated matter.

Which of these acts of Deity, may we believe, would be deemed beforehand the less credible—the less proportional to the Eternal Majesty—the less intelligibly befitting Him who is "glorious in holiness," "wonderful in counsel," "excellent in working?" We may I think conclude, and rejoice in the conclusion, that there is, antecedently, far higher moral probability in the one great mystery of re-

demption, which is invisibly sublime, than in the unnumbered mysteries of creation and preservation, which are invisibly minute: that the strange revelations of the microscope, if they reached us by mere testimony alone, would be more startling to faith than the revelations of the gospel.

Let one more supposition be considered, which may further assist us to rebuke our own incredulity or hesitation on this great subject. Suppose that we were creatures entirely unacquainted with the existence and possibility of *evil*,—of sin or sorrow, pain or death; and were apprized by a revelation of mere testimony, that in another world, made and governed by the holy and beneficent Being whom we perfectly and intensely loved, there had entered and prevailed for ages, dreadful guilt and keen remorse, and diversified suffering and terrible destruction. It might be difficult to convey to us by description a clear notion of those things, but, as far as they were understood, would they not be of all things the most incredible? Should we not be ready to tell the apostle who revealed them, not merely that he declared things "too wonderful," but that he must have been himself deluded by some frightful dream or phantasm of events, utterly inconsistent both with all our personal experience, and with all our knowledge of the adorable Godhead; unless, indeed, the very existence of such an imagination might painfully

betray, in himself or elsewhere, the possibility of some direful change till then unconceived? Yet, these things, which in that supposed position were so little credible, would be facts the while; and, to us, are facts experimentally familiar and lamentably sure. Will it then be argued, that the great *remedy* revealed to us for all these forms of evil,—for guilt and pain, for remorse and misery and destruction,—however amazing in itself, is *more* incredible than those very facts would on mere testimony be, which we thus know and feel to be indubitably real? Rather is not the provision of this amazing remedy, far *less* incredible than would be (in the case supposed), the introduction or ingress of the terrible disease? For is it not eminently consonant to our belief in the sublimest perfections of Deity, and adapted to establish and exalt that belief, which the prevalence of evil has in all ages tended to darken and perturb, though it never could subvert?

Whether then we meditate the Being of God,—or his providential and universal agency,—or the existence of evil,—each of these mysteries strongly reproves our distrust of "the mystery of godliness." Not that I would presume to accommodate to this last and loftiest topic, the apostle's singular expression, "not afraid with any amazement." There is a deepening "amazement" inseparable from deeper and more adoring thoughts of it; and a

holy fear, allied to such amazement, which will, nevertheless, be the guard and the support of love and joy. Who is not "afraid" at the awful equity of that divine tribunal, which can remit its penalties only in virtue of a divine expiation? Who is not "amazed" at the imperial fulness of that love which dispenses nothing less than "life eternal," the proper and commensurate "gift of God," the purchase of his own voluntary inestimable sacrifice, yet a free and complacent largess to the self-despairing!

But let not these truths, because they produce awe or amazement, sink us into faithless distrust. They are intended to accomplish far other and happier ends: to humble indeed, but to cheer also and excite and invigorate the heart. My view of this "glorious gospel" would be blameably defective, if I did not lead you to meditate on its admirable fitness for accomplishing a blessed transformation on the character of man: in this respect as in others, I hope it may be shown, that what has appeared and still appears to the proud "foolishness," does in effect vindicate itself as worthy essentially of the wisdom and the majesty of God. Assuredly it does so, if in fact we find, that by a cordial believing acceptance of this "unspeakable gift," while fear shrinks from it, and self-conceit revolts, and unbelief averts its half-closed and unwilling eye, there is wrought

in ourselves or others that moral change, which, in proportion as we know our own hearts and spiritual capacities, is found indispensable to happiness; the essence and the earnest of "salvation." To show that this change is really produced, I might offer bright examples in the history and character of distinguished believers. For the proof that it must needs be more or less expected, according to the measure and exercise of faith, a few considerations will, I think, suffice.

To "believe with the heart," that in order to the remission of our sins, it verily "behoved Christ to suffer," that the "Word" who "was God," truly assumed our nature into Godhead, and in that assumed nature became "sorrowful even unto death," in order to redeem us from a guilt which could at no less cost become gloriously and divinely pardonable, this surely is to believe, (in so far as the reality of the belief extends, and its exercise continues,) that sin is an evil of the most unequivocal character, and of intense malignancy, for which all creation could provide no cure; which even Ompotence itself could not frustrate or subdue, without taking to itself, in that strange conflict, the very attributes of weakness.

Is it then possible, that he who in any measure really believes this, should yet deliberately *love* and *choose* sin, should account that which he knows to be

sinful, a source of true enjoyment, or, indeed, esteem it anything better than a seductive poison of the soul?

Nor is it less evident, that to believe with the heart in that heaven-descending pity which accomplished such a sacrifice,—in that generous love which could not desert the wretched at their "utmost need," —in that blood which cries with impassioned kindness to each fallen offender, "thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thy help,"—in that free munificence, which, not content with the purchase of such costly pardons, holds out to the victims of transgression a celestial and eternal joy,—this is to "believe with the heart" in a Benefactor, whose claims to our love and devotion, eternity, so far from acquitting, can but augment and perpetuate. Is it possible, therefore, that the believing mind should not, by adoring self-dedication, respond in some degree, however inadequately, to these overpowering claims? Can we take at the hand of heavenly mercy an incorruptible inheritance, in lieu of a merited destruction, and feel no love, no devotedness, towards Him that stooped and agonized to ransom, to enrich, and to exalt us?

Here then are the two master-springs of moral renovation—aversion to sin, as a source of misery, awfully opposed to the divine nature and will:—grateful attachment to the Great Deliverer from it, himself

the giver and exemplar of holiness. Both are necessary results (if there be any order in the constitution of the human soul) from cordial faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice: and since the same scripture, which reveals this sacrifice, unfolds the aspects and the snares of moral evil, and the spirit and course by which to please and imitate the great Object of our gratitude, it is manifest that, with the most constraining motives, are thus associated the most enlightening rules. But even without referring to these, we may find their principles and lineaments contained and expressed in the great fact itself, which is the sovereign object of belief and trust. The astonishing fact of redemption, in proportion as it is believed, not only operates as a motive, but as an example and a rule. Though in its character and design inimitable by angels, it is in its spirit imitable by men; and when truly believed, *must* be in some measure copied. Who, for instance, can believe in his heart, that he has been so deeply ruined and so divinely rescued, and yet allow himself to cherish pride, or wilfully indulge an arrogant and haughty spirit? How can those yield themselves up to sensual and worldly allurements, to luxury, voluptuousness, and covetousness, who know these to be the chains of the great apostasy, the snares and bands that have held our race in moral ruin and estrangement from their God, and which the Son of

God himself was bound, and scourged, and pierced, on purpose to dissolve and sever? How shall I tolerate in myself a malicious, an unforgiving, or a selfish spirit, believing, meanwhile, that to me so much has been given and so much forgiven; that "God spared not his own Son;" that this illustrious sufferer implored in death a pardon for his bitterest foes; that, instead of exacting the penalty which I owe to justice, the King of Kings imposes on me, by infinite mercies, a boundless debt of love?

Thus we cannot but perceive, that a true acceptance of the "great mystery of godliness" is, in itself, that change of heart begun, by which we must enter "the kingdom of God." Christian conversion is the real and believing view, mentally, by a spiritual and divine light, of that infinite atonement and free pardon which constitute the gospel what its name imports,—"glad tidings of great joy." To acquire a new view,—a different internal apprehension or conception of all that is most momentous, of the character of Deity, of the personal manifestation of that character in Christ, of sin and righteousness, of life, death, and eternity, this is surely to be, in spirit, "born again;" to be "a new creature;" to become in temper and practice "alive unto God." As surely as conversion towards the sun expands and fructifies the blossom till then unopened, which is attracted by and turned towards its beams, so surely

the believing view of the gospel, in proportion as it is undiverted and unsuspended, must produce "fruit unto holiness." And this quality will be found essential to the satisfactory character of any remedy proposed to you for the ills of life, and the mental distress which attends them: because, as I have already remarked, it is the sense of moral evil, and of unfitness for a perfect happiness, which deepens the pain of every temporal grief. In order to combat effectually the sorrows of mortality, we want those pure principles of immortal life, increasingly developed and consciously maturing, which are the pledges of a joy "that fadeth not." And it is very material to observe, that *so fur* as our Christian obedience springs from this influence and these principles of action, the fruit will be emphatically "*good* fruit;" the believer's acts will be not merely good as to their fitness and utility in themselves, but good as to their prompting motive. Nor does it appear possible that acts performed by men from any other principles can be good in the same sense; or that those performed by Christians under the admixture or joint influence of other motives, can be good in the same degree. A mercenary, who, in the service of his sovereign or his chief, performs certain acts, and refrains from others, with the mere aim of earning a promised recompense, has obviously no better motive than mere prudential wisdom; and although

he should have the belief, that on account of the invaluable services of a deceased brother or friend, less will be claimed personally from him, that his conduct will be judged with less rigour, or a greater reward be conferred,—still, if he retains the notion, whether erroneously or not, that his own deeds are to be, in whole or in part, the procuring price, the "valuable consideration" for which he is to be requited, he may have as much of a mercenary spirit as if there were no such indirect advantage to enhance his expectations: nor is it easy to conceive how, under such impressions, he can be wholly divested of that spirit and aim. Thus, if we view the gospel, as too many appear to view it, with so indistinct a sense of its purpose and its value, as to account the merits of the Saviour but a sort of supplemental adjunct, however weighty, to the merits of the saved, the mercenary character of our conduct may remain quite unchanged, and radically changed it cannot be. He who regards the "unsearchable riches of Christ," as meant to compensate for what is lacking in his own deserts, but so that his obedience will still form part of his *title* to heaven, must be still employed *legally*,—and we may use this term both in the theological and forensic sense,—labouring to strengthen and complete that "title" to mansions in the skies. But acts so prompted, be they of what kind or amount they may, cannot be, in the highest

sense, good. For then would the obedience of angels and "the spirits of the perfected" be no better and no higher, whose title to felicity is completely ratified by possession. The works of the legalist, who labours to earn and secure a promised reward, would be as excellent as those of "ministering spirits," actuated by pure love to God and man, in whom every act is disinterested; except so far as the exercise of that holy principle *constitutes* their bliss. Thus you perceive, that it is the entire *gratuitousness* of our whole salvation, which can alone place the offender on that footing where he may really begin to exercise the *heavenly* sort of obedience. The "God of all grace" deigns to declare to returning sinners,—I pardon you freely, I justify you freely, I will sanctify you wholly, I now adopt and I will hereafter glorify you, all and merely for the sake of my beloved Son. Now, therefore, begin to obey and follow me "as dear children," as seraphs have always obeyed, as man in his primeval innocence obeyed, from filial, grateful, admiring, imitative love. Think not of being happy *for* your obedience, but happy *in* it. Your bliss will then be perfect when the sources and the streams of action shall become entirely "pure and undefiled."

Let me now, with the honest wish that you should attain substantial peace, not such "as the world

giveth," once more recall to view the sum and essence of this "gospel." It has been represented as a free, gratuitous, and entire remission of sins, granted through the amazing mediation of that Lord of glory who gave his life a ransom; becoming thus a demonstration of all moral perfections in God, and a creative power to re-awaken them in man: far more than a mere pardon or reprieve from penal justice,—rather a justification or honourable release, an act of full oblivion, which instates offenders in the same enjoyment of divine favour, as if their progenitor had never fallen, as if they themselves had never renewed and multiplied his fall; nay, which seals to them in reversion, for the sake and as the chosen reward of the Great Restorer, a sublimer happiness than they could have enjoyed unfallen, sublimer if only for that love of gratitude,—boundless and eternal gratitude—which is its best constituent; which begins when first we look with the eye of faith on Him whom we "have pierced," and can terminate only when He shall cease "to be glorified in his saints and admired in all them that believe."

It has been impressed on you that "this great sight," this view by faith, though "as in a glass darkly," of the reconciling and atoning cross, the centre whither all moral glories converge and whence they radiate, is the heavenly sunshine that cheers and vivifies the soul; mighty to quicken those germs

of pure obedience and holy blessedness, that shall bloom and be matured among "the saints in light."

We have affirmed there is no heart so cold, no conscience so steeled or captive, no mind so pertinacious in rejecting hitherto the counsel of God, or in refusing to be comforted, which has a right to despair of his omnipotent love, who was "lifted up" on the cross that He might "draw all men unto Him."

These, if I rightly view them, are the "gospel" consolations. This is the "balm in Gilead," and the "physician" there. It is a sovereign specific which you need; not a poor, deceptive, momentary cordial. But than this, let me ask, what nobler and what richer can you crave? Could you now call a minister of mercy from the skies, could you invoke a visible angel to strengthen and to solace you, what would you have him bring? Can your heart conceive of something more appropriate, something more inestimable, in substitution for this "glorious gospel of the blessed God?" Were that messenger to confer the gift of immediate health and ease,—or to bear "in his right hand length of days, and in his left hand riches and honours"—or to present again the dearest friend or child whom you have mourned for,—you know how ineffectual some of these blessings would be to heal the pains of the body, and all of them

to assuage the wounds of the spirit; you know how soon also they must vanish like the mist and wither like the flower.

Were he even commissioned with "another gospel," with another charter of pardon and immortal gladness from the court of heaven, how, I ask, could it be fraught with so divine a tenderness, or charged with promises which so exceed all price, as that which has been sealed in the blood of God's own Son, and invites the wretched to be "joint-heirs" with Him! Listen then to the voice which should soften, if not banish, every sorrow. Rise from dejection to greet the "Angel of the covenant." "Behold, He stands at the door and knocks." Be it yours to welcome and adore him. He comes to pour into your bosom "everlasting consolations." If there be in the universe an envoy or a message that might cheer the most disconsolate, and chase by spiritual joy the physical maladies of nature, that might make "the lame to leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb to sing," you must recognise them here. Behold the illustrious envoy: "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Listen to his joy-inspiring message—"He that believeth on me hath everlasting life:" so transcendently good and great that it is beyond our loftiest conception: so divinely simple, that it is not beyond our most childlike acceptation. May we have grace, be-

lievingly and devotedly to receive it! Then will the love of this heavenly Friend constrain us. Then shall we "count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Him." Then, "although in tribulation, we shall have peace;" nay, then may we learn at length, like his apostle, to "take pleasure in infirmities and distresses for Christ's sake," feeling in life and death the truth and emphasis of his own sacred words, "Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."

II.

ON STRAINED INTERPRETATIONS OF THE DOCTRINE OF FAITH OR CONVERSION, WHICH MAY INDUCE A DESPONDENT IMPRESSION THAT WE ARE AND SHALL BE DESTITUTE OF IT.

THAT "the gospel of Christ," when believed, has a signal adaptedness and power to produce the greatest moral effects, I suppose you—amidst whatever painful doubts as to your own vital reception of it—clearly to discern: so as to be little moved by the objections of those confused or cavilling opponents who decry faith, as if it were a delusive substitute for morals, instead of being, what it really is, their very root or basis.

It has been no doubt a ground of hesitation and even of repugnance to many, although but a superficial fallacy if examined, that when we affirm Christian conversion to consist in a cordial reception, by faith, of "the glad tidings" revealed, our all is thus made

dependent on one simple act of the mind, or even on a passive state of it. Simplicity, to many, appears weak, and is distasteful. It was hard even for many of the "wise and disputers of this world," to receive the one law of gravitation, in place of the vortices and fluid medium of Descartes. There is much shrewd insight of human nature implied in the query of his attendant to the Syrian captain, which has been often alluded to by divines in this connexion,—"My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some *great* thing, wouldst thou not have done it?"*

Yet, while the simplicity of any principle or means, and therefore of faith, will often contribute to excite prejudice, the power or tendency of this cannot, to any acute and understanding mind, be as latent, or appear as arbitrary as that of the ablution in Jordan. On the contrary, one would think there should need little or nought of reasoning, or explanatory developement, to apprize rational persons, that to "believe the gospel," though it be a simple thing, and in the world's eye an indifferent or immaterial thing, is yet in fact, and in a very lofty sense, the "*great* thing." A Naaman may scorn it for its supposed commonness, and a Hume for its supposed unreasonableness; a Julian may tauntingly tell us—"I *believe,* is the sum of your wis-

* 2 Kings v. 13.

dom;"* and they who "talk of morals," may still ask, why so constantly keep in view this *one* thing, this "faith," when, in the scripture itself, a variety of precepts and examples are so much urged on our attention and regard. But in treating of *your* difficulties, I have happily no need to vindicate this great principle from the contempt of some, or the depreciation of others. You are well aware that belief is the main-spring of conduct; that this "one thing," (whatever be its simplicity,) like gravitation, or air, or light, "is needful" and all-important; that if it were but a point, it would yet be the "*turning* point;" that were it but the affair as of a "moment," it would yet also be (so to speak) "the twinkling of an *eye*"—resembling, spiritually, that very small and slight corporeal change, which lets in upon the mind a new creation. When an oculist couches the first eye for a patient immersed in blindness, he does but one thing—and this a very slight and simple thing; he merely removes a small thin film: but that "one thing" was "needful;" and the removal of this little obstacle lets in at once a hemisphere.† He who was in darkness (even though it were not total) is as "a new

* As cited in Gregory Nazianzen, and from him by Bullet, Hist. du Christianisme, p. 117.

† Or rather, *would* do so, if it were not requisite to *guard* (in some cases at least) against the sudden and full influx of sun-light: a circumstance which should not be wholly overlooked in the spiritual analogy.

creature," "born again," as into a new world; to him there are "new heavens and a new earth;" he walks abroad and admires, and is transported with grateful gladness. And although the restoration of sight should in such a case be very imperfect, which it frequently is, so that the patient sees men only as "trees walking," or the ocean but as a misty plain, and the moon but as a glimmering lamp, still is there a great and happy change, which arose from one exceedingly slight and simple process. A physical conversion of the eye and of the man was in that small process effected. He turns toward the sun, whereas till now he knew not the place of its rising or its zenith; he moves to embrace a silent friend, whom but lately he knew not where to seek, and indeed, while silence lasted, was unconscious of his presence. Nay, the conversion is far more than physical. New feelings are awakened; and a new practice commences. He learns to do the works and fulfil the offices for which light is essential, and thus his life of privation and unprofitableness is converted to a new life of activity and comfort. Those who refuse to expect, or expect with hesitation, that so common and simple a thing as faith in the gospel can amount to moral and spiritual conversion, or to what the scriptures describe as a being "born again," might surely with more reason refuse to expect that so trifling and slight a change as the oculist effects on his patient, can involve

magnificent disclosures, awakened capacities of action, and new diversities of enjoyment. Such, however, I have remarked, is not *your* difficulty. You admit with readiness, that a true faith in the gospel must needs be a principle of great power as well as great simplicity; that it does amount to conversion of heart, motive, life, and prospect: and you anxiously fear, from the want of decisiveness and completeness which you find in its effects, that you possess it not. This impression, perhaps, has been strengthened by the views of some Christian writers or preachers, who seem not to admit that there can be gradations or fluctuations in faith; and of others, who, without holding that opinion, appear to teach, that, in all cases, where there has been a spiritual transition "from darkness to light," there must be always a vivid and assured sense of contrast between the previous and the actual state. By tests like these, your hope, it may be, is distressingly shaken.

But the illustration which has been now employed, although you needed it not for its former purpose, may, as I judge, be appropriate and serviceable to you here. For it obviously assists us to conceive, as indeed was hinted before, how it is that some whom we account sincere believers in the gospel, may have attained comparatively low degrees of spiritual animation and happiness, and may even suffer at times a grievous and dangerous interruption of both. That faith has its degrees and fluctuations, the lan-

guage of scripture and the experience of believers abundantly concur to evince.* But if faith, which is our faculty of spiritual vision, be quite languid and imperfect, its effects can be but proportionate to its condition. If it become increasingly dim and inactive, its objects will be less and less distinct, and its influence on our emotions and our actions will of course be enfeebled.

I have seen a patient who had been couched for blindness with success, and this in advanced years; but a great defectiveness of sight (though not amounting to absolute blindness) had gradually returned, and the operation had been successfully repeated. How much more may this returning dimness and obscuration be feared as to spiritual sight, as to the mental and cordial perception of divine things, the vivid apprehension by faith of invisible realities! Will you say, that by this supposition we impeach the power and skill of a *divine* Operator? Not so: I only proceed on those actual though mysterious circumstances and liabilities of our nature which it hath pleased him to permit. Our Saviour gave sight to the blind son of Timæus. Does it follow, that if this mendicant had afterwards chosen to travel among the sands of Egypt, he would have been secure from ophthalmia? or would such a disease

* See texts quoted in "Thoughts on Devotion," 6th edition, p. 227, and remarks there and at p. 240.

have disproved the completeness of his previous cure? It is beyond our sphere to decide what the God of grace *could* effect, or *could* prevent. Facts teach us, that in this world he allows the objects of his kindness to be still exposed to harms and perils, spiritual as well as physical, and to bear even within themselves many sources of both. The spiritual eye is originally darkened by the disorders of a fallen nature, and the operation of enlightening mercy, though it take a film away, does not remove those springs of inward evil which may reinduce in a great measure the sensual and obscuring cloud: still less does it destroy those noxious airs and motes which float around; or miraculously shield the eye of faith against their natural influence.

It is true, our Saviour said, and with a direct reference to the spiritual life, "if thine eye be *clear*, (free from clouds or spots, and in this sense *one* or '*single*,') thy whole body shall be full of light:" that is,—thy perception of objects shall be complete and all thy acts and movements be correctly guided by it. On the contrary, "if thine eye be distempered, (in that evil and diseased state which destroys vision,) thy whole body shall be full of darkness." But the Great Teacher here described those extreme opposites, between which, both physically and spiritually, there are many degrees and many fluctuations. He who came to save, had been predicted as

"a light to the nations; to open the blind eyes;"* and himself declared his gracious office of an enlightener; "I am come into this world, that they which see not might see:"† from the immediate connexion of which words with the cure of a man born blind, we have a peculiar warrant for regarding that kind of miracle on the body as designedly emblematic of his great commission to illuminate and renovate the soul. But the method of several in that class of Christ's miracles, seems expressly meant to intimate, as was hinted before, those "diversities of operation" that should occur in the spiritual cures which they typified. Thus in that miraculous giving of sight which has been now mentioned, the great Benefactor chose to adopt an instrumental process, such as in itself might seem even adverse to his purpose—the anointing the sufferer's eyes with clay; and then enjoined *him* likewise to employ other means, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam," as if to intimate these several lessons,—that the light of truth and grace may be conveyed to the dark hearts which "the God of this world hath blinded," through successive preparatory means; that what may seem an obstruction to spiritual light, an aggravation of spiritual disease, may yet be sometimes strangely instrumental to the cure; and also that the subjects

* Isaiah xlii. 7. † John ix.

of enlightening mercy may themselves be called to perform the part of diligent obedience to enjoined means, in order to the *first attainment* of the blessing. We find in the cure of another blind man, at Bethsaida,* not only some outward acts performed by his Restorer, but also a restoration which was distinctly and purposely gradual. It was only by the second imposition of the healing hands of Christ, that his sight became strong to discern all objects "clearly." On the contrary, in the case of Bartimæus, the miracle was the result of much previous importunity, (which in the former instances is not stated)—was accompanied with no other means prescribed to the subject of it—was in itself immediately complete,—and had this effect, not less immediate, that "he followed Jesus in the way."† So the removal of temporary blindness from Saul of Tarsus, appears, like his spiritual conversion which preceded it, to have been suddenly entire; though the Saviour who wrought it employed only the deputed ministration of an unknown disciple. Assuredly, such marked *variations* in the method of those "signs," than which none were more significant of the Messiah's spiritual character and office,‡ may well prepare us to expect much greater diversities in that higher process, by which the spiritually

* Mark viii. 22. † Mark x. 46—52.

‡ John i. 9. and ix. 5. 39—41.

"blinded" are brought "from darkness to light;" greater in proportion as the blindness of the heart is a disease more deep and latent, yet disclosing itself by symptoms far more various; above all, as it is likewise a voluntary disease, which the patient at once disbelieves and cherishes. It were indeed very presumptuous to deny that there have been and may be many Christian conversions as suddenly complete, as the restoration of natural sight to Bartimæus or to Paul: but it were still more so to doubt that the same happy change is usually effected by successive means, and by a far longer gradation than the cure of those eyes, which the Saviour only once retouched ere they saw with "luminous clearness." Still more presumptuous; since facts would more largely refute it: since also the previous reluctance or indifference, which in the subjects of bodily disease were unheard of, and the neglect of prescribed means and precautions which among them was likely to be rare, *do manifestly* exist to retard (as far as divine mercy allows such unhappy counteractions) the gracious work of spiritual healing. When, at the first touch of pity from the Great Enlightener, a beam of heavenly truth has reached the darkened heart, is it found that a persevering importunity always ensues, a persistive earnestness like that which dictated the ancient petitions, "open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law,"

—" make thy face to shine upon thy servant"—" lift up on me the light of thy countenance,"—or that a correspondent attentiveness is always exercised as to revealed injunctions and warnings? Whether the case be one in which the first entrance of spiritual light is so powerful as to amount to conversion, or in which its faint degrees can be deemed but precursory, is it found that the night-damps of worldly society, and the blinding dust of secular cares, are shunned as far as may be compatible with duty? If experience assure us that these can grievously impair the most confirmed and clear perceptions of divine truth, how much more the incipient and the feeble! Admonitions to " watch and pray" are virtually reiterated in multiplied forms throughout all scripture, and this in reference to every condition of the mind, from the first feeling of spiritual darkness, through each vicissitude of partial light, on to the hour of those happiest irradiations, which may meet the vigilant believer at " the gate of death." These admonitions are surely as legible and as imperative as that question which invited and claimed the renewed importunity of Bartimæus, " What *wilt* thou I should do for thee?" and as that direct command, " Go, wash in the pool of Siloam,"* which, in another instance, was annexed to the act of mercy. If,

* Luke xviii.

therefore, revealed invitations and injunctions be remissly complied with, must we not anticipate, in the spiritual cure, proportionate defects, nay, mournful relapses? And then, until the heavenly touch be sought with more importunate contrition, how shall the pilgrim go on his way, in cheerfulness, vigour, or safety? Must not rather his condition closely verge on that of one who "walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth?" In such a state, and we fear it is not unfrequent, there is urgent need to be "illuminated" anew. How awfully did the self-confident apostle need this, in the High Priest's hall. Very lately, his spiritual sight had been strong to perceive and own his master's glory, and he had received from Christ himself the assurance that this "blessed" perception was divinely given;* but the influence of the depraved world, like a foul and deadly vapour, unexpectedly enveloped him; the eye of faith grew clouded and distempered: he recognised that glory no longer, and you know the criminal result. The change was at once wretched and perilous. One would think the apostle, long afterwards, was mentally glancing at that unhappy night, when he wrote the admonition, "connect with your faith, *fortitude;*" and in the subjoined description of him who "lacketh these things," employed the figure that has now been used;

* Matt. xvi. 17.

"he is blind—extremely short-sighted or purblind,—and has contracted a forgetfulness of the purification from his former sins."* Such, doubtless, had been his own predicament in the hours of his distressing fall. The look of Jesus was that healing touch which restored a gleam of spiritual vision, and although he wept bitterly, yet did his very tears denote, that the inward eye was fixed, in reviving hope, as well as keen compunction, on "the Son of the living God." Thus was Peter again "converted;" we cannot scruple the term; since his Lord himself had prophetically used it in reference to this very event. Happy those believers (and we trust they are many) who have never sunk into such a depth of guilt and alienation; but the need of new and continual light, and succour, and restoration from above, is doubtless felt by all who are sincere. Not a few would unite in the strong though quaint language of the excellent Herbert—

"Lord, mend, or rather, *make* us: *one* creation
Will not suffice our turn.
Except thou make us daily, we shall spurn
Our own salvation."†

This to some may appear hyperbolical: but something not unlike it has been written in sober prose, by one who possessed both solid sense and solid piety. "Beside the first conversion of a soul

* 2 Pet. i. 9. τυφλος, μυωπαζων. See Doddridge in loc.
† In the poem entitled "Giddiness."

from a state of nature, there are after conversions from particular paths of backsliding, which are equally necessary to salvation. Every step out of the way by sin must be a step into it again by repentance."* You will find self-discerning Christians feelingly acknowledge, that, as in the material, so in the spiritual universe, He who made all things, "upholdeth all things:" that were not the eye of faith revisited often by the hand which first unsealed it, "and from the well of life fresh drops instilled," speedily indeed, and fatally also, must the light which is in them become darkness.

If then you have a sense of the excellency of the gospel, a wish to participate its blessings, hail this desire as "the day-spring from on high." I would address you now on the supposition—God grant it may be erroneous—that you are not yet under the vital influence of that gospel: but be this ever so painfully apprehended,—be it supposed that yourself or others cannot ascertain your possession of spiritual light, or that although you have seemed conscious to its beams erewhile, yet, from some hidden or some known and lamented causes, they are almost quenched,—yet pray much, and hope much, pray with fervour, and hope with reliance, that they may either be now restored and multiplied, or, if not then genuine, may

* Henry on Matthew xviii.

now be first bestowed. It is not for you to decide, that those former gleams of truth, though faint even then and unhappily grown fainter since, were not yet the gracious *beginnings* of a true conversion.

If you have found the remarks lately offered consonant to reason and to scripture, you will not judge that hope to be precluded even when conversion is described as an *instantaneous* change. For we may fully admit it so to be, without any inference which should in the least discourage even those, who are brought the most slowly and imperceptibly "out of darkness into marvellous light."

If, indeed, it be affirmed, that conversion is, in ordinary cases, a change instantaneously complete *in degree*,—this is a groundless and perverted account of it, which both the scriptures and experience variously and fully disprove. But if it be only meant that the change is instantaneous in its *beginning*, and so far complete in *kind*, this is no more than may be said of other great changes. Day-light, for example, is thus instantaneous: that is, there must be some point of time, where twilight might be correctly said to end, and day-light to begin; yet who can fix or mark the separating instant? But imagine that it *could* be marked; imagine that a competent observer, one placed in the fit atmosphere and at the fit elevation, could always note the true moment of sunrise, does it follow that the in-

stantaneous commencement of this change from darkness to light would not remain to most of us unascertainable? Till we have always a horizon without mist or cloud, always a distance without grove or hill, who shall pretend to ascertain it? The mariner on deck, or dweller on the shore, may now and then do so, when he watches the morning twilight in a cloudless sky, and catches the first ray that shoots over the ocean. It may, however, be justly doubted, whether the first dawn of spiritual sun-light can in any case be by man so ascertained. At least, while it is certain, that with all the "children of light, the children of the day," there *was* such an instant, it is probable that, in a vast majority of cases, that *instant,* except to the Omniscient, or to some higher created intelligences, must be quite unknown. But who of us will doubt that the material sun *has* risen, "though he rose in a mist," if he now break through the dispersing vapours, or even if we have still a shaded day-light, without any view till evening of the orb from which it flows; and who will decide whether the first faint light which visited us from the clouded east, or over the edge of the forest, was previous or subsequent to his unseen rising? If previous, still were those twilight rays its welcome pledges and its immediate harbingers. The commencement of this instantaneous and ever-recurring change is almost always

unknown to us; and its progress to completeness is invariably gradual.

Nor must this topic be dismissed without observing, that the forcible figure which our Saviour so solemnly adduced in describing that great change which prepares the spirit for heaven,—the figure of a new birth, or "regeneration,"—is viewed inconsiderately, not to say perversely, if it be thought to imply respecting that change, either a sudden completeness of degree, or a consciousness in the subjects of it as to the period of its occurrence. What was our natural life at the moment when it began? It had an instantaneous commencement, and perhaps a completeness in kind: but how exceedingly remote from completeness in degree! How feeble the principle and acting of new-born life:—how diminutive and helpless the frame;—and as for the mind, was not its existence for a time scarcely observable, and its developement a work of years?—Can an infant be shown to possess, in the first weeks after birth, any distinct *consciousness* of its being? Has it subsequently any remembrance, I say not, of the moments in which life began, but even of the first months and years which followed? Have we not also read or heard of cases, where natural life was so extremely weak in its beginning, or so sickly and tender in its early progress, as to be quite doubted of at first, and often desponded of after-

wards, yet where intellectual vigour became eminent and bodily vigour not deficient? It is somewhat singular that the biography of a Christian author, from whom probably the first hint was derived by me of the thoughts which are now insisted and enlarged on,* affords an instance of this kind, which I am persuaded ought to serve as an instructive illustration in respect to *spiritual* life, with reference both to our judgment of ourselves, and our treatment of ours. "So destitute was he at his birth of the signs of life, that he was thrown aside as dead. One, however, of the attendants, thinking that she perceived some motion or breath in him, cherished with such assiduous care the almost expiring flame of existence, that it was preserved for the benefit of the world. From his infancy he had an infirm constitution and a thin consumptive habit."† Yet that Doddridge *lived,* and nobly exemplified his favourite motto, "Live *while* you live," what Christian does not rejoice to know and to remember? A still more signal instance, of vast intellectual strength

* "As every man knows he was born into the world, by a consciousness that he now lives and acts here, though it is *impossible* he should remember anything of the *time or circumstances* in which he was first produced into it—so may a Christian be assured that some way or another he was born of the Spirit, if he can trace its genuine fruits and efficacious influences in a renewed heart and life."—*Doddr. Sermons on Regeneration,* s. 8. p. 168.

† Kippis's Life of Doddridge, prefixed to Fam. Exp. p. x.

joined with bodily health and great longevity, all from the same frail, and even hopeless commencement, is found in the life of Sir Isaac Newton. "The helpless infant (at its birth) was of such a diminutive size, and seemed of so perishable a frame, that two women, who were sent to Lady Pakenham's to bring some medicine to strengthen him, did not expect to see him alive at their return."*

With such facts and such analogies before us, may we not fitly ask the scriptural question, with an eye at once to physical, mental, and *spiritual* birth and infancy—"Who hath despised the day of small things?" Shall we not also adopt the cheering words of Doddridge himself, founded on that passage—

> "Lord, if such trophies raised from dust
> Thy sovereign glory be,
> *Here*, in *my* heart, thy power may find
> Materials fit for thee."

This at least is evident, from such cases, and from general considerations also, that the analogy selected by our wise and gracious Lord himself, in those remarkable words, "Ye must be born again," on which also the term regeneration is directly founded, so far from even justifying, in regard to the great spiritual change, expectations either of consciousness as to its commencement, or

* Brewster's Life of Newton, p. 3.

of suddenness as to its maturity, does, in all reason, lead us rather to expectations *directly the reverse.* Would it be reasonable, or would it be treating with reverence the comparison chosen and reiterated by divine wisdom, to conclude, that while the natural birth always presents a new life in utter weakness,—the spiritual birth will usually unfold a new life in confirmed stability and strength? that while in natural infancy the powers of motion, thought, and action, are very long in their developement,—in spiritual infancy they are at once mature? that in the great physical change, the newly-born must be fostered by a daily Providence, cherished by a thousand human succours, nourished, instructed, fed with milk, and then with solid food,—but in the great moral change, nothing analogous to all this is requisite for its maturity? that, moreover, while it is impossible as to natural life that we should remember when it began, and was (as far as we can conceive) equally impossible that we should be then *conscious* of its beginning, the period of spiritual regeneration *must* have been a matter of consciousness when present, and must be so of remembrance when past?

You will see that I all along suppose and imply the occurrence of some partial exceptions to those probable analogies which I have been aiming to exhibit. Such exceptions, both in natural and spi-

ritual physiology, are sometimes found. But in either department it would be alike absurd, usually to expect them.

And it deserves our attentive reflection, that had it been our Saviour's *chief purpose* in the choice of a figure, to preclude unwarranted expectations, no figure could be easily substituted which would be in that view so compendiously instructive. For this, while it expresses, in one word, with the utmost strength, the decisiveness of the spiritual change, contains within itself, in the obvious and partly inseparable circumstances to which I have referred,—but which seem to have been frequently forgotten,—what ought always to repress the fanciful, animate the diligent, and reassure the desponding.

Other scriptural figures, however, and particularly those derived from the phenomena of light and vision, we have found to be more adapted for a diversified and copious *illustration* of the same great subject.

To those, therefore, while endeavouring to impress what has been already urged, I shall still venture once more to allude, and to say—if but some semblance or prelude to the healing beams of the gospel has been yet vouchsafed to you or me, let us not despond of its heavenly origin and its happy increase. If not even so much has been or is at present realized, still let us not despond, but implore in hopeful earnest-

ness, that *now* "the dayspring from on high" may visit us, "to guide our feet into the way of peace." Though we are endangered, and may be ruined, by presumption and a false security, it is still emphatically true, that "we are saved by hope." Yield not, therefore, to the dread, much less to the hopeless conclusion, that it it is now too late, or that your moral disease and insusceptibility are already too great and inveterate. When "the earth was without form, and void; and darkness" (probably of long and dreary permanence) "on the face of the deep,"—when that wreck, perhaps, of a former world in ruins, had rolled on for ages in barrenness and gloom,—then it was that the vivifying moment came; "and God said let there be light; and there was light."

Even so the gloomiest night of sorrow and of conscious ill-desert,—in which, perhaps, outward calamity, inward compunction, bodily pain, mental forebodings and regrets, much unbelief, and many fears, are all conspiring to blacken and agitate the chaos of the soul,—may be that moment of extremity which God hath chosen, when He shall begin effectually to remove its blindness or to chase the shadows; that it may presently behold the "Sun of righteousness" arisen, and thrill under his quickening brightness.

Do not perplex yourself with the query, perhaps impossible, both for others and yourself, to solve,

whether as yet any direct and efficacious beam from that great Source of influence has visited your heart; but with earnestness of scriptural research and of devout supplication, pursue the promised blessing. Expect not either the commencement or progress of spiritual life in mystic, unintelligible impulses, but in being taught of God to apprehend and feel with your rational perceptions and natural emotions, the truth, import, and cogency of those wonderful facts and doctrines so pre-eminent in his word, which it is of unspeakable moment for a sinner spiritually to discern. Confidently hope, that, according to the Redeemer's promise, if you "ask," you shall "receive;" that the Great Comforter and Instructor, the Holy and Eternal Spirit, "shall receive of his, and disclose it unto you."

III.

ON SUSPICIONS THAT FAITH MAY NOT BE GENUINE, INDUCED BY THE FREQUENT OBSERVATION AND PARTIAL EXPERIENCE OF SELF-DELUSIONS.

You sometimes institute this anxious inquiry;—if I do indeed appear to be favoured with a "little faith," with a ray of that light "shining in the heart," which should be powerful to cheer, and guide, and purify, still where is my sure ground of persuasion, amidst those self-delusions, which, even within the pale of Christian fellowship, are too often observed,—and with some correspondent symptoms in myself,—that I possess in reality the "true light," the healing, renovating light, from heaven? Its occasional intermissions or continued feebleness would not so much impair my hope of this, did I not meet with examples, and these of painful frequency, where claims to the possession of it are evidently fal-

lacious. Have I not noticed some, and heard of more, professing to have "the eyes of their understanding enlightened," and actually seeming to fix them with a most joyful intentness on those very truths and hopes to which the gospel invites, who yet in time of temptation have betrayed the nullity of its moral power, and are habitually betraying the extreme defectiveness of this, by not being so upright and true, not so pure and humble, not so charitable, patient, and self-denying, as their creed should in all reason make them? Knowing that such fallacies exist, having ground to suspect that they are numerous, feeling also in myself a proneness to the same disjunction or disproportion between my professed faith and its due effects, and experiencing often such spiritual relapses, such falls from excitement into coldness and unwatchfulness, as seem to mark and brand the instability of the principle, how shall I know that the hoped-for influence, now at best so weak, is in very deed divine, or will not prove, at last, ineffective and illusory?—In reply to such queries, we must admit, with deep concern, the existence of perilous delusions, sometimes total, sometimes partial; and we have shared the disheartening apprehensions which they are fitted to awaken: yet, when you investigate the character of those most palpably ensnared by them, you will, I think, perceive, that such have been willing captives, con-

tent to substitute imagination for faith; and you may at once shun the danger and abate your despondent fear of it, by observing how much less it besets the self-examining, than the sanguine and self-confident. We cannot, indeed, hope to define or apprehend with precision, a state of mind which is, by the very supposition, unstable; nay, the deceptiveness of which is in a great measure cloaked and hidden from the self-deceived; but we shall perhaps best approach it, by conceiving, that in lieu of a belief and contemplation of the gospel facts as realities, there is in such minds a *theory*,—vivid and complete, yet still but a theory—of the same facts as *scenic visions*: for I venture, in this connexion, to use the term theory, not in its philosophic or familiar sense, but in one which its etymology would seem to favour,—the view of a theatric spectacle. The illusion in such instances may be far more perfect and prolonged, than that of the most fascinated devotees of the drama, who probably have not for more than some successive instants believed in, or supposed themselves to believe in, the action and decorations of the scene: still may the differing illusions be mournfully parallel in this, that they lead to nothing practical; that each is a mere luxury, a stimulant or opiate of the fancy, but has no sway over the temper and deportment.

Or perhaps the existence and nature of such cases, that is, of lively and zealous views of the gospel which yet prove morally inefficacious, may be more aptly illustrated by that perception of illusiveness, which is found in some cases to accompany our dreams. The marvellous facts of revealed religion are vividly contemplated and theoretically admired and loved: yet with a sort of occult or under perception, that they may be partially, if not quite, unreal; or at least a sense that the *belief* of them by the party is not firm and real: (which of course *involves* the doubt of their being so:)—easily, therefore, and instinctively, amidst such vague ambiguous views, will fancy select and repose on those aspects and qualities, which may at once excite and soothe, eluding no less instinctively what would claim to control and regulate the heart. It may be objected that this comparison is, in one very important point, ill-suited to our purpose, and the infidel may tell us it is in that point unwittingly faithful: inasmuch, as dreams are not only sometimes suspected or felt in sleep to be unreal, but always at last turn out to be so. Not always, however, (let me reply) the objects which they represent. These are very often *quite* real and substantial.

Let us suppose that only one or two travellers had yet visited the boiling Geysers of the frozen zone, or

the stupendous burning crater of Kirauea.* Ardentio has read their narratives. By some parts of them his imagination is strongly excited. He dreams vividly of those surprising scenes, and his waking reverie is sometimes almost as glowing as his dream. Yet he has a sort of feeling, even while he dreams or muses, that the pictures and the objects are but ideal: and when awake, a prevailing doubt as to the veracity or accuracy of these travellers, and as to the existence, at least in their magnitude or detail, of objects so astonishing. Sophron, on the other hand, is a person less apt, whether waking or sleeping, to form vivid and intense conceptions. His mental vision of these objects is less graphic and splendid than that of Ardentio. He has also his shades of doubt and clouds of suspicion, concerning the narrators and the facts, and yet he maintains a prevailing confidence in the fidelity of the former and the correctness of the latter. It may be objected,—what you call Sophron's real faith in these things, differs but equivocally when it becomes hesitating and clouded, from what you deem a delusive substitute for faith in Ardentio. There is suspicion in both cases. If both were merchants, and any gainful, though arduous enterprise of commerce could be grounded

* In the island of Owyhee, or Hawaii.

on the facts,—if the crystals of sulphur* in the lava of Kirauea were described as ores of silver, or if the "beautiful siliceous incrustations"† on the margin of the Geysers, were said to possess the quality of jewels, would Sophron be more likely than Ardentio to send an agent thither at his cost?—I presume he would be much more so. The doubts of Ardentio secretly prevail even while he is most absorbed and enchanted by the imagined sublimity and splendour of the scenes: those of Sophron chiefly intrude when his mind is dejected and beclouded, prone to question evidence and to magnify objections. It is true that, in his darkest and least sanguine moments, he might very reluctantly hazard anything on the veracity of these accounts; but I conceive he would be far more prepared to do so, in serener hours, than the imaginative Ardentio even amidst his most delightful musings.

Reverting from this imperfect comparison to the states of mind which it was introduced to illustrate, we urge this substantial distinction, that in one case the moral inefficacy exists, while the objects are "vividly contemplated and theoretically admired," that, in short, the suspicion of their not being real, is here combined with a *lively and elated* fancy, miscalled

* Ellis's Hawaii, p. 230. † Hooker's Iceland, i. pp. 142, 151.

faith; while, in the other case, it results from a clouded, sombrous imagination, apprehensive that the objects are not real, or that, if real, they are not *believed,* because discerned so "darkly." Now, if so, the attendant inefficacy (even were it equal for the time) will be obviously of very different character and augury: the one is the inefficacy of what apparent faith there is, at its very *brightest;* the other, that of what real faith there is, at its very *darkest;* the one party may be stationary and unprofitable even amidst the best combination and brightest exhibitions of the fire-works "he has kindled;" the other is certainly not more so (it may be hoped not so much so), amidst the heaviest clouds which consciously obscure and make dubious each glimmering constellation of his sky.

Or to adopt another, yet a nearly related figure, there may be seem as much difference between the view of humble faith, *dim* as it may be, and that of an elated fancy, as between a faint glimpse of the true sun, *through* or *beneath* a cloud, and the bright image of a mock sun or parhelion, *on* a cloud: between the sight of real lakes and palm trees, from a mountain top, caught now and then, and tremblingly, through opening mists and hazy distances, and that of a cloudless *mirage,* the bright but false apparition of those same welcome objects, gazed on in the desert.

Of this kind, we need not hesitate to conclude, has been the religion or faith of heathens: the creed, if it can admit that name, of all *mythologies*. The pantheon of each idolatry can have been little or nothing else than a spectacle of imagination to its dreaming votaries. Accordingly, they might in turn be powerfully soothed or stimulated by its influence, but still by a splendid reverie, not a sacred reality. They might yield themselves to the illusions slightly or profoundly; but only just as far as the *bias* of the heart concurred: they could not therefore be checked in evil or impelled to good, even by what was best in it, except so far as some terrors responding to innate convictions of divine justice, were masked under the forms that fancy had embodied. But in those minds whose self-deception, amidst the light of heavenly truth, we have been seeking to illustrate, the gospel itself seems perverted into something like a sublime mythology, and though its holy scenes must be the very contrast of pagan fable, yet the holiest system, if it be but fervidly imagined, and not in some measure wakefully believed, will have little or no practical and constraining power. It will excite transient feelings, but yet be very inoperative on habitual demeanour.

We know that romance or fictitious tragedy, or a ground-work of historic fact under romantic or tragic embellishment, often produces strong emotions; and

this even when silently read, without any of the added illusions of the scene: yet its real moral influence, in producing a spirit like that which it depicts as admirable, is I suppose exceedingly small. Biography which is authentic, though comparatively unexciting, practically moves a great deal more; and actions that are believed to have been wrought for our own benefit, which move therefore to gratitude as well as imitation, have a still far greater moral power, a power of combined forces, and both effective.

Here let me introduce a thought, which, though rather digressive, should not, as it appears to me, be withholden. It was impressively stated, in a preliminary lecture, by a late eminent Scottish professor of natural philosophy, that the actual physical wonders of creation far transcend the boldest and most hyperbolical imaginings of poetic minds; "that the reason of Newton and Galileo took a sublimer flight than the fancy of Milton and Ariosto."* That this is quite true, I need only refer you to a few astronomical facts glanced at in subsequent pages of this volume, in order to evince. But it is not less true, and it is quite analogous, that by the moral wonders of Redemption, the loftiest flights of imagination are still more exceeded.

* Manuscript Notes of Playfair's Natural Philosophy Lectures.

Those instances of the moral sublime, the pathetic, the heroic, which it is the very province and sphere of poetic invention (of romance and tragedy) to model or depict, are really and infinitely surpassed, by the simply narrated facts of Christ's humiliation, labours, and self-sacrifice. There is indeed, elsewhere, a tinsel of the false sublime, derived from worldly gauds and decoration, from a complexity of device and a strong infusion of earthly feeling, which make the fictions much more attractive to our pride, curiosity, and earthly affections: but in the *true* sublime, what can approach the facts of the gospel —what specimen of self-abdicating grandeur, of unostentatious fortitude, of romantic and disinterested tenderness, can be once *named* with the "unvarnished tale" of the unlearned evangelists?

This strikes me as one strong presumptive proof, that their tale is true; that the history of redemption is authentic. And not merely because it were passing strange, if such writers as those of the four gospels should in their homely fictions have left all poets and inventors far behind, but also, because if their history were false, it would follow that human nature had in other instances exhibited or conceived acts of moral heroism, of which there is no *known* archetype or anticipation (so to speak) in the divine. The reputed volitions and acts of creatures, and of very imperfect and depraved creatures,—such as the

patriotism of Curtius, the friendship of Pylades or Terentius,* the conjugal devotion of Eleanora,—would have in them a generous self-sacrificing quality, not apparent in any revealed act, nor I think conceivable by us in any unrevealed act of the Creator. My argument does not found itself on the *truth* of these or other such histories of self-devotement. Were they all fictions or exaggerations, as some of them probably are, still the moral idea developed in them, and with incomparably more grandeur in the story of our redemption by Christ Jesus, would be a human idea of virtue to which nothing analogous would be known to exist, or known even to be possible, in the acts or counsels of the Perfect Being. It may, I hope, without irreverence, be added, that not even the idea of mere munificence can be realized from the ordinary gifts of God (were they ever so immensely enlarged), in the same sense as when a man bestows "all his *goods* to feed the poor," or to "redeem his brother;" because the amplest gifts of God's providence can in no wise straiten or impoverish the creative Giver.

If redemption by a Divine Saviour were not a truth, (if scripture were only to be taken in the sense of the "rationalists,") then although power and wisdom would be divinely exemplified in creation, and amazing *forbearance* in the treatment of sinful

* See this and some similar instances in Valerius Maximus. Exam. Mem. lib. iv. c. 7.

and ungrateful man, we should possess, for some other human excellencies, no express Divine Exemplar nor even parallel. It could not be intelligibly enjoined by an apostle who should urge a self-denying, self-sacrificing kindness,—" Let this mind be in you which" is also in the Deity.—For such a mind or act in Deity, would be on that supposition unascertained. It is then alone discovered, when we discover and recognise in scripture, the fact, that " the Word became incarnate and tabernacled among us."* Its divine exemplification (and as far as we can imagine, its only possible exemplification) to man, is through the mysteriously constituted person of Christ; who, " though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor," and " being in the form of God," took on him, by some unknown occultation of uncreated glory, " the form of a servant."

Generosity and heroic love were then displayed to the universe by a veritably peerless and godlike model, when " the Lord of Life, unable of Himself to die, *contrived* to do it." †

He, therefore, who receives as true the record of our Lord's *exinanition*‡ and sacrifice, must find all other facts and ideas of moral elevation, self-devotement, romantic virtue among men, far beneath that divine idea and exhibition of them. And this

* John i. 14. See Dr. J. P. Smith, Scrip. Test. ii. 396. and iii. 69.

† Herbert—Prayer before Sermon. ‡ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσε.

unquestionably, is as it ought to be. He, on the contrary, who regards that view of it as an exaggerated and fabulous misstatement of a simple martyrdom, ought, I think, to admit, not only that men have conceived an act more sublime than their Creator is known to have wrought, but, also, that in all virtuous suffering, active and passive, they in reality have achieved and endured what Deity cannot in any sense conceivably achieve or endure. For except in an assumed and passible nature, we cannot conceive of Deity as in any sense exercising those virtues or perfections, from which we may directly learn how to *suffer*, to *renounce*, to *obey*, "to spend and to be spent."

The act of the self-torturing Mucius, and the temper of the condemned Socrates, seemed to be, according to the loftiest and most philosophic notion of the Divine nature, not possible with God; but when the "Son of Man,"—"God with us,"—"came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom," then was it seen that the transcendant prototype of *suffering* virtue had ever existed in the purpose, and was now at length developed in the human acts and human endurance of Him who "was with God and was God:" that the original "patterns" or "models"* of these moral

* τυπος, Heb. viii. 5. et Act. vii. 44.

glories (of which human examples had presented some faint and distorted outlines or broken and imperfect sketches*) were "in the heavens" alone.

This appears to me quite worthy of being weighed, as a presumption for the truth of the most wonderful and affecting of all records, the incarnation and suffering of the Son of God. Such, however, was not my direct purpose in adducing it: but to point out the probability that this great recorded fact, which ineffably surpasses and eclipses all romance, this "most touching or pathetic of all doctrines,"† may be mentally gazed upon *as if* romance, and attract some minds under that aspect only. I do not now at all contemplate the case of its being rejected or *dis*believed, but that of its being conceived as a picture, and not *held* and "held fast" as a fact. Hard it may be to discover and define the specific difference between a real yet doubting faith, and this sort of unreal, *imaginative semblance* of faith; but that such a difference exists is pretty certain; and moreover, that in very many, perhaps in all pious and believing minds, a portion of this latter, fluctuating with inward states and outward circumstances, generally mingles.

Hence we may no doubt likewise discern a peculiar danger, and infer an important warning, for the

* ὑποδείγματα, Heb. ix. 23. † De Stael.

whole class of the excitable and sanguine. This class is to be found in every station of society; it may be doubted whether more among its higher or inferior ranks: there is, besides, in every form of Christian worship and instruction some excitement provided for it; most amply, doubtless, in the attractive ceremonials of the Romish church; but not scantily in the popular preaching and devotional poetry of other communities. Let me not be supposed to entertain an opinion that the exercise of imagination in religion is censurable or not beneficial: on the contrary, when fitly regulated, the Christian graces are all exceedingly enlivened by its aid. Although, in the supposed instance of Ardentio, a lively and warm imagination has been represented as not accompanied by steadfast and practical belief, (a case, it is feared, not uncommon,) it does not at all follow that these qualities cannot be or are not frequently conjoined. So far from it, their happy combination, as the peculiar "gift of God," has been the great means to endow and to uphold the most zealous, eminent, successful labourers in "the work of Christ." But I apprehend that in those of whatever communion, who strangely combine with zeal for gospel-doctrines, and fervour of attachment to them, an evil temper and an irregular or unprofitable conduct, imagination is not *auxiliary* to faith, but is placed in the *stead* of

it; that their creed, if they will have it so called, is rather, therefore, that dreaming *theory*, that spectacle or reverie of the gospel which we have supposed, than belief of the gospel as a substantial system of truths and facts. Imagination may be employed either with an aim to render the truth or reality more near and vivid, and practically applicable as such,—or to obtain near and vivid pictures, without caring much about the realities and their uses. The same reflecting telescope may be employed by different observers with dissimilar purposes. One class may look eagerly at the image of our moon, with her supposed oceans and volcanoes, or of the planets and *their* moons, as an exciting entertainment;—the other class may be earnestly observing a lunar eclipse, or the immersion of a satellite, as objects of serious and practical science.

Neither class is looking at those celestial bodies *themselves*, but at their small and imperfect *images* thrown upon the speculum; the former, however, contemplate them rather as pictures than as actual orbs;* the latter apply their view of these orbs to the most important uses: to regulate, for example,

* The writer once knew a person of some education, of strong sense in worldly affairs, and of a generous temper, who, with unbelief in religion, professed his incredulity as to the magnitude and distance of the heavenly bodies; persisting to consider them as only lamps of fire, placed for our benefit and for ornament in the nearer sky.

a perilous navigation of untraversed seas. Now, unless the *mental* telescope,—whether with or without a bright imagination for its speculum—be *thus* employed when contemplating "things revealed," in seeking actual aid and guidance and government for our great voyage, so as to secure a heaven-ward course "and heaven the haven," it can with no more propriety be said that real faith is exercised, than that real science is prosecuted by the fruitless though possibly rapturous admirer of shadows and splendours on the moon's disk.

If these distinctions, so far as very inadequate comparisons can explain them, be found intelligible and just, they should obviate that suspicion concerning the power and truth of Christianity, which may arise from witnessing the inconsistencies and falls of some zealous professors; and while they warn us against the snare which it has been thus attempted to disclose, they should arm us also against discouragement, although our own view of the gospel may rarely or never glow with those brilliant hues which a warm imagination enkindles. Let us be consoled, for their absence or their fading, by the strong conviction—that a ray of faith is worth a rainbow of fancy.

The rainbow, however brilliant and complete, vanishes as the tempest thickens. The vivid theory or spectacle of the gospel, may vanish like it in the

gloom of a sick chamber, or of a troubled and debilitated mind: but the ray pierces through the densest storms; though darkened and obstructed to the uttermost, it is still the visible consequence and pledge of direct or reflected sunlight: and thus a "little faith," obscured and trembling, yet earnest and real, in the great facts and doctrines of salvation, may actuate and sustain the soul to endure and to obey, even while its powers are prostrate; while "the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint." He that, in doing or in suffering, walketh by *this* light, "he is *in* the light;" and although it be but a feeble glimmering "in a dark place," how far more safe and happy is his lot than that of those who "walk in the light of their own fire," and, if God's mercy prevent not, will "lie down in sorrow."

It has been already intimated that in characters which we trust vitally differ, by the possession of principles really heaven-taught, from such unhappy self-deceivers, (and very probably in your own,) fancy may yet in too predominant a measure unconsciously coalesce and mingle with belief; for the tendencies of nature are not extinct in minds where grace is infused. Some, concerning whom we may justly hope, that they are indeed believers, but whose warm attachment to gospel truth is not accompanied by so "*much* fruit," or so destructive of faults and infirmities, as one might reasonably

expect, betray by these marks the undue ascendency of imagination and the torpor or scantiness of faith. The eye of fancy is awake, but that of the believing heart is too often closed or dim. The great constraining facts are not, *as* facts, brought much and impressively into contact with the spirit, and the visionary view of them which is most frequent, has little influence on its practical resolves.

Thus also, I conceive, we may somewhat elucidate the sources of that spiritual distress and weakness which attend the *fluctuations* of feeling incident to many imaginative minds. We shall suppose such a mind endued with principles, more or less feeble, of divine and vital faith. Now, while imagination is vigorous and elated, it actively concurs with these; so actively and powerfully, that its host of splendid and swift auxiliaries may be too often trusted and gloried in, as if they were the best and tried forces of the soul. Those few plain and steadfast principles, given and strengthened from above, which must form the reserve and real force in conflict, seem lost in that "aëry crowd," "by thousands trooping," or submit to be led by the glittering advances of those whom they ought to govern. But at length, and perhaps suddenly, there ensues a dark reverse. Some disease within, or some perplexities without, have "troubled the host." The array and chivalry of imagination are

put to flight by the gloom, and from being vain-glorious auxiliaries, they turn at once to do the work of foes. For they now inspire confusion and dismay, proclaiming that all is lost; persuading the mind that its firmest principles are wholly sunk, or were but ideal like themselves. True, the little band from heaven secretly stand fast and survive,—like champions of whom we have read, that maintained in darkness the bridge or the defile,—but now in sad desertion, struggling hard and often foiled; smarting for the hollowness of those unsteady succours on which they had too much relied and calculated.

It is thus, I apprehend, that you may in a great measure account for those changes and declensions which discourage and afflict you. Not that I would seem to forget or limit the sovereignty or importance of direct spiritual influence both in its gifts and its withdrawments; but we are not authorized to overlook instrumental causes where they exist; and it is doubtless, often if not always, the method of divine discipline to make our idiosyncrasy instrumental to our spiritual vicissitudes. If then we are by temperament peculiarly liable to such reverses, we must learn to be especially prepared for them. In seasons when imagination promptly and perhaps ardently lends herself to hope, we must seek "wisdom from above," to use and esti-

mate her aids with caution; as in their very nature temporary and variable, never therefore to be leant and rested on:—at periods, on the contrary, when she surrenders herself most to fear, we must supplicate and employ a heavenly strength to stem the mischiefs and alarms of her confused discomfiture, and "stand in the evil day."

On the whole view of this subject, it is not to be inferred from the presence or the absence, the variation or great instability, of some emotions and mental excitements, that there dwells in the heart no real or abiding principle of faith. We ought indeed to call to mind, with humility and self-diffidence in the brightest hours, as we shall with sadness in the darkest, that very much of what scintillates and glitters is not solid and enduring. By such experience we are to be "humbled and proved," warned and disciplined, but we are not warranted to conclude from it, the non-existence of that which though less superficially bright and abundant, has a sterling worth and an imperishable quality. There may, it is true, be fragments raised from a mine which are of quite delusive promise; which abound in shining spar or metallic spangles, yet are found to yield not a granule of the precious metals: but does therefore the presence of those several substances *disprove* that of precious

metal, or is it even a presumption against this? Far otherwise. On the contrary, those substances usually accompany, and, therefore, in some sort indicate, that which is sought.

So the presence of some romantic aspiring for what is perfect and unearthly, and a cast of mind in religion too imaginative and poetic, may variously alloy the Christian character, causing it deceptively to promise or display far more than the amount of its practical and real worth; yet may it noway disprove the existence of true piety, but rather afford some hopeful indication that this genuine principle is not altogether wanting.

We have seen, in the rich mines of Cornwall, masses of ore first roughly broken, then pulverized by hammers, then washed repeatedly, in order to detach the metal from the earths, then heated to remove the glittering mundic combined with it, which becomes the most deadly of mineral poisons; and lastly, we have watched the pure residue, small in comparative amount, but sterling in quality, smelted and "delivered into the mould."

In their proportions of foreign matter, those first crude fragments greatly differed. Sometimes but a few grains of pure metal can be severed. And this may hitherto be but too just and humbling an emblem of your Christianity and mine. Much

more literally may we have to say, than devout Herbert wrote—

——— "The good extract of my heart
Comes to about the many hundredth part."

Yet let us not despond; rather, in the phrase of miners, let us "adventure." We adventure on no earthly promise, but on His word who hath said, "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom,—for the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver.—She is more precious than rubies,"*—"Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they *shall* be filled."—By a deeper solicitude and diligence in prayer and scriptural meditation, let us labour fervently for a purer, richer vein (so to speak) of Christian attainment; trusting in Him, who "sitteth as a Refiner and Purifier" still;—assured, that as "the fining-pot is for silver and the furnace for gold," so, "the Lord trieth the hearts;" trieth them by various agents and expedients, "as gold is tried;" "refineth them as silver is refined;"† that He will but "purge in the furnace the dross and remove all the alloy,"‡ so that we shall come forth "as silver seven times purified." His "Word," his Providence, his Spirit, are "as a fire," "as a hammer that breaketh the rock," and as the clean-

* Prov. iii. 13, 15. † Zech. xiii. 9.
‡ Isai i. 25. Lowth's translation.

sing stream. Much that is sparkling will be swept away and vanish, much that is baneful will be dissipated in the smoke of the furnace; but some pure and solid particles will, I trust, remain: in his hand they cannot be lost;—and thus "the trial of your faith, (far more precious than of gold that perisheth,) though it be tried with fire," shall be to his "praise, and honour, and glory," in the final day.

We should beware of something like presumption under the garb of humility: taking heed lest suspicion and caution do the work of rashness, when we hesitate or scruple to ascribe to special grace, any "good thing" which is found in us towards the "Lord God of Israel,"—any measures of spiritual discernment, sincere attention, and awakened feeling. At the same time, let us honestly pray, and humbly watch, against our own spirit and "the spirit of the world," and for an accession of "the Spirit which is of God:"*—who gives neither that "of fear," nor of illusion, nor of presumption, but "of love, and of power, and of a sound mind."

He can effectually teach and animate us to forget "the things which are behind," in such a sense and manner as they ought to be forgotten,

* 1 Cor. ii. 12.

and to press "along the mark for the prize of his high calling in Christ Jesus;" rejoicing in Him who is the "Purifier" as well as Redeemer of his people, and needing in earth or heaven no other confidence.

IV.

ON FEARS THAT FAITH OR CONVERSION IS NOT GENUINE, ARISING FROM A NICE ANALYSIS OR SCRUTINY OF MOTIVES.

THERE is implied, in the apprehensions which disquiet you, what should in itself be matter of preliminary thankfulness and hope;—namely, that you do not reject revealed truth, but in some sense revere and receive it; that you deeply feel at times its value and importance; that you can trace many desires and purposes, some acts and habits, to its impulse as their motive; or at least, as one motive which has assuredly combined with others to make the impulse adequate; so that had it been wanting, the purposes and acts would not have been produced. Such degrees of regard to Christianity, and such consequences arising from them, you will not disclaim. I advert to them not as in themselves at all sufficient to preclude your present

fear, but as admissions on which some thoughts may be founded, tending both to evince to you that this fear is not necessarily just, and to correct those errors of the heart by the perception of which it is excited. When you trace and investigate, or discover unawares, the secret springs of conduct, you are frequently distressed by the suspicion that your kind of faith may prove at last to have been not *saving* faith; your sort of conversion not the real. I suppose the sources of this fear to be in your case chiefly the following. First, your distinct knowledge of the character or import of Christ's gospel, as a free and complete salvation for the lost, has clearly and perfectly informed you, that the truly religious or Christian kind of well-doing, is that which is prompted by the principle of love to God; either under the modification of grateful filial love to Him as our infinite Benefactor, or that of reverent and imitative filial love to Him as the infinite Author and Exemplar of perfection. You are well aware that the Divine Founder of our faith, and the apostles whom he inspired, touch the true springs of devout and heavenly obedience, when they say, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect;" "As He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy;" and also, "Ye are bought with a price, therefore, glorify God;" "I beseech you by the *mercies* of God, that

ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable;" "Be ye followers of God as dear children;" and that this strong declaration, "Though I bestow all my goods in alms, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing,"—must apply to want of love to God and a desire to please Him, as well as of love to man. You distinctly know that love to God is the first and great command, binding even originally on account of our creation and preservation, and all the benefits of this life, but unspeakably the more on account of the inestimable and constraining mercy of redemption. But you are painfully apprized by self-inspection, how often this pure motive of devout and grateful love, or reverential imitative love, as immediately prompting your obedience, is unapparent. Do not, however, overlook what appears to be a just and important distinction. We are not to infer that this motive is *non-existent* whenever it is *unapparent* or *unfelt:* that there is no principle acting, because there may be no emotion or sentiment awake. It were indeed most happy to have this love always consciously actuating and impelling the mind as an emotion; but it would be quite wrong to conclude that such is not the governing and primary impulse to a course of conduct, because it may not be sensibly so in very many details of that course.

Let us suppose that from gratitude and esteem to a distant or disabled friend, you undertook to manage his farm or superintend his merchandise. If in the daily variety of such transactions, those feelings or even immediate motives were often absent from your mind,—so that sometimes no direct impulse should remain except this general impression, (resulting from the judgment and feeling of times past,) that what you were now doing was *right*, and must be done,—could it thence be argued that esteem and gratitude had ceased to be the actual principle and motive of your conduct? Is it not rather certain that these thoughts and sentiments might be frequently excluded or blunted for the time, only by those very exertions and fatigues which their own strength in your mind originally prompted? The great question is—Are you doing those things by which you will serve your friend, and doing them diligently? Would this be the case if you had no love to him?

I grant that where other motives may concur, such as the hope either of some tangible or ideal reward, the prospect of gain or commendation, there is great reason to "examine and prove our own-selves;" and the apprehension that such *preponderate* is probably the chief origin of your fear. For you, perhaps, hardly question the existence of some occasional love, both in the form of veneration and gratitude to God, as a motive of your obedience:

but you feel more sensibly the strength of others, and are consciously certain that this one never subsists and acts with unmixed purity, rarely if ever with a clear undisputed predominance.

You own not that happy, unquestionable character—" singleness of heart as unto Christ;" but perpetually detect the movement of those proud and pharisaic, or those self-seeking and mercenary tempers, which the light and spirit of the gospel so powerfully reprove and explode. For these we ought doubtless to be ever humbled, and to exert against them a far more strenuous vigilance; but, while unallowed and combated, while prayed and watched against, with a true desire for the cultivation and prevalence of those motives which are highest and most pure, their existence can afford no reason for despondency. And as to the anxious question of their present or occasional predominance, it ought not to be forgotten, that these unchristian and inferior motives, which you are concerned to eradicate, are not foreign and infused principles, but innate and worldly feelings, in their very nature sensitive and obtrusive: whereas, the deep and heaven-born sentiment which you would have to reign in your heart and actuate your life, is of a spiritual, retired, and tranquil kind, and were its gentle though constraining power greater than you can feel or believe it actually to

be, its force might still remain frequently less apparent, its actings less perceptible, than those of other impulses which might combine with it.—A vessel heavily and richly freighted is ascending a navigable river. Each passenger remarks the variable gusts that swell her sails, the light breezes which flutter in her pennons, the towing-ropes which are attached and acting from the shore; yet without the tide, that unperceived and quiet, yet powerful and equable *motive,* which silently uplifts and as silently bears her on,—not all these other forces would either carry her keel over the shallows, or bring her weight steadily and effectively up the stream.*

* This comparison, like many others, is applicable only in the single point for which it is adduced. It is an analogical instance in physics of what we think is true in morals,—that the steadiest, strongest, and most elevating impulse is not always the most discernible and obvious. To press the comparison at other points were to misapply and to pervert it. It may be a matter of no moment at all by what impulses the ship is moved; though the pilot, it is probable, would prefer a tide which of itself were strong enough, even to the fairest breeze that might shift or die away during her progress; and much more to any artificial force. Still the mere progress, and not the *kind* of impulse, is his great concern.

But if, either by the misuse of a figure, or of the statements with which it is connected, we should be at all the less solicitous that motives purely evangelical may dominantly and more consciously impel and govern our course of Christian conduct, this would be abusing considerations which have been suggested with a view to abate discouraging anxiety, for the purpose of fostering an unhappy indifference. Reference has been made in the preface to the possibility of such perversions. May both writer and readers be preserved from them.

But besides those movements of selfishness and pride, those hidden covetings of praise or estimation, those wishes of personal distinction and influence, or that secret sentiment of vain *self*-complacence,* which you are justly anxious to subdue, there is a disposition, more equivocal and obscure, yet not undiscernible from *within*, to perform duties chiefly with a desire to strengthen the "evidences" of our conversion; to confirm or revive, by multiplying the fruits of faith, the hope that faith *is* genuine and such as will "accompany salvation." Now this, if really adopted as a *primary* motive (although half-latent to the anxious mind which instinctively acts on it), is not scriptural or commendable.

We ought to be primarily and supremely influenced by a grateful adoring desire, to please Him who hath "first loved us," and who so "abundantly pardoneth," as to acquire each day and hour new titles to our love:—not by a purpose or solicitude to prove to ourselves the fact that we

* Fenelon depicts this "modest pride," in phrases which would suffer by translation.—"Il se mire avec complaisance dans son desintéressement, comme une belle femme dans son miroir: il s'attendrit sur soi-même, en se voyant plus sincère et plus desintéressé que le reste des hommes: l'illusion qu'il répand sur les autres rejaillit sur lui; il ne se donne aux autres que pour ce qu'il croit être, c'est-à-dire pour desintéressé; et voilà ce qui le flatte le plus."—Œuvr. Spirit. i. 139.

do thus desire to please Him. Besides which, such a motive, when detected or recognised by us as the governing impulse, at once frustrates its own aim.

And yet, not the less, is it fit and requisite to examine, retrospectively, what have been the fruits of faith and love, as the proper and indispensable marks of the genuineness of those graces: which, let it be observed, is quite a different thing from making it our direct aim, prospectively, to perform good works in order to acquire such marks, and because they will be needful to our comfort. You would not therefore be warranted in imagining, that while you feel it a duty, and sometimes a consolation, to examine past obedience as an evidence of faith, this at all implies that such obedience was designed and fulfilled *for the sake* of, or with a view to its constructing, such evidence.

The "prodigal son," welcomed with an unexpected and overpowering effusion of paternal kindness, was bound unreservedly to trust in that cordial reconcilement and that free forgiveness: and then, on account of such exceeding kindness, as well as of his parent's general worth, to love him more abundantly, and in all things obey him from the dictate of love, with a heartfelt and disinterested promptitude: it would also be very important to his real comfort to be satisfied of this, by a

frequent review both of his habitual conduct and the spirit of that conduct;—to ascertain or find proof that he was no longer in his heart an alien or an ingrate. But it would be wrong that he should entertain in his purposes or acts of filial duty, any direct or primary view to this proof; that he should be aiming to obey with promptitude or exactness, just *for the sake* of obtaining such an argument and such a satisfaction.

Indeed, it is obvious, as was before remarked, that if such were the governing and conscious motive, it must necessarily defeat *itself;* it would preclude the very evidence which it laboured to create: showing that the obedience was not properly filial, not, in so far, the result of love, but of an anxiety to construct proofs of love, which, if they were all, would at last be counterfeit intimations of a love that was really wanting.

Yet, not the less, would it behove this repenting and accepted son to *review* his tempers, words, and acts, and inquire if they had been prevailingly such as filial love should prompt, in order to be assured that he has truly loved his generous and indulgent father, and to enjoy, as far as it extends, the legitimate comfort of that persuasion. It would not be safe that he should omit this self-review, except at seasons when the practical impulses and recent results of his affection and gra-

titude have been so strong and indubitable as to evince themselves at once, and thus to supersede it. When they have been recently otherwise, when the marks of filial attachment have been feeble and dubious, when there have been wanderings of unduteous disaffection, then is the *humbling* retrospect painfully needed. Then must it awaken him to muse intently on all the motives of devoted love, to recall his previous demerits, his father's sacrifices and gifts and relentings, his own subsequent unthankfulness: to move, therefore, the distressing question, whether, while met by all the tenderness of that reconciled parent, he has yet been truly, on his own part, a reconciled child; to admire the long-enduring kindness which has not cast him off for his coldness and ingratitude, but still waits to take him to its warm embrace:—till, while thus musing, the mingled sparks of shame and love, astonishment and contrition, be struck within his alienated heart, and his spirit be quite melted into the flow and channel of loving dutifulness anew.

Meanwhile, I am not aware that he would then be censurable, or that the filial genuineness of his affection and obedience, in these best and happiest moments, would be vitiated or alloyed, if he were gratified and animated by the secondary and concurring thought that his present temper and acts, might be afterwards reviewed with comfort, as a

"testimony of conscience," as indications of grateful and unfeigned attachment,—whereas a differing course would assuredly bring upon him, as it had already often brought, painful self-reproach, and just self-suspicion.

You will see how this representation applies, in a far higher and more affecting sense, to the relation of a repenting offender towards his "Father who is in heaven." In such a mind, not only will the spirit of pride and legality, the delusions of self-sufficiency, and the least indulgence of hopes built on merit, be resisted and condemned, but moreover that deeper subtlety which has last been noticed, of performing duties *for the sake* of earning or purchasing supplies of evidence and comfort, will, whenever it *really* betrays itself, be repressed and disallowed. Yet not the less will there be cherished a habit of self-scrutiny; a retrospect which at times will yield some measure of blameless comfort and encouragement, but can never be allowed to foster pride: which also must ever give cause for new and often deep contrition, but certainly never should induce despair. Let this examination, also, whether of past or present motives, be faithful and impartial, but not scrupulous and adverse. Aim at the strict yet candid fidelity of a judge, not the jealous ingenuity and harsh, unfair constructions of a hostile advocate.

It is not, I apprehend, possible in fact, nor requisite as duty, that with all our past experience of those diverse and just effects which conduct has produced on feeling, we should entirely exclude or suppress an *indirect* and *secondary* regard, even prospectively, to the accession of evidences and comforts, which obedience will procure, and to that want of these which must ensue from transgression or remissness; but it would be an unjustifiable self-tormenting refinement hence to conclude, that evidences and comforts are our *primary* and *mercenary* aim.

Let us pray more and watch more for the simplicity and energy of filial love, that it may attain a more *decisive and conscious mastery* in the heart; but not be dejected meanwhile by the existence and concurrence of other motives. Some of these are legitimate, in their due *place* and *order*. Others are to be checked and extirpated by diligence, but not by despair. The husbandman will never destroy the weeds by hopelessly imagining that there is no wheat in the blade.

Perhaps, also, to one possessing your mental habits, this advice of Fenelon may be not always inappropriate:—"He who" (in common life) "would at every instant convince himself that he was acting from the dictate of reason, and not of passion or inclination, would lose the time of action, would pass

his life in anatomizing his heart, and yet never ascertain that which he sought: for he could never fully assure himself that inclination, disguised under some specious pretext, did not cause him to do that which might seem to be dictated by pure reason. In this obscurity God places us, even as to the motives of ordinary life. How much more inevitable is it to fall short of clearness and certainty, when we inquire into the most hidden operations of grace, in the darkness of faith, and in reference to what is spiritual? This restless and determined research after an impossible certainty, is a movement of nature, not of grace. It is strengthened by the plausible plea of 'holy fear,' of 'watching,' of guarding against illusion. But evangelical vigilance ought not to be carried to such a point as to destroy the peace of the heart, or to demand a clear view of those obscure operations which it has pleased God to veil."*

* Œuv. Spir., iii. 425, abridged.

V.

ON THE PAINFUL DOUBTS EXCITED BY THE PREVALENCE OF EVIL AND SUFFERING IN THE WORLD.

You encounter, in the daily walks of life, unnumbered moral mysteries; and can subscribe, perhaps, to the pointed remark of Mr. Cecil,—"A reflecting Christian sees more to excite his astonishment, and to exercise his faith, in the state of things between Temple Bar and St. Paul's, than in what he reads from Genesis to Revelation;"—a fact, which, while it strikingly exposes the folly of rejecting, on account of difficulties, the light of scripture, shows also how much we need that light amidst the painful phenomena of our earthly condition. You are so constituted as to have a quick perception and susceptibility of these: and while minds not discursive, not prompt in associations, engrossed by one object, or observing few, see and

hear and read of the same occurrences without inference or questioning, you find this, at many periods, quite impossible. You are tempted at once to envy and contemn that apathy or dulness which travels on between the hedgerows of habit, and sees an insect long struggling in the fangs of its enemy, as it sees a blossom fall, or a chrysalis disengage itself; while to your own mind the wide-spread influence and reign of evil are suggested afresh at the minutest point of its display. Each fraction and each aspect of it is a new proposal of the one distressing mystery; and, as that which is near and visible strikes us with peculiar force, it may be that to look on a toiling animal starved and lacerated by its barbarous master, or an unconscious infant cradled in the horrors of vice and destitution, has affected you more than the earthquake at Aleppo, or the cells and screws of inquisitors, or the persecutions in Japan.

You want a general antidote for the sceptical and perturbing thoughts, which you know to be widely at variance with revealed truth, but which observation and books and converse too strongly re-awaken; tempting the dark suspicion that creation is, at certain points, neglected by its Author, or consigned to the operation of laws in which evil must profusely and interminably mingle. It is true, as will be afterwards shown, that nothing short of re-

velation, in its last and full completeness, is our "rock" and citadel, our "strong tower" of defence, against such invading suggestions: but there are fundamental truths, which even natural reason cannot discard, and which revelation amply discloses, that must form the very basis of our standing-place for resistance and repose. First, in a universe which is immense, having an Author and Preserver who is *infinite*, what can we, his workmanship, rationally expect to know, except what He teaches or permits? Secondly, by an *omnipotent* agent, with a boundless extent and duration in his works, what may we not expect to see vindicated, rectified, or compensated? These are commonplaces of theology; but they are habitually uttered and received, I suspect, with a very slight and contracted amount of *meaning*. A part of their very purport, indeed, if I may hazard the paradox, is to state how imperfectly they can be themselves understood, while they would express the inability of all creatures, even the most exalted, to comprehend the divine greatness.

One might imagine, on the first view of this subject, that the lowest order of rational beings would be most sensible of that inability. But analogy and experience correct such an opinion, and lead us to conclude that higher beings have a far more extended and satisfying apprehension of

the infinitude and omnipotence of Deity, and a proportionate sense of their own limitation and weakness, which are correlative to these. The marmot of the Alps, or the lizard basking in the crevice of a rock, must have much narrower views of extension and altitude than the chamois, giraffe, or ostrich. A traveller in the defiles of the loftiest mountains sees nothing but their base, nor can he perceive their magnitude and his diminutive power to scale them, till he laboriously reach some neighbouring elevation. If it be thus in reference to objects which, in comparison with the distances of the nearest worlds, are but as atoms, then consider what a point of view and capacity of vision would be needed, in order to gain a like impression of the scale of some other works of God. What actual impression have we of the vastness of a *planet?* If we could so approach it, that although still distant, it should conceal very many of the heavenly bodies, itself half fill the celestial hemisphere, and present to us the amazing prospect of a mighty moving world, with its bright rivers and blue oceans, its sun-crowned mountains and dark forests,—how different would be our measurement of our own littleness, of the immensity of that universe in which this huge globe was seen lately but as a petty star, and of the infinitude of Him who governs it!

Thus beings of larger capacities have, I doubt

not, a much sublimer and stronger impression (even apart from any sensible discoveries of his personal glory) concerning the natural attributes of their Creator. It is probable that they also possess the power of immensely diversifying and endlessly revivifying this impression, by new and widely different aspects of the divine works. With unlimited means of locomotion, with a perfect faculty and reach of telescopic vision and microscopic in spection, how inconceivably may these be varied!

We, meantime, in the present state, are so far from holding a station of "vantage," that we occupy the lowest point of developed reason, a reason also blunted and enervated by moral degradation. The wonder is, that man, thus situated, should so arduously investigate and should have learned so much; not, surely, that perplexing doubts and narrow conceptions should still remain "the lot of his inheritance." When it shall please God to emancipate him into intellectual eminence and moral perfection, how much more widely will he expatiate; how much more experimentally confide; with what new reverence estimate the divine power and grandeur! But it is a part of duty and happiness,—in order to combat doubt and confirm adoring reliance,—that we should labour for a broader, deeper view of these attributes even here.

We fancy that we understand the proposition—God is *infinite*; and that from *this* truth we infer his

unsearchableness. But do we not in reality rather infer it, only from the slight and vague notion that God is *very great;* an idea not merely below the incomprehensible truth, but which does not at all suffice for impression? The opinion has been intimated by a distinguished living writer, that those conceptions which most human worshippers form of the Deity, do not at all equal the real attributes of some created natures.* I believe that opinion to be indubitably well-grounded, at least in the following sense,—that if such conceptions as we may reasonably form of an exalted creature be studiously analysed, they will then become much more impressive than is our habitual thought of God, while that thought remains undeveloped.

Complex totals, or comprehensive terms for great objects, (at least as far as I am conscious to the mode of their reception and use,) seem little more than substituted *names;* mere symbols for the unknown. As in algebra one letter may stand for some vast quantity, so the syllables of the word *infinite,* or the ciphers or words which accurately state an immense number or measure, are rather a sign *instead* of the idea, than any effective expression of it. Thus when the painful statement is made, that there are five hundred millions of idolaters

* In a passage,—not, I think, from his published works,—inserted in a "selection" entitled "The Rose of Four Seasons."—(Hamilton, 1832.)

and Mahometans in the bondage of error, this total is too great for our minds at once to apprehend. Till it be some way developed, it conveys nothing expanded or distinct, but rather one vague apprehension of a vast whole. It is little more than the algebraic letter which denotes an unknown quantity. It stands for a multitude, I might rather say a *mass*, indefinitely and obscurely great. We may be the more sensible of this if we attempt some method for its developement, however imperfect.

Imagine that the "angel" whom John beheld in vision "flying through mid-heaven," having "the everlasting gospel to proclaim," were charged to announce the "glad tidings" to each individual of those contemporary millions personally and apart; that he should devote to this office unremittingly the moments of each hour, and should use but a *single minute* in declaring to each wondering listener, severally, that sacred message. Would the mere thought or utterance of the total (five hundred millions of mankind) suggest anything like *this* fact, or at all prepare you for it,—that *ninety years* would scarcely suffice for fulfilling a *tenth part* of that swift, unwearied task?—that in order to its completion, the lives of that race must be extended as in the world before the flood, and even then a period of nine whole centuries be occupied,

without an instant's intermission, in uttering those compendious errands of God's good-will to man?*

Such totals, therefore, although exceedingly limited in comparison with many others, we cannot, *as* totals, so far as I may judge from the incapacity of my own mind, intelligently contemplate. How much more then, when we say or hear—the divine Wisdom and Power are *infinite*, —is *this* idea unexplored, unpursued, even partially, (for I need not observe that it cannot possibly be *comprehended*,) unless we attempt some developement of a part,—an infinitely small part it needs must be,—of that infinitude. That infinitude is itself *the total*, the boundless integral, of which all number, distance, power, magnitude, intellect, are fractions: nay fractions infinitely small; (such must be the mysterious fact;) although some of them relatively to others are so immeasurably great.

Take, then, one of these fractions of intellect; if the term may be allowed. Suppose a created intelligence to preside over one race of creatures in a planet of some other system; a region peopled

* What a comment on our Saviour's statement and injunction, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.—Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest!"

with living tribes as various and as numerous as those of our own world. We will not imagine him endued with any knowledge of the thoughts or influence on the actions of its rational inhabitants; but charged only to regulate the instincts and acts of its birds or insects. When we think of either class, and its wonderful peculiarities,—the architecture of both,—the migrations, and refined diversities of song, among the former,—or the arts, polities, and transformations of the latter,—and the task of preserving these undisturbed from age to age in each individual of each species, it will be felt that a being so qualified and commissioned, would be a "watcher," or "ruler over many," to an extent that baffles the human mind. Let it not be thought, however, that to imagine the possibility of a creature's competence to this, or some equally extensive sphere of knowledge and of vigilance, is utterly extravagant. Would a child, or a New-Zealander, or even an English peasant, although of the astronomer's own race, believe, if you could intelligibly indicate it to him, the knowledge of Herschel? Why may there not be beings of other races, to whom the wide and prompt combinations of Napoleon, the recondite calculations of La Place, and the prophetic forecasts of Bacon, (supposing these to meet in the same mind,) appear but elementary efforts, leading to results, which, for themselves, would be intuitive; and who

no more wonder at the incredulity of some gifted mortals respecting *their* higher range of intellect, than we at the scepticism of a ploughboy or Hottentot when we tell him of our measuring the moon, or calculating the longitude? It appears to me not doubtful, that there are such incomparably superior intelligences; when we consider that man, in his present state, seems to occupy the lowest grade of rational existence. Dr. Barrow observes, "beneath omniscience there being *innumerable* forms of intelligence, in the lowest of these we sit, one remove from beasts*." If so, there could be no extravagance in supposing created minds of the loftiest order to have capacities and offices far more extended than the being whom I have imagined. Yet what conception have we of the promptitude and ubiquity even of that ruler of one minor department in one secondary orb? And if this confound us, what do we expect to conceive of the attributes and reign of Him whose "understanding is infinite!" What could the frogs or flies of Egypt be supposed to know of the faculties of that prophet who was made the instrument of their miraculous formation? if they had been produced in the great desert, what would they have known of his legislative code or judicial decisions, his visions in the solitude of Horeb, or within the cloud of

* Works, vol. iii. p. 258.

Sinai? Yet from the reptile to the inspired lawgiver is but a finite interval, and therefore, in comparison of that between the creature and the infinite Creator, incalculably small. This may strike some Christian minds as a monstrous and false analogy, inasmuch as the difference between a mean creature which they may *suppose* to have no immaterial principle, and a human being whose essence is spiritual and immortal, will appear to them a difference not of gradation but of kind; a great chasm of dissimilitude intervening, such as they conceive to be nowhere found within that scale of intelligent and spiritual natures which terminates in the Supreme. Without inquiring whether they do not err in the first supposition, I would observe that the second betrays that very limitation of ideas respecting the Infinite First Cause, which we ought to combat; as if because the words "spirit," "mind," "intelligence," are applied in common to the created and the Creator, there were not a more absolute chasm between the Mind that creates and the mind which is created, than between the fabric of the potter and the fabric of his clay; the life of the insect and the life of the prophet.

There may, indeed, be decisive and summary thinkers, who ask and gain no help from circuitous illustration, but under the pressure of doubt will resort to this one thought—He that is

unsearchable, whose ways I anxiously ponder, alone sustains these powers *by* which I doubt. It is only by his strength that it has become or continues possible for me to question that of which "He giveth not account." How intrinsically absurd and presumptuous to be in these circumstances captious or distrustful, when, except for his own upholding hand, I could not, during another instant, conceive of his existence, much less descry or criticise his secret purposes!

There may be also those, who rise, at a glance, far above that mystic ladder which the patriarch saw, and have no need to measure, as we have now attempted, some lower steps of ascending and descending existence, in order better to apprehend the inaccessible grandeur of "the lofty One that inhabiteth eternity." I can conceive (and almost covet) such a comparatively prompt and powerful grasp of the human intellect; particularly where it has been exercised in the very highest sphere of astronomic science. Still, for most minds, any mode of additional developement for what is so inadequately impressed, may, I hope, be profitable. It will be so, however, if at all, chiefly for the sake of ulterior consequences from these views. For there is nothing beneficial or consolatory in merely strengthening the conviction how unspeakably little we can expect to know,—except it be linked with a proportionate persuasion

how unspeakably *much* we may and must expect the Cause and Lord of all things both to know and do. Scepticism surrounds herself with the darkness of the former thought, and aims from thence her contemptuous assaults on faith; but right reason, sustained by revelation, advances to the second, and affirms that of Him who is Infinite it is impossible for the finite to expect *enough;* since his means, and purposes, and doings, will, after all, be "most exceedingly or transcendently (ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ) above all that we ask or *think*." * But whatever measure of this expectation we happily attain, must obviously be founded on our real *theism;* it can only be coextensive with our "faith in God;" and from the weakness and fluctuation of this principle, it is hard for even the Christian to keep to the blessed elevation of expecting the *infinite;* of practically holding fast this truth, that "with God all things are possible."

This train of thought, like most others, brings us more fully to recognise the great value of the gospel. It is true that mere theism, acquired or aided, perhaps, by traditional revelation, assured some heathen sages of God's infinite knowledge and power. The creed of Socrates on these points was thus eloquently stated to Aristodemus,—"Consider, my friend, that your own mind regulates at

* Eph. iii. 20.

will the frame in which it acts. We ought to conclude, therefore, that the intelligence which pervades the universe, orders all things at its pleasure; and not to imagine that while your eye is capable of reaching distant prospects, the divine eye is incapable of beholding all nature at one view; nor that while your mind can meditate on affairs and objects here, and in Egypt, and in Sicily, the divine intelligence is insufficient to embrace all things within its simultaneous care."*

It is true, also, that the moral attributes of Deity were, in some measure, ascertained by natural indications. Conscience ever reiterated the inward monition, that there is somewhere a supreme tribunal and Arbiter of right. The revulsion of the mind from suffering, the sentiment of pity for another's sorrow, and indignation at another's wrong, concurred with the many marks of benevolent contrivance throughout nature, to intimate that Benevolence presides. Still were ten thousand adverse appearances ever warring on this happy thought. It was not even for him of whom Athens "was not worthy," to evince conclusively to others or himself, amidst all those dark anomalies, that the Being of infinite knowledge and power, is infinite likewise in rectitude and goodness. This was for Him only to demonstrate, who had already declared to his

* Xenoph. Memorab. l. i. c. 17. p. 61.

separated worshippers, "I am Jehovah, who exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth: for in these things I delight:" and who, after variously proclaiming this in records that bear the stamps and seals of his own prescience, hath since confirmed it by the mystery of "loving-kindness" which those records foretold, certifying the universe by one "unspeakable gift," that

"His love is as large as his power;
And *neither* knows measure nor end."

Then, as the apostle nobly expresses it, "the goodness and philanthropy of our Saviour God shone forth;"* and it has ever since been, to believers, the regent phenomenon of our world; by whose stupendous yet benignant light they preconceive and expect that flood of brightness which must at length be cast on *all* the gloom; waiting the while with an assured submissive persuasion that "He doth all things well." It is very observable, as an implication which may raise our gratitude and hope, that when He who is One with the Father, refers (in words already quoted) to divine omnipotence, he does so expressly and solely under this delightful aspect. It was in answer to the query "who then can be *saved?*" that our Saviour spoke those memorable words, "with

* Tit. iii. 4. literal version.

men it is impossible, but not with God, for with God all things are possible:"* intimating that this almightiness, which triumphs gloriously over what we deem impossibilities, will be specially exercised in subordination to divine love; power being the infinite means, but love the infinite principle,—and universal good, as coincident with His own glory, the boundless purpose, of the divine administration.

But further, the character, sufferings, and doom of this Saviour himself, if we believe in the details and estimate the effects of them, exhibit one of the most startling and painful mysteries of Providence that can be conceived, issuing in results of good which no human mind could have foreseen. We may as confidently ask,—who could have feigned those details†, as, who could have expected these results? We contemplate (as Rousseau confesses in the person of his sceptical priest) a far more striking and revolting scene than the condemnation of that revered philosopher whose words were lately cited. We see one, whose virtue was spot-

* Mark x. 27. Matth. xix. 26. Luke xviii. 27.

† "One may venture to say, that Christianity will never be overthrown by argument, while such a character as that of our Saviour, and so supported, lieth open to the ingenuous and impartial. How came we to have it here? is a question, to which a person, who doth not believe in Christianity, will never be able to give a substantial answer." Duchal, Presumptive Arguments, p. 106.

less and transcendent, execrated, scourged, and impaled with the vilest criminals, and all demoniacal passions exulting in his fall; and yet from this cruel mystery of injustice we behold suddenly springing up, and after the lapse of many centuries still spreading through the world, harvests of civilization, purity, and hope. The more deeply we explore its tendencies and consequences, the more is this atrocity of "wicked hands" found to be made "the power of God unto salvation;" but to measure the full scope of those consequences, we must wait till "principalities and powers in heavenly places," assist us to appreciate that "manifold wisdom" which, in *their* view, it illustrates.

After thus beholding a display of unparalleled evil, producing an unfathomed predominance of good, with what relieved and reassured feelings ought we not to meet those successive mysteries of sin or suffering which still cross our path, or exist in the world around us! Are we justified in doubting whether that Being can or will educe preponderating good out of all these, whom we know to have brought incalculable and still progressive good out of a scene of iniquity and agony more awful than any? Of these, it is true, we witness some, and of some we read or hear in all their recency, and in all their detailed novelty of

horrors, and they may sometimes seem, by their extent, or repetition, or multiplicity, or even minuteness, to acquire a more inexplicable character, than belonged to the death of Jesus;—but suppose that (instead of reading the gospels as a long familiarized narrative) we had been spectators after the paschal supper, and in the prætorium of Pilate, and had stood around the cross, and had then been the disconsolate companions of those who walked towards Emmaus, whose "communications" were so deeply "sad," and whose hopes had well nigh perished;—What might we not have been tempted to utter or to feel concerning the divine Providence in that dark hour? Yet had we yielded to distrust, how immensely should we have erred! Do not the life and death of each among unnumbered happy Christians,—a life, constrained by the love of him that died, a death, softened and blest by confidence in Him who "ever liveth," proclaim how great would have been the illusion of that despair?

But if so, then *what* mystery of evil ought prevailingly to agitate or dishearten us? What guilt, what endurance, what pangs of the sinless, what delay of remedy can we after this contemplate, and discard the cheering hope that a superior good, if not even now in secresy attendant, will finally result? When to prior natural intimations and revealed assurances of divine wisdom and goodness, we add this con-

current proof from fact, evincing that the wisdom and love of God can transmute the blackest crime into a source of blessings, and elicit the most glorious hopes from the profoundest anguish,—*what* contrary appearances should thenceforth cause us to "stagger, through unbelief?" We may still have frequent reason to feel,—this is, indeed, in my own weak and narrow view, a terrible and overwhelming mystery; or that, although of a minute character,—by many undiscerned—and by multitudes never thought of in its moral aspect—remains to me a most perplexing and insidious fact. But yet, were a thousand more such distressing enigmas of evil placed under our review, it would behove us to conclude with hope as well as submission,—all these are within the instant solution and the curative or compensating resources of Omnipotent Beneficence: all shall co-operate for good in his hand who wields eternity and immensity to achieve the structure of his own glory; who has revealed also not the mere vastness but the inventiveness, so to speak, of his remedial wisdom and love, and from those appalling, agonizing scenes "accomplished at Jerusalem," called forth the lustre of innumerable graces, and the promise of unfading joys. When we think of what Omnipotence *can* do, and of what Love *has* done, shall we not feel bound to say—"Is there any thing too hard for Jehovah?" We

may rise higher and higher towards this devout and delightful assurance, but after the most arduous effort of reason, and the most solemn aspiration of faith, we must be conscious that there are heights where it would be incomparably more complete, since "as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are His ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts."

It is not at all to be doubted, that, even for the highest of created minds, there must remain in the divine administration mysteries unsolved; and that their successive, though still partial solution, must be one of those ever-new satisfactions which the recesses of endless futurity reserve. But we can well conceive, that, after the *first* series of such solutions, all distrustful and painful doubt concerning what shall remain or accrue will utterly subside, and be converted into a tranquil, and unhesitating, though still astonished faith. Thus, in the present life, after having studied some dark predictions of Daniel or Isaiah, and found them marvellously and undeniably fulfilled, we are prepared to await, with far more confidence, the fulfilment of other prophecies which may still remain in unrelieved obscurity. And thus also the experience of memorable difficulties and singular extrications, in our own personal course, has often a measure of like salutary influence.

But when we shall pass into a second state of being, and shall find many, perhaps all, the mysteries which distressed us here, scattered by the first daybreak of another region, then must we, of necessity, attain a new and transporting reliance on the Infinite Revealer. New "clouds and darkness," indeed, awful in their majesty, may still be gathering "round about his throne"; but it will be never possible to forget what doubts and terrors and despondencies were turned to praises, in that moment when the curtain of mortality was rent; and we shall hail those new secrets of heaven which cannot be too vast or multiplied, since they are all to be prolific, at length, of new adoration and delight.

VI.

ON THE DIFFICULTIES OCCURRING IN REVEALED TRUTH, AND IN THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE.

We are often, it may be, much disturbed, when meditating on revealed truth, and particularly when reading the scriptures, by philosophical, critical, or moral difficulties, or by miscellaneous objections and suspicions, which our minds rather insinuate in passing, than distinctly and formally present. Thus the very exercises which have been justly commended and enjoined, as especial means of growth in piety and happiness, are frequently rendered to us an occasion for conflict and discouragement. This is a source of grief, not only at the time, but in the recollection that such is our propension of mind; and it is aggravated by observing, that many excellent Christians do not appear to share it. We could, indeed, view this with complacency as the privilege of the poor and un-

learned;—that of having their speculative difficulties less and fewer, while their other trials may be more severe. If we observe their happy simplicity, and sometimes sigh to be partakers of it, there is no contempt in the perception, and no bitterness in the wish. But when persons of finished education, and enlightened understanding, appear not only not to feel, but scarcely to discover difficulties; when, having no such trials to interrupt their comfort in religious thought or scriptural study, they hardly comprehend or sympathize with those who deplore them,—when we even find something of this characteristic in certain expository writers respectable for learning and honoured for devotion,—we are apt to repine, and sometimes to despond. We ask ourselves, how is it that these Christians of our own class enjoy while we suffer; that they are edified and animated while we are "shaken in mind and troubled;" that they can say cordially, "Thy testimonies are my delight," while we have much more cause to say, "Open Thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law:" "let the crooked be made straight, and the rough places plain." We regard the dissimilar experience of such persons, sometimes with discouragement and envy at their "unmoveable" and triumphant faith, sometimes with a half-grieved, half-proud (perhaps half complacent) suspicion of their want of intellec-

tual sharp-sightedness or strength; and thus we vibrate between the fear that the absence of a really heaven-taught spirit may cause our own cavils and disquiets, and the other fear, by its implications yet more painful, that the absence of a clearly discerning and keenly investigating spirit causes their acquiescent tranquillity. Now there may be *something* of truth in *each* side of this alternative; and yet not so much as should *greatly* disturb or distress us. There are certainly two kinds of differences which may give rise to such a contrast. The one is in the intellectual constitution; the other in the moral temper and emotions. The former we cannot radically change; nor, perhaps, though the change might exempt us from many trials, would we, if we could. The latter, by divine help, we may acquire; and in so doing we should acquire that, which being a source of strength and enjoyment in itself, destroys some of the anxieties referred to, and lightens all the rest.

In the intellectual constitution of some Christians, and those endowed with highly useful kinds of learning and ability, we observe what I must call, not invidiously, but for want of better terms, a certain hebetude or insensitiveness with regard to objections. Embracing warmly and holding firmly the most momentous truths, they are no way prompt to discover, and still less to feel, the difficulties con-

tained in the record which presents them, or which the truths themselves involve. Such minds, when truly "taught of God," may occupy most important and successful posts as teachers of others. They are least likely to be retarded and perplexed in the aim and career of evangelic zeal. They may eminently bless, by a warm and unhesitating inculcation of essential truth, those numerous classes who possess an uninquiring temperament, or whose education has been not very enlarged, or in whom both these circumstances, by a joint and mutual influence, concur to narrow the sphere of doubt, or repress its excursions.

But you, for whom the present train of thought is chiefly adapted, cannot acquire, if you would, such a mental structure. The native character and bent of your faculties may preclude this, even if no peculiar course of discipline has conduced to awaken and extend them. Nor, perhaps, (as I have already conjectured,) would you, on the whole, desire to possess it, were this within your choice. For you will suspect that the mental quality or defect, whatever it be, which tends to blunt or to exclude objections, may tend likewise to obscure or to contract the view of exalted facts or doctrines: that the Shechinah of divine truth, though steadily and gratefully contemplated by the eye of such a faith, must yet be "shorn of his beams;" that the less ample

or moveable glass of such a believer's perception, while it excludes unwelcome objects on either hand, circumscribes that broad and undefined glory, "dark with excessive light," which belongs to your own wavering, fitful pillar of celestial fire. Not that you or I are to assume a general superiority to such minds. Far from it. They may be less versatile or inquisitive, or may possess less promptitude and less scope, as it were, of lateral vision; but withal much more strength and clearness in apprehending and defining the truths on which they fix. Neither you nor they can think or feel each in the other's manner, nor did the Father of spirits intend it. It is true of natural as of supernatural gifts, "there are diversities of operations," and the great Ruler divides "to each one severally as He will." Your trials were, in some respects, to differ from theirs: your services likewise, and your advantages, were not to be altogether of the same order.

But then we must not forget another class of minds, which, permit me to believe, have been *more* prepared by native and acquired susceptibilities and powers, to discern and be affected by difficulties than either yours or mine; who yet, we have the highest reason to conclude, habitually meditate on revealed truth, and pursue the study of scripture with much less of pain, and with much more of spiritual profit, than ourselves. Shall we account

for this difference by their greater capacity and superior vigour in answering and overcoming objections, which enables them to subdue and trample down at the instant each pain and doubt which is awakened? Certainly not thus in every case; inasmuch as there are some difficulties in revelation which *no* human mind can at any time fully remove; much less at every instant. We must account for it, I conceive, principally by their more devout and ardent apprehension, more constant and energetic hold of those few most glorious truths, which, while invested by many difficulties and obscurities, shine through and above them all. Now this, as we have early intimated, is, by the grace of God, attainable. Not the force and penetration of intellect, not the mass of erudition and strength of memory, which were in a Pascal or a Howe—those are no where promised, and we have no ground to suppose they are anywhere dispensed, in answer to prayer. But that is attainable (for it is surely held forth as an object of the humblest Christian's successful desire) without which those qualities and attainments might have plunged a Howe or Pascal in the depths of frigid scepticism; namely, a spiritual and affectionate adherence, a realizing and appropriating attachment, to the great things which God hath declared. This is the wisdom which he "giveth liberally," and for which we are all taught to pray, entreating "that the God of our Lord Jesus

Christ, the Father of Glory, may give unto us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him;" that "the eyes of our understanding may be enlightened; that we may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance."*

Now let minds of ever so great perspicacity, and research, and furniture, the most capable, therefore, of objections and resistance, become happily imbued with an admiring grateful love for the *great* discoveries of the gospel let them come to meditate feelingly on a Being infinite in power and holiness, who is also infinite in pardon and in grace; let them fix on the intense concentration of these glories at the cross; and then, for them, the difficulties of revelation—though they do not disappear,—recede into their proper dimness, and shrink into their just dimension.

This supernatural unveiling of the Deity, this disclosure of his righteousness and love in all their moral glories, is a centre ever luminous, glowing, and expanding, from which the eye of their faith cannot be very long averted, and which casts its rays even upon objects otherwise suited to repel that eye; but which thus guide back its glance anew to the light by which their own seeming gloom or barrenness or asperity are alone relieved.

Would we then read the scriptures with more

* Eph. i. 17, 18.

benefit and satisfaction? We must seek, not so much more learning or more commentators, (although these are valuable in their place,) but, by earnest prayer and humble vigilance, an increase of faith, hope and love towards the great scheme of gospel truth, the grand remedy of guilt and unhappiness and ruin; for we may expect, in proportion as these graces are awake or dormant, cherished or declining, to find scriptural reading a source of encouragement and comfort, or a source of disappointment and distress. I do not know that the difference which it has been thus attempted to point out admits of comparison with any contrasts in the actual scenes of nature, or in the incidents of secular life: but perhaps a slight apologue in the eastern taste, where fiction is blended with some scenery that nature offers, may contribute not unpleasantly to its illustration.

In a century long "before the flood," and in regions bordering on Euphrates, the youth Idoriel had learned by tradition from his pious ancestors the existence of a mystic cavern, through which he was assured that he might arrive at scenes explored but rarely since the Fall: even at that paradise which Adam forfeited. His dying father had solemnly urged him to become a pilgrim thither; warning him, indeed, of the doubtful and rugged way, of the darkness and difficulty which might attend his entrance, and perhaps long impede his pro-

gress; yet still repeating,—Go, my son, enter and persevere. Light will spring up in darkness. Though Eden be tenantless and its groves lie waste, and the cherubim have resigned their needless watch, yet go; for the very air of that once blessed garden, the murmur of its waters, and the odour of its silent woods, will prefigure to thee that better country to which the promised Deliverer of our ruined race will at last exalt the purified.—Idoriel heard with tears, and when he had committed to the tomb his parent's revered remains, and the sun of that funereal day was setting, he earnestly asked himself—Can I defer the pilgrimage which such a father has enjoined? The youth rose before the following dawn, girded himself, and providing a small store of simple viands, journeyed towards the entrance of the cave. It was situate, as he had been told by the departed, at the end of a sequestered ravine in the mountains; and concealed by the projection of a low-browed rock. When he had pressed through the thorny gorge of the defile, and was stooping to explore the cavern's mouth, he heard laughter far above him. It was from the cell of a hermit-astronomer on one of the cliffs which towered round the pass, who, though dwelling so near the mystic cave, had not approached it, and would have sneered in utter contempt at its reputed wonders. A warrior and a hunter from "the land of Havilah" were visiting this sage, who laughed scornfully to see a goodly youth

below, creeping through bushes, and groping among the stones of the brook. They bade him leave wild berries for children, and come with them to chase the lion and leopard. But he heeded them not, and having at length discovered a low and narrow opening, which the rocks and trees had hidden, he proceeded with difficulty, always stooping, frequently kneeling, and sometimes even prostrate, into the interior of the cavern. After this was gained he found no want of space, though he was compelled to bend low ever and anon as he advanced. The cave expanded on his view; while but a glimmering yet unearthly light pervaded it, and the small torch which he had brought with him burned dimly amidst its vapours. Vast stalactites hung from the roof, and seemed to carry back the date of this excavation towards the creation of the world, and of that paradise to which he hoped it would conduct him. At intervals the images of shepherds, priests, and kings, of sacrificial rites and holy symbols, were sculptured in colossal forms upon the rocky walls. All along beside his path there was a deep abyss, on which the vapours hung densely, and which his eye essayed in vain to pierce. At times the scene grew not only rude but dreary, a sort of subterranean desert; at other times sharp points unexpectedly wounded his feet: now and then also some hideous shapes issuing from the

vapour motioned him to retire; and his taper at times so feebly dispelled the darkness, that his heart began to sink and his patience to faulter.—Alas!—(he exclaimed,) perhaps my good and simple-hearted father was deluded. He thought he had attained by this path to a view of paradise, but I fear he must have erred. He may have seen amidst this chaos of clouds some imaginary semblance of those happy gardens; but this cave seems likely to be one which demons excavated, and where the sons of the giants have graven historic legends. It is ancient and magnificent, but I am weary of its obscurity, its beetling roofs and rough, uncouth windings; I will go back to the fair valley of Euphrates, and dream of no paradise beside. And yet my beloved father foretold these discouragements and hinderances, and admonished me nevertheless to persevere. But then they are so great, so many, so continued, so wearisome.—He was turning to retrace his steps; when a white-robed figure gliding from behind a crag, thus chid the youth's irresolution and revived his zeal.—Idoriel, son of Sethos, forsake not thy father's steps, despise not thy father's counsels. Follow on, and thou shalt know. Stoop yet again, even as a little child; for this stage of thy pilgrimage demands it: bend in lowliness; look intently for the light beyond thee: invoke Adonai with fervour, and he shall give thee light.—The genius

spoke and disappeared. Idoriel, amazed yet animated, resumed his purpose; bent low to follow onward; called more reverently on the God of his father, and looked intently towards the light beyond. Nor was it in vain. For as the cavern's roof now rose again into loftiness, the volumes of mist above him seemed suddenly unrolled, and beyond him a crescent meteor, like the new moon in miniature, but of a ruby light, shot its lustre through all the vault; and, unlike the moon, diffused a cheering warmth. Idoriel's eye brightened and his heart beat quick. He looked around, and all the rough places and recesses of the cavern were tinged with living rays. The crags, indeed, had not lost their ruggedness, nor the sands their tedious flatness, nor the abyss its precipitous and murky depth shaded by rolling vapours; but the new illumination cast upon all these now showed the pilgrim fully what he had before been ignorant of, that the cavern abounded with inestimable treasures. He had found, indeed, previously here and there a gem, which the light of his own feeble torch detected, and which seemed beautiful and precious. But now each height and each recess disclosed them. The purest native gold was in the veins of many rocks; "the precious onyx and the sapphire" gleamed on every side; and sometimes where that ruddy light fell full upon them, they became as "stones of fire." On the face of the blankest

and most frowning rock, there sometimes shone an invaluable jewel; and some lay sparkling at his feet in the dry and sandy passages that intervened. Even from the clefts of the abyss which he despaired to fathom, these untold riches glistened, and seemed to relieve its terrors. He saw, too, that at least each principal and distinguished gem, as he gazed on it grew brighter, and threw back, as if by magic, the very image and reflection of the crescent star.—In sooth (exclaimed Idoriel) though my progress through this ancient cavern has been sometimes dark and sad, and wearisome and intricate, yet it is full of countless riches and of growing wonders. This glorious and guiding star bespeaks the presence of Adonai; and the gems which it discloses seem to befit and indicate the approach to "Eden, the garden of God." In that region, as our seers and poets have assured us, were found not only the delicious luxuriance of flowers and fruits, but also mineral treasures in abundance. "The gold of that land was good." There was the sapphire "and the onyx stone;" and our first parents, yet blest with guileless innocence, walked often when the sun had set, with friendly cherubim "in the midst of those stones of fire," which shone like glow-worms in the moonlight that revealed them. This cave, with all its discouragements, yet seems likely and worthy to be an avenue to that forfeited abode. Idoriel's fancy

was kindled, and his affections were "stirred within him." He thought of his departed father; he shed tears both of grief and joy; and while, even through tears of sorrow, his eye was on the star of promise and his heart upraised to God, he still advanced in hope and "went on his way rejoicing." But ere long he grew remiss in the devout and the observant spirit which that good genius had enjoined. He now forgot to pray, and now was weary: he ceased to look towards the ruby light beyond him, because he had encountered a stone of stumbling; or some rock of offence had bruised him even through his sandals. Whenever these changes in Idoriel's temper and practice occurred, there ensued effects the most discouraging. A chilly vapour, arising from the abyss and gradually condensing, involved him in its damp and disheartening cloud, hiding at once the crescent and all the treasures which it had made so visible and splendid. Little more than the first glimmering light remained: it sufficed, indeed, together with his taper, to discover the rudeness, the depths, and the windings, but it was attended by no warmth, and it revealed no brilliants. He might grope for a gem as at first, but if he found it, it was pale and frosty to his eye. He began to be haunted afresh with the thought of illusion and disappointment. Yet Idoriel could not now resolve to turn back. He remembered what wonders had

been shown him. He had "seen the star" and all its minute but enduring mirrors, and though he was grieved and disconsolate at this return of "gloominess," more sad than the heaviest "morning spread upon the mountains," yet he dared not renounce his desire or nourish his despair.—At least (he cried) if there *be* a paradise, and if there *be* access to it, this must be "the way."—He mused on the admonition of the genius, and self-convicted of neglecting it, implored with a heartfelt prostration the return of that sacred and consoling light. But it beamed not on the instant; it revived not speedily. Yet his white-robed monitor, half seen amidst the cloud, was heard solemnly to whisper—Though justly rebuked and chastised for thy remissness, be encouraged "always to pray, and not to faint," always to "watch," and not despond.—Cheered by these words, the sorrowful Idoriel feebly persevered. With what grateful rapture did he find, after patient waiting, the cloud begin to be dissipated, and the long-concealed star appearing again beyond him! not waning or more remote, but become a broader crescent and of still more ruddy beam.

Thus he grew bitterly and joyfully acquainted with the secrets and marvels of the cave, and though "folly was bound up in his heart," he better knew its remedy. When mists began to flit before him, and the cold cloud to rest on him, he felt

the warning penalty, and sought to resume a more devout and earnest watch. And still at every point where he actually did this, the star reappearing grew towards a full-orbed radiance, and the gems around his path became more numerous and refulgent. At length the adventurer grew feeble with continued effort, and lay down to rest, like the patriarch long after at Bethel, with stones for his pillow; weary, yet happy; for he felt as if paradise were near. It was a deep sleep which had come upon him; but in that slumber he was borne by the genius round a jutting rock which almost closed the exit of the cave, and woke reclining under the glittering arch of egress, where the fragrant groves of Eden lay spread beneath, and the sound of many waters echoed round him; and the lively visions of a new Eden never to be forfeited, and of a second Adam, the Adonai from heaven, the glorious ransomer and restorer of the wretched, was poured into Idoriel's heart.

I hope, that to this slight allegory, when taken in connexion with the thoughts that precede it, no key can be found needful. But it is usual to subjoin the moral to the fable: and it may be well, even at the risk of tautology, that we rapidly review the purposed lesson. A tender reverence for parental example and injunction is among those means which Providence frequently and graciously appoints, to

prompt the mind to a serious study of God's word. But, whatever the immediate persuasive, whether this filial love and veneration,—or personal distress, or spiritual conviction, or speculative anxiety,—those, who, having learnt anything of the spirit of the world, begin really to "search the scriptures," cannot but feel, how entirely that potent and derisive spirit is against them; how science and levity, pride and secularity and frivolousness, would all conspire in sarcasm at the tempers which this search must intimate. Yet often, in retirement from the notice of those scorners, and sometimes openly, in despite of them, from a just feeling how little *they* can claim to be patterns or arbiters of moral wisdom,—this study is engaged in and pursued. Whenever it is so, the subjects to which the scriptures relate are perceived to be vast and profound. Dark questions of history and philosophy suggest themselves, and the great spiritual and theological secrets which no human mind can fathom, environ us on all sides. In some parts we are surprised by what seems irksome and unimportant. In others weighty and painful difficulties repel and wound us. The feeble lights of our reason and our information cannot half dispel these obscurities, and we are tempted at times impatiently or despondently to ask ourselves,—Can a volume, which so perpetually excites my doubts and baffles alike my capacity and my research, be

verily the holy word of God; given as my only guide and way to heavenly wisdom and life eternal? Such, doubtless, is the unacknowledged and afflictive feeling of many an inquirer's mind. But let the great Inspirer of that holy word give a new prominence to its most affecting truths, or rather soften and prepare the mind to receive deeply their designed and natural impression,—let Him "shine within the heart to give the light of the knowledge of his glory" (as it is unveiled by this volume) "in the face of Jesus Christ," and then at once are the aspect and estimate of the whole book essentially and benignly altered. Difficulties indeed remain: many of them perplexing, some important, some inscrutable. But not a few are unravelled; while others are illustrated, and all, in a measure, relieved, by those strong and glowing beams of divine holiness and loving-kindness which are now thrown upon the whole. By the ever-crescent light and warmth of that forgiving Love which is felt to be the very essence of the revelation, are all its parts now examined and interpreted, or, where not to be interpreted, submissively yet hopefully postponed. The appalling sins and miseries of man, and the terrific judgments from his Maker, which this book so explicitly and awfully records, are vindicated, as far as they can be, probably, to our present narrow faculties, from the dreadful mystery which involves them,

by a view of the still greater remedial mystery of salvation. A multitude of precious truths, unequally interspersed, but wonderfully harmonizing,—admonitory, consoling, promissory, predictive,—are now discerned and valued, as reflecting, in their several modes and degrees, the one great light of the divine perfection. In this temper of heart, that is, with a strong apprehension and earnest "acceptation" of "the glad tidings of great joy," the scriptures, notwithstanding their unremoved difficulties, will assuredly be held fast as "the gift of God," the "word of life," the charter for eternity. But when this sentiment becomes deadened or suspended, when, from remissness in prayer, or an unwatchful, unbelieving disposition, we cease to contemplate with grateful tenderness those cardinal doctrines, and think coldly of the attributes displayed in God's own way of dispensing pardon, life, and felicity,—then, while our hope grows faint, our doubts are strengthened and multiplied. We turn to dwell almost exclusively on what is distasteful or unsearchable, and every such difficulty acquires tenfold force.

The great antidote for such a state must be "watching unto prayer;" together with renewed though humble efforts to realize the deep necessity and unequalled worth of those same doctrines. Yet these best of means, in that languid and poor way

of using them with which some of us are chargeable, may not at once, or even speedily, remove such feelings. If, however, they are sincerely and perseveringly resorted to, we may confidently hope they shall do so at length. "Who is among you that feareth the Lord, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness and hath no light? Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay himself upon his God." "The glorious gospel of Christ," when it shines again with new power in the heart, shall be yet more glorious and more welcome. Our recent folly and unfaithfulness and pain shall have given us new reasons to prize it; and difficulties shall be still more cast into shade by the blessed discovery. Let us press through these alternations; which, by our own fault, or perhaps by the secret counsel and appointment of Him who designs to "humble and to prove" us, may yet be many. But "he that endureth to the end shall be saved;" saved by those divine and immutable methods which he too often failed to appreciate and rejoice in. And when in the "deep sleep" of death, the Christian bids farewell to God's written revelation, then shall the immediate and unclouded light of divine perfection burst upon him, and he shall be transported "to know, even as also he is known."

Meanwhile, though the complete Bible, if we hold

it to be in all its parts a published revelation, should be as much accessible to all as the prospect of the earth and skies, yet it by no means follows that each portion of this collection of scriptures ought to engage equally the attention of every reader, or that of any one reader in an equal degree. If revealed truth contain, to adopt a well-known figure, "fords where the lamb may wade, and depths where the elephant must swim," the feebler is not called to venture daily where the flood may overflow or weary it. Had our pilgrim of the cavern, when new mists and darkness occurred, not selected that path where was most light and least obstruction, he would have been still more disheartened and bewildered. Had he thrust himself far into "the clefts of the rugged rocks," the guiding star might have been at any moment hid. And this seems one reason why the habit of biblical criticism is sometimes found to have lowered faith and lessened spirituality; because while the "things hard to be understood" are so much and sedulously investigated, the great things of God, the truths which "bedew, embalm, and overrun the heart,"* are too little imbibed.

He who is exploring the strata of a damp chasm, or searching a mine for subterraneous fossils, is no doubt investigating (and, it may be, very commendably) "the wonderful works of God;" but if these

* Herbert, in the beautiful piece entitled "The Glance."

be his habitual preferences and pursuits, he will seldom gather health and animation amidst the breezes and sunshine of the mountain landscape. He who is studying with Selden the detail and principles of the Mosaic code, or with Lowth the structure of Hebrew poetry, is doubtless well occupied in examining those scriptures which are given "by inspiration of God;" but he must beware lest, while occupied by the laws of sacrifice or the laws of metre, he should be too little conversant with that redemption of which the Mosaic expiations were a temporary shadow, and which the lyre of Isaiah could but prelude. To the weaker or more susceptible Christian I would say,—neglect no part of scripture wholly; still less adopt selections unfaithful to your highest interests. But do not study most those parts which profit you the least, which are, in your experience, most difficult, and therefore sometimes, at least, will be unfit for you. Do not enter on the visions of Ezekiel or Zechariah, the conquests of Joshua, or the wars of David, at a season when Peter's epistles or John's gospel, or some devotional portions of the psalms or prophets, are better adapted to your perusal. Some modern writers appear to intimate, that the study of every part of scripture is to all persons equally a duty. But this is as if a shepherd, having a large and varied district for his flocks, should urge the weary and

weak, in regular circuit, across torrents and up rugged paths, to pick the "herbs of the mountains," instead of encouraging them to feed oftenest "in green pastures beside the still waters."

I will only recall, in conclusion, the leading thought which has been enforced. Let us earnestly and hopefully seek an increase of faith and love: a more unintermitted and affectionate adherence to the most *invaluable* truths, those which must be above all price, whenever sin is felt to be perilous and death imminent, and a full salvation from both the only glorious hope: which, when contemplated with steadfastness and fervour, will dispel much of the surrounding obscurity, and reconcile us to the rest.

VII.

ON THE DESPONDENCY ARISING FROM A SENSE OF GREAT AND MULTIPLIED SINFULNESS, ESPECIALLY AS AGGRAVATED BY A PROFESSED RECEPTION OF THE GOSPEL.

It happens with prescriptions for spiritual griefs and distresses, as with those for latent bodily disorders; the medicines may be most valuable and efficacious in themselves, yet may frequently fail to reach our particular case. If we adduce to you (for example) St. Paul's noble proclamation of his Saviour's mercy, and solemn avowal of his own extreme need of it,—"Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, *of whom I am chief*,"—you will probably say,—Yes, but the apostle referred to sins before his conversion, and these, heinous as they were, I can readily conceive "blotted out" by an act of sovereign grace. It is true that, for my own offences, even of a parallel period,

(although of less "injurious" character and magnitude than his,) I can find less of extenuation; inasmuch as I cannot forget the tender *Christian* instructions, and the keenly luminous rebukes of conscience, in despite of which they were fostered; nor, altogether, the inward malignity of those tempers, the hidden turpitude of those passions and imaginings, which they involved. I dwelt *in* that "world of iniquity" and traversed its recesses, while others could but observe it transiently and distantly as among "wandering stars;" so far, moreover, from saying with Paul that "I thought I did God service," I must confess, that knowing myself a rebel, I "revolted more and more." And yet,—with this afflictive distinction from his case, this darker, stronger title to the motto, "of whom I am chief,"—I could still confidently indulge the hope that a pardoning God had "cast all those sins into the depths of the sea," had He but likewise "*subdued* my iniquities;" were there proof as indisputable as in the instance of Paul, of my being indeed "a new creature." But although, in desire and profession, I have long resorted to the refuge of the penitent; although in purpose I have abjured iniquity, and have sought to present myself "a living sacrifice" to God, still so great and numerous have been my "secret faults," so fearful at many times the strength and

mastery of " presumptuous sins," so far and often am I brought " into captivity to the law of sin and death," that I know not how to hope my renovation has been genuine. I tremble lest offences subsequent to so many prayers and vows on my part, to so much long-suffering kindness on the part of the Most Holy, should in all their hundredfold ingratitude and baseness remain uncancelled, and consign me at last to woes intensely sharpened by the thought, that I was so long " almost a Christian,"—" not far from the kingdom of God."

Still it is not, I think, usually among this class, who have to acknowledge the bold and unrestrained transgressions of former life, that we may expect the most anxious interest in our present subject: for those who once gave unchecked indulgence to corrupt desires and irreligious habits, can hardly fail to recognise so much of *practical* change attendant on their Christian profession, as to indicate at least *some* great revolution of principle and feeling; and, whatever be the power, or even incidental dominance, of a sinfulness which they deplore, they must yet often revert to that prior change, with a degree of hope that it was truly " from above."

But you, it may be, have a different kind of path and memoir to retrace. Your course has differed exceedingly from that of Paul or Augustine, of Bunyan or of John Newton; you were not only brought

up (like some of them) "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," but you never (like them) scorned that admonition, nor overtly and daringly "turned from the holy commandment:" you maintained from earliest years an unbroken outward respect, with a measure likewise of inward veneration, for the appointments and promises of religion; and though secret sins ensnared and often enthralled you, yet were you not permitted at any time long to yield yourself their unresisting prey. Now from this state, when your feeling of the perilous evil of sin became more acute and poignant, and your sense of the value of the gospel remedy more deep and cogent, a most real and vital transition might take place, to the reception of God's mercy through an atoning Saviour; and yet this transition be, even in your own view, comparatively unmarked and slight. You had passed, as it were, into what was deemed the path of evangelic light and warmth, not from a dark and icy zone of indifference and hardness, but from some nearer and more dubious track. This it is which augments your doubt. You seemed, and still seem, to have been previously sailing, or drifting, however slowly and unsteadily and heartlessly, in almost the same course: for the climate, and the vessels in company, were not very dissimilar.—You question besides if you are indeed within the tropic line, because instead of those

gentle and uniform gales which should there impel you heavenward, you encounter mists and calms and tempests, and often find the wind more boisterous and more contrary than before you were professedly steering towards the land of rest.

But there is something in your case still more peculiar. Not only do you contrast, like other watchful self-examiners, the opinion of human witnesses with your secret knowledge of evils in your own heart, and viewing these with the eye of interior consciousness, through the detecting microscope of God's holy law, find their multitude and deformity and restless force appalling,—but you feel the just demand of your special privileges and *exemptions*. You were never imbued in childhood by intimate connexions, with prejudices against revealed truth. You saw and felt even then the momentous grandeur of "the things eternal." Providential restraints have surrounded you. You are aware that bodily and mental temperament have ever contributed to deter you from flagrant transgression. And when, amidst these thoughts, you revolve your own unpublished annals, you perceive with dread how much more culpable each offence, of thought, word, and deed, must be in your case, than the gross outward sins of some who were not a thousandth part so enlightened or exempted or favoured. But above all, as you have advanced

through successive years in a Christian profession, and have experienced, amidst so many relapses, the forbearance of your God, and yet,—with these unnumbered debts and bonds of gratitude accumulating still, with life hastening to its period, with the great work of sanctification more and still more urgent, with the confirmed opinion of others that your heart must, long ere now, be "*established* with grace,"—have found irresolution and corruption still prevailing against your principles and hopes,—then has the gloomiest and most afflictive of all fears invaded and oppressed you, the fear that you are not in reality "transformed by the renewing of the mind." You have awfully felt, perhaps, what one of our most original writers has thus forcibly stated, that the same sin "committed at sixteen, is not the same (though it agree in all other circumstances) at forty; but swells and doubles from the circumstance of our ages; wherein besides the constant and inexcusable habit of transgressing, it hath the maturity of our judgment to cut off pretence unto excuse or pardon:" that "every sin, the more it is committed, the more it acquireth in the quality of evil; as it succeeds in times, so it proceeds into degrees of badness; for as they proceed they ever multiply; and, like figures in arithmetic, the last stands for more than all that went before it."* Or (to express

* Sir T. Browne, Rel. Med. pp. 100-1. Ed. 1642.

more accurately what seems to be this author's allusion) you shudder to think that each new repetition of the same sin is like a notation of units from the *right* of the page; where each figure added on the left, though it be only a unit like the former, yet stands for a multiple of the last preceding.—Alas (both you and I must say), how fearful yet how true a reckoning! how dreadful a "progression!" How overwhelming and self-multiplying a burden of offences!—And my path (you will add) has been always full of light: I have been gently drawn, by various attractions, and by distinguished instruments, towards the way of peace; divine Providence has favoured me at once by restraints and incitements:—yet, while the world and the church may have seen little to condemn, I have been consciously "a backslider in heart," and been "filled with my own way." Worse than all, when a gracious God has seemed to "restore" me, and to lead me "for His name's sake" in "paths of righteousness" anew, and the most affecting motives to watchfulness have multiplied while reviewing the pangs of past transgression, and the mercies which allayed them,—still, after all this, have I been again and yet again unfaithful, and "a deceived heart hath turned me aside." The spiritual languor, the want of peace and joy, the strong temptations to utter unbelief under which I labour, seem to be the bitter fruits of all this reiterated

ungrateful inconstancy: and often does my heart interpret them as the too probable omens of that awful rejection which I may at last experience, when the faithful followers of their Lord shall be received "into everlasting habitations." For if so many and long-continued petitions and desires have not yet availed to procure me "an overcoming faith" and a constraining love; if I have "come short" of conversion through these numerous years of profession, of feeble conflict, and of languid though frequent waiting upon God; what hope can I possess, that, now or hereafter, with susceptibilities blunted by being long conversant with ineffective truth, I shall attain a new heart and a right spirit, and feel efficiently and joyfully "the powers of the world to come."

We must ask, in reply to these dark fears and distressing presages,—what right have you to conclude, that there has been and is no saving efficacy of divine grace upon your mind, on account of the unceasing conflicts of a corrupt and degenerate nature? Or, rather, are you not unmindful of the anti-scriptural and presumptuous views which such a conclusion would imply? By your own acknowledgment, you have offered up many and continued supplications; and the deepest desire of your heart, though doubtless often interrupted and always contended with, has been and still is to attain real communion with God and freedom from iniquity. To what

then do you ascribe this desire, and all the prayers, confessions, and endeavours, however great their imperfection and defilement, which it still has prompted? You know that one of the earliest divine declarations revealed in scripture was this,—"the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth;"* and we are previously told "God saw that the wickedness of man was great,"—"and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."† You remember that a prophet, many ages after, solemnly affirmed, in the midst of the only people who possessed a pure faith and worship, "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked;" you have read the more recent declaration of Him who "knew what was in man,"—"from within, out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within."‡

Can you then attribute your secret prayers, and unfeigned desires, and even feeblest efforts for holiness and obedience, to your own unassisted nature and will,—without consequences from which you would utterly recoil?—without implying, that "that which is born of the flesh" is *not* "flesh,"—that "every good and perfect gift" does *not* specially come down "from the

* Gen. viii. 21. † vi. 5. ‡ Mark vii. 21-23.

Father of lights,"—that "the natural man" *can* discern "the things of the Spirit," perceive their excellency, and go on to seek them,—without, in short, abundantly falsifying the word of God?

We are not apt to consider how much pride and unbelief there may be in denying, although it be with a temper of self-abasement and voluntary humility, that it is God who worketh in us "to will and to do;" that He also hath "wrought all our works in us;" that we have nothing which we have "not received." The conviction ought to be more deeply impressed on us, that not only is it presumptuous, and in some sense blasphemous, to question the power or willingness of Jehovah to forgive and to renew us, if still unforgiven and unrenewed; but that it also approaches, more than we are aware, to a self-righteous blasphemy and contradiction of God's word, if we say,—I have indeed often prayed with sincerity, and (amidst unspeakable frailty and depravity) hungered and thirsted after righteousness; I have *sought* to lay hold of the gospel refuge, and to walk worthy of that high vocation; but all this has been my *own* impulse and my *own* work, and not the operation of the Holy Spirit. Yet this is what you virtually assume and affirm when you despond of your spiritual condition, and refuse to number yourself among those who are partakers of divine grace. How does such a view of your state answer the apostle's question, "who hath made thee to

differ—and what hast thou that thou hast not received?" It answers by implication, though unconsciously, thus :—I have made *myself* to differ; or mere circumstances have made me to differ. I have spiritual desires, and an anxiety for perfection, for obeying the will of God and benefiting others; yet I have not received them specially from Him; they are natural or accidental, or arise from the force of habits and associations.—"Many" (writes an old divine) "out of a dangerous error, think that the good which is in them and issueth from them, is from themselves, and not from the powerful work of grace."* When the matter is placed in this light, (and I see no reason for doubting its fairness,) a sincere and humble mind, which reveres the testimony of scripture, which shrinks from false and arrogant pretensions, and would shudder at the thought of robbing the Almighty of the glory due unto his name, will, if I mistake not, be powerfully and solemnly restrained from denying, (even by implication, or apparently,) that where "a good work" appears to have commenced and to exist in the soul, it is "He that hath begun" it;† that it is a work "not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."‡ I would have you to be reduced and "shut up" (as it were) "unto the faith" of these revealed truths, on pain of the conviction, or at least suspi-

* Sibbes. † Phil. i. 6. ‡ John i. 13.

cion, that you virtually discard them, in assuming to yourself what the scripture ascribes to the Eternal Spirit. And if this impression be produced, it will conduce at once to hope and humiliation: for it is certain that the latter sentiment cannot be wanting, to mingle with your comfort and enhance your gratitude: since if you feel, as I trust you may be thus compelled to feel, that it is still your *duty* to address the throne of mercy in the character of a *child*, you must needs go as a faithless and wandering, though returning child, "not worthy to be called" a son. You will be ready to preface your requests with the confession

> "I that have most ungrateful been
> Of all that e'er thy grace received,
> Ten thousand times thy goodness seen,
> Ten thousand times thy mercy grieved"—

And the ground of your hope, in this filial, yet *un*filial character, will, in itself, be no other (though it may perhaps be stronger) than would be the ground of your hope as a convinced but unreconciled sinner, if you still, notwithstanding the thoughts now offered, should distressingly conclude or apprehend that you have never attained the adoption of "the children of God." For I am not unconscious that these arguments may not avail with you (nay it is possible that with some readers they ought not to avail) in establishing the persuasion that your profession has been genuine; founded in a true con-

version of the heart begun. It would indeed be clearly presumptuous in those whom I address, (those who in principle are humble and sincere,) to decide that it has *not;* but I can imagine cases among them where it will be still felt presumptuous also to determine that it *has.* Whichever, therefore, in the interior scrutiny of conscience, accompanied with prayer for heavenly light, be at any time your decision,—whether you conclude, I have been hitherto but a "borderer," often close beside "the narrow way," but never really *on* it; or whether—I have indeed been led *into* that path, but have treacherously and perpetually declined and wandered from it, and when brought back have yet again gone wretchedly astray; or whether you *cannot* ascertain which is the fact, and must cast yourself at last on the omniscient mercy of your Judge, saying, like the prophet, "Oh Lord God, thou knowest;"—still, let me repeat, the basis of your hope is one and invariable in itself; and if you will humbly rest on it,—prostrate, but prostrate before the mercy-seat,—it is ample and immoveable for you. Whichever you deem to be the worse and less hopeful supposition,—for this will depend partly on the kind of theology you have imbibed, and partly on the turn of personal feeling,—we address ourselves to that worse and more painful supposition, and would apply to it that one balm of hope which the wounds of

conscience call for, which the expiations of heathenism proposed to furnish, but which neither false religion nor philosophy could yield; which the bible alone discovers and presents, when it declares the exhaustless placability and evinces the infinite loving-kindnesses of the Holy and Just God. It is indeed fully admitted and deeply felt, that this very attribute of divine mercy, so graciously revealed to us in many forms of promise, and in one unparalleled exhibition and act, does itself awfully augment our guilt; that the very resort and recurrence to it shows us also with a more and more terrific clearness, against what a "God and Father" we have knowingly transgressed; that in one sense, therefore, it may seem to render hope or assurance more difficult to attain or to recover.

But while the greatness of this mercy convicts and abases, still must its victorious infinitude reassure and console. The doctrine of redundant and illimitable pardons, constitutes the glory and seals the divinity of the "glad tidings;" of that gospel, which the Irish version of scripture (we are told) emphatically entitles —"the story of peace." It did so even to believers of patriarchal times; much more "in these last days" when "God hath spoken by his Son," and the "story of peace," the doctrine of boundless pardon, is more fully developed, and still more strongly ratified. That doctrine pours into the mind, if strengthened to

receive it with cordial and animated faith, a beam at once convicting, purifying, and healing; which while it enlightens each secret "chamber of imagery," pierces also and scatters each defilement, and effaces each record of condemnation there; bringing out more visibly, but to cancel as potently, the stains of guilt and the sentences of ruin; shining in the heart to display the dreadful strength and complexity of its self-rivetted chains, and to melt them in the glow and splendour of a divine redemption:—which says, what no priest or hecatomb, no sage or disputant, can say with efficiency to the wounded spirit, "Return unto Jehovah, for He will have mercy, and to our God, for he will *multiply* pardon."* What less than this could meet your anxiety and fear? What more than this, except by facts more forcible than words, to which I must presently advert, could Infinite Mercy say to dissipate them? Without this promise of reiterated pardons, this boundless store of "mercies and forgivenesses," what personal trust or joy could the gospel of Christ inspire in you or in me? If we could not hear this proclamation still renewed, as from the Saviour's lips, as from the Redeemer's cross,—He will multiply, and still multiply, his pardons,—in vain for us would be the song of seraphs, "peace on earth, good-will towards men."

* See Hebr. Isai. lv. 7, and comp. Ps. li. 1, 2. The marginal Latin of those passages, in the version of Junius, is
—— "multiplicat condonando" —— "multiplica abluere!"

If the good-will were bounded, what fully awakened transgressor would not say and feel,—alas! "it extendeth not" to me. If we could suppose the divine forgiveness offered but a hundred or a thousand times, how many a Christian would be unhappily conscious, — oh I have forfeited it *ten* thousand times, and how shall it avail for *me?*—and if we should conceive of it as secretly limited, though without an assigned or discoverable limit, how would prevailing fear suggest,—that unknown boundary is past by *me!* And yet this very process, of suppositions alike gloomy and unwarranted by scripture, takes place in the desponding mind. While we may admit in theory that God's revealed mercies in Christ, his power and will to forgive, are, like his other attributes, infinite, there is a latent temper and habit of distrust, which practically sets bounds to them. It is this limitation of "the High and Holy One" which seems to hold back not a few convinced offenders from the throne of grace, and many mourning believers, if not from the precincts of that throne, at least from reviving hope and from recovered peace.

Would we triumph over this unhappiness, and, I may add, over this kind of unbelief and sin, then whatever be our views or apprehensions concerning our spiritual state, we are bound to meditate intently on those scriptural arguments which will demonstrate that it cannot be a condition destitute of hope; which will show the truth and force of

that divine declaration, made in immediate *connexion* with the promise of multiplied pardon, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord: for as the *heavens* are high above the earth, *so* are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts:" thus forcibly enjoining a belief, that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ will, in an extent very far beyond our reckonings or conception, "multiply" his pardons. I may, indeed, before adducing some of these arguments, here premise, that if there be divine forgiveness at all, it *must needs* be thus. For, from our inevitable forgetfulness, as creatures, of a past multitude of sins, and also from our incapacity as sinners, even could we recall the details and aggravations of them all, to sum up the complex product *, to judge how opposed they are to perfect holiness, and how obnoxious to unswerving justice, we cannot know the greatness and the multitude of the pardons requisite for us. Still less can we estimate or comprehend any infinite attribute; least of all the attribute of mercy, "his beloved, his triumphant attribute; an attribute if it were possible, something more than infinite, for even his Justice is so, and his Mercy transcends that." † As well therefore might "the heavens cease to be unmeasurably high above the

* See the citation from Sir T. Browne, p. 148 above.

† South. Serm. on Prov. iii. 17. Works, vol. i. p. 21. Edit. 1704.

earth," as our minds be able to compute or fathom those "forgivenesses" which may and will, by Him who possesses infinite mercy, be dispensed.

But we shall find that scripture supplies still more affecting and important arguments. First let me inquire—has not God himself, in the latest and fullest revelation of his will, most strongly inculcated on us the exercise of unlimited forgiveness towards each other? What duty was so frequently and diversely enforced by our Saviour as this,—which was embodied in his pattern of prayer, urged as a direct precept, stated as an indispensable imitation of a divine perfection, and exemplified by his own petition uttered on the cross? Besides all these modes of enforcement, a singular question of Peter * seems to have been ordained, or graciously overruled, to procure for the church, in his Lord's answer, an assurance not to be evaded, that this duty knows no limit; that if we would aim to be "merciful as our heavenly Father is merciful," (which is solemnly pronounced essential to our own forgiveness †,) we must be *ever* "ready to forgive." It is true, the parable which immediately follows and illustrates that answer, hints, in the contrast of the hundred pence, and the ten thousand talents forgiven, at the immense inevitable disproportion between our utmost mercies,

* Matt. xviii. 21, 22; and comp. Luke xvii. 4.
† Matt. vi. 14, 15, and xviii. 35.

and a small part of the compassions of our God. But from this very contrast, from the arguments and example by which the duty is enforced, from the diversified injunction of it, and the special prominence assigned it as a grace, we are surely compelled to draw the happiest inference. For if it be strictly indispensable to the character of a good man, that he be always, and without limitation, " ready to forgive,"—if the " followers of God as dear children," have strongly evinced that readiness,—as did Stephen, " a man full of faith and of the *Holy Ghost,*" when amidst the storm of deadly assault, he cried " Lord lay not this sin to their charge,"—if this was itself but an imitation of him who in his human character was the " image of God" and of divine virtues, and one of whose latest acts was to intercede for his murderers,—and if we believe his word, that " none is good" (originally) " save one, that is, God,"—if also, we are enjoined to be " followers of God,"—invited, and promised, and declared to be " renewed *after the image* of Him that created" us, commanded to be " merciful as *He* is merciful," and " perfect as *He* is perfect," then were it not truly blasphemy to imagine that this same excellence or grace, this gift " of his own," this fruit of his Spirit, so enjoined on the children of God, and partially exemplified by them, is less than supereminent

and infinite (proportionably to his transcendent essence) in God himself?—If we, being "evil," are taught and commanded ever to forgive, and if even fallen creatures, under the teaching of God's grace, have *learnt* in some good degree this heavenly lesson,—is the One great Teacher and Exemplar to fall beneath them, by being less than infinite in any exercise of moral glory? "God requires of us" (writes Dr. Owen) "the forgiveness of others without bounds. This grace he bestows upon his saints, and manifests that he accounts it one of their most lovely and praiseworthy endowments. What then shall we say? Is there forgiveness with Him or not? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that prescribes and bestows this grace, doth He not possess it? This were as much as to say, though we are good, yet God is not? though we are benign, yet He is not. He that finds this grace wrought in him in any measure, and yet fears that he shall not find it in God for himself, doth therein, and so far, prefer himself above God."*

You may object, perhaps, to the soundness or propriety of such arguments,—that when we are enjoined to exercise unlimited forgiveness, it is in our private character: whereas the Divine Being must ever sustain that which is sovereign and judicial:—that they also seem to imply a sort of

* On Ps. cxxx. p. 303, abridged.

irreverent *claim*, as if the Almighty had brought himself under an *obligation* always to forgive, by commanding *us* always to do so;—and that they would even, by inference, tend to impugn the doctrine of Atonement. But let it be considered (referring first to the last part of the objection) that this great doctrine runs through the whole Scriptures, and especially through those later parts of them, whence the above arguments are chiefly drawn:—that it is, and can be no other than "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," in *him* "reconciling the world unto Himself," of whom we at any time speak;—that it was the same Redeemer who himself came to remove the only *bar* to our forgiveness, that likewise uttered the declarations and injunctions cited. The fact of His infinite satisfaction to justice, is therefore all along understood, and tacitly carried with us, as obviating all *impediments* to the exercise of infinite mercy. Nor do we vitiate or invalidate our reasonings from that essential attribute, by assuming and including this revealed fact; for the atonement or satisfaction of Christ can neither modify nor enhance that essential character and disposition of Deity. On the contrary, it flows from, and is the effect of it.

We should notice, on this subject, that the Divine Being is scripturally described, (and is, I think, also necessarily conceived of by us,) as bearing towards us both the paternal and the sovereign re-

lation. The former is original and intimate: much more so in one respect, than that of human paternity, which is but instrumental, not creative: more intimate also than the relation of Deity to creatures beneath us, (though He be in some sense the "Father of all;") for "God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness."—The latter—the sovereign and judicial relation—is not of such an intimate kind; although indissoluble, it is but *official;* if I may reverently apply that term to the supreme rule.

Now it is in the *former,*—in the creative and paternal relation,—that we must needs conceive the Divine Being infinitely to possess *every* essential perfection, every grace or excellency which He enjoins and imparts. Even equity or justice must be in God the Creator and Father of all, as well as in God the judge; much more, therefore, *mercy:* though, for this latter, there cannot be, in the sovereign and judicial relation, (without some special provision to prevent ill consequence,) a room or scope entirely unlimited. This, I think, reason agrees with Scripture to teach us. We find in the awful case of man, a great obstacle to it. By free forgiveness of all transgressors, even "being penitent," without some great expiation which might indicate, "save harmless," and make still more venerable the claims of justice,—so that the gift of remission should be wholly without

prejudice to these,—the order of the moral universe, and honour of its Lord, would seem unavoidably endangered. Even the heathen philosophers, with their imperfect views of sin, would hardly have thought it safe or fit that great offenders, approaching the class of Sisyphus, Tityus, or Archelaus,* should be freely, fully, and at once forgiven and blest on account of *mere* repentance. But the infinite propitiation of Christ affords a safeguard and vindication of justice amidst the boundless mercies of the real and eternal Judge. It takes off or annuls (if one may so speak) the official hinderance to the free and full effusion of essential kindness; emancipates moral perfection from its own restraints; gives room to the infinite yearnings of God's paternal heart. And that which prompted the sacrifice, is the essential "kindness and love" of "God our Saviour," himself: devising first a wondrous way to remove the necessity imposed by a divine office, and to become morally enabled to put forth in act his infinite willingness to pardon. That willingness is not produced by, but did itself originate and accept the sacrifice.

In the well-known case of the Locrian lawgiver, who enacted that adulterers should be deprived of sight, and then sacrificed one of his own eyes, that his offending son might retain one, and the law be

* See Plato, Gorgias, Ed. Routh, pp. 294 and 155—and Note p. 520.

not the less honoured, it is evident that the same "quality of mercy" might have dwelt as fully and vividly in his heart, although he had held that expedient not available for its end, or although it had been rejected by the judgment of others. But in "God the Judge,"—"glorious in holiness,"—the very existence and early disclosure of that attribute of illimitable mercy, which he also enjoins and confers upon the saints, has always predicted and implied some great and *fit provision* for its exercise, although long unexplained. Such was the position of ancient believers with regard to the atonement. They knew that there must arise some new and efficacious satisfaction to justice, *because* Jehovah had proclaimed "mercy for thousands," forgiveness of "iniquity, transgression, and sin." They had typical intimations of the nature of this satisfaction. How far they could interpret or apply these aright, we know not. They tacitly assumed, however, and were warranted in so doing, the removal of all obstacles to pardon by Him who *would* "abundantly pardon."

Neither must the above reasonings be viewed as if indecorously urging that the Supreme Being *ought* to forgive; or that a new *claim* on Himself is created by His own injunctions to us. We do not even insinuate this; (any more than that the Almighty ought to be *just* or *true,* because He

commands us to be so;) but we say that the Perfect Being, who inculcates and *inspires* mercy, *must*, by a glorious necessity of nature, (since He actually *has* removed, as it might be confidently expected he *would* do, all impediment) illimitably exercise it. Nor is it, I hope, improper to add, that were this otherwise, then Jesus in praying for his murderers,—a prayer which must have included their repentance as well as forgiveness,—would have exercised a virtue enjoined by himself as divine, inspired also by the Eternal Spirit, but yet surpassing the revealed compassion of Deity; which suppositions would be not more profane than confused and contradictory. The examination, therefore, of such objections (though they are natural and of apparent weight) will, as I judge, confirm, instead of disturbing, our confidence in the boundless grace of God. But then it may be further asked,—does not the analogy infer *too much?* For would it not show, that the Divine Being must be expected to forgive even the *impenitent*, since our forgivenesses are surely to extend to these? We answer, God does in one sense forgive the impenitent whenever he forgives, for it is only his mercy which makes them cease to be so; which gives at once both "repentance and forgiveness;" but the *separation* of those, both the judicial character and the nature of things forbids. Even *human* forgiveness, though it

may be exercised, is not fully felt and partaken as a blessing, by the offender who remains hardened against his brother that forgives. And in reference to Deity, no expiation, as far as we can conceive, could procure for a being *continuing impenitent*, an effectual participation and enjoyment of forgiveness. It would be as much as to say, that reconcilement and alienation might consist or coincide.

If finally, you press or pursue this subject to the awful question, why does not He who "multiplieth pardons" at once make all men penitent, and forgive them all, or make all men penitent by, and in, the very act of his forgiveness?—We reply only—who can "by searching find out God"?—It is "high as heaven," what can we do? "Deeper than hell;" what can we know? "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right"? Let us be exceedingly grateful that He confers on us some desire and will to repent, and that to the penitent, his mercies are boundless, both in the gift of more of the grace of repentance, and of new remission, and of new repentance still.

While engaged in meeting an objection, I have thus incidentally introduced that second and most forcible argument for infinite forgivenesses, which is derived from the *act* of Deity; showing you how this inestimable truth, of the Almighty's boundless placability, is demonstrated in a way that far tran-

scends our thoughts, by the means devised and employed to make boundless pardons possible or fit;—accordant with the inviolability of Divine justice: namely, the humiliation and sufferings of the Son of God. What pledge of Jehovah's infinite desire and readiness to pardon, and unchangeable "delight" in mercy, could we ask for or invent, that should equal or approximate to this? If He who "layeth up the depth in store-houses," were to collect the ocean into the spaces of the sky, and pour it, drop by drop, again into its mighty bed, and declare—so many, so vast, shall be the multitude of my forgivenesses—would He in truth proclaim his compassions to be inexhaustible with so intense an emphasis, as when He "spared not his own Son," but permitted blameless love to agonize, and be poured forth, drop by drop, in the garden and on the cross,—saying with a silent force that rent the rocks,— all *this*, even *this*, expressly, that I may, though perfectly righteous, yet "abundantly pardon;" only, that I may, though inflexibly "just," yet "justify," and "sanctify," and "glorify" the ruined.

Once more, the truth which is so invaluable, and which is so demonstrated, may yet receive some corroboration from another thought; namely, that thus *alone* (as far as we are able to conceive) could one great moral attribute of Deity be, in its infini-

tude, exerted and displayed. His stupendous power and wisdom are perpetually evinced in the support of an immeasurable creation, which, at least in part, he declares, shall be imperishable likewise. But in what way could the vastness of his forbearance and mercy be occupied and made apparent, without fallen, guilty, and miserable creatures to forgive?—creatures, moreover, whose ruin should be so verily "to the uttermost," whose offences so great and numberless, that nothing except a godlike, illimitable grace could be supposed "*more* to abound?" I offer not this at all as a solution of the Origin of Evil; to which awful question our faculties appear essentially incompetent; still less as an impious plea for "continuing in sin that grace may abound," a state of heart dreadfully incompatible with penitence, and therefore with pardon: but, simply taking the facts as they are, that our sins are overwhelming, and that God's mercies must needs in themselves be infinite, I adduce it as an "exercise against despair." It is forcibly touched on by Bishop Taylor in a passage of his works, so entitled;—"I am taught to believe God's mercies to be infinite, not only in Himself, but to us; for mercy is a relative term, and we are its correspondents. Of all the creatures which God created, we only" (he should here, I think, have added—so far as we are informed) "are, in a proper sense,

the subjects of mercy and remission.—Since, therefore, man alone is the correlative or proper object and vessel of reception of an infinite mercy, and that mercy is in giving and forgiving, I have reason to hope that He will so forgive me, that my sins shall not hinder me of heaven; or because it is a gift, I may also, upon the stock of the same infinite mercy, hope He will give heaven to me; and if I have it either upon the title of giving or forgiving, it is alike to me, and will alike magnify the glories of the Divine mercy."*—"Were not forgiveness in God" (observes Dr. Owen) "somewhat beyond what men could imagine, no flesh could be saved†;" and elsewhere, "God will not lose the glory of these his excellencies, he will be revealed in them, he will be known by them, he will be glorified for them; which He could not be, if there were not forgiveness with Him ‡." "Now this forgiveness" (he remarks in another place) "is like Himself, such as becomes Him; that answers the infinite perfections of his nature; that is exercised and given forth by him as God. We are apt to narrow and straiten it by an unbelief, and to render it unbecoming of Him §." And this, he justly argues, is to "dishonour God," as well as "to entangle our own spirits, by limiting his grace." At least this question, I am sure,

* Holy Dying, ch. v. sect. 5. (An exercise against despair.)
† On Ps. cxxx., p. 305. ‡ Ibid., p. 283. § Ibid., p. 309.

may be forcibly pressed on every desponding mind,—Ought we to be hopeless of the extension to ourselves of a mercy in which we know that God "delighteth," because we are in that very condition which alone can give Him occasion to display it most admirably, to reveal it most divinely?

I have thus attempted to bring under your view and my own, reasons, which appear unanswerable by any one that believes the Bible, why the extent of Divine "forgivenesses" must needs transcend our largest necessities and largest hopes. Here then, could we but feel as we reason, are sovereign antidotes against despair. Here is the unbounded and unfathomed ocean of God's mercies, into which we should be ever aiming to steer and impel our feeble bark of hope, away from those rocky shallows of our own narrow apprehensions, where else it must presently be wrecked or stranded. Give it this ocean-room, the immeasurable "breadth and length, and depth" of the divine compassions, and then though every "stormy wind" of terror beat upon it with increasing fierceness, none shall finally overwhelm or utterly destroy.

But I am quite conscious that, in order to the happy and prevailing application of such arguments, we need far more than the mere statement of them, or even meditation on them; we need an answer to more fervent prayer; that we may be strengthened with

might by His Spirit, "and thus enabled to apprehend" more effectually these boundless and inspiring consolations. Still must we implore, without ceasing, the aid of that Eternal Spirit, that "Communicative Love," (as an old divine has styled the heavenly Comforter,) to touch our spirits with the feeling, though our reason cannot grasp the thought. For it must needs be with this attribute of mercy as with every attribute of Him who is in all things infinite: when it is presented to the intellect, we labour as it were to grasp a globe upheld by the enthroned King of Kings, and we discover only, as we gaze and reach forth towards it, that it is incomprehensible; that "the measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea:" yet let Him who bears it deign, with condescending sovereignty, to incline his sceptre gently towards us,—and a quick radiation from all that orb of mercy shall flow into the heart, and we shall feel with transport, in our child-like littleness, what angels in their elder greatness cannot comprehend.

We may, as professed believers, have contemplated this doctrine of superabounding mercy, or at least have had it presented to us, in modes and at times unnumbered. But yet is it now, through its own augmented agency and power, poured into our souls with a new and healing vividness? Surely so divine an infusion, if we quench it not, will mightily enlarge

and gladden them, will animate and impel every pulse of spiritual life, will prompt us to that growing forbearance and sympathy, without which we can never advance in his resemblance who "multiplieth pardons," and will quicken every aspiration towards that realm of love where the redeemed must eternally outvie each other in the praise of his surpassing grace.

VIII.

ON THE PAIN ENDURED IN THE WANT OR LOSS OF SOCIAL BLESSINGS WHICH WOULD BE PECULIARLY DEAR TO US.

SOLITUDE is but a comparative and indefinite term. The isolated Selkirk, as his complaint is pathetically imagined by Cowper, felt himself in loneliness, though "lord of the fowl and the brute." Yet, had his islet been even by these unpeopled, void of all other life, or only of the larger animals, that "monarch of all he surveyed" must have been much more desolate still. "Their tameness" was "shocking," but their disappearance would have been doubly so; especially as he had found means to induce in some a sort of attachment to himself, and thus to indulge, however inadequately, the social and benevolent affections*. Where solitude has

* See the account of Selkirk given by Captain Woodes Rogers in Harris's Voyages.

been meant and deemed to be cruelly complete, the discovery of but one living inmate of the cell, even a mouse or spider, has afforded solace. Something to feed and to welcome, something to be aided or attracted by the captive's care, has been a matter of soothing interest. To have sentient creatures round us, which—though we may fastidiously decline to name them *fellow*-creatures—show an instinctive sense that they are the better for our presence, is a relief which must needs make the penalty of solitude less rigorous and less absolute. But even to witness animation and enjoyment, to watch the sea-birds wheeling round the cliff, or the herd resting in the shade, though they may see our "form with indifference;" and though it may, in one sense, aggravate solitude to feel that they all have the kindred society which to us is wanting, is yet a source of pensive pleasure. It must have been so, one would think, to our first parent, before his Eve was formed; a pleasure felt indeed to be exceedingly defective, but which he would not have lost without regret. On the other hand, the mere *presence* of human beings, without any intercourse,—as when we pass through crowded streets, and meet perhaps through the hour or day no one with whom to interchange a thought or feeling,—this, it has often been observed, if not solitude, is as surely not so-

ciety*. Yet how preferable this to the compulsory intercourse of those from whom the mind revolts; which were far worse than solitude! Thus Trenck or Bonnivard might willingly abridge the brief visit of a coarse unfeeling keeper, to resume their intimacy with the little speechless comrades of the cell.

Nay, in cases far removed from such, there is a sort or degree of solitariness which some minds habitually endure, amidst associations necessarily constant. There are those who find in the small social sphere to which sex, or youth, or age, or want of wealth restricts them, no mind of like capacities or tastes, or none possessing those highest, deepest sympathies with their own, which embrace "the things eternal;" and without which other affinities of taste and habit are but shallow and inconstant.

Such privations,—where, by the supposition, deep affections, earnest sentiments and intellectual activities are peculiarly excitable but wholly ungratified, —must needs deepen every natural yearning for the most intimate attachments.

But let this case be even reversed. Let the social circle be extensive and acceptable, and nearer unions of kindred and friendship enjoyed. Still may the heart in secret sigh for more. A tender or a fervent spirit

* ——— "this crowded loneliness,
Where ever-moving myriads seem to say,
Go—thou art nought to us, nor we to thee—away!"
KEBLE.

will often long for that closest union where soul is most intimately "knit with soul," and where confiding tenderness can mutually unbosom joys and griefs, interests and trials, from the greatest even to the least. Many are the circumstances which may give to this desire a character at once of intenseness and of despondency. Affection may find no congenial object, or it may be unresponded to, and even unknown. Disparities of rank or years, local remoteness, prudential checks, regretted differences of religious or secular connexion, may repress its indulgence; or death may soon and fatally break its charm. These, no doubt, are chosen themes of romance; but they are not unworthy of a place in pages dedicated to truth; for the mental pains which they involve are keenly real, and must occur in all grades of society that rise above the lowest form of barbarism.

Nor is this the only class of privations to which we now refer. From her days of whom Elkanah asked "why weepest thou?" and the earlier times of the disconsolate Rachel, how many hearts, in which the maternal pulse was beating with almost predictive warmth, have mourned to be childless: some, no doubt,—though we trust, in these latter days, with submission befitting the heirs of clearer promises,—praying earnestly for the gift deferred; and if it be finally denied, or bestowed only to be re-

sumed, bitter is the disappointed wish, as pure as it was ardent; and yet more keen the stroke by which God "hath taken away," what seemed to the parent almost her earthly all.

Not seldom does more than one of these wants or losses contribute to darken an individual's lot. But let only one such be assigned; and no heart affectionately susceptible will be able to conceal from itself the pain of destitution. Often might we hear, if thought were audible, the secret musing—how would that tender friendship, that treasure of affection which is hopeless or for ever gone, soothe unblameably the cares of life, and sweeten all its comforts; how would it sustain me in griefs and avert my steps from snares, engage me in benevolent and tender duties, excite the happiest thoughts, and quicken the most sacred purposes!

And there is much general truth in those feelings and expectations. It is quite true that, by the good pleasure of Him who ordaineth our lot, such acquisitions might induce a great diminution of present trial, and a great accession of usefulness and enjoyment. In very many cases, therefore, is it not only allowable but commendable, to seek and to pray for these blessings.

But yet how true likewise is the adage often repeated by an old divine, and (though it may seem to the inexperienced or inconsiderate a sort of jejune

truism,) how important also;—"creatures are helpless things without God, for every creature is that, all that, and only that, which He makes it to be."* In applying this maxim to our present subject, we need not suggest those strong or extreme cases, where the most ardent wishes, the most sanguine and even pious hopes, have issued, by the very fulfilment of their aim, in utter and heart-sickening disappointment,—where passionate or deep attachment, apparently mutual, indulged perhaps at the cost of personal sacrifices, or perhaps by procuring such from its object,—has, ere long, been wounded by an unkindness that would have seemed incredible, or has led to spiritual declensions and moral aberrations the most unhappy. Nor need we dwell on those deplorable instances where a child, whose birth or whose recovery was once matter of intense solicitude, has proved no Samuel, but rather, like the sons of Eli; piercing a parent's heart with many sorrows. We may advert to facts and circumstances much less melancholy than those, and yet sufficing to mar or disfigure the *ideal;* to rend or soil the faultless but slight embroideries, with which a creative imagination invests some of life's most genuine pleasures.

It is affectingly true, that in minds where the capacity to weave this enchanting scenery is greatest,

* Matthew Henry on 2 Kings vi. 27. A like saying had been common with his excellent father, Philip Henry.

where the woof is of gossamer and its tints are of ethereal glow, there must the contact of reality most surely disarrange or discolour it. So that the very minds, which feel at times those privations and yearnings of the affections most deeply, may often, after their wishes are favourably realized, be most acutely perceptive and tremblingly sensitive as to the differences between the idea and the substance, the picture and the landscape. The magic tints of the visionary painting did not change; or the change was but as a variation of loveliness, from spring to autumn, or sunlight to a soothing shade; but the real landscape must have its days of mistiness, and its hours of tempest. Discoveries and experiences of weakness, the collisions of practical life and fluctuations of daily feeling, misapprehensions to which our weak and limited reason is ever liable, distractions and thwartings of the work-day world, infirmities and faults of childhood and of manhood,—all, in short, on which an eloquent writer has founded her impressive testimony that "Life is not a hymn,"—have been discerned and felt with especial acuteness by some who had endured the deepest previous pain at the delay of those enjoyments which make life *most* poetic. The presentiment or bare suspicion of such deductions, may avail to check the unchastened vehemence both of wishes and regrets.

Yet many whose emotions we thus would mode-

rate,—nay even the more reflective and foreboding, schooled in the illusions and the pains of life, and thus most wont to take refuge, when joys are denied, in the forethought of probably attendant sorrows,—will doubtless feel and say—these, after all, are pleas for resignation which serve much more to deject or exacerbate than to satisfy. Besides, there must be fallacy in a view of things which persuades us to acquiesce in foregoing the best and tenderest pleasures, on the single ground that they are sure to be alloyed and interrupted, if not extinguished, by some contingent pains. On the same ground, the want of liberty, of learning, of competence, of reason, nay perhaps of revelation itself, might be paradoxically pleaded for as a matter of preference.

Others will add, with an afflictive remembrance of the past—you would console by cheerless possibilities, but I mourn over heart-rending facts. I know by sad retrospect, that the comforts of affection may be enjoyed, without any considerable share of those abatements by which you would detract from their anticipated worth.—This, however, is to imagine, that we would unduly extenuate that worth, or dissuade from the acceptance of such blessings; whereas it is really a quite different aim to remind those from whom Providence withholds them, that these, like all temporal enjoyments, cannot be unmingled.

But I dismiss these unwelcome themes of conso-

lation. I assume these privations to be as grievous as you sometimes feel them: I grant that they also might, if it pleased the great Arbiter, be so supplied, that there should be no sharp thorns or weighty crosses hidden in the delightful gifts. Yet this very supposition, welcome as it may be to the mind where such hope is warmly cherished, must speedily conduct and compel us towards those highest and final resources for comfort, to which all others are at best but subsidiary. For the more assured we could be, that refined and exquisite earthly gratifications, *if* possessed, or *while* possessed, would for us be unalloyed and untarnished,—the more depressing the thought of their hourly precariousness, of their swift and certain extinction; unless as Christians we attempt—what none but Christians can afford or dare, —to gather comfort in destitution (felt or feared) from the transitoriness of all possession, and pluck, as it were, some leaves of healing from the very nightshade of mortality. If this brief life were all, then truly were its selectest joys and deepest griefs, its hopes and wants and desolations but of small account; its most chosen and endeared delights but a poor fugitive decaying all. The pensiveness and refinement which feel and render these most precious, would render them also melancholy treasures. The "thought of death" which hovers upon all the fairest forms and mutations of nature, and finds a home in

every poetic heart, would wear irretrievably a spectral darkness; and we should say to each enjoyment as Herbert to his rose,—the more hopelessly in proportion as it were bright and sweet and thornless,—

> "Thy root is ever in its grave,
> And thou must die."

If this life were our all, and known to be so, then indeed to be inconsolable for its whole ascertained penury and wretched mystery were inevitable and just: but it would not be worth the while to sigh over its fleeting variations, its momentary differences or contrasts. We might be well too sad or desperate to weep over the want or loss of pleasures fatally evanescent, which at best could but tantalize and excruciate us with their dying sweetness.

But when we "know and are persuaded" that this life is *not* all,—nay, that it is but "the twilight of our day," the dim and narrow "vestibule" of our existence,—then may the perishable character of earthly good suggest consolations under the want of it, which, while they thus acquire a new impressiveness, are more than half divested of their gloom. The boundless radiance of immortality, while it contracts the "vapour" that "vanishes away" into a less hand's-breadth than the prophet saw from Carmel, softens and gilds the "little cloud" which it diminishes.

To toil or glide onward through our "few and

evil" days, without the dearest of created blessings to soothe us, is to want that which, were it our all, would be next to nothing to possess, but which, being not all, will be viewed hereafter as next to nothing to have lacked; as the by-gone absence of too little a portion of happiness to miss; a sort of infinitesimal, heretofore subtracted from the sum of endless joy. Inestimable as it might have been "for a moment," still would the privation be too momentary to be at all counted in retrospect, if it were not that it must be counted gratefully; since each cross which God appoints us here, however in itself "unworthy to be compared" or mentioned there, will be seen to have had a high prospective value towards heightening subsequent felicity. The best earthly joys that are withholden are as grains of gold snatched by a descending angel from life's swift and troubled stream. You mourn that you find them not: but they are stored and combined elsewhere; they shall form those golden vessels of the heavenly sanctuary, whence you may take "of the fountain of life freely." For it must never be forgotten, that these wants or losses, which, though indeed but transitory, are often, in our narrow mortal view, protracted as well as severe, have been adapted and designed to fix profoundly in our hearts the unalterable truth,—that Uncreated Good can alone have an original and immutable reality;—to incite our wavering desires after this "one Good,—that is God;" and convince

us that, in the unclouded experience of his everlasting favour, there is a bliss which infinitely outweighs all joys of finite affection: nay that the glimpses and prelibations of that bliss, when it shall please Him who "is Love" to indulge with these the vigilant and waiting spirit, will amply compensate every other privation even here. And yet the pain of such privations,—which, so far from being culpable, indicates the strength of benevolent and kindly feeling,—may itself not obscurely intimate, that the God of love will hereafter employ his perfected creatures as reciprocal *media* of those pure joys which must owe their origination, fulness, and perpetuity, to Himself alone. For I strongly dissent from what a few philosophising theologians have appeared to hold,—that the highest and final attainment of bliss in the perfect love of God, will involve the cessation of subordinate affections. To imagine, under whatever colour of devout sublimity, "that among the blessed in heaven all love of the creature does utterly cease, and is for ever silenced in that region of happiness,"* is not only to presume "above that which is written," but to wander beyond the region of common sense.

It is assuredly lawful and right, that we love our fellow beings not only with a love of good-will, but with a love of esteem and complacency as far as they bear and reflect the divine image, and with a love of

* Norris's "Letters concerning the love of God," (1695,) p. 168.

gratitude as far as they are instrumentally valuable and benevolent towards us; and it is contrary both to all analogy and many scriptural intimations, to suppose that either of these sentiments will be extinct in heaven; nay that they will not each be multiplied, enhanced, and blissfully animated there. The excellent Shaw seems in like manner to err by an excess of devotional aspiring, when he affirms that "we shall come to live upon God and delight in God alone, without any creature;"* that "the holy soul shall feed upon Him singly, live upon Him entirely, be wrapt up in Him wholly;†" alleging also that "angels delight not in any created comfort,‡" and that the perfected saints will thus "equal" them, in being "abstracted from all created things," so that the creature "shall be nothing at all to them or in them."§ Much more scriptural and tenable is this devout writer's language when he only censures "living upon the creature, or a loving of the creature with a *distinct* love;‖" and adds, "to taste a sweetness in the creature, and to see a beauty and goodness in it, is our duty: but then it must be the sweetness of God in it, and the goodness of God, which we ought alone to taste and see in it."¶ The precept is just,

* Angelical Life,—in the "Mourner's Companion," (Chalmers and Collins,) p. 366.

† Ib., p. 351. ‡ Ib., p. 350. § Ib., p. 350.

‖ Ib., p. 356. ¶ Ib., p. 357.

though lofty, which he quotes and enforces,—" In a particular being, love the universal Goodness: let the whole world be as the garden of God to you, from which you may drink something of the divine sweetness."* But surely that temper, while fitly suggested as earnestly to be pursued on earth, is likewise the only one revealed to us as subsisting in heaven. When, going beyond this, it is attempted to imagine either " ministering spirits," or " glorified heirs of salvation," as having reached a further and *absolute* abstraction from the creature, we alter the scriptural notion of their social state of bliss, without any ground to believe that we substitute a state which would be really more perfect or exalted. Doubtless, " the blessed and only Potentate" *could* create beings who should be fully and for ever blest in the exclusive contemplation of Himself: each unacquainted with, and incapable of knowing, the existence of any creature; conscious only to the beatific presence of an infinite Parent and Preserver. Possibly, amidst the multiform wonders of creation, there are found such lonely yet happy intelligences, whose peculiar mode of blessedness may be designed to impress most strongly on other orders of the happy, the perfection of the divine All-sufficiency.

> It may be,—in some " wilderness of suns,"
> Some heavenly Polynesia, calmly bright,
> Where scarce a breath the odorous forest waves,

* Angelical Life, p. 376.

Such eremites muse; enrapt eternally
In the sole vision of the boundless mind.
Created impercipient; needing nought
From hues or forms or fragance, or the swell
Of holiest harmonies in starry vales,
Or glancings of the seraph's eye divine.
But ever and alone the fount of life
Imbibing, ere its hidden fulness gush
In wellings of creative splendour forth;
Bath'd ever in that inmost plenitude;
Amid the primal and translucent depths
Of glorious wisdom and enrapturing love.
Latent, to these, all worlds: yet not themselves
Unseen, nor by the hymning seraph view'd
With unaugmented fervours; visible
Like hallow'd luminous statues, softly crown'd
With evening starlight: too absorb'd in bliss
For local change, yet, through the varying mood
Of blissful contemplation, still instinct
With gesture most emphatic, and quick gleam
And changeful shade of meditative joy:
Till e'en celestials kindle as they gaze,
Then marvel how the' unconscious can have touch'd
The chords that wake a thousand thousand songs.
These too perchance, e'en lowlier creatures eye
With half intelligent fondness, or recede
In wistful awe. The swift and gorgeous bird
From some far paradise, on rainbow plume
Slow floats,—and stays her warblings,—fain to watch
The hermit spirit's beauty.
But much more
The saints, creation's nobler pilgrims, pause
When guiding angels point, to linger o'er
The solitary's rapture; where,—entranced
In his interior heaven—to eyes unseen,
And realms unknown, his voiceless extasy
Proclaims the immense and all-sufficing God;
Who, should he shroud with an impervious veil
This universe, and every happy mind
From happy minds dissociate, would seclude

Each in a Father's bosom; each insphere
Within that orb of glories increate,
That uncaused universe whence nature sprang.

Such beings are imaginable; but their existence, if not unlikely, at least is unrevealed. The only state of happy spirits, whether angelic or human, which scripture discloses, is, as was before remarked, a social state. We may conclude, indeed, that all have their optional solitudes,—perhaps attainable without new or separate locality by a power of complete mental abstraction,—in which they enjoy exclusively the contemplation of Deity. But this opinion arises from our experience of change as heightening enjoyment, a condition it may be of all finite natures; and from a sense of the great limitation of our own faculties; not from anything intrinsically better or loftier in that supposed abstraction. For we know that in Him who is essentially perfect, the highest and happiest contemplation must consist with eternal omniscience, perpetual omnipresence, universal and unsuspended agency. We know, also, and every lasting hope and joy are built upon the fact, that the love and complacency of this glorious Being are ever fixed on an "innumerable company" of sinless and renewed creatures. Therefore, although there can be no proportion to this divine capacity in any finite mind, yet assuredly the nearest resemblance and approximation to the mind of our infinite Creator and Saviour, must be sought not in abstrac-

tion from creatures or indifference towards them, but in the very reverse.

Besides which, it is obvious to inquire, *wherefore* that associated state which is revealed to us; why that "innumerable company of angels;" why that "general assembly and church of the first-born;" if it be not in order to enhance felicity? Even if it could be shown that glorified saints reciprocate no love except that of mere benevolence or good-will, would it be affirmed that there is no joy in *this* love, the very love which moved Him who "*delighteth* in mercy," to confer "His unspeakable gift;" and our Redeemer to endure the cross?—But further, mutual love of this kind between creatures, necessarily involves a mutual love of gratitude; nor would it be less than unnatural and presumptuous to suppose the absence of that other love, which consists in esteem, admiration, and complacency, towards those who bear the image of the heavenly Saviour, and are presented "faultless before his throne." And why should either of these sentiments,—either a benevolent or grateful or complacent affection—towards perfect creatures, be deemed to interfere with supreme love to God, or even with ultimate love to Him in the very act of intermediate love to them? It is finely said by the writer above cited, "Every particular good is a blossom of the first goodness; every created excellency is a dark draught of God, and a

broken beam of this infinite Sun of righteousness."* But would it be a just consequence, that there is to be no admiration, love, or joy, in viewing the reflected or refracted beam?

If some erring devotee of Surya† were gifted with an eye more unblenching than we deem the eagle's, able to fix with unfatigued admiration on the sun's fullest blaze, would it follow that he must do this unceasingly,—or would not the vision of that "great light" be virtually continued, although not direct, when he should turn to look upon "the sea-wave's multitudinous smile,"‡ "the moon walking in brightness," or the "pearled and rubied clouds," where

> "Myriads of diffusive dyes
> Stream o'er the tissued skies?"§

Would he be likely to forget, amidst these brilliant reflections and refractions, the day-spring which first shed forth and still renews their splendour? or would that lunar mirror and that rubied cloud, and "many-twinkling smile of ocean," each prepare him to turn

* Angelical Life, in ibid., p. 376.

† The title of the sun in Hindu mythology. See Sir W. Jones's Poems, vol. ii. p. 93.

‡ See this fine phrase of Æschylus quoted, with the different version of it which is added, "the many-twinkling smile of ocean," in the "Christian Year," (p. 134,) one of the most original and beautiful volumes of sacred poetry since the days of Herbert.

§ Sir W. Jones's Poems, vol. ii. p. 101.

to the sun itself with a deeper, though deluded, reverence?

And when you shall look in heaven upon angelic "ministers of grace," or on some dear object of whom you are now bereft, or whom you loved in untold sadness because the sentiment could not be expressed, or could not be mutual; when you shall find all excellencies, real or ideal, which you had conceived in creatures, verified and far transcended, and every pure and blameless ardour shall awake in the intimate society of those whom Jehovah has caused to reflect perfectly his glorious image,—will the beatific and adoring vision of the "Sun of righteousness" be by such objects or feelings suspended? and although it should be less constantly direct or exclusive, will it not, by these alternations, acquire at one season a milder loveliness, at another a sublimer majesty? When you shall thus associate with perfect creatures, it is true you will, so far, admire and love the "shadows of that glorious essence with whom there is no shadow of change."* It will be in some sense but a "bright cloud" of heavenly "witnesses" which shall encompass you; but in its "myriads of diffusive dyes" you will venerate that plastic all-pervading brightness, which can give even to the cloud an ever-during beauty, varying yet indissoluble.

Be consoled then under the vanished hopes, the

* "Shaw's Angelical Life," p. 377. in the "Mourner's Companion."

unfulfilled wishes and repeated wounds, which you have suffered and may yet endure. "The hour cometh" when, without any infringement of supreme devotedness to the Author of all good, you shall give to glorified creatures a love alike pure and fervent; mediately to them but ultimately to Him; feeling that all their moral and material beauty is in itself derivative but in Him unchanging; in them also destined to be permanent, because it is his will and promise that it shall not decay. Anticipate the unreserved endearment, the perfect love of heaven, as means by which the God of grace will manifest his beneficence and glory. "Remember how short the time is," ere the dejection of a lonely heart may be exchanged for the full sunshine of blessedness, and all that living and love-breathing imagery, which shall reflect and variegate its beams. Till then, may "the Lord direct your heart into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ."

IX.

ON ADVERSITIES IN PECUNIARY CIRCUMSTANCES.

NOTWITHSTANDING a great number of distressing facts which wear the contrary aspect, it is soothing to conclude on the whole, that the order of Divine Providence, and the progress of human affairs under that hidden administration, are lessening from age to age the general sum of violent and extreme adversity.

The civilization and science, the public spirit and prudential foresight, which have grown with the growth of enlightened Christianity, form a sort of lower parallel, in temporal benefits, to the sublimer blessings which the gospel has diffused; so that its complex influence is seen to have abated the insecurities and terrors of "the life that now is," as well as those, more momentous, of "that which is to come."

There is in this concurrence an obvious fitness and harmony. It yields a kind of collateral pledge for the loftier promises of that "godliness," which "is profitable unto all things." There would have been some discordancy, had a religion which predicts, even for this world, an era of glorious peace and blessedness, rendered meantime the social and individual state of man more and more calamitous on the whole.

It is well, therefore, to recollect, with gratitude and hope, how far that is from being the fact. In what may be specially termed the ages and domains of Christian civilization, those dreadful visitations of disease have become less multiplied and less destructive, which, by striking most awfully at human life, "shake terribly" the whole social fabric: and although a grievous scourge of this kind has recently filled many parts of our land with mourning and others with dismay, yet I trust we may regard its desolations as actually far less wide, and its speedy recurrence or long duration as far less probable, than they would, by the *unchecked* operation of natural causes, have been at remote periods. In the fourteenth century, and in each of the four successive reigns of Elizabeth, James, and the first and second Charles, this island was ravaged by pestilences which, in the extent of their depopulating havoc, were greatly more terrific.

The horrors also of famine, which in the first-named century were dreadfully experienced in England, have been rendered much less an object of dread, not only by a better regulated industry, but by the resources of a vastly extended intercourse with distant nations.

It should, doubtless, be much more solemnly and submissively remembered than it is, in reference to both, that we are ever, and most absolutely, "in the hand of" Him, who could give to "his sword" the pestilence, a *quite* unsparing commission, or inflict, on every region, simultaneous and protracted barrenness. But we do not omit to feel and acknowledge that "very great are His mercies," when we attribute, instrumentally, the rareness and mitigations of those dire distresses, to such advancements in society as have attended on His higher gift;—themselves, therefore, *equally* ordinations of His undeserved goodness;—yet the natural and happy effects of which, He could, at any moment, and in any measure, frustrate.

In the same order of concomitance with Christian civilization, have massacre and rapine become less prevalent in war; feuds, assassinations, and outrages, more rare in times of national peace; pillage and palpable extortion have been checked by settled laws; conflagrations have grown less frequent and incontrollable: and against the effects of these,

as of some other losses, securities have been devised, by which, though the love of gain might invent them, the cause of humanity is served. I select one minor instance, (casually presented to me,) of the frequency of *one* kind of those calamities; which, perhaps, may be more impressive than general statements as to all of them.

It appears from the annals of one of our most ancient cities, that of Gloucester, (which happen to come under my notice while writing this piece,) that, during the first century from the Norman invasion, it was four times destroyed by fire, and in the following century as often; though if any place could be safe by precaution or protection, it might be one where kings often held their courts, and prelates their synods.

If we meditate on the plagues and fires, the dearths, the oppressions and intestine wars of earlier history, we shall not be very prone to conclude—"the former times were better than these."

But has it then ceased to be true, that "man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards?" Are sudden, conspicuous and extreme reverses gone out of date, or can modern prudence wholly ward off or remedy them? The memory of our own day of revolutions and convulsions strikingly proclaims the negative. How many have yet a strong remembrance of that epoch when princes and dignitaries

from the *nearest* continental shore took refuge here from public tumult and threatened destruction; stripped of their estates, palaces, and honours, and forced to engage in irksome employments for a dubious support. In the year 1793 the present sovereign of France, then the young and destitute Duc de Chartres, a member of one of the most ancient reigning families, travelling with a single domestic, on foot, over the snowy Alps, approached the hospitable convent of St. Gothard. "He rang the bell, and a capuchin appearing at the window asked in Italian—what do you want? Some nourishment for my companion and myself, replied the wanderer. We do not receive foot-passengers or persons of your sort here, rejoined the capuchin. But, reverend father, we will pay what you demand—said the Duke. No, no, the inn opposite is good enough for you, said the monk; and pointing to a miserable shed where the muleteers stop for refreshment, he closed the window, and disappeared."* Surely this one slight scene might teach us, that the account of vicissitudes incident to greatness three thousand years ago,—"He poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness wherein there is no way,"—has not become wholly inapplicable by the lapse of ages.

* Lady Morgan's "France." A fine painting commemorates this occurrence.

But we need not go to the houses and memoirs of sovereigns, in order to seek a fair and fit application of the phrase, "He poureth contempt upon princes." The prophet Isaiah's language, in his vivid picture of "Tyre the crowning"—"whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers the honourable of the earth," * has become singularly apposite to those of Genoa and Venice in their turn, and still is, in some points, to those of our own "merchant cities." Yet we have seen the successors of the Dorias and Durazzos tenanting obscure corners of their splendid palaces; and of late years, in our own country, not seldom has the petty dividend of a just demand been actually paid to creditors by the individual who had possessed both rank and commanding opulence. I have myself received such a fraction at the hands of such a sufferer, who fulfilled the mortifying office with a manly courtesy.

How families have been thus cast down as by an earthquake, from the refinements of education and of luxury to the hard and bitter trials of dependence, all persons intimate with our recent commercial annals are too well apprized. If some of my readers have become acquainted with such a change experimentally, they will feel as if other forms of kindred disaster should scarcely be compared with that of the class in which they are numbered; and may

* xxiii. 8.

imagine, perhaps less justly, that some aggravations of circumstance or character give to themselves individually a sad pre-eminence of suffering even among that class.

There are, however, other modes and degrees of pecuniary adversities, in some respects much less severe, and yet not trivial, which especially belong to our own times and country; consisting not in sudden and total overthrow, but in a quiet, partial, continued subtraction of means and resources. It may be not inaptly expressed in the scripture phrase which precedes that lately quoted; "they are minished and brought low;" a phrase descriptive, more or less, of the present condition of multitudes; applicable, in a painful sense, to that of many who never possessed more than a very small share of this world's goods, who moved in a lowly sphere, and acquired their daily comforts by daily exertions. Yet these they did acquire, with moderate toil and tranquil regularity, obtaining "food and raiment," and the simplest conveniences of life, with little fear that the sources of supply would be interrupted or reduced. But national or local changes, the consequences of public policy or of others' private ruin, of war, or peace, or of mechanical inventions, have gradually brought them to a state of penury; if not an actual destitution of things "needful for the body," still an anxious dif-

ficulty in procuring these, with measures of hardship, dependence, and privation, which they never expected would be mingled in their lot.

Another class less numerous, but still not small, and more likely perhaps to meet with these remarks, is that of persons who have been in what are termed "easy circumstances," either employing their property in respectable kinds of trade, or placed above the necessity of any such aid for their support. Many of these were heretofore fairly ranked among the rich; according to what seems the truest definition of that word,—the having a competent disposable surplus above those claims which the fit habits of our social station lay upon us. But they have ceased, by a succession of changes, to be, in *this* sense, rich. Their means have variously failed and been contracted; and while they have seen some, who were at the summit of affluence and display, whirled suddenly, with broken reins and a fearful crash, into the valley, they have found themselves led from their much less lofty position, not hastily or ungently, perhaps, but by a strong hand, far down the hill-side. They may still have considerable means and many comforts. They want not "*food* convenient." But they are checked in their former scale of liberal and hospitable expense, though it was never at all ostentatious, nor was thought improvident. They are become less able

"to do good and to communicate;" and they anxiously foresee that, should this train of minor but successive assaults on their always moderate prosperity be continued, they must at length be painfully straitened. Such changes and prospects are of various shades as well as from different causes; but even of those, who in the less degrees experience them, it may be said—"they are minished,"—if not with equal truth,—"they are brought low." It will also be felt by themselves, and should not be forgotten by those whom more ruinous losses have overthrown, that these lesser adversities are painful, as being scarcely known or reckoned on except by those who encounter them. Where they do not compel or warrant that decisive and visible change of habits, which duty or expediency, or both, may prevent or retard, they produce little or no change in the external estimate of circumstances; they receive therefore little or no sympathy, and are met with little or no allowance. The other instances to which I have adverted are of a more broad and striking character; but this last sketch may be verified by not a few with sadness, as that of their own unwelcome though unnoticed allotment *.

* It may be added, that this latter degree of adversity has likewise occurred to many persons of rank and affluence; and also, that when it befalls any who subsist without personal industry, there are those who view it not only with no concern, but who urge and advocate public measures which would greatly aggravate and vastly multiply such cases.

To render, however, such dispensations the less unwelcome and depressing, nay in some respects to reverse their influence, is an office to which, if ever any moral system can be so, the Christian system must be competent. The old philosophy boldly affected to perform it, and not without some success; but the gospel undertakes the task with incomparably greater power; and if we are not, in some measure, thankful learners, the weakness of our faith is of necessity betrayed. With regard to that primitive body of believers whose rise and sufferings the New Testament records, so far were they from being distinctly encouraged, like the Mosaic church, by a hope of temporal indulgence,—so far from receiving any pledge of immunity from worldly trial,—that adversities were to them a special matter of their Lord's prediction and *promise:* were to be marks of genuine discipleship and paternal adoption; and were made both by Christ and his apostles a subject of beatitude.

This, we may observe in passing, yields strong presumptive confirmation to the claims advanced by the exalted Founder of our faith; to his consciousness of the reality and force of his own credentials,—that he hesitated not to propose to a people enamoured of wealth and pleasure, a religion linked to calamities, and offering no secular prize or allurement. None, surely, but He who was giving miraculous proofs that He could heal and

resuscitate and pardon, and was about to ratify those proofs by his own triumph over death, could have afforded to invite and attach followers with that strange and gloomy promise, "In the world ye shall have tribulation;" or with the austere command, "Sell all that thou hast, and follow me." We are not indeed thence to infer, that the possession of ease or wealth is incompatible with the reception of Christ's gospel, any more than that an exemption from violent persecution annuls the character of a disciple. Neither penury nor martyrdom were invariable accompaniments of Christian faithfulness, even in the first age. The church had then its Joseph of Arimathea, its Gaius and Philemon. No one, however, can study the general tenor of the Christian institute, without perceiving that we ought not to "think it *strange*" if, as followers of Christ, we be "minished,"—or even "brought low."

Yet it may be that we are sometimes much inclined to think it so; since the contention and bias of nature are often too strong for the submissive conclusions of grace. You may say—if these adversities had assailed me while I was still estranged from God, and spurning or slighting the message of his reconciling love, I could readily interpret them as a salutary though stern discipline for bringing me to the revealed refuge: but, on the contrary, they have

gathered and pressed around me, long since I had embraced that refuge, and had aimed to realize in daily habit the principle of consecrating temporal blessings to the service of my Lord. He was pleased, indeed, for a time, to smile on me by the growing favours of his constant providence; but, in later periods, "all these things are against me;" and the change is adverse to my usefulness as well as comfort; without being apparently in all respects conducive to spiritual improvement; since, by fomenting tempers of dissatisfied regret and unquiet foreboding, it rather impedes and distracts my Christian course.

Doubtless, if we unhappily misuse, or are not watchful duly to interpret and improve, these and other "manifold" trials, they may all acquire that lamented tendency; but it would be not the less true that they were both graciously designed, and accurately calculated, as indispensable for our eternal good. Indeed, if we trust personally in the care of a "reconciled God and Father," it cannot be questioned that these adversities were fit and requisite, though their uses should happen to be quite beyond our conjecture; especially when we observe that some of them have been made to originate from counsels and transactions of our own which had an aim precisely opposite, and were in themselves apparently quite legitimate and promising; when losses

have arisen from the very steps cautiously and plausibly taken for prevention of loss: from the errors of friendly and experienced advisers; or from connexions formed on discreet and disinterested principles.

But some general and important uses of pecuniary checks and disappointments, even to real Christians, are surely, by the help of revelation, not undiscoverable or obscure.

Such modes of adversity will practically remind you, though by a very distant approach to resemblance, of the earthly condition of our divine Saviour; and by this suggestion itself you may be taught, that they are appointed to constitute, in your case, a means and part of your conformity to Him. Are they slight and unobserved as compared with the violent reverses of some others? Still, if you acutely or pensively feel them, if your latent pride be wounded, and your complacency disturbed, will you not appreciate with new wonder "the mind which was in Christ Jesus?" Will you not of necessity reflect—am I reluctant to be somewhat circumscribed and "minished," and did the Lord of all things freely consent to be "*brought low?*"

Are you, on the other hand, more conspicuously or decidedly humbled? Have you been cast down from a state of wealth and comparative dignity, to that of narrow supplies and dependent endeavours? If we even addressed a mendicant prince or a de-

serted sovereign, a second Belisarius in penury, or Dionysius in exile, we should have still to ask, not in the spirit of insult or insensibility, but with a desire to condole and to animate,—have you heard of or remembered that "Prince of life," that "King of Kings," who "made himself of no reputation, but took on him the form of a servant?"—who, "though he was rich" in all the splendours of Deity, "for our sakes became poor," assuming our frail and necessitous nature with all its wants and sorrows?—That "great mystery of godliness," indeed, transcends not only our comprehension, but still more our subject. There would be something little less incongruous in comparing to it the most signal and total of mere human reverses, than the most ordinary and mitigated. We have rather to contemplate now, that preference by our Saviour, *among* human conditions, of poverty and lowliness, which is so memorable, and was doubtless meant to be so monitory. I am very far from judging (and have indeed already guarded against the inference), that all followers of Christ must needs endure more or less this particular kind of adversities, in order to an essential conformity with Him. The "Father of our spirits" has various methods at his choice, by which substantially to produce and develope that conformity. He can "minish" or impoverish in bodily health, in mental vigour, in the treasures of

friendship or of reputation; and in either way sufficiently conform his adopted children to the image and sufferings of Him, who was "the first-born among many brethren."

Yet this we safely may affirm, that when trials of the same kind are appointed, when, instead of riches having been unimpaired, or gainful occupation having increased, they have been diminished or have disappeared, then are we, in this respect, led more strictly into the footsteps of our Master. And what Christian can resolvedly wish and deliberately pray, (notwithstanding the secret conflict often in his heart,) that this sort of approach, which after all may be still but distant, had not been ordained? Who that has read and in any measure believed those words of Jesus, "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master:" or the words of Paul, "If we suffer with him we shall also reign with him?"

But, amidst the inward conflict to which I have adverted, it will perhaps be ingeniously urged—since we cannot be (as you just now admitted) conformed to the humiliation of our Redeemer fully,—so far from it, that his must ever remain infinitely greater—why these particular adversities in addition to many more? or why so severe in degree? or wherefore in this successive and continued form?

Let it first be called to mind, that these particular adversities have ever constituted a frequent in-

gredient of those very trials with which the Almighty has seen meet to visit not a few of his distinguished servants. It is true, this part of their afflictions is in a great measure withdrawn from notice amidst the more prominent and keener distresses which it has accompanied. But was it, therefore, the less real? When the wealth of that Arabian prince and patriarch on whom "the blessing of the perishing had come," and who had "caused the widow's heart to sing," was quickly devastated by repeated strokes,—had this kind of calamities the less of intrinsic rigour, because thrown into the shade, as it were, by grievous disease and bereavement and reproach?—When the chosen apostle of the Gentiles, who had probably till then enjoyed all the advantages of life, suffered in his new career "the loss of all things," so as sometimes to hunger and thirst and be insufficiently clothed,—were these privations the less real because we almost lose sight of them—as he also sometimes might—amidst imprisonments and scourgings, and murderous assaults from those whom he toiled to save? In the first-mentioned hardships Paul was but the forerunner of a cloud of witnesses and confessors, who "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods." We are prone in their case, as in his, to overlook that species of adversities, just because it is eclipsed by others still more grievous. But,

again I would ask, was the forfeiture of property, or the loss of profitable employ and comfortable support, the less afflictive in itself, because then attended with stripes or cruel mockings, mutilation, or exile? Yet these were persons whom our Saviour emphatically pronounced "blessed." Your experience, it is probable, even as to one kind of adversity among the many, will scarcely bear comparison with theirs: but were it equally severe, would this at all imply unkindness on his part, who thus dealt with apostles, with evangelists, with the noble army of martyrs, and who meanwhile bade them "rejoice and be exceeding glad?" You will object, perhaps, that their trials, as being for the name and cause of Christ, were tests and demonstrations of fidelity, and, therefore, grounds of joy; but that yours are devoid of this consolatory character. Remember, however, that where it has pleased God to remove such persecutions, they can no longer form the test of Christian faith and constancy. A submissive and grateful endurance of those afflictions which are common to all, (but of which believers may usually expect an ample share,) with a special reference to their Master's will, must be now amongst the strongest proofs of their allegiance and their trust. Could you, indeed, on a serious review, whether of church history or of scripture predictions, deem it a clearer token of your Saviour's

love and care, if the tide of worldly prosperity were always rising, if the gale of success were ever with you?

But while it behoves you to feel and to acknowledge, that He who "careth for you" must "do right," and also that appointments which are in unison both with his personal example and distinct predictions, may be presumed accordant with his most gracious purposes, it will be more satisfying if you can also discern other weighty and merciful reasons for these appointments. And how, with the New Testament before us, with its assurances that the grand object of God's dispensations is to detach us from this world, recall us to Himself, prepare us for eternity,—together with some observation of mankind and knowledge of ourselves,—how shall we fail to discover such reasons? In the tempers and habits which unchecked prosperity so often generates, what a commentary do we find on the various warnings of the gospel as to the danger of abounding in riches! not that instances are wanting, either ancient or modern, of good men who may have passed *quite* unhurt through this ordeal; the "Father of the faithful," and Job in his redoubled wealth, and a Thornton and Reynolds in our own times, could be "very rich," not only without "shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience," but perhaps without being the less spiritually-

minded, or desiring the less earnestly "a better country." The question, however, still remains, —have we any reason to be confident that such would have been our own case? No one, I suppose, could frame the presumptuous expectation or extravagant wish, that God might bestow on him correspondent measures of wisdom and of grace, *in order* that he might be as safe and spiritually prosperous as some of those very wealthy believers. This would be prescribing its methods to Divine sovereignty with a boldness which strongly evinced the need of humiliation. We must accept our measure as it is; both of natural tendencies, and spiritual gifts: and then ask,—if that share of means which God entrusted to me had been yearly augmented, or yearly undiminished, does it appear likely that I should not have "trusted" more in this world's possessions? Is it probable that, amidst an accession of worldly prosperity, or even with no ebb and interruption of it, I should have embraced the gospel so firmly? Can I even assure myself that as good and right a use would have been made by me of the larger gifts of Providence as is now made of the less? It will assist us perhaps in this inquiry, to remember, how we have in past life actually been carried by certain positions of affairs or impulses of the mind, into aims and undertakings, both laudable and the contrary, which at other periods, both previously and

since, we could never have expected to pursue or to achieve: for we shall thus in some sort judge how greatly,—how far beyond all present calculation,—certain differences in the course and turn of our affairs might have changed the current of our purposes, the nature of our connexions, and "the spirit of our minds." Besides, are you conscious, as it *is*, of no unfaithfulness towards God in temper or in practice? Have you never had reason, while professing to be his, to appropriate to yourself that ancient charge, "My people have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and have hewn out to themselves cisterns?"—Has there been no need for you to be feelingly convinced, that these cisterns are broken, or fragile? When God has disappointed you as to worldly wealth, he has in effect broken one of the chief cisterns which you, or others before you, have diligently hewn. Possibly he has overthrown it at a stroke; "dashed it to pieces like a potter's vessel:" more probably he has let the contents in part escape by unseen flaws; or filter away, as it were, through the very pores of the reservoir. If it had been quite otherwise, if you had hewn more capacious cisterns, and sculptured and adorned them, and no flaw had yet been detected, would you have been so likely to return in humility to Him who says, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me?"

Connecting these considerations with the former, may I not still the more confidently expect of you as a Christian—that whatever regrets or even repinings you may sometimes be possessed with on account of pecuniary adversity, you will even then utterly shrink from adopting, unconditionally, the presumptuous prayer,—Restore, oh Father of mercies, the gifts which Thou hast taken away, or hast caused to make to themselves wings and fly.—When you contemplate the brevity and precariousness of this life; when you meditate on His wisdom and compassion, who alone can be our "guide even unto death," you will "covet earnestly" no gift but "the *best*:" spending your fervour in that noble prayer, "Lord! lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us;"—conscious that the Author of all good can thus put more gladness in your heart, than ever was conferred by the abundance and increase of earthly possessions. And while you so "ask" of Him who is "our portion for ever," who alone can teach us unwaveringly to choose, and fit us eternally to enjoy, that all-sufficient portion,—you will try to sum up your desires and regrets as to things temporal, in the words of Him who endured the cross; "not as I will, but as Thou wilt:"—nor need we scruple to associate with them a poet's beautiful declaration:—

> "Give what Thou wilt, without Thee I am poor,
> And with Thee rich, take what Thou wilt away."

X.

ON THE FEARS OF A WIDOWED MOTHER.

A HEAVY burden has devolved upon you; and we know it presses hard on a wounded, desolate spirit. You feel that the lost companion, who, even from the first so kindly and intimately shared it, would, in coming and distant years, if spared to you, have borne a much weightier and more indispensable portion of the load. As yet, indeed, it may be, you have only to watch over a helpless and unconscious charge: but though this includes many actual cares, you cannot limit your solicitude to the passing hour. While the busy and gentle hand fulfills its offices, the more busy and restless heart expatiates through the dubious future. You glance onward to those months, when the little one, now playfully engrossed with his cowslips or his pencil, shall have risen into youth, and must incur the

incompensable want of paternal judgment and restraint, through all the steps of tuition, and in the choice of destination for life. Or you look on those whose "delicateness and tenderness" time will less diminish;—and while your own impaired health may forebode the uncertainty of their remaining parent's days, you meditate on the trials and hazards of orphan daughters with a still deeper sigh. Your resources also for the support and benefit of those so beloved and so dependent, it is likely, have, by the same event, been painfully abridged; and you predict with sadness how much more this will be felt, as their occasions for aid shall progressively augment and multiply. But this is not all. You are a Christian; and your inmost solicitude contemplates interests that extend beyond the boundaries of time. You desire intensely, and supplicate continually, the spiritual and endless happiness of those so dear. That stroke of bereavement which has marred your earthly comforts and aggravated all your cares, has too keenly graven in your heart the thought of eternity, for it to be long obscured; and you therefore anticipate with a new dread those moral dangers of the world, in which, as they advance, the cherished objects of your care must mingle. You foresee, for those who will have to enter on its active pursuits, inevitable contact with its deceits and perils; and sometimes a trembling

anxiety, at once for their temporal and eternal welfare, and for that fortitude and wisdom on your own part which the adjustment of these claims may demand, oppresses and almost overwhelms you.

Although conscious that these afflictive feelings often rise to a degree which is culpable, you still cannot appropriate a distinct condemnation of them from our Saviour's precepts against "anxious forethought,"* because you know that, besides not being personal or selfish, they relate ultimately, and in the largest measure, to interests "not of this world." Nor is the excuse which you found on these distinctions at all inadmissible. It rather claims our warmest sympathy and respect. Eternal good is represented by Him that came down from heaven, as the fit subject of profound solicitude: and if a large philanthropy, if a deep concern for the true and final happiness of others, be "the fulfilling of the law," —if it be the temper of angels towards our foreign race, and of those who have imbibed the mind of Christ and the apostolic spirit, towards the remotest of our own,—how much more where the closest bond of nature all but identifies your offspring with yourself, and affection yearns over those who have begun within your own embrace their pilgrimage towards immortality. No one condemns St. Paul for his

* Matt. v. 27-34; vi. 25, &c.

daily "solicitude"* concerning "all the churches;" still less for that "heaviness and sorrow" on account of his "brethren" and "kinsmen," (though only a national consanguinity were meant,) which moved peculiarly his "heart's desire and prayer that Israel might be saved." No one who is not estranged from faith and charity will censure the daily tears of Monica, the devout and widowed mother of Augustine, poured out to the God of mercy for her son's conversion: on the contrary, what Christian would not venerate and love that persevering fervour of maternal intercession which the son so gratefully records? But the principle and feeling of solicitude may be just and pure, and yet the measure of it excessive, or the mode erroneous. You are prone, I may venture to suppose, very often to transfer your own from the all-important issue so fitly and piously desired, to intervening means and distant obstacles; to those events, engagements, and connexions, which, as you imagine, may obstruct and defeat that happy termination; or rather that happy acquisition of blessings *not* to terminate. You seek to pierce, not for yourself indeed, but for these other selves, the shades and labyrinths of this world's transient future. Not for yourself, because you humbly trust that Divine

* 2 Cor. xi. 28. It is remarkable that the original word is the same as in the above-cited texts of Matthew's gospel.

Mercy has taught you to seize the sacred clue, or rather has "apprehended" you with a rescuing and sustaining hand; and though you should walk in a yet deeper darkness, you would hope and resolve to "stay yourself upon your God." But for them you tremble as imagination paints their untried way. You shudder at the precipice and the torrent; you dread the rugged tract and the luxuriant valley, the crowded scene and the solitary; forgetting that it may be in that most perilous juncture,—or in some part of their course, the most opposite to what you would select, the most similar to what you fear,—that the "Guide of their youth" will meet them with his free and unchangeable compassion; and from that memorable hour of weakness, error, or wretchedness, will lead them "by the right way." Undue anxiety, even when its source and subject are of the most justifiable kind, is not only reproved by our conscious and insuperable ignorance, but lies open to the severer rebuke of being deeply tinctured with a want of "faith in God." As to the former, could we need confirmation, the events of every day and of all society would yield it. Even were the temporal welfare of your family the limit of your earnest wishes, were the prosperity of this life (for I apply not the term happiness to what is brief and unsatisfying) all that you would invoke for them, you know how impossible it would

have been, not only for the fond parent they have lost, but for the wisest and greatest of mankind, to foretell or effect with certainty what would conduce to this. Sages might fail to divine, and monarchs to secure it. You know that all kinds of worldly advantages—brilliant talents, large acquirements, hereditary rank, ample wealth,—have proved, in multiplied instances, the instruments or occasions of temporal ruin. Character, and health, and life, have, by turns, been sacrificed amidst those splendid perils. You have seen sometimes the amiable and virtuous, who possessed almost every personal and relative privilege, plunged by a sudden malady, or an unworthy associate, into depths of distress. On the other hand, you have observed positions of comfort and success, respectability and honour, attained through all the varied paths of early danger, difficulty and hardship.

You tremble to see the little barks in which your dearest hopes are deposited, now launched with so feeble a convoy; and to think that even from this they may so soon be parted. But remember that were the convoy even princely, the frail skiffs and the protecting ships would be alike upon a treacherous ocean. The richest galliot, and the armed fleet that surround her, are alike exposed to the tempest, if not to the foe. The convoy may be dispersed; the enemy eluded, and the skiff pre-

served. The modern Cæsar twice safely traversed the whole Mediterranean, without protection, amidst hostile armaments; and while he, as infidel as Julius, only invoked his fortunes, the providence of God forbade his capture till a mysterious and unhappy course should be fulfilled. And cannot and will not the same hand direct (not in judgment, but in mercy) the course of those whom parental love continually commits into his keeping? The same power that scattered an "invincible Armada" guides the nautilus into its petty creek; and has wafted many an exhausted mariner, in an open boat, without a compass and with failing stores, into some "quiet haven."

Human life would still be a course through a trackless deep or a perplexing labyrinth, even were earthly prosperity the only goal. But how much more is prediction baffled, and the guarantee of all human vigilance in itself inadequate, when we include in our estimate those vast and unseen realities which, with you, are happily paramount; outweighing, as they do, all the unsubstantial gains of time. If the shortsightedness intimated in that ancient question "Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?" might be acknowledged, even though the days "which he spendeth as a shadow," were the whole of his existence,—how much more when the shadow forms but the preliminary veil to

a destiny that is boundless! A sense of our incapacity to foresee the spiritual effects of this life's incidents and changes, though it must not relax caution or paralyse exertion, ought surely to modify all our prayers, desires, and efforts, for the earthly welfare of others, as well as for our own; introducing into all of them this heartfelt reservation,—"the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good." Augustine relates that his devout mother had earnestly deprecated that change of his residence, from Carthage to Italy, which was, in fact, the means of his conversion. Doubtless her grief at the thought of separation was mingled with the dread of his incurring greater transgressions, and being still further alienated from piety. The immediate object, therefore, of her earnest prayer was, that his departure might be prevented. "What, oh my God!" (he writes) "did she at that time intreat with such excess of tears, except that Thou wouldest not permit my voyage? But in thy profound and hidden counsels, listening to the deeper object, the *cardinal* point of her desires, Thou wert regardless of what she *then* implored, in order to accomplish in me what she *ever* implored."* Perhaps this Christian parent, even while thus hurried away by tender affections and forebodings, exercised a more sub-

* Confess., l. v. c. 8. Exaudiens cardinem desiderii ejus, non curasti quod tunc petebat, ut in me faceres, quod semper petebat.

missive spirit than her son ascribed to her. But we should ever remember, that the very supposition of these prospects beyond the tomb, which create our deepest anxieties, both relative and personal,—itself involves and is built upon the fact of God's perfections and providence. When, as Christian parents, we yield to a desponding or agitated temper of mind as to the unknown course and destiny of our children, we not only seem to mourn over that want of prescience which is the allotment and condition of our being, but we really betray the feebleness of our trust in that great Ruler and Father of his creatures, from whose own declarations of holiness, and acts and promises of mercy, it can alone be inferred that the course of those whom we love is truly so momentous. Had not the Almighty revealed himself in the person of that "beloved Son," who, by his authoritative voice, but more impressively by his vicarious sufferings, promulgated the incalculable worth both of the human soul and of its ransomed patrimony, then would those ultimate hopes and fears, which possess you on behalf of your beloved charge, have never been awakened: you would have had, probably, no fixed expectation of a life to come; certainly no knowledge as to the connexion of happiness in that life with pardon and spiritual renovation in this. You would have been incompetent to conceive for them the hope of a perfect and un-

changeable felicity; inasmuch as nothing in your view of the human nature and condition, and nothing in your ignorance of the divine, could warrant or even suggest such a hope. The source, therefore, of your deepest anxiety, should be the source of its cure; should afford its sovereign antidote. If you gratefully believe in an immortal life to come, then must you believe that He who proclaims and confers it is the "God of all grace," the God who is "Love," who has given unspeakable proof of his compassion, as excelling (to use his own pathetic language) not only a Father's pity, but even a *mother's* tenderness.

You will answer, perhaps,—Alas! no comfort can arise even from these gracious attributes, and these consolatory declarations, as to the happy issue of my children's course, except divine truth personally affect their hearts. Most true. But let it not be forgotten, that we serve "the God of hope:" that he delighteth in mercy, and is able to do "exceeding abundantly above all we can ask;" that since He has expressly enjoined and encouraged intercession, it would be profane to imagine that earnest supplications, (and especially parental prayers,) having the highest good of others for their object, should be wholly or usually ineffectual.

Who will venture to assert, that when a parent's

sincere and believing, though imperfect petitions, combined with such practical vigilance as our infirmity admits, have been the child's inheritance, —that child is likely to pass into another world unvisited by heavenly mercy; unrepenting and unblest? Are we even warranted in indulging the fear, that if we, "being evil," perseveringly entreat this best of gifts for our children, our heavenly Father will refuse to bestow on *them* "the Holy Spirit" which He has promised to them that ask? What right have we to conclude, that this blessing, which it is our first duty to implore, and which is unconditionally promised, will be withholden when it is solicited for *them;* solicited by those in whom all the sentiments of nature are a pledge for undoubted sincerity, if not for unwearied ardour? By what principle are we authorized to limit or depreciate the efficacy of intercessory prayer? It is, surely, prayer of the purest and most heavenly kind. It has for its very essence and impulse, the spirit of love. It is the kind of prayer in which Christ abounded on earth, and which He continues in heaven. And in the case of those whom you "love as your own soul," how shall it not be often winged with a peculiar fervour? Nay, I doubt not you have sometimes felt,—though my supplications for myself have this day been so distracted and lukewarm, at least my supplications for my dear

children have been truly from the heart. We grant that intercession, even for those most beloved, as for all others, whatever be its warmth or frequency, cannot essentially and supremely promote their spiritual good, unless it be graciously accepted as instrumental in procuring for *them* personally the grace and spirit of prayer. Without this, indeed, it may be instrumental to avert or mitigate evil, to prevent many sins and sufferings, or many aggravations of both. But how are we justified in foreboding that it will *not* ultimately, nay speedily, procure that grace, which shall prompt our children to pray with earnestness for themselves; that it will not be owned of God by his mercifully granting them convictions, early and deep convictions, of the value of heavenly truth; such as will bring them truly to his Mercy Seat; and in that great disclosing day, "when the thoughts of many hearts shall be revealed," will be found linked in his secret records with the solitary effusions of a parent's love?

On these grounds we may surely acquit of presumption him who said to the mother of Augustine, "It cannot be that the child of those tears should perish." Monica, we are told, received his consolation as if sent by heaven. Nor should you, or any devout parent, hesitate to share it. It is a thought which may transmute the tears of despon-

dency to tears of joy; which may give a happy warmth to each tender admonition, animate each prudential endeavour, and shed a calm upon your spirit amidst that distressing uncertainty which must attend some of your decisions. Indulge the bright anticipation of final inseparable union: pray with confiding hope for a blessing so immense: resign, not with careless indolence but with devout acquiescence, every intervening scene and change, into His hand, who, as you well know, has led his most beloved "sons and daughters" through paths of danger and perplexity, to penitence and joy. Rely on Him who shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom. Originally and efficiently all good must flow from Him; but instrumentally, you may, in all likelihood, hereafter trace their blessedness to your sharpest sorrows, to the more fervent devotion, and genuine reliance, and tender vigilance, which those afflictions wrought, —and to those subsequent trials, in their own course, which you contemplated with dread, but which God in mercy pre-ordained to bring them to Himself, and reunite them everlastingly with you.

XI.

ON THE CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION OF MYSTERIOUS CHASTISEMENTS.

In contemplating the afflictions, however severe, of those around us who are in revolt against God, who violate at once His law promulgated in Scripture, and the anterior law recorded in the heart, we cannot be wholly at a loss to perceive in them a purpose both just and gracious. They are less perplexing to faith than either the sufferings of inferior creatures, irresponsible and sinless, or of the penitent and obedient, the returned and adopted children of God. For we have discerned, and have ourselves experienced, their *reclaiming* tendency. What so effectual as pain and privation, to bring the "lost sheep" back to the "Good Shepherd" and compassionate "Bishop of souls?" And under the constituted order of God's dealings with rebellious man,—in which we must either humbly acquiesce or fruitlessly speculate,—it is

often very plainly requisite that such chastisements be "sharp and long." Nothing less, in many cases, than the force and pressure of most "grievous" anguish, can suffice to recall the hardened offender, contrite and suppliant, to accept the overtures of paternal kindness*.

In observing also the pangs and griefs of those who *have* thus returned, and still more in enduring such personally, we can often discover that they are needful for *correction;* designed to improve and chasten those who still "in many things offend;" that the Father of our spirits thus treats his adopted children "for their profit, that they may be partakers of his holiness;" the actual defects and evils by which they differ from the model and standard of that holiness being thus abated or expelled:—that in this manner He curbs the remains of pride, chastises corrupt self-indulgence and love of the world, rebukes a neglect of devotion, punishes those "secret faults" which have marred the peace and honour of the Christian course, and quickens the view and desire of those divine realities which are too often strangely obscured by this life's cares or enjoyments. You are abundantly conscious, that you still need such corrections; although you may

* Even Heathens perceived the fitness and *necessity* of pain to reclaim the wicked. See Socrates in Plato's Gorgias, p. 294. Edit. Routh.

"faint" not seldom, and sometimes almost murmur, at their character or their degree. Where are the believers who can presume to say, that corrective chastisement is, or will be in this world, quite superfluous for *themselves?*

And yet, looking at the course of others, perhaps of some that are most dear to you, you feel it difficult, and may even deem it culpable, to assign this reason for their sufferings, disappointments, and privations, which you see to be exceedingly acute, greatly protracted, or variously enhanced; and which therefore often bear an appearance the most dark and inscrutable.

Do you then, let me ask, enough consider, that sufferings, when allotted to the "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," have an ulterior and superior use; the use of completion or exaltation in obedience; that, in other words, they are designed not only to correct, but likewise to *perfect* or to *elevate?*

If you doubt whether this end can be justly regarded as distinct from that of correction,—which we admit to be usually, and, perhaps, always conjoined with it,—consider that the sinless Redeemer, in his human nature, is declared to have "learned obedience by the things which He suffered." But one of the chief aspects in which that glorious Person is presented to our view, is as a faultless exemplar of human excellence or virtue; and this

also in those parts of his course which especially fulfilled a far more exalted and inestimable purpose; namely, his sufferings. For this we have the express testimony of an apostle,—"Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we might follow his steps;"* where the foregoing context evinces the writer's meaning to be, not merely that He who suffered left us an example generally, but that his *sufferings* were especially thus designed. It was therefore a distinct and material end, though far from the highest and ultimate end of them,—to afford a specimen and pattern of the most arduous human virtue. Jesus, although infinitely dignified, and infinitely dear to his heavenly Father, and entirely free from sin, yet could not, without the endurance of his great and various sufferings, have exercised and displayed, as man, so sublime a perfection of obedience. We have, indeed, mentioned obvious uses of suffering, in regard to fallen and revolted, and even to recalled but imperfect human beings, which evidently and totally *differ* from any that it had or could have in relation to Him "who knew no sin." As the sufferings of Christ, on the one hand, fulfilled an entirely different and infinitely superior end to those of any other human being,—that of the *expiation* of sins,—so, on the other hand, do the sufferings of apostate but redeemed creatures promote an entrely dif-

* 1 Pet. ii. 21.

ferent end from any which they could accomplish personally in the holy Saviour,—that of the *subjugation* of sins. While, however, this dissimilarity exists, a remarkable affinity or identity subsists together with it: one great and honourable use of suffering being common to the followers of Christ with their Lord,—the only one which *can* be so, which we have already termed the use of completion or exaltation. Were it not for this point of intercommunity, there would be much less strictness and fitness in the phrase lately cited from St. Peter, and in that strong expression of St. Paul, where, having styled believers "*joint-heirs* with Christ," he adds, "if so be we *jointly-suffer*, that also we may be *jointly-glorified* with Him,"* language precisely adapted to indicate communion in the character and end of suffering. With regard to our Saviour, it must be superfluous to show, that, the endurance of suffering could have, as it respected himself, the last-mentioned use alone. It were blasphemy in this case to attribute to it any reclaiming or corrective use. When we are told that He thus "learned obedience," nothing else can be meant than that He thus was enabled to exercise and exemplify a more elevated obedience than he could else have done, and than our first progenitor could have done, had he persevered for ever

* Rom. viii. 17. See Macknight's translation, and in each case the compound word of the original.

in sinless virtue *without* suffering. This is expressed more distinctly in another remarkable passage.—"It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation *perfect* through sufferings."* But if acquiescent endurance was thus a crowning constituent of moral perfectness in Him that took our nature upon him, why should it not be so,—or rather, how shall it not be so,—in those ransomed and adopted "heirs of God," whose perfection consists in being "co-heirs with Christ," and "conformed to the image of his Son?" View in this light the afflictions on which it sometimes oppresses us to meditate, and see if that perfective tendency, that close resemblance of character and purpose to the trials which our Lord endured, does not avail at least to abate our wonder, and dispose the mind to waiting adoration.

You may have known a devoted and highly-gifted Christian, who has zealously embarked in some special task of philanthropy,—whether that of inviting men into "the kingdom of God's dear Son," or combating on their behalf some forms of injustice and cruelty, or promoting some mode of their positive comfort and improvement,—arrested by a disabling stroke, and without any extinction, perhaps without diminution, of mental energy and

* Heb. ii. 10,—literally—"to perfect, (or complete) through sufferings, the prince of their salvation."

zeal, entirely laid by from those activities in which he was ready "to spend and to be spent." This is a very startling and mysterious check. But let it not be forgotten, that while the cause, already, or at no long interval, may be prosecuted by other instruments, he that fain would serve it is meantime "learning obedience,"—practising a harder, nobler lesson in the school of true discipleship,—"by the thing which he suffers." Nothing which he could have achieved or attempted in the way of active duty, nothing even which he could have *borne* in the *pursuit* of that duty, would have been so arduous, as to bow to this unlooked-for prohibition; and while compelled to say "my days are past, my purposes are broken off, even the thoughts of my heart,"* to add, "The Lord gave" strength, "and the Lord hath taken it away; and blessed be the name of the Lord."

You have known also, perhaps, such a benevolent and ardent mind, intent on the service of God and the happiness of men, *itself* visited with afflictive weakness. Bodily health may have been, or at least have seemed, unbroken; but languor and prostration have come upon those mental powers and sentiments which were so awake and vigorous. The very "*will* to do good" seems wanting. It is merged in the oppressive sense of incapacity.

* Job xvii. 11.

The "fervour of spirit" has vanished, and, at least in the sufferer's apprehension, cannot be rekindled. This will appear a still more marvellous and confounding infliction. Yet, from this very character of strangeness and heaviness, it is obvious to infer, that the sufferer is called to the acquisition of a still more difficult and refined "obedience." To be thus assailed and smitten at the heart, thus "emptied" or denuded in the innermost recess of feeling,—especially when such a state involves, as it often must, distressful doubts as to the greatest truths, or as to personal interest in them,—may be a far weightier trial and sharper test of submission, than martyrdom, with the firm and elated hope bestowed on many martyrs, itself could be. That is a deep and lofty lesson in the discipline of passive virtue, in which the learner still cleaves to his great paternal Teacher, though unable not only to render Him animated service, but to realize His unseen presence, and much more to appropriate His unseen smiles.

You have seen, it may be, a good man's warm endeavours baffled by perverse and unfeeling opposition; or fruitless through the sloth or prejudice of those who should concur with him. He has exercised a disinterested and patient earnestness, but has been requited with indifference, sometimes perhaps with scorn. He is compelled to say or to

suspect, "I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nought."*

What a grievous wound to the spirit! What a chilling damp on the fervent and dedicated heart! But he who feels it, and can add with some measure of the prophet's resignation, "yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God," is practising assuredly an exalted and happy obedience in "the thing which he suffers."

Trials akin to this may occur with sharp and peculiar aggravations even in the closest privacy, and in the nearest bonds of life. Efforts for the spiritual, moral and temporal welfare of dear connexions may all have been apparently frustrated and lost: many prayers and counsels, many aids and toils, many tender expostulations, may be yet in vain. To acquiesce here,—to bow to the dark appointments or permissions of Him whose "way is in the sea" and whose "footsteps are not known," to bear the denial or postponement of the most pious and ardent desires,—what an agonizing pitch of "hardness" for the "soldier of Christ!" How many a sorrowing but not murmuring relative, full of anguish, yet meekly bending to the sovereignty of God, has thus been led up the flinty steep of Christian endurance! You have witnessed it; and perhaps with an amazed

* Isai. xlix. 4.

disquietude. But do we not here behold the "goodness" as well as "severity" of God? How eminently are those patient mourners "learning obedience," by the uncomplaining though heart-sickening sadness of their "hope deferred!" That hope perhaps will be fulfilled ere they go hence, and will gild their later days with a calm and sacred delight; or perhaps not till they are "ascended to their Father,"—even as His suffering prayer, who implored, "forgive them, for they know not what they do," was answered, after his ascension from our world, in the penitence and peace of thousands who had scorned and resisted his whole ministry of love.

Sympathize tenderly therefore in the sorrows of such hearts; but be "not offended." They are "bearing the cross" with Him who wept over Jerusalem. They are "learning" an unreserved deference to divine wisdom, and reliance on divine mercy. In proportion to the painfulness of their tuition will be the exaltation of their joy.

Once more—you may have observed, or watched over, a Christian who appeared mature in piety, "ready to be offered," fully "meet for the inheritance of the saints," but who has been long, very long, detained under the grasp of cruel disease, lingering on a bed of pining sickness, racked with unremitting pain: or, if the malady has, on the

contrary, been rapid, you have witnessed intense pangs it may be, which seemed to pour "gall and wormwood" into the very "bitterness of death." You have been led to ask mournfully at such a sight,—why all this—why not a calmer dismissal of the prepared and expecting spirit? Why these pains prolonged, or accumulated, or sharpened, when a merciful Father, a compassionate Redeemer, is about to receive the departing and beloved sufferer to his own embrace? To these queries we must accept, and may with reason accept, the scriptural answer, which has been repeatedly adduced. The beloved sufferer, though an adopted son, is still "learning obedience:" attaining that last and highest gradation of perfective endurance which worketh for him "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." The grace by which he endures this final test,—"not charging God foolishly," but trusting in His wise and merciful design,—although it be God's own gift and can afford no shadow of a plea for boasting,—shall be "counted worthy" of a rich and "full reward." By these pains and languishings is he brought into closest union, into holiest conformity, with Him that "endured the cross." The human exaltation of our Lord himself has been ascribed to that endurance as its cause. He "became obedient unto death, even

the death of the cross;—*wherefore* God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name."* Surely then, by the various forms of bodily and mental sufferings, as probably as by any mode of faithfulness in active duties,† may his followers be appointed to graduate for their stations in his "Father's house;" to "procure to themselves an excellent degree;"‡ to be "counted worthy of double honour;"§ to have "an entrance ministered to them *richly* into the everlasting kingdom of their Lord and Saviour;"‖ to be numbered with those who "came out of great tribulation;" who are before the throne of God and "serve Him day and night in his Temple."

Doubtless, as was before suggested, if you personally endure such distresses, you will feel that they are properly *chastisements*, merited and corrective: and so will those whose similar afflictions you observe. Nor is it to be questioned, that, in all the sufferings of fallen man, even those of the most advanced believers in their latest hours, a corrective quality and design may mingle: but that does not preclude, even in your case, and still less in theirs, the higher and perfective quality and purpose. Neither is it for you or me,—though great

* Philip. ii. 9, and comp. Heb. ii. 9, 10.

† See 2 Thess. i. 5. ‡ 1 Tim. iii. 13. Macknight's translation.

§ 1 Tim. v. 17. ‖ 2 Pet. i. 11. πλουσιως.

and awful be our conscious demerit, and chastisements be far more deserved and needed by us than our fellow-creatures might account them,—to define and circumscribe the aims of Him that correcteth in mercy, as if He could not associate with this a more latent and yet diviner purpose when he appoints the rod. It were presumptuous to dispute or set aside, what scriptural statements and inferences establish, that it is their *perfective* quality and use, as distinguished from the corrective, which identifies the sufferings of "the members" with those of the exalted "Head;" and that this quality and use may, therefore, probably enter into every "chastening" even of the unworthiest and least faithful of the "children of God."

But our view at present has been chiefly directed to the course and the trials of *others;* and of those who are much more advanced. Let it be impressed on our minds in reference to such, that those "friends" or "brethren" of Christ most strictly and precisely "suffer *with* Him,"* just so far as their sufferings have in them what is *beyond* or *above* the corrective character. But the more they suffer "with" or like their Master, the more pre-eminently doubtless shall they "reign with Him."† The apostles appear to have recognised this design in their own appointed conflicts. Though Paul dis-

* Rom. viii. 17. † 2 Tim. ii. 12.

tinctly acknowledges a corrective or preventive use, when he writes, "*Lest* I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh,"* he at other times intimates a strict communion of suffering with their sinless Lord. "The sufferings of *Christ*" (he had declared in the same epistle) "abound in us;"† and elsewhere he announces it as part of his supreme desire that he might know the "*fellowship* of his" Lord's "sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."‡ To another society he declares, "I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and in my turn fill up the remainder of the afflictions of *Christ*, for his body's sake which is the church."§ Though he chiefly rejoiced that these things were endured in the service and for the benefit of the church, and in that respect also resembled his Lord's, there is no reason to doubt that he rejoiced likewise in their perfective or completory, and, if I may use the term, in their honorary character, as means and marks of communion and coheirship with Him, "who for the suffering of death was crowned with glory."‖ Peter holds a similar language: "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye *participate* (or communicate) in

* 2 Cor. xii. 7. † 2 Cor. i. 5. ‡ Philip. iii. 10.
§ Col. i. 24. Macknight's translation. ‖ Heb. ii. 9.

Christ's sufferings: that, in the revelation of his glory, ye may exult for joy."*

I know not indeed how we, who possess a nature susceptible of pain and "compassed with infirmity," can conceive of obedience thoroughly or extremely tried, *except* through this ordeal of suffering. There may be, and we doubt not there are, other modes of adequate trial for spirits unfallen,—whether they be incapable of pain or otherwise;—modes which, though having no pain in them, are yet some way as effectual and conclusive (perhaps even extreme) in attesting *their* obedience. Yet there is something strangely illustrious in the fact, that lapsed and renovated creatures thus acquire a sort of conformity and communion with the Son of God, which beings that have never suffered cannot be imagined to possess. If there be first a something surpassingly glorious in the peculiarity and condescension of his suffering "*for us,*" there is next a something reciprocally glorious in the peculiarity and honour of our suffering "*with Him.*" May we not reverently conceive it one purpose of Eternal Wisdom in permitting man's apostasy, to illustrate, as it had not been and could not perhaps otherwise have been illustrated, that mode of spiritual discipline and elevation which consists in

* 1 Pet. iv. 13.

the endurance of pain—thus introducing an unprecedented *kind* of victory, a novel sort of triumph and of victors, into the "general assembly" of the blest?—the "Lord of glory" and "Image of the invisible God" Himself assuming a crown which celestials never won, and bringing "with Him, out of great tribulation," a new array of "more than conquerors," from whom new glory should redound to "Him that loved them," and at whom the heavens should wonder?

XII.

ON MENTAL ILLNESS OR DEBILITY.

Our fallen nature owns three sources of infirmity and suffering,—the corporal, the intellectual, and the spiritual *; which, though we can often experimentally distinguish, we sometimes imagine more distinct than in reality they are. Instances, no doubt, are found, of a wonderful distinctness, and almost a seeming independency, of those several states. Thus the intellectual strength of some men has been evinced in arduous public effort, while enduring acute bodily pain. Thus again, while torture by disease or martyrdom by violence has been inflicted, there has been a high degree of spiritual joy. Some also, under the lash of guilty passions, and amidst the smartings of remorse, have yet

* The term spiritual is, of course, used in the *moral* and *religious* sense; to which, by Christians, it has been almost exclusively appropriated.

seemed to possess their bodily vigour and mental promptitude unbroken. It is, however, quite rare, for the *intellectual* health to be even transiently shaken, without some corporal sympathy; and even without some moral or spiritual pain being thus induced or heightened. Usually, when the mind, the medium both of sensations and emotions, is weakened or perturbed, all that are painful become the more so, and all that are pleasurable, the less. We somewhat illustrate, though without really explaining, this law, when it is said, in familiar metaphors, that the mental medium, like a stained or clouded glass, now mars the hue of what is bright, and deepens what is sombrous.

There are exceptions, indeed, to this; for the intellect, in later life, may be consciously impaired and circumscribed, yet the bodily powers and perceptions not sensibly abated, and the moral and spiritual comforts happily enhanced.

But while there are thus examples of distinctness, and in all its forms, the contrary cases, of complication, are abundantly more frequent. It is matter of trite remark, how the mind and body act upon each other. Such indeed is their hidden reciprocity of influence, that it often passes the most self-analysing consciousness, and the most observant skill, to pronounce where such affections originate; whether some insensible bodily disarrange-

ment gave rise to the languor of the mind;—or some disorder more strictly intellectual first untuned the physical functions;—or whether some secret wound of conscience, or sense of grief or shame, or wrong, or disappointment, has wrought on either, or both: and how far, in this case, a predisposition of the mind or body has made that grievous at one time, which might have been harmless at another.

But, while all this is latent, it will be often felt, and perhaps still oftener seen, that there is a mutual action, a pervading sympathetic malady. And although intellectual weakness (which is our immediate subject) may not, in the decline of life, produce any spiritual gloom, this is because the Christian mind has learned to acquiesce in its own perceived decay, as a common ordination of Providence, the appointed lot of age. But when such a visitation comes (speaking humanly) before its season, then is it naturally productive of discomposure and complaint; the more so because exaggerated by the mind which endures it, and viewed as humiliating, perhaps judicial. It is true that Christian patience will *mitigate* these feelings; yet with a conscious premature suspension of mental health and vigour, spiritual serenity and abounding hope seem incompatible. As I judge it therefore likely, that some sort of dejection as to the highest

of all interests mingles in your case, I shall afterwards advert to this; yet assuming that intellectual debility is felt and acknowledged by yourself as its prevailing symptom. You suffer, then, the mortifying consciousness, that your power to *think*,—with the previous clearness, vivacity, and continuance,—is now interrupted; that the mind is bereft of its elasticity and strength. You feel, it may be, as if the invisible organs of thought, so exquisitely framed by the Great Artificer of all things, were all or most of them injured or withdrawn; as if "the wheel" were "broken at the cistern" of truth; the shining coil of imagination snapped and motionless; "the silver cord" of fancy and of feeling deprived of all its tones, and "mute as if the soul were fled;" the lenses or mirrors of the mind (to repeat a former allusion) all tinged with gloomy hues; all "sicklied o'er with the pale cast" of thought.

Or, if you dislike such marked and extended metaphors in describing mental powers and acts and deficiencies, (though some metaphors we needs must use,) you feel, at least, that there is a hidden disability beyond your skill to relieve, and which it demands all your faith submissively to abide.

Now I ask you not, either by way of solace or reproof, if there might not be, in some grievous bodily disease, a measure of affliction less endur-

able; for this is obviously a question of degree: it would indeed be most presumptuous for you to conclude, that He who made us could not inflict a corporal agony which might surpass yet heavier mental griefs: while there are, on the contrary, lighter bodily pains and weaknesses, for which, I doubt not, your present sorrow would be thankfully exchanged. But I ask you—(and it behoves us all, under our several modes of trial, to recollect the "measured" character of divine corrections)—would the *addition* of an excruciating bodily pain, supposing it of course not to deaden or obliterate your present feelings, be no aggravation of them? Would no calamity or guilt of your dearest connexions increase your actual unhappiness? Would no error, vice or crime into which yourself might fall, add sharpness to what you undergo? Such queries must at least convince the mind,—unless its malady be too intense for argument,—of the strong reasons which remain for unmurmuring submission; and for holding fast the *principle* of gratitude, though the happy emotion may not be excitable beneath that load which weighs upon the heart. I address you as not bereft of judgment, not wholly insensible, therefore, to the force of these considerations; and as desirous of being ever submissive to God's will, though much and often failing in that aim. Let me now show you that the writer of these lines is not quite "unknowing of the ill" which you endure, by

entering a little into the dark views which you yourself may take of it. I am quite prepared to agree with you, that such an affliction, in several respects, exceeds that of any bodily disease, unless when the latter is extreme, and deemed to be incurable. First, because this mental pain involves in itself the grievous quality of prevalent fear; a deficiency or inertness of hope. Fear is its very essence; fear from a sense of inability or ill desert, or from the dark undefined perspective of all future evils, and the dread that your present incompetence and reluctance to the offices of life may be heightened, till the mind be wholly paralysed and overthrown. Not that there is really an entire exhaustion of that which "springs eternal in the human breast." As art has not rendered the vacuum of the air-pump absolute, so can our nature scarcely experience, in its present condition, a really total void and exclusion of hope. But even art can produce a vacuum in which the butterfly seems lifeless, and the thistledown falls like lead; and God permits sometimes such a deep destitution of hope within the heart, that the slightest wing of fancy is grown torpid, and the very motes amidst which it fluttered, are all sunk and still: so that it may seem to the sufferer as if hope were extinct for ever; forgetting that He with whom are "the issues of life," who "openeth and no man shutteth," not only *can* but *may* pour in a life-renewing stream.

and fill the soul with gladness. Those who have had proof of this,—who have hailed, and perhaps not seldom, that reviving change,—will, of course, be comparatively secure against even the imagined deprivation of *all* hope. If Christians, they sometimes, at least, will acknowledge, "God *has* delivered," and He *may* "*yet* deliver." Still there must remain that dismal prevalence of fear, which, as was before said, is the very *essence* of dejection.

This will suggest distinctions, as plausible as they are afflictive, to defeat all hopeful inference from former restoration; such as added years, the inveteracy of the evil, the less pardonable because relapsing acts of sin or folly which have procured returning chastisement: and though all this may equally apply to bodily inflictions, yet is it obvious that those are very often alleviated by hope; frequently just; but sometimes more palpably sanguine and deceptive, than the want of it in mental illness is melancholic and deceptive also.

This last-named characteristic contributes to another peculiarity of your distress, too well known by those who have endured it,—namely, that some of your acquaintance do not understand, and none (at least as you now conceive) can estimate it fully. Indeed, if we speak strictly, such is the very truth; for how can even the general malady (much more the special case) be apprehended in its weight and

keenness, except by one who is at the time a fellow sufferer;—since it has been often noticed, both in ourselves and others, that the remembrance and even belief of mental pain is far from clear and realizing, soon after a contrary state of mind succeeds? This is much less the fact as to bodily disorders; because the signs, localities, and remedies of these have been usually apparent and tangible; while the pangs and faintings of the spirit, the visionary train of confusion or dismay, the flitting host of dark evasive shadows, are, equally by their vagueness and their multitude, beyond the grasp of recollection. So that, were it not for certain proofs derived from words or acts to which the mind is known to have been then impelled, or from written memorials of its past emotions, there might be not even a belief, still less a strong remembrance, that so much was suffered. Nor can even those proofs bring back (and it is a provision of mercy that they shall not) the perception of that which they attest. If, in mental health, we could plunge into the ideal yet not unreal past, as fully as in mental sickness we image and concentrate the ideal though uncertain future, it were hard to conceive of our tasting present good with tranquillity, or contemplating without dread the probabilities yet unrevealed.

But since it is thus, and kindly, ordered, that the mind, when such evils have ceased, can no longer

thoroughly sympathise with its past *self*, how hopeless that to minds of a mould and temperament quite diverse, they should be intelligible. The writer was once joined by a traveller in the prime of life, whose profession claimed of him to "weep with them that weep," but who averred, that he had "never felt five minutes' pain." A fellow-traveller, happening to be acquainted with this stranger's history, observed, when he had left us, that "in truth he *ought* to have felt *much* pain;"—meaning pain of the moral kind. But, as far as outward indications could be trusted, he was alike unfamiliar with any and with *every* kind. If it may be thus, even where peculiar cause for pain exists, and where liberal education has tried its softening power, what may be looked for from those in whom faculties slenderly improved, as well as naturally limited, are joined with this insusceptibility? What wonder if the spectacle of your "dulness," "fancifulness," and "mopishness," should tune such hearts of oak and "nerves of wire,"

"To wit that puppet prompters might inspire!"

The poignant remonstrance, full at once of pathos and of sarcasm, from which those phrases are borrowed, must have done much in our own land, where such afflictions are thought to have peculiar prevalence, towards awakening the more capable and instructed to a deeper view of trials which

personally they may have *not* endured ; teaching them at least the heavenly lesson, that " sorrow is a sacred thing." Yet there are minds both strongly intelligent, and on some points strongly susceptible, who will fail to understand your sadness. Their own vigour and fortitude seem to preclude their conceiving it. With them it is but matter of *faith*, (if I may so use the term,) and not of comprehension. They will not deride, but they cannot condole. In fact, although " the harp of thousand strings," as our frame has been poetically termed, displays to anatomists such complex wonders as might almost warrant the hyperbole of " *ten thousand* thousand " in another poet,—and though this figure is yet more appropriate, in many cases, to the *mind*,—there are some minds which should be rather compared to the finest wind-instruments, vocal without a string: they have strains both soft and sonorous: a violent shock would mar them: but as they cannot yield tones like the chords of the more fragile, so they cannot well estimate an untuning of which they are themselves not capable.

You lately suffered, it may be, from a fracture or dislocation; from the failure of a merchant; from the death or peril of a dear connexion: those friends could then heartily feel with you :—you now suffer more and longer, and they are only perplexed at you; or even may not discern the existence of a

malady, which you would certainly despair of explaining. It may thus happen that (although in society) you suffer without sympathy, justly hopeless of convincing others that your pain is not a weakness, whimsical and self-created. You are quite aware that, where it is estimated thus, there must be consequently a disposition to censure and contempt, degrees of which may even mingle and alternate with friendly concern; for irresolution and infirmity of temper and purpose, while the *will* seems in any sense free, can rarely be viewed with unmixed compassion or unimpaired respect. You will also be exceedingly prone to exaggerate these penalties by suspicion; (for such is the bias of your mental state;) to imagine that your "friends scorn" you; and that you detect the sentiment which they study to conceal. Nor are you without degrees of self-reproach and self-contempt which make you regard as more probable, more just, and more afflictive, the sentiments ascribed to those around you. You perceive some vices of the mind by which your malady is heightened, and which it nourishes; for when, in our corrupt nature, is not moral disorder implicated with the intellectual? You detect sometimes pride, or cowardice, or sloth, adroitly borrowing for shelter the tattered cloak of your infirmities. Besides, that very pride, concurring with the blunted moral perceptions which indicate our fall, prompts

us inwardly to despise weakness more than sin; and of weakness you are now acutely conscious: for you cannot but suspect that many of the spectral forms which confront you, are, in truth, but insects, seen, as by a solar microscope, in the magic glass of fear. Thus the sense of culpability and that of self-delusion combining, disquiet and dishearten you afresh.

Further, as was before remarked, your disorder can scarcely fail to affect the state of *spiritual* feeling. An accession of sensibility will give vividness to the remembrance of guilt, and darken every awful anxious contemplation. It is not my object now to enlarge on this class of your griefs, but I will not overlook it, especially as it may be for these you most despair of an adequate and real sympathy.

Friends who possess, as to other points of your distress, refined discernment, true affection, and a degree of personal experience, may yet, it is painful to reflect, noway conceive the spiritual anxieties you encounter, nor appreciate the Christian peace which you have lost, or which you are earnest to secure: so that amidst the confidential intercourse of assiduous kindness, the deepest of your wants and sorrows may be inexplicable still.

Although it be too common, for it is often superfluous and fruitless, to expend thought and time in delineating an evil, rather than in urging means or considerations that may alleviate or remove it, I

have held the present an excepted case; because it is the well-known complaint of most who undergo this kind of trials, that they are not comprehended and perhaps cannot be. Even the faint views now given may *somewhat* tend to disprove this, and show that your affliction is, at least in its leading characters, "common to man." Every complex malady is indeed in some sort unique; like every brier, and every tarantula, it is unlike each beside; yet the species is the same. You will say that I have not given the colouring, nor sounded the depth, of what you feel; nor touched with precision the especial points of your discomfort. This is admitted; and more than this—again I must remind you,—when it shall please God to restore your vigour or tranquillity, you will *yourself* have lost the power to do so. But if an unwilling traveller through the passes of St. Gothard or the desert of Sennaar, find proof in the sketch-book of another that those wilds have been crossed, he must not infer from the slightness or defects of the outlines, that it was not amidst storms and snows as fearful, or thirst as insupportable, as he himself endures.

It is time, however, that I attempt more directly to re-animate that hope, which may be now but as a buried spark.

We will assume,—to put it at the worst,—that this affliction is to you a new and "strange thing,"

a calamity unfelt before; or else that, although you must admit some similar trial past, and therefore some former recovery, you can yet assign to yourself such important and melancholy differences in its present causes or aspects, as seem to preclude the comfort that might otherwise justly be deduced from any previous instance of relief. You feel, therefore, sometimes, like a lonely seaman in a shattered bark, reduced to the scantiest allowances, and with the dread that these must fail him ere he reach the haven. Your small remainder of hope and energy is wasting, and you "know not what shall be on the morrow." But forget not, I pray, that, from an absolute despondency, this very ignorance of the morrow, combined with your knowledge of the good providence of God, should itself withhold you. His power to relieve and rescue, it were atheism to doubt. But I ask, whether as to his *will*, and the usual *methods* of his government, there be in any case more ground to hope for his *immediate* succour, than in such as yours?—immediate, not in the sense of instant, but of being not conveyed through any perceptible means. True, both reason and revelation testify that He "upholdeth *all* things," the body as well as the spirit, and that, by whatever instrument, "*He* woundeth and *his* hands make whole."* But yet we feel

* Job v. 18.

and observe that mind has a more immediate action upon mind. Even human minds swiftly inform, excite, console, dissuade, or stimulate each other, by the slightest symbols of thought, sometimes by one whispered word, one speaking look, one instantaneous gesture. How much more shall he who pervestigates and sustains our very being, be likely to reverse and rectify its inmost state, without *any* medium; or if by a medium, yet through some change of function, suggestion, or motive, so latent and so transitory, as to be utterly indiscernible by us? If therefore you think or say,—My powers of mind, or my peace of mind, cannot be restored without a miracle,—remember that, in reference to *mind*, that which, as it respects the absence or latency of means, will appear as if miraculous, is not at all improbable. It is true, that because the sequence of our mental states cannot be viewed as subject to fixed laws *, such changes, however great and immediate, would not be what we term miracles. But when mental illness is removed, as it frequently is, in a manner entirely hidden and unsearchable, to what should a theist ascribe this but to the sovereign act of God? Such instances graciously assert his prerogative and title as "the Father of *spirits*:" and from the twofold warrant of observation and experience, some can aver that they are

* See Thoughts on Private Devotion, pp. 53, 54, and p. 59. 6th Edition.

not unfrequent. In your kind of affliction, therefore, there is peculiar ground for hope, (though so little actual possession of it,) that you may be fully and speedily relieved by an unseen but ever-present Power.

Yet I would rather insist on instances less unexpected and surprising; because these are more numerous; and because, having ensued on the use of fitting means, they cannot be perverted (as the others might be if they stood alone) to defend a neglect of such. Besides, some young persons may encounter a temporary ebbing of the spirits from the vivacity of childhood, into pensiveness and gloom, without being apprized, while their social circle and their knowledge of biography are small, how incident this has been to thoughtful minds before them. The Holy Scripture,—though I shall not suppose it, by any reader of these lines, an unexamined book,—may not have been at all consulted in *this* view. If it be so, there will be found strong indications of such feelings in one of the very noblest among sacred writers. Many are the passages in his Psalms, which, though they *may* be applied to the pressure of bodily sickness or external griefs, have yet such superior appositeness to spiritual pains, and to reliefs obtained from those, as leaves small room to doubt that they were chiefly so prompted and designed. Indeed the temperament of their author would itself be a strong presumption

of this. Thus the first of "harps," "the soul of David," far more powerful and harmonious than his "instrument of ten strings," was sometimes, at least in his own esteem, untuned; "dumb with silence," "so troubled that he could not speak." Thus also the lyre of that "lamenting" prophet, whose elegy Bishop Lowth has pronounced unrivalled, expresses, amidst many outward calamities, griefs peculiar to a dejected heart,* and the pious thoughts and hopes which conduced to allay them. Thus the harp of our Herbert, one of the sweetest and holiest that were ever waked in Britain, descants on the depressions and revivals of his own spirit with that grateful wonder which betokens no feigned experience.

"Who would have thought my shrivelled heart
Could have recover'd greenness? It was gone
Quite underground: as flowers depart
To see their mother-root when they have blown;
Where they, together,
All the hard weather,
Dead to the world, keep house unknown.

* * * * * * * *

And now in age I bud again:
After so many deaths I live and write:
I once more smell the dew and rain,
And relish versing. O my only light,
It cannot be
That I am he,
On whom thy tempests fell all night.

* Lamentations—iii.

These are thy wonders, Lord of love!
To make us see we are but flow'rs that glide;
Which when we once can find and prove,
Thou hast a garden for us where to 'bide.
Who would be more,
Swelling through store,
Forfeit their paradise by their pride."*

But if only poets and divines were mentioned, it might be erroneously supposed, or falsely insinuated, that such afflictions have arisen from the imaginative character of the one class, or the grave and awful vocation of the other. Let me add, therefore, that the philosophic Boyle has described his own dejection, occurring in the midst of youth and variety, and the advantages of prosperous station, as so profoundly painful, that "although his looks did little betray his thoughts, nothing but the forbiddenness of self-dispatch hindered his committing it;"† and records, that under this melancholy state of mind he laboured many months.

Even the more illustrious Newton, endowed, as his able biographer observes, "with an intellectual strength which had unbarred the strong holds of the universe," distinguished also by "unbroken equanimity," and by "weakness of *imaginative* powers," yet, apparently from the influence of some disappointments, endured in middle life an op-

* Herbert's Poems—The Flower, p. 211-12. Ed. 1826.
† Quoted in Jones's Christian Biography—Article Boyle.

pressive " nervous disorder," and wrote, " I have neither ate nor slept well this twelvemonth, nor have my former consistency of mind." The attempt, indeed, of French sceptics, to represent this temporary illness as a confirmed mental aberration, has been by Dr. Brewster most justly rebuked and thoroughly defeated; yet the true statement of the case suffices to remind us that the mightiest mind is easily vulnerable; while the entire recovery and healthfulness, both bodily and mental, of this eminent man, even in very advanced years,—so that, at the age of eighty, " he was fully able to understand his own Principia," affords a cheering memorial of the kindness of Providence*. Will not these signal and indisputable examples forbid you to despond? If you are tempted to distinguish and separate your own case from all of them, as marked by some peculiar guilt, and having in it a punitive character which no one of those might partake, consider whether you are not questioning, as it respects others, the testimony of Scripture, that all men need correction from the hand of God; or else refusing, in your own case, the testimony of that same Scripture, that, when the Father of our spirits corrects, even most severely, he does it " for our profit."

Now in the greater number of such restorations, we have every reason to believe that appropriate

* See Brewster's Life of Newton, pp. 224, 232, 234-5, 318-19.

means were not omitted: and I therefore indulge the hope that when a few of these, although they will possess no novelty, are suggested to your attention, you will not prejudge or reject them as necessarily unavailing.

I would admonish you, in the first place, not to act on those mistaken impressions which may urge you to conclude, that physical causes have little or no part in your present affliction. Moral causes and intellectual symptoms are perhaps, to your consciousness, so predominant, that you are disposed to account what is bodily (if indeed perceived by you) to be merely incidental, and of no weight or moment. But permit me to say, you have neither power nor right to decide this question, without that complete interior survey of your being which it must be an extravagant pretension for man to assume; and which perhaps belongs, exclusively, to Him who formed us. You were above reminded that, in such disease, the point of origination and the predisposing causes are for the most part hidden. So therefore doubtless may its complex character remain. The bodily state may intimately affect the mind, even when there is no sensible bodily ailment. It is not that I would recommend you to adopt complicated or violent or prolonged medicinal means. Upright and able professors of the healing art will themselves rarely counsel you to this. They have

often merited and won the confidence and gratitude of such patients by a contrary advice; by prescribing only the gentler and the simpler remedies, and by enforcing rather the curative properties of genial air, of moderate labour, and of active though not distracting change. Follow practically those disinterested and experienced counsels, and discard your own fallacious notion that these expedients are quite indifferent and fruitless, because it is the *mind* which suffers. Recollect that the mind, though not matter, is not *disembodied;* that it receives its impressions and performs its functions by a system of material organs; that whatever therefore can restore and invigorate the action of these organs, directly tends to re-establish its capacities of cheerful, vigorous exertion; nor can this re-establishment be often expected without some attendant bodily change, however slight and undiscerned.

Let me further advise you (as far as your circumstances may admit) to choose at present that kind of intellectual engagement, and limit yourself to that share of it, which are proportioned to your mental state. The sufferer from visible and known bodily illness, whether general or local, will generally, without hesitation, observe this obvious rule. But not unfrequently, I believe, in mental illness, the more strenuous kinds of effort are, on some

erroneous ground of judgment or feeling, too much attempted and pursued. No convalescent from fever is ashamed or self-reproved at feeling unable or unfit to climb a steep ascent, nor will he therefore have a distaste for seeking exercise and refreshment in some more level paths until his strength return. But the student, or member of a studious profession, who can assign to himself no palpable undeniable reason why a long calculation should perplex or a train of investigation weary him, may feel it a dereliction of duty to decline his accustomed pursuits; until the new experience of present inaptitude, and the mortifying sense of disappointment, combined with the exhaustion of this ill-timed effort, still more depress his mind.

To remark that this should, if possible, be avoided, is not to inculcate indolence and inaction, but only that *selection* of mental occupations which will not increase your illness or your painful sense of it.

There are those who will say to you — resist these feelings; give them battle; resolutely vanquish and suppress them.—Even friends who in some measure understand your affliction, may sometimes, with the kindest, best intentions, urge this on you. Shall I second and enforce *such* exhortations? —Besides that I would not willingly lose or impair your confidence—I *could* not do so in sincerity: but must rather assent to what you perhaps may answer,

that as well might you be enjoined to change the weight of the atmosphere, as to remove by an effort the pain or weakness which you suffer. Yet I firmly unite with your best friends in saying, it is a state, which except it were the will of heaven to aggravate, you can, as hitherto, for a while endure. Do not cast into the cup new ingredients of despondency, nor make it bitterly effervesce by your repinings. Do not omit duties, if at present indispensable, because they are burdensome; nor abandon others permanently, because they cannot at this season be performed. Pursue, however feebly, what is fittest now to be pursued. The sick or wounded soldier cannot make a rapid march or hold the front of battle. But he may perhaps be the sentinel even of to-day. He may occupy the trench or rampart: and, if not even so—shall he therefore cast away his armour? Another sun, another conflict, may find him, reindued with strength and ardour, among the foremost bands. Meantime forget not, —"they also serve who only stand and wait:"— and that service, as performed in weakness and in loneliness, may be the hardest of all; the most decisive of their loyalty and faithful zeal.

Having thus alluded to the Christian warfare, it is surely most appropriate for me to remind you, in this peculiar exigency, to look for help from Heaven. When St. Paul exhorted his brethren, "take unto you

the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day," he at once subjoined the comprehensive injunction, "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the spirit:"*—and the remarks already offered on the *immediate* character of that relief from mental illness which is sometimes realized, afford you especial encouragement to use this great resource. Not that we are warranted to expect a blessing on prayer in the perverse or indolent neglect of other means: yet may the Father of our spirits see fit often to accept it, not merely as the paramount means of his rendering those others effectual, but also as that which shall avail *instead* of them. This may happen likewise in bodily restorations; yet their more frequent connexion with physical means is too obvious to be questioned; so that to mental healing prayer is far less unlikely to become the *immediate* antecedent.

Besides, as far as your distress is really, and on just grounds, of a moral and spiritual kind, *so* far you cannot rightly look to physical means for its removal, nor, I am persuaded, will you. Here therefore prayer, grounded on the study of God's promises, which will ever prompt it, is your exclusive resource. And here let me add,—if they be indeed God's promises, ultimate success is not dubious. The cure of bodily disease may, for wise

* Eph. vi. 13 and 18.

reasons, not be granted; and when a few years are come, it assuredly will not: the cure of intellectual debility or pain may be mysteriously withholden: but the attainment or recovery of spiritual safety (I affirm not this of spiritual joy) is as sure to the persevering suppliant, as the word of God is true. Either the gospel you have heard must be a false and imaginary gospel, (and that supposition, however gloomy in itself, would annihilate any alarms which its solemn statements and its defective reception had inspired,)—or else, the promises of the true and "everlasting gospel," so boundless in their extent and adaptedness, must needs be available for you. "All manner of sin and blasphemy," said our gracious Redeemer, "shall be forgiven unto men," that is, to the penitent who implore forgiveness. The exception made of "blasphemy against the Holy Ghost," is no exception affecting the penitent, but must be understood to involve in its very nature a hard contumacious *im*penitence. Those who thus "resist the Holy Ghost," and "trample under foot" redeeming blood, are persons who, so far from "*coming* to Christ," contemptuously reject him.

"Him that cometh to me," (that merciful Saviour proclaimed,) "I will in no wise cast out." "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "The blood of Jesus Christ, his Son,

cleanseth from *all* sin." Here, therefore, contrite prayer is the sole but the infallible refuge.

"This condition" (observes Dr. Owen) "is a sin-entangled soul ofttimes reduced to; it can discover nothing but this, that God is able, and can, if He graciously please, relieve and acquit him.—Wherefore they cast themselves on God's sovereign pleasure, and say with Job, 'though He slay us we will put our trust in Him.'—'We see not our signs and tokens any more; evidences of God's grace in us, or of his love and favour to us, are all out of sight.—Nor is there relief to be had but by and from Him. We will then bring our guilty souls into His presence: what He speaks concerning us we will willingly submit to. And this sometimes proves an anchor to a tossed soul; which though it gives it not rest and peace, yet saves it from the rock of despair. Here it abides until light more and more breaks forth upon it."* But I am not forgetful, that whether your distress be chiefly of the intellectual or the moral cast, if it be severe, if it prostrate and debilitate the powers, you will tell me that you *cannot* pray. And truly if Prayer necessarily included a self-conceived, orderly, fluent, unbroken utterance of thoughts before God, such as would beseem the office of one who conducts *social*

* Owen on Ps. cxxx., pp. 150-1. Abridged. See also Fenelon, Œuv. Spir. t. iv. p. 311. (Lettre au Pere L'Ami.)

worship, then might you justly plead a present inability. But that this is far from being the case, may be most conclusively and variously shown by a reference either to scripture facts or to general considerations. It may no doubt be fit that such a kind of prayers be offered even "in secret," whenever and wherever the present capacity is bestowed; for our Maker is surely entitled to the best of that intellectual strength which at last must be weakness in His sight. But even then the mental exertion, the vigour of thought, the aptitude of diction and of distribution, are clearly not the essence of devotion, but its adjuncts. That prayers may be not the less "fervent and effectual" because not vocal, nor prolonged, nor continuous, nor varied, is evinced by those of Nehemiah when he stood before the king; of the sorrowful Hannah; of the contrite publican; and even of our blessed Saviour himself in his hour of mental anguish. But indeed, were it otherwise, how should the child, the illiterate, the speechless, the sick, the dying, offer prayer? Yet all these peculiarly need to offer it; and when happily awakened to their wants, do by divine help, and with divine acceptance, yet without any removal of natural imperfection or infirmity, pray "in spirit and in truth." "Jehovah heareth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners."

—"A broken heart shall please Him more
Than the best forms of speech."

Nor have some of the most gifted as well as devoted suppliants been exempt from seasons of weakness, or of mental bondage, which compelled them to take refuge in these views of the alone essential qualities of prayer. Such a state is affectingly expressed by A'Kempis. "Oh let my sighing move thee, and my manifold desolation here below. Jesus, brightness of eternal glory, solace of the pilgrim spirit, before Thee my lips are voiceless, and my silence cries to Thee,—how long shall my Lord delay? I am wretched, imprisoned, laden with fetters, till thou revive me with the light of thy presence, and bestow new freedom."* It is remarkable that the excellent Scougal, a bright ornament of the Scottish episcopal church, has described prayer which is not oral, nor even silently verbal, as the highest kind of devotion; not the resource of weakness, but the expedient of intense, unutterable feeling. He writes, "this mental prayer is of all other the most effectual to purify the soul, and dispose it unto a holy and religious temper; and may be termed the great secret of devotion, and one of the most powerful instruments of the divine life. Certainly a few of

* De Imitat. Christi, l. iii. c. 21. p. 111. The expressions of the original are beautiful. "Moveat te suspirium meum et desolatio multiplex in terra. O Jesu, splendor æternæ gloriæ, solamen peregrinantis animæ, apud te est os meum sine voce, et silentium meum loquitur tibi—usquequo tardat venire Dominus meus? Miser sum, et quodammodo incarceratus, et compedibus gravatus, donec luce præsentiæ tuæ me reficias ac libertati dones."

these inward aspirations will do more than a great many fluent and melting expressions."*

Now although this exalted kind of mental prayer, which the author describes as the result of deep previous meditation, be exceedingly different from any which you can at present offer, yet his estimate of silent devotion in general may conduce to forbid your depreciating or counting for nought your voiceless "supplication in the spirit," however confused, incoherent or oppressed.

Not that you are advised to acquiesce even now in such a kind of worship *only*. Aids to oral devotion are of easy access. Those who most disapprove the use, as well as prescription, of forms, would certainly not contend that the words of all true prayer must be wholly self-originated. Such a notion would exclude those scriptural phrases by which the best of what are called free prayers are in general abundantly enriched. Possessing therefore a bible, or even a psalter, you can be at no loss for the form and matter of devotion. What so apposite to your dejected state as some of the petitionary psalms? Their very want of apparent continuity and method, as well as their simple but intense language of complaint and entreaty, may

* "Life of God in the Soul of Man," a little work distinguished by exalted piety, chaste beauty of style, and calm sobriety of thought.

render them more consonant than any prayers which can be found elsewhere, at once with the feebleness and with the sorrows of your mind. Select the passages which are most appropriate. On such engraft, or with such sometimes intermingle, those brief variations of confession or petition which your case may dictate:—it is only the spirit of atheism which doubts whether such prayers are heard, and only that of distrust in Christ's advocacy which doubts whether (if the heart go with them) they will be mercifully answered.

Once more, allow me to warn and solicit you in the spirit of Christian friendship,—shun every new source of *moral and spiritual* pain, every indulgence of imagination or conduct which your heart condemns. You may very fitly "have left undone" certain things which, in another state of mind, you "ought to have done;"—but beware lest you now yield, more readily than at other periods, to do or meditate those things which you "ought *not*." Your present state of feeling has its especial temptations; and those may be now strong which would sometimes have been easily banished or subdued: for what foe or what allurement is not strong to the enfeebled? The human mind always covets a state of complacency; of ease, if not enjoyment; and now that you are without mental pleasures, without spiritual comfort,

without buoyancy of hope, without energy of immediate action or alacrity of busy forecast,—anything which exacts no effort, but excites imagination or attracts the senses, promising thus to lull and obliviate pain, or soothe with sensitive delight, will address itself to you with a perilous charm. Your dim suspicion that the slightest indulgence would now entice you to that which will be unquestionably culpable, and that thus your "sorrows shall be multiplied" and sharpened by the keenest of all pangs, may be met by a sophism worthy of our arch-enemy,—that you cannot be more wretched than you are. Assent not for an instant to this treacherous fallacy. You *will* be, by indulging in what is evil, *incomparably* more wretched than you are; and if you now make one step either in deliberation or in wishes towards it, your weakness almost necessitates your fall. Wait then submissively for those brighter hours which the Great Dispenser and Restorer of all blessings can speedily assign you. Prefer even the protracted faintness of mental inanition to the touch or taste of luscious but destructive poisons. The caution is important and seasonable whether you receive it as literal or metaphorical. I would not be understood to inculcate a scrupulous or superstitious rigour, but only that you sedulously shun both what in itself is evil, and what will directly, perhaps from your past experience too assuredly, conduct to evil. Even apart

from the highest grounds,—the purely Christian and unalterable grounds,—of argument against this, your acute susceptibility of mental pain is in itself an argument, why you should not hazard the self-infliction of this most grievous kind of wound. An excellent Christian authoress evinced both friendship and penetration in writing thus to the late distinguished but unhappy John Henderson,—"I know you have so high a sense of right that you can never be well, while you are not satisfied with your own conduct."*

If pain of mind has been thus unhappily sharpened, a return with humble contrition to the right path, and to the pure fountain of gospel consolation, is the only specific to assuage that self-condemning pang: and thus may it yield at length to an ingenuous filial melting of the heart, in the sense of your own sin and folly and of God our Saviour's abundant loving-kindness: so that his own surprising declaration may be fulfilled in your experience, "I hid me and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart: I have seen his ways and will *heal* him: I will lead him also and restore *comforts* unto him."

* Letter of Mrs. Hannah More, given in "Cottle's Malvern Hills, Poems and Essays," vol. ii. pp. 364-5. The whole letter is highly valuable; and the work of Mr. Cottle, which preserves it, contains many interesting facts and reflections. See especially a brief Essay "On the size of the Bible," vol. ii. p. 366. 4th edit.

It has been thought not unsuitable nor unimportant thus to digress, at considerable length, from the subject more immediately proposed; because, as I have more than once already intimated, distresses of this deeper character may be very frequently (if not always) expected to accompany, in minds that are morally and spiritually awake, the state of augmented sensitiveness and prevailing fear.

The few remarks which I have now to subjoin will in some measure be applicable to any modification which your mental affliction may assume.

It will of course tend to consolation and promote submission, if I can impress on you some designed and probable *benefits* of this heavy trial: such as may outweigh not only the pains but even the disabilities it has brought upon you, the moral dangers which it involves, and even some actual evils which it appears to create or to foment. These uses, at least during its infliction, you may be little able to collect or to discern. You will rather say—how *strangely* sad that I should be thus "*led* into temptation," brought into a state which induces and invites it! How melancholy and judicial in its aspect is this fact, that my affliction should be such as incapacitates me for cheerful and successful service actively, and for a right temper of mind even passively; exposing me, like "a city broken down and without walls," to each irruption of evil,

to the agitating assaults of cares and trifles, to vain and corrupting thoughts, to the suggestions of the impious, and the wiles of invisible foes.

Let me remind you of that rule so necessary for those that have "need of healing,"—do not assume to be decisively a judge in your personal case. We have seen a patient in low fever or latent inflammation, and even his best friends distrustful of that medical decision which has repeatedly applied the lancet, forbidden all that was stimulating or even nutritive, and persevered in what were apparently the most debilitating measures. Yet the sufferer, though increasingly distressed, though swooning, though helpless, was not radically weakened or permanently disabled; but, if I may so accommodate a scripture phrase, "out of weakness was made strong."—How much less are we entitled to dispute the remedial severities, the regimen, the mode or measure of privation, ordered by the great Physician of our spirits; or to estimate at present their ultimate effects.

But, in truth, the sanative tendency is far from being in all respects unapparent or obscure.

You have perhaps been quite conscious (for a mind which thus suffers has usually the self-scrutinizing introspective cast) of a want of due tolerance for weaknesses and defects in your associates, for the obtuseness of some, for the morbid and childish

apprehensions of others, for the moral narrowness, or ungraceful habits which obtrude themselves on your unwilling attention. These faults of human nature you have not well borne with. Your impatience, if not expressed, may have been negatively betrayed. You have not attained, even in trifles, the charity which "suffereth long," which "beareth all things."

"The more perfect one is," (wrote an eminent student of the human heart and of the Christian temper,) "the more one is reconciled to imperfection. The Pharisees could not endure those publicans and sinners, with whom Jesus Christ associated in so much meekness and benevolence. When self is renounced, we enter into that divine magnanimity which nothing wearies or repels."*

It will scarcely be doubted that your present humiliating discipline is greatly adapted to promote that attainment, by correcting the censorious and intolerant spirit, which, had you been quite exempt from such chastisement, might have been most injuriously augmented and confirmed. You might have then been altogether indisposed, and almost unable, to recognise, in the permanent defects of others, the wise appointments of Providence, or, in their temporary or superinduced infirmities and failings, the stroke of the same hand. Your scorn or irritation

* Fenelon, Œuv. Spir., t. i. p. 255.

would have been unallayed by pity. Whereas you are now compelled to feel, I was misjudging and unkind; ready to despise those who shrank from a small or imaginary danger, or were slow to comprehend what appeared to me a simple truth: prone in my heart to lay all to the account of indulged timidity, or wilful sloth, or wandering inattention. But now I am taught that "my mountain," in its seeming strength and loftiness, was but of infirm materials; and find myself in the position of those whose slow or fearful or vacillating steps I had contemned.

This remembrance, when it shall please God to lift you up, will surely continue to abate (if not entirely control) a temper which is culpable in your own eyes, and must be far more so in His who knows at all times your essential weakness, and who Himself, although infinitely above the most exalted of his creatures, despises not the meanest.

You are also learning not only to tolerate, but in some degree to sympathize. You have felt the inability of most to do so, and you know therefore, that your experience, though grievous to yourself, may be soothing and valuable to others. St. Paul distinctly assigns this as an eminent advantage to be derived from "tribulation" and deliverance,—"that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."* You will say—this ability

* 2 Cor. i. 4.

to comfort others implies a restoration which I cannot hope for. It does so; many beside you, however, have quite as despondingly said, "my strength and my hope is perished from the Lord," —and the time may be at hand when you, like them, shall own, "He brought *me* up also out of a horrible pit, and out of the miry clay—and hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God."

You are learning, meanwhile, that most important lesson,—your entire dependence upon Him. There are those who less need to acquire the sense of it in this manner, because *other* kinds of trial continually and effectually recall it. The continuance and sufficiency of their employ and its requital are so doubtful, that in the most literal sense they must implore, "Give us this day our daily bread;" or their resources hang on the frail tenure of another's life; or they are liable to recurring attacks of bodily disease, which make their own unusually precarious. Even if you *have* had some of these mementos, it is very possible that, in your firm and sanguine mood, they failed to impress on you your immediate and entire dependence. But if so, what would be effective except your present correction? "Who teacheth like Him?" Especially if you have been in firm bodily health, and possess what is called, by a strange mis-alliance of terms, an "inde-

pendent fortune," and were thus in danger of trusting in your uncertain strength, and your "uncertain riches,"—what so calculated to dispel this illusion as your actual affliction? You now perceive that bodily health may be not perceptibly affected, and worldly resources neither impaired nor menaced, and yet the course of feeling and the capacity of action be secretly quelled and fettered and brought low. You are now taught to ask,—and it is only in kindness I remind you of it,—"Who hath made me to differ? What was it that I had not *received*? Why did I glory as though I had *not* received?" Why treat as independent, inalienable possessions, those mental or moral attainments, which are, in fact, no more so than bodily health or worldly prosperity, but equally, and even (to appearance) more *immediately*, in the hand of God?

It may likewise be to you a solace, and a salutary warning to those who never dream that they may or can thus suffer, (if any such eye should glance upon this page,) to remember that the greatest elevation of rank or mind does not secure its possessor from the extreme of mental ruin. The first of princes or of statesmen may sink into fatuity, into sudden aberration, or more gradual dotage, and his mind be, not like the columns of Thebes or Palmyra, majestic in its fall, but, like those of Babylon, indistinguishably crushed and lost. The builder of

that Babylon, letting the sceptre drop, and taking a place beneath the level of his slaves, affords at once a memorable rebuke to mortal arrogance, and a monument of God's gracious and restoring power. We read of one of the most illustrious commanders of modern times, that, "during the last two years of his life, his faculties had so much declined," (nor was this in advanced old age,) "that scarcely a trait was left of the Great Condé."* Our own age has furnished examples of minds eminently active on the world's great theatre, which have sunk in "total eclipse." Be grateful that yours is so partial; and remember that for you, as a Christian, or one who aims at that character, there are special grounds of hope that God will not ordain the aggravation of the evil, or the permanence of its present degree.

Neither yield to the thought that, in your present illness, you are incapable of contributing to the good of others. Not only may such degrees of resignation as you are enabled to evince, be highly instructive, but it may be found at last, (though this would be no sound plea for carelessness of proficiency, or in the choice of means,) that God has often chosen to accomplish most good by the weakest instruments, or by the stronger, when in some way incomplete. Even a skilful artisan sometimes effects more with a worn or fractured tool, on account of

* Rees, Cyclop. Article Condé. He was born 1621, died 1686.

some particular adaptation in it to his special purpose, than he might have done with a whole assortment of the brightest and the keenest. If you have long used endeavours, always imperfect, and sometimes most distressingly feeble, for the good of those around you, have you not been now and then reminded of words which you are quite conscious were spoken in weakness, or of some small gift bestowed amidst dejection, which yet appear to have been not without results? How can you be certain but that, after all, the seeds which shall "prosper" most, will be not those which you scattered with a strong arm and an elastic step, but some which you dropped almost at random, when weary and "in heaviness?"

In conclusion, let me again invite you to dwell much on that sustaining thought,—the infinite power and compassion of our God: on his gracious declaration to the suffering and murmuring pilgrims of the wilderness, "I am Jehovah that healeth thee;"—on that prominent and cheering character of his miracles, when "manifest in flesh,"—"he healed all that had need of healing." Who should despair of final relief and "perfect health"* when such has been the promise, and such have been the pledges, of the divine Physician? Doubt not that He is able to present even *you* "faultless before the pre-

* Acts iii. 16.

sence of his glory with exceeding joy;" to do far more than restore those mental and spiritual powers which have been hitherto, at the best, so imperfect and so frail: to capacitate you for serving Him eternally with unwearied devotion and pleasure unabated: to endow the spirit with such celestial harmony and vigour, that it shall ever ardently *will* whatsoever its perfected nature *can* render, of adoring service to its Author and Redeemer,—and shall ever be as entirely capable, to effect, with unremitting and delighted energy, all the services it wills.

Forget not,—since you always know, and often feel, the connexion between the infirmities of the spirit and those of a corruptible and mortal frame—that the perfection of this divine healing will be felt and owned, in its coming victory over corruption and mortality; when those prophecies, once obscure, "I will ransom from the power of the grave: oh grave I will be thy destruction," shall receive their bright fulfilment; and the inherent weakness of the "natural body" be exchanged for that glory of the "spiritual," which pain and death can never more assail.

Meditate on this heavenly cure of all which now humbles, depresses, and excruciates our ruined nature,—the spirit healed of sin and woe, the mind and body rescued from their sad communion of anguish and debility; the whole renovated crea-

ture "made meet for an inheritance in light," there to dedicate immortal health and blessedness to Him whose "perfect gifts" they are. Think how criminal it were to disbelieve, and how blameable as well as unhappy it is to despond, when "God, who cannot lie, hath promised;" promised that though weariness and helplessness and agony, as well as death, may intervene, yet the hour of healing is at hand; when the spirit shall be filled with "power and love," the body raised to unchangeable vitality, the whole creature endued with faultless similitude to the Possessor and Giver of all bliss.

It is exceedingly difficult no doubt, for you, under existing depression, to conceive and anticipate, and above all to appropriate to yourself personally, this glorious change. But though your hold on it be ever so faint and distrustful, you cannot, I hope, renounce it. With reference both to that ultimate and perfect cure, and to intermediate alleviation and relief, you are bound to remember and to venerate his words who said on a different occasion,—"with men it is impossible, but not with God, for with God all things are possible."

XIII.

ON DISTRUSTFUL ANXIETY FOR THE COMING OF CHRIST. A NEW YEAR'S OR ANNIVERSARY MEDITATION.

HAS not our impatient weariness, or timorous distrust, too often echoed, inwardly, that taunt of scoffers,—"Where is the promise of his coming?"

From their tone and spirit indeed we painfully recoil: yet the same question which they urge in flippant mockery, our hearts may whisper unawares in silent sadness. When the infidel derides our dearest expectation, we know his "wish" is "father to that thought;" and yet our own misgivings, condemned and combated by faith, may be his secret allies.

We muse cheerlessly on the ages that have rolled away, the many corruptions and declensions of the Christian cause, the slowness of its genuine triumph since those years of infant strength, when it bruised,

as in its cradle, the serpents of idolatry; on the unchanged aspects of the natural world, where "all things continue as they were;" on the tardy or even questionable amelioration of the moral. In such a mood of gloomy retrospection, must we encounter with new pain those reckless "sports" of sceptics which are "death to us" and to all solid hope: the wretched speculations by which, while they profess to liberate, they would, in fact, lay waste; and just for the sake of levelling the fences of our "narrow way," would make a trackless desert to loiter and to perish in, without even the far-off vision of a better land. "As with a sword in our bones" these "enemies" of holy truth "reproach" us, "while they say daily," as in the old time before us,—"where is thy God?"

But surrender nothing either to their cold railleries or your own anxious musings. There remains a spoken and recorded word of promise. "Exceeding broad" are the attestations it has since acquired; and far other echoes revive, and far other voices respond to it, than those either of levity or despondence. The Saviour in whom we have trusted assured both his adherents and his adversaries of his future majestic advent; in figures and in explicit statements; personally and by the word both of angels and apostles. "I will come again and receive you to myself" was the language of his

affection on the solemn eve of parting: and when He appeared in glory to his exiled servant, with new admonitions and predictions for the suffering churches, —"behold I come quickly"—"surely I come quickly" —was the message at once of warning and of love.

The lapse of centuries indeed has long since taught the church, that its terms must not be interpreted by the narrow measure of our days or generations: but each century has meanwhile affixed, or enlarged, some vast historic seal, on the divinity of the record which contains it. "The bands" who would "rob" us of our only real wealth, do but vainly declare the "pearl of great price" in our shrine of scripture to be spurious, till they can break or obliterate those seals of heavenly truth which are set upon the shrine itself by the broad and far-extending annals of the church and of the world.

These extrinsic confirmations of the "precious promises," we should sometimes review: nor will the task be laborious.

With a glance you can revert to that empire of the first Cæsars, where a splendid starlight of intellect did but adorn, without dispelling, the shades of atheistic and idolatrous darkness which brooded and mingled over its wide regions, fostering all deadly fruits. We see the sudden "day-spring from on high" shedding on those realms a rapid moral illumination; and—where philosophy had been all but

powerless,—kindling the hopes, ruling the hearts, purifying the lives, and hallowing the deaths of myriads. The fact is in itself marvellously and delightfully convincing;* but it gains fresh power as an argument of faith, when you examine how that strange and mighty revolution had been distantly foretold; that in writings unstudied and contemned by Greeks and Romans, but composed and treasured as prophetic by a people alien and averse from other nations, there had been, for ages, extant predictions of that very change; of a great renouncement of idolatry which (as one of those same writings itself incidentally testified) was without example;† of its origination, also, by a single illustrious teacher, of whom, through a long antiquity, it was variously declared that "to Him should be the gathering or homage of nations,"‡ that "the Desire of all nations" should "come,"§ that the "isles" should "wait for his law,"‖ that God would give him "the heathen for his inheritance,"¶ that he should be a Light to the Gentiles**, and the "pleasure of Jehovah should prosper in his hand;"†† that in the days of the fourth great

* See several passages from *Origen* on this subject, in the author's "Divine Origin, &c." vol. i. pp. 79, 126, 300-2, 311, 353. ii. 87-8, with other confirmatory citations and reflections.

† Jer. ii. 10, 11.

‡ Gen. xlix. 10. Dr. J. P. Smith's version. Scrip. Test. i. 247.

§ Hag. ii. 7. ‖ Isai. xlii. 4. ¶ Ps. ii.

** Isai. xlix. 6. †† Isai. liii. 10.

monarchy (the Roman) should "the God of heaven set up a kingdom" which would "consume" all hostile powers, and "stand for ever;" a kingdom emblematically described as "a stone cut out without hands," destined to smite and crush the "great image" of idolatrous dominion,—to become itself "a great mountain," and to fill "the whole earth."*

* Dan. ii. 31, 44.—"So long as the civil history of the ancient world shall last, under the scheme of its four successive Empires; so long as the introduction of Christianity, in the place and order previously assigned to it, shall remain upon record, and its visible reign exist; so long as the conclusion of the Iron Empire of Rome shall be known in the promiscuous partition made of it by the host of northern and eastern invaders;—so long there will be a just and rational proof of the inspiration of these illustrious prophecies of Daniel."[1]—It is not within my scope to advert to those prophecies concerning our Saviour's life and death which the New Testament verifies, but only to glance at those, the fulfilment of which is broadly marked on the pages of *secular* history. In respect to *both* classes of predictions, the book of Daniel seems pre-eminent. Abbadie, in examining what this book foretells as to the first advent and kingdom of Messiah, remarks that "one knows not which most to wonder at, the evidence of truth which is found in it, or the prodigious blindness of those who perceive not that evidence." After stating ten wonderful correspondencies between these prophecies and the events, he comments on some of them to this effect,—What could be a more indisputable mark of the prophetic spirit than to have foretold the destiny of the Jewish people as ensuing on the coming and death of Christ? Who will imagine that it depended on this writer to cause that Jerusalem should be ruined, and "the sanctuary destroyed," and "the sacrifice and the oblation cease," when a person called the Christ or Messiah should be "cut off?"[2]. Great

[1] Davison's Discourses on Prophecy, p. 526.

[2] Dan. ix. 26, 27.

How shall we not discern, in the wide diffusion and permanence of that light which Christ revealed, himself "the Light of the world," a glorious accomplishment of those long-predicted wonders; especially when we include the fact, too little noticed, that where this light has been once *prevailingly* diffused, although it often has been, and continues to be, dreadfully and ruinously darkened, yet rarely, if ever, has *polytheism* resumed its ancient sway.

Meditate next on the singular and hapless race, among whom alone arose that lengthened series of predictions; from whom also the mighty religious innovation which fulfilled them, first went forth: and see in their whole story since, and their condition at this day, the fulfilment of another series scarcely less extended; bearing strange reference to their own fearful destinies; begun more than three thousand years ago by their venerated law-giver, renewed by their most honoured prophets, sealed at length by Him whose mission they so

Great events may sometimes be foreseen by the combined light of experience and penetration; but that this should be the period to make reconciliation for iniquity—to bring in everlasting righteousness—and to anoint the "Most Holy,"—that the death of Christ should connect itself with such events as these, is what no human sagacity could anticipate. "Surely the divine wisdom would not have ordained these things to happen in complaisance to the fancies of an impostor or enthusiast[1]."

[1] Ver. de la Rel. Chret. t. i. p. 488 et supra. (Edit. 1689.)

fatally despised. From the foretold and frightful doom of their metropolis and temple, from the frustrated attempt to rebuild that renowned sanctuary *, from their "proverbial" ignominy, † their unparalleled "scattering" ‡ and "sifting," and distinctness still "among all nations," "like as corn is sifted in a sieve;" § in short, from the whole judicial sequel, in "plagues" thus "wonderful," and of so "long continuance," ‖—how can we choose but gather clear "instruction," as well as deep "astonishment," ¶ at the verification of the oracles of God!

Once more, retrace the simultaneous rising, the concurrent greatness and parallel decline, of the Mahometan and Papal tyrannies,—the two vast forms of Antichristian domination;—and in these awful scenes of our own era, spreading over two-thirds of its whole extent and unfinished still, further ascertain the prophetic claims both of Jewish and Christian scriptures. Remember that the nation who reject the mission both of Paul and John, had, long before the times of these apostles, placed the book

* Ammian. Marcell. lib. xxiii. c. i. † Deut. xxviii. 37.

‡ Deut. xxviii. 25 and 64. Levit. xxvi. 33. Jer. ix. 16. Ezek. v. 10, 12. Hos. iii. 4.

§ Amos ix. 8-9. ‖ Deut. xxviii. 59.

¶ Ezek. v. 15; on which see Davison's Lectures on Prophecy, pp. 452-3.

of Daniel in the sacred canon.* Consider whence could spring the immense anticipations of either writer, much more the circumstantial, differing, yet accordant anticipations of each, as to scenes so buried in a remote inscrutable futurity?—except from the dictation of divine foreknowledge. Ask yourself with a commentator, whom few will rank among the credulous, "Were *these* words written after the events; or can the congruity of the descriptions with the things themselves be reasonably ascribed to chance?"† Or generalize a passage in which the same author particularly refers to the *later* prophecies of Antichrist, but which applies, with yet greater force, to those of much higher antiquity,

* The predictions contained in the book of Daniel on these and other great subjects, which has been termed by Mede[1] "a sort of prophetic chronology of the Kingdom of Christ," require too wide and exact comparison with the world's history, to be at all duly appreciated by mere reference to that book itself. This is also true, in some measure, of the predictions concerning Antichrist in the writings of St. Paul and St. John, though readers, possessing some general acquaintance with the annals of Romish Christendom, cannot but perceive in them wonderful delineations of the tyranny and corruption of that church. See 2 Thess. ii. 3, 10.—1 Tim. iv. 1, 4. —Revel. xvii. and xviii. The full impression can only be gained by a studious examination of the agreements between these prophecies and history, both ecclesiastical and secular, much too detailed for this work. I subjoin, however, a few extracts from the works of learned inquirers, which show the impression on *their* minds resulting from such an examination. See Note B. at end of volume.

† Dr. Samuel Clarke on the Attributes, p. 429.

[1] Quoted in Bishop Hurd's Lectures, p. 80.

—If in the days of Daniel, Paul, or John, there were vestiges of such a sort of powers in the world; or if there ever had been any such powers; or if there was then any shadow of probability that there would be such powers in the world, much more in the church of God; and if there be not now such powers, actual and conspicuous; and if any brief sketches of them, drawn after the event, could describe them more strikingly than they were described by those writers so many ages before they existed;—then let it be believed that these prophecies were not of God.*

It should also be distinctly noticed, that although each of those great accomplishments of prophecy might, very long ago, in a qualified sense, be called complete; yet is each of them ever since, and still, in a continued and *ulterior* process of completion.

Thus the predicted spread of monotheism among the Gentiles was largely and wonderfully verified, even before the cruel reign of Diocletian; but who does not know that it has since advanced, and is advancing,—though with deeply mysterious checks and fluctuations, yet indubitably,—towards a final and universal fulfilment. Besides the great (though very imperfect) northern conversions of the middle ages, part of which have been, by subsequent reforma-

* Dr. Samuel Clarke on the Attributes, p. 439, abridged and altered.

tions and awakenings, purified; we see, moreover, a whole western hemisphere colonized, in later times, by nations not idolatrous; and amidst the unexampled growth of population, in what must be, if this world long endure, one of its mightiest continents, we hail a wide revival, a deep and growing vitality, amidst much overt and daring opposition, of "the faith once delivered to the saints."

Meanwhile the light of real science in the farthest East, co-operates with the desires and energies of Christians; chasing and "casting out" those phantoms of a gross mythology, which can no more work their work or spread their wings in its full sunshine, than those "moles" and "bats" to which as fit associates they were anciently foredoomed. Infidels may sneer at the limited, slow, and unstable conquests of the cross; nor shall we contradict the epithets; yet let us conceive for an instant the "prophet monarch" of Judæa unapprized of all events on earth, since the time when he predicted in Jehovah's name "The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Sion;"*—"the Son," (his *Christ*)† "shall have the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession."‡—And now let the geography of Christendom and of missions be suddenly unrolled. Would he deem the fulfilment of those

* Ps. cx. 2. † Ps. ii. v. 2, and v. 12. See the Septuagint. ‡ Ps. ii. 8.

oracles equivocal or narrow, and his "soul be cast down within him," when, looking "from the land of Jordan, from the hill Mizar," over waves which no ship of Tarshish ever crossed, he should find his *own* hallowed songs, "the songs of Zion," read in the hut of the Esquimaux, chaunted in the kraal of the Hottentot and in the churches of Tahiti—when he should hear the name of "the Son," "the Christ," resounding on the shores of the Ganges and Ohio, and "mark" those "towers" and consider those "palaces," where "God is known for a refuge," adorning the once savage banks of Thames and Delaware?—Would not rather some of his own lyric melodies now burst from him afresh, and a new and warm significance be thrown into those strains, "Jehovah gave the word: great was the company of those that published it! Thou hast ascended up on high: thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men?"

So, as to the dispersed preservation of the Hebrews; that phenomenon was already striking and complete in the eye of Cyprian or Eusebius,* though the time had been then comparatively brief of their unprecedented doom: much more so in the long subsequent age of "the great Condé," who professed that it was of itself, to his mind, an unanswerable argument for the truth of revelation. But its con-

* See Euseb. Demonst. Evang. lib. v. c. 23.

tinuance since his time, in connexion with an undecaying expectation by that people of their great Deliverer, through a new age like ours, in which old distinctions and ideas have themselves been scattered and "trodden under foot of men," has been, and becomes year by year, more signally instructive *still*.

Thus also do we witness, beyond any former generation, the protracted existence, and the unretrieved decline both of the Papacy and of Islamism; and though their long-enduring sway and slow proclivity to fall, may render these scenes less "marvellous in our eyes," we know that this slowness is but analogous to that of other sequences and movements which Providence has ordered or permitted, both in the physical and social system.

In this manner events that, during ages, have stood forth as stupendous seals for the veracity of God's holy word, become still broader and more palpable by the accession of those new margins and inscriptions, which revolving centuries mysteriously annex.

Nor is the scorn of unbelievers, which has grown more overt and hostile, since scriptural and active piety revived conjunctly with civil and religious freedom, an *unpredicted* scorn. Have we any title to expect that, in our "last days," it should cease, unless when the awful advent which it challenges, shall suddenly rebuke and silence it for ever?

Let such men "set their mouth against the heavens," while their "tongue walketh through the earth," as if they held the "line and measuring reed"* of the Eternal:—we must still ask—wherewith shall they blot those marks and signets of His Prescience? How do they deface or melt away those vast and self-enlarging seals, "graven as with an iron pen" in the living "rock" of history; comprising the greatest national and religious revolutions from the days of Tiberius to our own, and closely answering to diversified trains of predictions, whose remote priority no rational examiner disputes?

Are not these seals most manifestly indelible; and what less do they attest than the divine inspiration of the writings where those prophecies were of old recorded, and the omniscient, unceasing sovereignty of Jehovah who inspired them?—What less than that "the Lord God Omnipotent *reigneth*,"—that "His eyes are upon the ways of men," that He "understandeth their thought afar off," and "worketh all things,"—though concurrently with man's free-agency,—"after the counsel of His own will?"—what less than that (as these scriptures solemnly announce, and as reason compels every real theist to believe) He is the "God of truth," the "Holy One," "who cannot lie," and whose "mercy

* Ezek. xl. 3.

endureth for ever?" Are we, then, heartlessly to relinquish our trust in those of his predictions and promises, which as yet are *un*fulfilled? He who by his first despised and unacknowledged advent transformed the worship and habitudes and sentiments of half the world, has said, "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven;" and again, by the pens of apostles, "He shall come to be glorified in his saints;" and "behold He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him."* These latter passages, let it be observed, are from the very same books of scripture which have before been cited as containing wonderful prophecies in part fulfilled, and still in progress of fulfilment. We may add that the book of Daniel, which was cited with those, anticipates likewise, in distinct and lofty terms, that glorious final coming. "I looked in visions of the night, and behold with the clouds of heaven came one like a Son of man.—His dominion is an eternal dominion which shall not pass away, and his empire that which shall not be destroyed."† Shall we refuse a patient credence to assurances like these,

* 2 Thess. i. 7-10, and Rev. i. 7.

† Dan. vii. 13, 14. Dr. J. P. Smith's version, Scrip. Test. i. 448. "The Rabbinical commentators, without exception, appear to have acknowledged the application of this text to the Messiah." Ibid. 450. Note B.

from Him whose "determinate counsel and foreknowledge" the very same writings, by the fulfilment of their other great oracles, demonstrate, and are themselves thus proved to have been prompted by Himself? If scoffers mock our hopes, and defame His attributes and dispensations with the charge of what "men count slackness," it were well to ask,—for our own profit if not for theirs,—How near was Messiah's *first* victorious coming, when Balaam, in reluctant trance, had lately uttered, "I shall see Him, but not now, I shall behold Him, but not nigh; there shall come a star out of Jacob;"—when one patriarch had declared in dying, "the sceptre shall not depart from Judah, until Shiloh come;" and another amidst his anguish had triumphantly exclaimed, "I surely do know my Redeemer, the Living One, and he, the Last, will arise over the dust;"*—or when Abraham, yet earlier, was divinely promised, "in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed?"

Had your lot been among "dwellers at Jerusalem" in the days when Pompey made Judæa tributary, or when Crassus seized the treasures in its temple, would you have been then less prone than now to ask—where is the promise of Messiah's coming?—What indication was in *those* times discernible, (unless it were that gloomy and ambiguous

* Job xix. Dr. J. P. Smith's version, in Scrip. Test. i. 286.

prospect, "the sceptre" ready to "depart from Judah,") of his appearing whom the ancient oracles foretold? Yet within one century after, the "star out of Jacob" had arisen; the gatherer of the nations, the Light of all earth's families, had sent forth his heralds to the Gentiles; the Redeemer had lived and suffered and departed in whom millions since have had "a lively hope," that they, like him, shall "arise over the dust;" and from that epoch the seals of the world's history are attached inseparably to the volume of the church's hopes. For never since has there been wanting some great and progressive class of facts, respondent to those same and other trains of signal and remote prediction. And have we not in these, a mode and series of prophetical testimony far more sustaining to our faith, than even all the long succession, diversity, and amplification of unfulfilled prophecies concerning the Christ could be, to those, who before his first advent, "looked for redemption in Jerusalem?"

How can we bend to these testimonies the mind's eye and ear,—tracing thus the earliest signatures of what claimed to be Heaven's Prescience, re-written by vast events on the tablets of the living world,—hearing thus the solemn voices of "Moses and the prophets" echoed by facts that, through all "latter days," have filled the trump of history,—without a deepened impression that "verily" there "is a

God who judgeth in the earth;" that "the Holy One of Israel is" indeed "our King," that his "counsels of old are faithfulness;" that "good is Jehovah, eternal his mercy, and for all generations his truth?"*

But then, if amidst the freshness and strength of this impression, we turn to meditate the order of the universe around us,—what clear perpetual echoes are hourly *thence* also responding to the word of promise, and to every proof of a divine administration, in the movements which we call processes of nature, and too faintly recognise as agencies of God! The amazing mechanism of the heavens; the familiar succession of yearly verdure and of daily sunrise; the ever-controlled and refluent tides; the uniform instincts of unnumbered animals; incessantly reassure us, though we listen not, of an Omniscient vigilance and immutable fidelity. Among the most astonishing parts and evidences of this complex order (the great rule or index indeed by which many other parts of it are observed and ascertained) is the exactness of those celestial motions which mete out what we call our Time. The prolongation of these (like the continuous progress of some fulfilments of prophecy) is a cumulative or germinating argument for the steadfast unintermitted reign of the Most High. By how much therefore

* Ps. c.—ult.

the "promise" is deferred, while yet we calculate from heaven's unerring dial the years of its delay,—by so much, in that very reckoning, do new sums of proof accrue, for the perfections of the Promiser. Each century which has become complete, each eclipse which has been computed and observed, each waxing and waning moon, every year that has been joined to the eighteen hundred that are for ever gone,—nay each diurnal rotation of our earth in its swift and accurate career,—while made by scoffers a new plea and topic of disbelief, has been in effect one added and punctilious tribute of creation to the perfect rule of the Supreme:—at once a fulfilment of the special promise, "summer and winter and day and night shall not cease,"* and a ceaseless echo to the authoritative words, "Hath God said and shall He not do? or hath He spoken and shall He not make it good?"†—"My counsel shall stand and I will do all my pleasure!"‡

When we reach, therefore, either in personal or public calendars, some new annual demarcation of that vast but divinely regulated progress,—when the "noiseless foot of Time" seems to touch one of those great invisible chords that measure out his realm,—and his own memento of the transient and the dying vibrates at a birth-day's sunset on the heart of one, or at new-year's eve upon the hearts of

* Gen. viii. 22. † Numb. xxiii. 19. ‡ Isai xlvi. 10.

nations,—this very thrill of feeling should bring with it to faith, nay and to reason likewise, a new memorial of his unchanging "ordinances," who "hangeth the earth upon nothing;" who "causeth the day-spring" both natural and spiritual "to know his place;" who has said, "Behold I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to give unto every man according as his work shall be!"

Must we still be taunted with the word "*quickly*," —as if irreconcilable with this prolonged delay?

Ask him who so refers to it,—especially if, though "undevout," he have any acquaintance with astronomy,—whether he considers the swiftest of discovered planets, Mercury, to move "quickly" in its orbit? and whether he will accept a computation which some observers have greatly exceeded, as to the distance of the fixed stars? Then suppose, (and of course as a *mere* supposition) that *no sooner* had the Prince of Life ascended—perhaps by instantaneous miracle—"far above all heavens," than He actually began the triumphal and judicial *regress* of his final advent; and ever since, encompassed by "his mighty angels," has approached us with a velocity equal to that with which Mercury revolves. Question the objector, how soon would this awful procession reach our world even from the *nearest* star; and he may answer you,—in about eight thousand years. Should he however add,—this

were but a lingering rate of progress for Him who orders and impels the flight of *sunbeams*,—let it be remembered that the local distance we have assigned for the *commencement* of that progress is relatively narrow: that the "heaven of heavens," the central glory*, the abode of the "Majesty on High," is, in all likelihood, immensely more remote: Herschel having "discovered objects whose distances he estimates to be so great, that their *light* must have been nearly *two millions* of years in travelling down to us." † But the radiations or undulations of light possess a velocity so surpassing and incomprehensible, that for this among other reasons its materiality has been questioned; and yet a space which light has been twice ten thousand centuries in traversing, "probably comprehends but a small part of the universe." ‡

Let us therefore imagine (which, I repeat, in *no* degree implies or intimates such an *opinion*) that the "sign of the Son of man" were not to be "revealed from heaven," for millennial cycles of ages yet to come,—would it even then be for modern *philosophy* to insinuate that he spake not truly, or even not *literally*, when affirming "Behold I come quickly?"

Must an orb, compared with whose rapidity the voice of thunders and the flight of our swiftest missiles

* Note C, at end of volume.

† Phil. Trans. 1802. Quoted in Vince's Confutation of Atheism, p. 29.

‡ Ibid.

of destruction are but tedious, be yet eighty centuries * traversing a small portion of our visible heavens, — must rays or undulations which are inconceivably more rapid that that orb, be *millions* of years in reaching us from some remoter star,—and shall it be said that the "chariots of God" are like those of Egypt's host, who "drave them heavily," because not yet arrived at these suburbs or outskirts of creation from the central throne and "right hand of the Most High?" Ere He who "sitteth thereon" shall have fulfilled his glorious progress, "travelling in the greatness of his strength," more swiftly than planets or than sunbeams in their courses, with all that "dread magnificent array,"— how many proud measurers of "hands-breadths," who exclaim, forgetful of their boasted science, "Your Lord delayeth his coming," may have been borne away by inexorable Death to meet Him?

If the rapid undulations of the minutest sound, and the far more rapid movements of planets, are strictly governed by Him with whom is "no varia-

* These rough numbers are founded on the statement in Rees's Cyclopædia, that "a cannon ball moving at the rate of about 19 miles a minute, would be 760,000 years passing from the nearest fixed star;" and that "sound, which moves at the rate of about 13 miles a minute, would be 1,120,000 years" traversing the same distance. It is stated in Bonnycastle's Astronomy (p. 31), that Mercury in its course round the sun "moves at the rate of about 105,000 miles an hour;" more than 130 times as fast as the flight of sound.

bleness," nor does any irregularity betray even "a shadow of turning," shall not his own approach be expected with as confident and "patient waiting," as the return of comets that have vanished from our skies?

But while thus the fixed and moving worlds, at once by their sameness and their revolutions, their remoteness and celerity, utter unnumbered echoes to the recorded "word,"—so also that change and progression in human affairs, which, amidst much of like sameness and stability, become yearly more observable, present to us another order of corroborative facts, which, though on a minuter scale, are perhaps not less significant. I have said,—amidst much of like sameness and stability;—because in many points, the unchangeableness and completeness of divine sovereignty are strongly manifested in the *limitation* of human nature as to its capacities and its advances. The boasted "perfectibility" of certain self-sufficient and imaginative speculators in Europe, remains as ideal as the earthly immortality of Lao-Kung in China.* Still, as in the Psalmist's age, "the days of our years are three score years and ten." The bodily form and constitution, the daily wants, the mental affections of man are mainly unaltered. His Maker and Preserver "hath appointed the bounds that he

* Barrow's China, p. 463.

cannot pass." No philosophic voice dares tell us, "he that believeth on me shall never die:" "I will raise him up at the last day:" but the divine voice which spake those words with authority, and in whose name they are reiterated, still challenges the "wise" of this world to add "one cubit to his stature," or "make one hair white or black." Amidst those permitted advances, and noble augmentations of power, which we are now to speak of, man remains at most points as dependent as ever, unable to add one month to his life, or one muscle to his frame. He is still constrained, as in the days of ancient times, to view himself as "fearfully and wonderfully made" by some unseen and unchanging Power; and those changes in the condition and capacities of the race, of which in his generation he is invited to avail himself, are the permitted work of nations and of ages; in which his own share, if it be any, is for the most part very minute. Yet on the other hand, amidst all this sameness and these marked restraints, how important and accelerated are those advances of human science, art, and power! The great though simple invention of "imprinting,"* with all its consequent applications, which has given means of cheap and boundless diffusion for scriptural and all other knowledge,—that likewise of optical

* This word, (seen on old titlepages,) may include, I think, with typography in all its modes, the kindred arts of lithography, engraving, &c., with their most recent improvements.

instruments and mathematical processes which have perfected the art of navigation,—the recent accession to this and other modes of locomotion, by an immense motive force,—the conjunct tendency of these things to spread both scientific and revealed truth swiftly throughout the world, and the fact that each of these discoveries was made in countries enlightened by the gospel,—all these are wonderfully consonant with the written and once spoken promise, "Behold I come!" They are as new voices in the wilderness of earthly labours, or amidst the desert of human disappointments, which cry "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight a highway for our God."

I doubt not that some of the "wisehearted," * the ingenious and inventive, forgetting whence their own talents came, have sneered at the language of Moses, when he describes the "Son of Uri" as "called" and filled with a heaven-descended "spirit," that he might "devise curious works;" might attain expertness in arts unknown to his nation, and aptness to teach others also, in order to the prompt completion of a fitting sanctuary. But such scorn, if not atheistic, is at least self-idolizing and superficial. "The Father of lights," while he confers and sustains in those who indulge it each faculty and each acquirement which themselves possess, does but permit that

* Using the term in that very limited sense which it has in Exod. xxviii. 3.—xxxi. 6.—xxxv. 25, &c.—Those texts are curiously illustrated by Aristotle.—Eth. Nicom. l. vi. c. 7.

infatuation of their pride, that blind deification of second causes or successive means, by which they learn to despise a reference to His special providence almost as much as to His special grace. It must still be true in the judgment of real theists, (and not the less for that chain of causes or instruments which those men exclusively regard and boast of) that "every good gift" descends from God. Particularly with respect to every intellectual power and effort, the question of a most ancient book will never lose its force—"Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts, or who hath given understanding to the heart?"* The same book supplies our only right answer,—"The inspiration of the Almighty."†

Whatever hyperbole and approach to impious flattery there may be in Pope's epitaph on our great philosopher, none but a virtual atheist can doubt that it expresses a great truth in declaring,

"*God* said, let *Newton be*:"

And so concerning each and all of our race, unknown or well known, illustrious or obscure, who, whether by aid of a long train of previous lights and preparatives, or by seeming fortuity, have contributed something to the advancement of mankind, it should be distinctly recognised that He who ordereth all things, has "in very deed for this cause raised them up," or for this same purpose endowed them. The antecedent or surrounding train was laid either

* Job xxxviii. 36. † Ibid. xxxii. 8.

by the cumulated labour of ages, or by the rich concurrence of natural gifts; still it is as true, though not as manifestly so, of Faust or Gutenburg, Galileo or Watt, as of Bezaleel and Aholiab, that the Great Disposer "called them by name," and ordained them "to devise curious works."* If "the Assyrian" was "the rod of his anger," the "staff" of his "indignation,"† why shall not a Bacon, or a Davy, or a Kepler, be viewed as wands of his beneficent power, cleaving, as it were, the waves of obscurity and error, smiting out the streams of knowledge in the wilderness, or "blossoming" and "yielding" unaccustomed fruits? "Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or the deaf, or the seeing, or the blind?"—or who confers the vigorous, capacious, penetrating intellect? There are, it may be, proud possessors of that gift (though I hope such a spirit has very rarely been associated with *British* science) who would scorn to be denominated instruments in the hand of the Supreme Intelligence. And so, doubtless, would the royal Assyrian have scorned to be termed the unsuspecting scourge in the hand of Divine Justice ‡. But in each case we may pertinently ask,—"Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?" § We are obliged, as theists, and let it be also our consolation,

* Exod. xxxv. 30-2.

† Isai. x. 5. See Abp. Secker in Lowth's Isai. vol. ii. p. 106.

‡ Isai. x. 7. § Isai. x. 15.

as Christians, to trace in those advances which arise amidst the sameness and feebleness of human society, and which facilitate the accomplishment of revealed promises, new tokens and preludes of their approaching completion; new parts, as it were, in that grand *overture,* whose very discords have in them a latent harmony; still ushering in the perfect consummation; still burdened with these solemn strains of prophecy,—" Surely I come quickly,"—" behold I make all things new!"

Once more, amidst those awakening secular changes, there is yet found a durability in the chief tenets and best emotions of the sound parts of Christ's church, (wherever subsisting, and by whatever civil or ecclesiastic forms connected or disjoined,) which yields a further and happy attestation that their source has been divine. We might, indeed, have ranked this among the widening seals of prophetic promise; the fulfilment, thus far, of those distinct assurances—" Lo I am with you always "—" the gates of hell shall not prevail :"—but passing by its claim as a fulfilled prediction, let us view it simply as an unexampled fact. Do not the steadiness and brightness of these sea-lights, (the true churches of Christ) through the tempests of all ages, contribute to show that they are founded on the everlasting rock, and still fed with fire from heaven?

Although the principles of the religious system

least remote from ours,—that of Mahomet,—should prove equally enduring, this would present no parallel. For who will pretend that in the *best* adherents,—the "true church" if I may so speak—of that false prophet, (much as he was indebted to the gospel,) there has been or is that purity of moral principle; that chastened and transforming ardour of faith, hope, and charity; that pure but enlightened self-denial and philanthropy; of which indisputable specimens still are found, under each diversity of name and form and section, among the disciples of Christ? We wonder not, as far as human nature is concerned, at the permanence of the Mahometan system. "The world" is not against it, for it was constructed to suit and captivate the world; and if *its* "methodism," a zeal for its forms or for its fanaticism, were despised and persecuted, the world would cease to "love its own." These forms, and this fanaticism, it possesses in common with all or most of the idolatrous systems which it condemns. The mosque, therefore, is not as a sea-built light-house, with all the waves of worldly passions sapping or assaulting it: it was reared on the iron pillars of force, and its gilded lamps have been fanned by luxurious breezes. But Christian churches, properly so called, that is, the "faithful" of each communion and of each assembly, forming collectively the church universal,—and each of these faithful persons themselves,—are in some true and

important sense, (though less obviously than in ancient times,) still "light-houses in the world." * Many such churches,—thousands, we trust, in our own and neighbouring lands,—still throw the gleam of their hallowed watch-fires across the "troubled sea" of this world, "whose waters cast up mire and dirt." Of the multitudes who compose them, each cherishes the separate yet combining spark of faith and love; and all conspire to brighten in their day those beacons which have withstood the storms of time, and shed some moral and celestial light even on the darkest ages of our era. They have glowed brightly amidst the hurricanes of persecuting violence which threatened their extinction, and they still glow, if dimly, amidst the pestiferous vapour of unbelief which seeks to chill and quench them with its paralysing enmity. And even if many should be quenched, (as some unhappily have been,) and many should "wax cold,"—nay were there only left, which may God forbid, "seven thousand" of our millions, who had not bowed in the self-idolatry of the godless,—yet would the "burning" and growing "light" of those, amidst their desolateness, still confirm their mutual trust that God "abideth faithful;" and be an earnest of that fresh diffusion, which his good pleasure can, in any region, and at

* Phil. ii. 15. Saurin (Ser. vol. ix. p. 460, as quoted by Doddr. in loc.) suggests this allusion.

any moment, give, to "the light that shineth in darkness."

In this sense the sighing of the heart,—when, though alloyed by impatience or distrust, it is yet devout and hopeful,—the Christian's spiritual attitude of vigilant expectance *, "looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God,"—is as a light-bearing and flamy gem, like those which are related to have blazed upon the High Priest's mystic breast-plate †; sparkling forth legibly —man is not made in vain, but made to be reunited with his God.—Sceptics have said, "if God had given a revelation, he would have written it in the skies." ‡ But besides its being, in one sense, true and obvious that He *hath* done so; and in another sense, (as Dr. Paley has remarked,) contrary to the analogy of the whole system of things that He should do so §; it is also most cheeringly true and apparent that He hath written it in the *earth;* placing within "earthen vessels" (as in the lamps of Gideon) heaven-descended flames, ever aspiring, discernible already by their warmth and gleaming, but ready first to shine forth brightly when the frail pitchers crumble. Such flames inurned, and sometimes in the meanest clay, have been always many, still breathing heavenward, and each one—as a

* ἀποκαραδοκια. † Joseph. Ant., iii. 8. L' Estrange, p. 69.
‡ Paley's Evidences, v. ii. 347. § Ibid.

"tongue" of fire—responding to each word and echo of the heavenly promise—"Even so, *come* Lord Jesus."

That ardent Rutherford, whose letters, through twenty years, had overflowed with ceaseless aspirations, "Oh would my Lord cut short the months and hours, and overleap time, that we might meet;"* still in his dying weakness evermore uttered the impassioned wish, "Oh for arms to embrace Him: oh for a well-tuned harp!"

That devoted Herbert, whose temper seems graphically expressed in the piece entitled "Home," beginning

> Come, Lord, my head doth burn, my heart is sick,
> While thou dost ever, ever stay; . . . . .
> Oh show thyself to me,
> Or take me up to thee!

said with a calmer fervour a little before he departed, "I shall shortly leave this valley of tears, and dwell where these eyes shall see my Master and Saviour Jesus."—"And this is my content, that I shall live the less time for having lived this and the day past."†

Howe, in a brief memorial of a benevolent and Christian physician, Dr. Henry Sampson, states, "In all my conversation with him, nothing was more observable than his *pleasant* and *patient* expectation of the blessed state which he now possesses; the mention whereof would make

* Letters, p. 239. † Life prefixed to his poems, p. 41.

joy sparkle in his eye, and clothe his countenance with such tokens of serenity, as showed and signified submission, with an unreluctant willingness to wait for that time which the wisdom and goodness of God should judge seasonable for his removal out of a world which he loved not; nor yet could disaffect from any sense of its unkindness to him, but only from the prospect he had of *a better*." *

How fully the biographer himself partook the temper which he here delineates as evinced by a friend, remarkably appears in his having "once told his wife, that though he loved her as well as is fit for one creature to love another, yet if it were put to his choice whether to die that moment, or to live that night, and the living that night would secure the continuance of his life for seven years to come, he declared he would choose to die that moment." †

And lest it should be insinuated that, however it may be with divines or devotees, this holy flame has now gone out in minds really imbued with modern science, quenched by that broad clear day-light,—as our coal-fires are found to grow faint and lifeless if exposed to the bright sunbeams,—I shall add the *recent* instance of a physician distinguished by scientific and literary merit; the late Dr. Thomas Bateman. In an excellent memoir, composed (I am

* Works, i. 696-7. Fol. edit.

† Calamy's Memoir of Howe, prefixed to his works, v. i. p. 74.

informed) by his sister, we are told that he had been inclined "to the wretched doctrine of Materialism," and "sceptical respecting the truth of Divine Revelation." But exactly twelve months before his decease, (which occurred "in the prime of life, at the age of forty-three,") he attained a happy persuasion of that truth which he had long opposed. It deserves attention, that during four previous years of illness (from 1815 to 1820) he continued in "total estrangement from God and religion;" and not less,—that "his mind retained all its powers in full vigour to the last moment of life, and was never once clouded or debilitated."—"During the last week especially, the strength and clearness of his intellect and of his spiritual perceptions were very remarkable; and on its being one day observed to him, that as his bodily powers decayed, those of his soul seemed to become more vigorous, he replied,—They do, exactly in an inverse ratio; I have been very sensible of it."—"He conversed with the greatest animation all the day and almost all the night preceding his death, principally on the joys of heaven and the glorious change he was soon to experience, often exclaiming, —What a happy hour will the hour of death be!—Some of his last words were—Oh yes! I am GLAD to go, if it be the Lord's will.—He shut his eyes and lay quite composed, and by and by said, —What glory! the angels are waiting for me!

Then after another short interval of quiet, he added,—Lord Jesus, receive my soul;—and, to those who were about him,—farewell. These were the last words he spoke." In about ten minutes after this he breathed his last, on "the 9th of April, 1821, the very day on which, twelve months before, his mind had been first awakened to the hopes and joys of the ever-blessed gospel."——"What a contrast" (adds his biographer) "did his actual departure form to what I had reason to apprehend, when I watched over his couch in London, expecting that every moment would be his last! and when, with a hard indifference and insensibility, he talked only of going to his 'last sleep!' And how can I worthily acknowledge the goodness of Almighty God, who effected such a change in his state!"*

Thousands of Christians, quite unknown to fame, but well-known to "brotherly kindness," have evinced, in their humble days of life and hours of death, a desire and hope as fervid and as pure. And is not each such instance, near us or remote, a living voice the more,—testifying, like all the rest, that heavenly power awakened it? One of the devout men who have been mentioned as strongly exemplifying this spirit, thus comments on its origin:—"He that hath wrought us for this selfsame thing *is God.*"—

* Memoir in the Christian Observer, Nov. 1821, p. 665-72,—which has since been republished as a tract; and also in an enlarged form, as a separate volume. The last I have not seen.

—"For that such a work should be done upon such creatures; to mould them into such a frame, that now nothing terrestrial, nothing temporary, nothing within the region of mortality will satisfy; but they are restless for that state wherein mortality shall be swallowed up of life,—This is the work of Deity!"*

The natural desire of life to come, and the dread into which this is changed by crime, are justly adduced by sound philosophy as among the "strong presumptions of a future state."† But this natural desire is manifestly faint and variable, in comparison with that new and concentrated sentiment of hope and love which burns in hearts that have most steadfastly embraced the gospel promise. Is not this latter therefore to be held "a strong presumption," a noble experimental argument, for the reality of that pure and lofty happiness from which sinful nature shrinks, but which this gospel at once discloses and makes lovely? Let us watch and pray for growth in every grace, that we may be far more unquestionably numbered among these aspiring *witnesses*, whose "citizenship" is so manifestly "in heaven." It should be remarked that the divine origin of those desires and hopes is confirmed by their not being of a *selfish* character; not sighs of mere personal heaviness or pain,—not for mere per-

* Howe's Works, i. 680.

† Dugald Stewart Act. and Mor. Powers, ii. 206. et sup.

sonal deliverance from conflicts and from sorrows—but sighs which are sympathetic; first with the whole body of Christ,—for "if one member suffer all the members sympathize;"* then mingling with the interceding groans of all that mystic body with and for "the whole creation," for the last triumph over sin and every pang that flows from it; for that blest day when the Spirit of God shall move upon human hearts as once upon the waters, and all our alienated race shall hail and adorn and celebrate his "great salvation!"

Such was the sympathy of Paul when he wrote,—"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved;" and when his love to the Philippian church tempered and checked within him the fervent wish for what he knew to be "incomparably better,"—"to depart" and to be "present with his Lord."

These surely are not the feelings of an earthly and degenerated nature, but derived from Him with whom the apostle longed to be "at home;" who "loved the church and gave *Himself* for it;" the "Good Shepherd" who "laid down his life for the sheep." It is true that some of us are distressingly conscious to the languors, intermissions, and even dubiousness, perhaps, of this spirit in ourselves; yet none who perceive its excellence,

* 1 Cor. xii. 26.

and pray for its perfection, can be warranted to despair that they shall participate the boon; but are rather bound to believe that, by Him who will not "quench the smoking flax," the spark which He has kindled is discerned in all its weakness, and shall be cherished still.

This spirit of sympathy embraces even the inferior forms of sentient life. It looks, as we have said, in pensive hope upon "the whole creation;" "travailing in pain" as for some great deliverance; and sighs for that new paradise where all modes of blameless suffering, incidentally the fruits of sin, shall cease for ever; amply compensated perhaps, as well as terminated, by unforeseen resources of Almighty goodness. But far more constant and deep will be these sentiments, on behalf of such as are linked with us in the strongest bonds of nature and society. Often too faint and superficial towards the whole church and towards mankind at large,—they will be more profound and fervent, as indeed they ought to be, in reference to friends and kindred and fellow-Christians, with whom we are especially "knit together in love." Let it not be thought, that piety, while it expands our affections, is meant or adapted to equalize or level them. It permits and consecrates to each heart those closer and dearer affinities, while it creates a new affinity with all the brotherhood of Christ, and asserts

that with the wider brotherhood of man; prompting continually the great petition—"Come, Lord Jesus," and make these fraternities but one,—"one fold" under "one shepherd."

Thus indeed will the whole sympathy and intercession of Christians be collectively most wakeful and intense; when each indulges the especial effusion of their warmth and fulness in those nearest, deepest channels, which affection and association must have wrought around us. How often may we thus be prompted to pour forth the devout petition, "Come, Lord Jesus," in each varied acceptation which it admits!—as it implores either his spiritual coming to renovate the unrenewed, to sooth the disconsolate and perfect the departing,—or his last and visible advent to transform the living and summon forth the dead.

How earnestly on behalf of those who are "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh," from whom we know a few short years must sever us,—that this divine Redeemer would embrace them with us in a yet stricter, happier union,—or, if we be thus unitedly already his, would mature us together for endless companionship in that mansion which He ascended to provide!

How tenderly for the "near and dear" whom we would fain have locally nearer or by intimacy dearer; whom seas or continents may have sundered

from us, or whom differences of communion and education may at some points dissociate, or with whom other causes may preclude the unrestrained expression of a deep regard,—that he would spiritually come to each, make us more indubitably one in Him, and prepare us for that Home where vastness shall involve no remoteness, where diversity shall induce no shade of alienation, and where the tenderest sentiments of hallowed love may effuse themselves without reserve and multiply themselves for ever!

How fervently as to the nearest and dearest that are gone,—who already "sleep in Jesus," whom, in the pomp of that divine appearing, "shall God bring with Him,"—that He would soon present this perfected and blissful train, among whom we are each to recognise some that were "lovely in their lives," and, spiritually, in their deaths more "lovely;" who, if the "patience of hope" and the gentleness of meek endurance be pledges for the new and heightened loveliness of forms which death has marred, will at "his coming" put on the fairest forms of "incorruption," the undying types and due concomitants of a spiritual beauty that shall best reflect his own! Even a chief of modern sceptics could perceive, that "the most consoling hope" which "the beneficent Divinity

confers on virtuous minds," is that of "reunion, where there shall be no more tears of parting;" and could own that "a profound and vital sentiment has inspired and excited and enlightened our reason, to make it embrace with transport this precious expectation, the desire of which behoved to wake, not in cold philosophic understandings, but in hearts which loved."*

With what superior certainty and warmer transport may Christians fix on this "consoling hope," inspired and sanctioned for them, not merely by the dim though earnest visions or glimpses of nature, but by the explicit promise of a perfect social bliss; when our "Father" of whom "the whole family in heaven and earth is named," shall have "gathered his children together," and He that "is not ashamed to call them brethren" shall have called them visibly into fraternal oneness with Himself! The blessed and celestial character of such a promise, the tender hope with which unnumbered Christian hearts adhere to it, the accordance both of the promise and the hope with our universal nature's best presentiments,—are they not all divinely prophetic of the issue?

May we pray for the augmented, unremitting

* *D'Alembert*, Eloge de Sacy. Quoted in Stewart's Act. and Mor. Powers, ii. 223.

ardour of such hope, as a heavenly voice bearing witness with our spirits, whispering in the darkest solitude, "Behold, I come quickly," and eliciting evermore the responsive supplication, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

And since we know that the blessedness of this visible coming, and our gladness in the forethought of it, must essentially depend on a previous and abundant *spiritual* coming of "Christ in us, the hope of glory,"—on our being more and more renewed and changed into his moral image,—our prayers, both personal and intercessory, on this great subject, must ever include (as was hinted before) these paramount requests. They should be like the "fervent" entreaties of Epaphras for his brethren at Colosse,—that they might "stand perfect and complete in all the will of God;" and of Paul for his Thessalonian converts, that "the very God of peace would sanctify them wholly, and their whole spirit soul and body be preserved blameless *unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Let us ask for each other and ourselves—"*Even so* come, Lord Jesus;" come, first, and sway thy spiritual sceptre here with a more constraining and emancipating power: let it touch and unveil and banish every hidden foe. Communicate richly thy own lowliness and purity. Hasten the hour when

this shall never more be all that we dare profess (as now sometimes amidst contests or disquietudes of heart), "I love to love thee!"—but when at every moment we may warmly breathe the exulting declaration, "Lord thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love Thee!"

Let us unite with a divine of the last age in his petitions for this heavenly love: "Oh, make it great in us, good Lord, as well as in Thyself! Cause it to do marvels in our hearts, as it hath done in Thine!"

And when we contemplate more peculiarly the last and glorious advent, what prayers more appropriate and excellent than those of the same writer! —"Oh, let the splendour of that day irradiate my soul, even at this distance from it, and leave no space void of its light and comfort! Yea, let it eclipse all other joys; and by its glistering beauty, cause the small contentments of this world to seem but as so many glow-worms, which shine only in the night.—The spacious heavens hope to be filled with the majesty of Thy glory. The sun is but a weak image of Thy brightness, and will be content to go out to make room for Thee when thou appearest. Whatsoever is lovely confesses it is but Thy shadow. Possess Thyself therefore, Lord of life and glory, entirely of this heart, which hath

been too long estranged from Thee. Impress such a lively sense of Thee and of thy glory there, that I may sooner forget myself than Thee and thine Appearing!"*

* Bishop Patrick's Glorious Epiphany, pp. 94, 114, 109, abridged.

XIV.

ON THE PROMISE OF "ETERNAL LIFE" AS THE GREAT REMEDY OF EARTHLY SORROWS.

THERE are woes of no unfrequent occurrence, which miserably baffle each proposal, and strike dumb each voice, of philosophic or worldly consolation, whether from lighter or severer schools; which those do but mock, with solemn or flimsy trifling, who would lull the sufferers into a dream of earthly possibilities, or harden them by a stern theory of pre-established fate.

But the revelation of the Most High God uplifts itself, like a never-setting sun, over the most dark and frowning heights of calamity and hopelessness. Our Saviour, just before his own predicted agony, calmly enjoined his sorrowful disciples, "Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions.—I go to prepare a place for you." "I give

unto my sheep" (he had previously declared) "eternal life, and they shall never perish."

So his most beloved follower, at the close of a long and suffering mission, testifies, "this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life; and this life is in his Son:" while another apostle, once a blasphemer of that holy name, declares, "the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord:" and "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and *eternal* weight of glory." What wonder if with such promises, received and embraced in "full assurance of hope," Paul was constrained, amidst his varied martyrdoms, to "reckon the sufferings of this present time not worthy to be weighed against the glory that shall be revealed." *

Would we, however, practically and availingly unite with him and other saints in this most blessed "reckoning,"—would we derive from the promise of Eternal Life that strength in sorrows, and that stimulus to duties, which the reality and magnificence of the prospect should induce,—we must make it a matter, not of nominal or cursory regard, but of heartfelt belief, and of earnest meditation; contemplating, so far as our powers admit, the import of the gift; though it is obvious we must find in it depths and heights that will ineffably surpass them.

* Rom. viii. 18. See Schleusner.

The term "life," without an epithet, is sometimes used in scripture as an emphatical expression for happiness. "He that hath the Son hath life." —"I am come that ye might have life."* The very idea of life, in this its highest sense, as the conscious existence of a moral being unfallen, or perfectly and blissfully restored, is one which, till we are ourselves thus entirely and indefectibly restored, we cannot fully realize. Even apart from that attribute of endless continuance which appears to be in truth inseparable from it, there is something in such a life which must transcend the thought of any not possessing it. The gift of its beginnings does but faintly intimate that perfection of which it is the earnest. Some devout persons, indeed, have attained, even here, such degrees of this "life," which is "hid with Christ in God," as to "take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches,

* "The life which we now live," (writes Bernard,) "is rather death; not life properly, but a death-like life." "There shall we truly live, where life is a *lively* and a *living* life." I have tried, at the expense of style, to give something like the force of his own Latin phrases:—

"Hæc enim vita qua vivimus, magis mors; nec simpliciter vita, sed vita mortalis." "Ibi vere vivitur, ubi vivida vita est et vitalis." [1]

Milton has very forcibly expressed the same sentiment in one of his finest sonnets:—

——————"This earthly load
Of death, called life, which us from life doth sever."

[1] S[ti]. Bern. Opp. p. 558.

in necessities, for Christ's sake;" yet we have not found the most eminent among these pronouncing themselves wholly freed from spiritual corruption and paralysis and pain; the marks and remainders of that spiritual "death" from which God's mercy has begun to raise them.

How fitly all sinfulness or moral defect is scripturally designated "death," we may infer from this; that the term Life describes the highest possession, and sometimes the very being, of the ever-blessed God, and of Him who is one with the Father. "As the Father hath life in Himself, so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself."

Such were the words of Christ; and his apostle afterwards wrote; "The Life has been manifested, and we have seen [it,] and bear witness [to it,] and we announce to you that Eternal Life, which was with the Father, and has been manifested to us."*

These august titles of "the Life," the "Eternal Life," thus ascribed to Him who "was with God and was God," correspond also to the most holy and awful name, Jehovah; which denotes essential and eternal existence.

Life, then, is the essence and blessedness of the "only Potentate." He "only *hath* immortality." It is his to confer the mighty boon, and his free

* 1 John i. 2. Dr. J. P. Smith's version, Scrip. Test. iii. 83.

grace bestows it not only on beings never separated from Him, but on those who, through his beloved Son, are reconciled and reunited to Himself. But it is, I venture to conclude, not possible on earth for the most advanced believers to apprehend, even in speculation, still less experimentally, the perfectness of such a life. How few among us may have enjoyed a single *hour*, which would equal our own faint conceptions of that pure felicity; reposing, as it were, on one celestial charmed spot amidst the wilderness, from which the sense of sin and infirmity, and fear, and grief, was banished; the fulness of divine communications having, for a little space, utterly superseded or subdued it! Yet we are taught to meditate not on an insulated section, a transitory portion, of that life, but on the boundless expanse of it above and beyond the wilderness. The gospel invites us to pray to "the Father of glory," that He "may give unto us the spirit of wisdom and revelation,"—that we "may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the *riches* of the glory of his inheritance."

The contemplation, therefore, of "eternal life," accompanied by prayer for heavenly light and strength, is a sacred duty and privilege of Christians. And surely the attempt at this will constrain us to prayer; for how are we lost as we commence, and still more as we pursue it.

We possess indeed artificial measures, by the addition and succession of which we conceive of protracted time. Even those notations which human skill has devised for very small portions of its flight, when immensely multiplied in imagination, can bear us onward mentally through enormous periods; — so that when the hour strikes, or the very pendulum vibrates, a mind which feels the brevity of this fleeting scene, and glances at the vastness of futurity, will not seldom listen (with the wakeful poet) "as if an angel spoke."

We have also natural measures of time. You observe the sun; now near, it may be, to the vernal equinox, or to the winter solstice; and you know that since it last occupied, relatively to us, the same position, our earth has rolled through its great orbit, and another year is gone. What would be the impression of "the solemn sound," if at some annual period, a fixed number of loud and distinct thunderings told us the world's age, and announced a year complete!—how much more if, at each close of some greater natural epoch—such as the eighty-two terrestrial years of the Georgian planet's revolution—an alarum yet more awful proclaimed the sum of such ages; or, in the language of that world's chronology, such greater *years*. Yet this, though it might add a deep solemnity to our

thoughts of prolonged duration, could not enable us to conceive of eternal life, but only to make us feel more fully that it is inconceivable; for eternity is the negation of all limit,—and accumulated measures, whether very small or very great, are still but modes of expressing limitation. If there be exalted creatures, (and this is surely probable,) who can review many more milleniums than we can months of existence, that will deepen rather than solve for them the mystery of "an endless life;" since the whole retrospect, with all its multitude of scenes, will be known and felt to be a point, in comparison with the unfathomed existence yet to come.

Although the words "everlasting life," "eternal happiness," be familiar to the lips and ears of Christians,—what can be so utterly foreign and adverse to all earthly experience and prospect! What position so gloriously new, so rapturously opposite to every habit of human thought, as the first investiture with a felicity that shall never end! Here, the more we are endued with that reflection on the past and comprehension of the future which distinguish rational natures, the more *must* decay, and change, and evanescence press upon us. We look on the monuments of antiquity, and they have fallen; on the flowers of a new spring, and they are fading; on the countenance of affection,

and it sinks in death. The words of a French writer are but as the voice of humankind, when he exclaims, "I entreat in vain a few more moments; life escapes and flies: I say to the summer night —be slow, but morning comes dispelling it. Man has no haven; time has no pause; it rushes onwards and we are gone."

Oh, what a startling security, what a superhuman novelty of bliss, will be in that moment, when the Christian shall first feel within himself that he can die no more; perceiving also in the celestial aspect of those who are recognised with transport, that "neither can *they* die any more," being "children of the resurrection!" What will it be to gaze for the first time on eyes that never shall grow dim; on a face that shall be always radiant!—to touch, with a hand that cannot moulder, the harp that cannot be untuned; to be first made conscious of a spirit that never more may faint, and a joy that must eternally be cloudless! And what, to meet the same eyes of benevolence and rapture, when millions on millions of happy ages have been numbered,—and to find *then* the "fulness of joy" unabated, the perspective of glory unabridged; the ascending vista of eternal life *thence* pictured in a still receding and more mysterious immensity, as contrasted with the absolute vastness yet relative nothingness of that far ex-

tended past. "Eternal life!" If all the winds of heaven might be concentrated to fill the trump that should proclaim it, the blast would be but too feeble for the theme: if all the constellations of our firmament were grouped afresh to blazon those few letters on the vault of heaven, the matter would be more than worthy of the legend.

Let this oppressive sense of our incapacity, and that of all dying creatures, to realize such prospects, furnish a sublime argument of their boundless grandeur. No less than this is "the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus." No less than this "the gift of God," which we think and hope that we *believe* in; and in some sense, if we are indeed Christians, *do* believe in. How marvellous that we can ever forget it; that we are not on the contrary almost absorbed by it! Yet more marvellous, that we can forget its Author! If such be the incalculable donation, what must the Donor be! If such the untold riches of a humble penitent's inheritance, what the sovereign munificence of Him who shall pour forth this "weight of glory" from the stores of his own Being, not only for "an innumerable company of angels," but for a "multitude which none can number" of redeemed transgressors also.

It may indeed be well for the Christian, in his present state of frailty, that by faintness and inade-

quacy of conception, such an expectation should be partially veiled. We have heard of a subversion of the mental faculties occasioned by the sudden accession of great earthly wealth. Yet what a contemptible pittance, what a counterfeit mite, as it were, would be the wealth of the whole world, and ten times a patriarch's life in which to inherit and enjoy it, as compared with "life eternal!"

But it is not merely from inadequate conception, —nor from forgetfulness of the unseen, nor from the power of temporal and sensible things to involve and oppress and fascinate us,—that we are not more consoled or incited by that amazing prospect of the life to come. Our languor of feeling is ascribable in great part to the defectiveness of faith. There is a distrust or hesitation in our hearts. The promise, even obscurely as we view it, seems too stupendous for our littleness; the grace and joy too superabounding for our deep demerit.

Now, although it be wisely and graciously ordained that our *conceptions* in this life should continue feeble, it is most devoutly to be desired and sought that our faith and hope should cease to be so.

Consider therefore some reasons, from which, by the divine blessing, it may appear the more *credible*, that so immense and inestimable an inheritance is designed for *you*.

We may find it less difficult to exercise faith even in that unparalleled "mystery of godliness,"—the incarnation, sacrifice, and resurrection of the Son of God—than in the promise of this as its personal effect. For in reviewing that awful drama of divine love, we behold the redemption and rescue of a world. But when, after "reaching forth" towards eternal life as the purchased fruit of that redemption, we turn from those dazzling contemplations back into a mean and sinful *self*,—well may we recoil in shame and wonder from the thought of such a gift and such a destiny. As an ingenuous little child, who would think himself but too happy in the gifts and kindnesses proportioned to his infancy, knowing that his faults have made him liable to a just suspension even of these,—if you could take him to a height whence he might survey a whole paradise of shining pleasures, and say,—All these things will I give you—might well be prompted to answer,—My father, you *cannot* mean it: all these things for *me?*

How then may we best combat and silence the suspicion (urged sometimes as a taunting charge by the unbeliever's pen) that it is presumptuous vanity to indulge so vast a hope; how strengthen our confidence, till we "stagger not through unbelief," even at this mighty and overpowering promise?

First, by calling to mind, that not only the treasures and resources, but the *gifts* of God, must, in order to be worthy of Himself, be godlike; and therefore immense. What gift too great for the Majesty of the Self-Existent, "the King Eternal, who is, and was, and is to come, the Almighty!" and how shall the most boundless exhaust his generosity or diminish his abundance! It is well known that gifts, even from man to man, are expected to bear a proportion to the rank and ability of the giver. A great sovereign bestows imperial donatives. Petty and slight benefactions, though sometimes beyond the claims or hopes of the recipient, would degrade the crown. Darius, or Artaxerxes, and the slave whom he might "delight to honour," and might therefore choose to invest not only with freedom but with a principality, were by nature on a level; creatures "of yesterday," sinful and mortal;—yet the elevation, by mere state and office, of the one above the other, renders quite credible the princely gift: but between the "King of Kings" and the subjects of His sovereign mercy, there is a disparity, essential as well as official, greater than that of the "heaven of heavens" from the "closet" where you kneel before Him. What, then, if the Possessor of all power and glory choose to dispense to his frail creature "life eternal?" Will there be anything

in the largeness of the gift which outvies and surpasses the supremacy and greatness of the Giver? Rather, may we not ask, could anything less than infinite be a gift fully appropriate to the grandeur of Him "that inhabiteth eternity?" Let it be remembered, that if He bestow immortal life on beings far *above* us, on the most exalted and perfect of all celestial creatures, the gift must infinitely exceed even *their* conceptions, which can be but finite: yet none would deem this an objection to the credibility of such a gift; on the contrary it would appear of all things most improbable, that the Author of good should cause the life of those glorious and holy beings to cease and be extinguished.

And if, on the other hand, it should please this "God and Father of all," to endow some creatures *beneath* us with a second and endless existence, who would not view this as an added trophy of omnipotent beneficence, raised on the ravages of pain and death, by exalting and perpetuating what had seemed to us but perishable and mean?

It may indeed be objected—the actual gifts of God in this world are on a scale directly opposed to such reasonings; they are brief, scanty, precarious; life itself is so; much more all which life includes: on the fugitive character of what we here possess, you have been yourself expatiating. The

analogy of nature therefore is quite adverse to that prodigious expectation which you would infer or corroborate from the infinitude of Him in whom you trust.

I reply,—those temporal bounties of Divine Providence, however kind and various, are not properly gifts but loans; loans for a transient and preparatory use. It were no wrong to that incessant Goodness which imparts them, to call these the "prison garments," diet, and accommodations, of the not yet liberated though ransomed captive. Their scantiness and insufficiency are ordained to excite his watchful ardour for the time of manumission, and for the real, exhaustless gift of "durable riches," from his all-sufficient and infinite Deliverer. In this sense we may without presumption say, there is but one "*gift* of God" to man; the commencement and the growing hope on earth, and the plenitude in heaven, of "life eternal;" of that which comprehends all other gifts:—or rather it behoves us to ascend far higher, and say, which itself is comprehended in the essentially divine and "unspeakable gift" of "Jesus Christ our Lord,"—of that "Eternal Life" which "was manifested,"—that Son of God who "quickeneth whom He will," who declared,—"He that believeth on me *hath* everlasting life; because I live ye shall live also;" and "ye shall know that

I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you :" —who was Himself given to be " Head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."

It is also by these last invaluable facts and doctrines, that we can alone hope to overcome other arguments of personal diffidence and fear as to the possibility, for us, of so glorious a possession,—arguments more just and painful than any which our mere littleness or frailty could suggest. We are self-arraigned of guilt, unworthiness, unthankfulness. The very proclamations and " powers of the world to come,"—the solemn thoughts and absorbing meditations of it, by which we have sometimes been occupied,—stamp a character of criminal infatuation on our subsequent neglects and trespasses, condemned by light so marvellous and convictions so profound.

We feel, besides, our very defective preparedness for that exalted and divine felicity. A perfect bliss seems beyond the rational humility of hope, in those who have so much offended; and especially when that endless duration is contemplated, without which it could not be perfect, with this overwhelming promise must our conscious ill-desert appear awfully at variance.

Relief can be found only in that same evangelic record where the promise is itself contained, and which rebukes our distrust by that

amazing declaration, "God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten *Son*, that whosoever believeth in Him should have everlasting life." "He that spared not his *own Son*, how shall He not *with Him* also freely give us *all?*" "Who is he that condemneth?" and surely we may add—who is he that *circumscribeth?*—"It is Christ that died." Who will presume to abridge or limit the glory and infinity of the result?

It becomes, in truth, impossible, when the person of Christ is once seriously regarded as *divine*, to expect or conceive any *less* than transcendent and infinite effects from his voluntary humiliation, and his surprising offices of love. The death of God's "own Son" is incomparably more astonishing than the "eternal life" of fallen but rescued mortals. The descent of true Divinity, by union with our nature, to an earthly cross, is far less conceivable than the ascent of guilty but glorified humanity to a heavenly crown. Procured as this redemption was "not by corruptible things, but by the precious blood of Christ," except the result were a felicity unchanging and indestructible, there would appear nothing in the issue proportioned to the stupendous cost. Had but one spirit in the creation fallen, and could we suppose for that ruined *one* the infinite atonement marvellously offered and procuring "life eternal," there were yet in this

one *endless* result a sort of infinity, correspondent, in that sense, to the infinity of the offering; whereas, on the contrary, were redemption from wrath extended to *all* fallen spirits, human and superhuman, and were their number a thousandfold greater than it is, still had this redemption been but to a terminable life and blessedness, there would have been actually nothing infinite in the effect and reward of the Redeemer's love. Nay there would have arrived a period (whatever be supposed its remoteness) in which all direct results from it would have ceased, and been extinct; a supposition so inadmissible, that even to advert to it may appear almost irreverent. If, therefore, we believe in redemption, as achieved by Him "in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead," the character of this act itself, and of Him who wrought it, must demonstrate the eternal life of the redeemed, even although their eternal life were not distinctly promised.

It seems, on all grounds, but consonant to the majesty of the universal Lord, that there be gems about his throne which cannot perish or "wax old," as well as garlands which may fade and be replaced. Matter, with its vicissitudes of beauty and decay, is but as the garland. Spirits, in their intelligent and moral splendour, redeemed and renovated, or sustained in their primeval purity,—

these are the gems which he himself hath polished; nay which were "purchased and cleansed with richer blood." For who knows but that "his holy angels" have been morally upholden in "their first estate," by that view of divine holiness and the malignity of evil, which the human redemption first prospectively and then actually supplied? Is it, then, too vast and satisfying a recompense for the "travail" of the Redeemer's soul, that "jewels" preserved or ransomed at so dear a rate, should shine eternally,—and that none should "pluck them out of his hand?" Is it not due to the glorious humility and costly love, of Him who "came to save that which was lost," that there should be *no* futurity,—no coming age even beyond the ages of ages,—in which it will not still be sung, and ever yet to sing,—Lo! *these* are the trophies of that ancient victory won in the infancy of Time; *these* are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the "blood of the Lamb;" *these* are they who have their security and pledge for "endless life," in the divine grandeur of that enterprise which their blessedness commemorates, and must for ever commemorate. Should the Eternal stoop from his throne, the Son of God disrobe himself of his celestial glories, and the result be a perishable triumph, an inheritance that fadeth away? Rather let the

guilty and the frail consent, with self-renouncing, wondering gratitude, that "He be admired and glorified" in their endless exaltation,—though they cannot lose, in contemplating those honours which accrue to Him, the sense of infinite disproportion in the gift to *them*. And here let me observe, that this accordance between the "eternal life" of the spirits of the just, and the divine "preciousness" of their redemption, confirms the truth of this latter doctrine, as well as of the former; and that without any fallacy of reciprocal reasoning. For of "eternal life" there are distinct scriptural promises; and some who (to our surprise) do not find in the New Testament the divinity and sacrifice of Christ, yet deduce and expect, from those its promises, the saints' immortal happiness. But this doctrine is, in my apprehension, a collateral and corroborative proof of the other. If creatures so rebellious, defiled, and ungrateful as ourselves, are to expect the inestimable gift of "life eternal," *must* not this be the result of *some* "great mystery of godliness," some moral miracle in the counsels and acts of the Supreme, which has made the donation compatible with His attributes and sovereignty? Thus does the promise itself prepare us for the record that "this Life is in his Son,"—that the "unspeakable gift" was first *of* his Son, then *to* his Son;—of Him *for* us, of us *to Him*.

And now, after thus attempting to weigh the credibility of the promise,—nay, I presume to add, when salvation, by a divine Redeemer, has been once admitted, the moral necessity of this vast consequence,—seek to be animated and consoled anew by these "unsearchable riches of Christ." Review the feeble thoughts which were at first presented; or rather let your own awakened emotion multiply and vary and enhance them. Labour to know more both of the "love" and of the "life" that "passeth knowledge." Use the sounding-line of devout and unrestrained meditation, that you may more and more discover the depths of Christian hope to be indeed unfathomable. Ascend the holy mount, that you may gaze abroad upon that ocean without boundary, whose waves are lost in the sunlight of "the heaven of heavens." As you contemplate thus a coming eternity, awfully "at hand" yet boundlessly afar,—your spirit, though overwhelmed by the immensity, may be also enlarged. It may expand and be calmed, while it broods on that glorious abyss;—till you shall turn back to the cares and sorrows of mortality, as a voyager, who had been long on the Atlantic, might cross the stony track and troubled stream within some narrow glen. Remember that we also are voyagers, and must soon be gone. Whether this be a vale of few or many tears, whether the scene

be tranquil and bright, or dark and tempestuous, we must launch away. Think of the isles and mansions of that eternal deep, to which He that "brought life and immortality to light" invites and guides you; where He has prepared an abode, perhaps a succession of abodes, each more sacred and happy than the last, in which his eternal grace and your eternal joy shall be realized! It is not here so much my object to urge the claims of this "hope laid up in heaven" on our zeal and active vigilance, as those which it presents for our unrepining submission. Yet can the former be possibly unfelt or undiscerned? Can such a prospect, believed and meditated, fail to awaken in our inmost souls a living gratitude, and insuppressible desire? Will it fail to divorce us from the love and habit of sin, and make us flexible to the will and discipline of our Lord and Saviour, as "vessels" to be moulded and adorned by his sanctifying hand? Will it not arouse us into steadfast, practical solicitude that we may know and do his pleasure? And shall it not constrain us to endure with comparative cheerfulness, or at least without a spirit of murmuring, the burdens of this life which "vanisheth away?" But, oh! how imperfect are these influences: how null even and extinct, as to sensible and cheering efficacy, except the grace and providence of God reanimate and strengthen them! how

marred and intercepted by clouds of unbelief and care and despondency!—We are forced to take refuge,—not I trust as self-deceivers, but as those who earnestly implore "help of God,"—in the oft-repeated truth that "eternal life" is His "free gift, through Jesus Christ;" for surely, that a ruined, a feeble, inconstant man should earn it or should win it, is a thought which only ignorance and arrogance can cherish. Let us entreat of Him, whose godlike gift it is, to consecrate our unworthy hearts for its reception; to give us daily far more of its initial bliss in a true assimilation to His image; to make those streams of heavenly life more quick and fervid which are infused from the fountain of redeeming love, which circulate through the mystic body of our Lord below,—and which, when these poor mortal throbbings falter and are stopped in death, shall flow and beat for ever as the countless pulses of real and celestial life,—never to be suspended till that "Head over all" shall droop,—never to stagnate till the "Fountain of life" itself run low,—never to languish till the very heart of Him that loved and ransomed us be cold: assuredly eternal therefore; surviving all things finite, still fresh as His own sympathy and undeclining as His Power.

NOTES.

NOTE A.

Other writers have dwelt on the illustration of the divine perfections by the Atonement, &c. Page 16.

THE following is part of a passage dictated by Dr. Johnson to Mr. Boswell.*

"Whatever difficulty there may be in the conception of vicarious punishments, it is an opinion which has had possession of mankind in all ages. There is no nation that has not used the practice of sacrifices.

"Whoever therefore denies the propriety of vicarious punishments, holds an opinion which the sentiments and practice of mankind have contradicted from the beginning of the world. The great sacrifice for the sins of mankind was offered at the death of the Messiah, who is called in Scripture the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.

"To judge of the reasonableness of the scheme of redemption, it must be considered as necessary to the government of the universe

* See his Life of Johnson. Edit. Croker. vol. iv. pp. 498, 9.

that God should make known his perpetual and irreconcilable detestation of moral evil. He might indeed punish, and punish only the offenders; but as the end of punishment is not revenge of crimes but propagation of virtue, it was more becoming the divine clemency to find another manner of proceeding, less destructive to man, and at least equally powerful to promote goodness. The end of punishment is to reclaim and warn. *That* punishment will both reclaim and warn, which shows evidently such abhorrence of sin in God, as may deter us from it, or strike us with dread of vengeance when we have committed it. This is effected by vicarious punishment. Nothing could more testify the opposition between the nature of God and moral evil, or more amply display his justice, to men and angels, to all orders and successions of beings, than that it was necessary for the highest and purest nature, even for Divinity itself, to pacify the demands of vengeance by a painful death; of which the natural effect will be, that when justice is appeased, there is a proper place for the exercise of mercy."

That strong and pointed reasoner, Richard Baxter, had, long before, with arguments substantially very similar, met the objectors who alleged—"it doth, *sapere scenam*, sound like a poetic fiction, that God should satisfy his own justice, and Christ should die instead of our being condemned, and this to appease the wrath of God, &c." ———He answers, "Ignorance is the great cause of unbelief.—If the word *satisfaction* offend you, use only the scripture words,—that Christ was a 'sacrifice;' 'atonement;' 'propitiation;' 'price,' &c. If this be incredible, how came it to pass that sacrificing was the custom of all the world? God hath no passion of anger to be appeased, nor is he at all delighted in the sufferings of the worst; much less of the innocent: nor is his *satisfaction* any reparation of a loss of his. But, do you understand what government is: and what Divine Government is, and what is the end of it; even the pleasing of the will of God in the demonstration of his own perfections? If so, you will know, that God's penal laws might not be broken by a rebel world, without either execution of them according to their true intent and meaning, or such an equivalent

demonstration of his justice, as might vindicate the law and law-giver from contempt, and attain the ends of government as much as if sinners had suffered themselves; and this it is we mean by a Sacrifice or Satisfaction. Shall God be a governor and have no laws? or laws that have no penalties, or are never meant for execution? Were it becoming Him to let the world sin on with boldness, and say—God did but frighten us with a few words, which he never intended to fulfil?—or should he have condemned the whole world according to their desert? If none of all this be credible to you, then certainly nothing should be more credible than that his wisdom hath found out some way to exercise pardoning, saving mercy without any injury to his governing justice and truth; and without emboldening transgressors in their sins: a way which shall fully vindicate his government, and yet save us with the great advantage of honour to his mercy, and in the fullest demonstration of that love and goodness which may win our love. And where will you find this done but in Jesus Christ alone?"

Reasons of the Christian Religion, pp. 406-8. Edit. 1667. Abridged.

N.B. The next two notes (A A and A B,) and the note D, are not referred to on the pages to which they relate: those sheets having been printed before they were written. The reader can easily supply this defect, by inserting the references, to these notes respectively, on the pages quoted at the head of each.

Note A A.

———it may, however, be justly doubted, whether the first dawn of spiritual sun-light can in any case be by man so ascertained.

Page 53.

———all this has been my *own* impulse and my *own* work, and not the operation of the Holy Spirit.

Page 152.

It will not be supposed that I am ignorant or unmindful of the distinction made by divines, and very formally by the *old* divines, between "common" and "special" grace. But this distinction is not the less real, if, like twilight and daylight, dawn and noonday, the difference be purely of *degree*. Such indeed appears to be the accepted theological view of it. Since writing the passages to which this note refers, I have met with the following "definition" of "special grace;"—"the communication of grace to any soul in such a degree, as actually to bring that soul to faith in Christ and consequently into a state of salvation, may properly be called Special Grace;"*—and with the subjoined valuable passage in the posthumous sermons of John Howe; which appears to me to confirm, in a manner alike sound and forcible, the encouragements which I have endeavoured in the above pieces to convey, and indeed in some points, both as to the turn of thought and expression, remarkably coincides with them.

———"There are some previous essays tending to life that you are under the present seizure of, even now, while you are looking God-ward; it is somewhat of life, or of preparatory workings that have that tendency and that cognation, which have taken hold of you; because it is plain such thoughts are internal, and are

* Doddr. Lect. vol. ii. 248. Def. lxxxiv.

the springs of an internal motion; and there is no internal motion which is not to be looked upon as a kind of vital motion; though it is true, indeed, there are fainter beginnings that are extinguishable, yet there is a great matter to have some beginnings; for if they are yet such as are extinguishable, they are yet also such as are improveable, and may rise and come higher, till they come beyond the sphere and verge of common grace, into the verge of special grace, which two spheres do very closely border and touch upon one another; and he that is upon the extremity, the extreme verge (as I may speak) of common grace, is often upon the very verge and brink of special grace. And, as you are in the way of God, a way that hath a good look and tendency, God is in the way with you.—You are to impute it to his being with you, that there are inclinations and dispositions that tend heaven-ward, that tend towards that good and blessed state. You are to take heed of arrogating anything in this kind to yourselves. Suppose it be yet but common grace;—common grace is grace; and if it be grace, it is not nature; it is not to be attributed to you,—you are not to arrogate and claim it to yourselves;—This is of me. The thinking of a good thought, we have not a sufficiency for, as of ourselves; we are not to claim that; and there is many a good thought that may be short of saving grace; but we should take heed of assuming it to ourselves; and therefore if there be inclinations and dispositions towards that way, and towards that state which you are to design for, and are professedly bending your thoughts towards, yet say, you have a divine presence with you: for these things are to be ascribed to Him. All such previous workings and dispositions, you must say, they do all lay claim to a Divine Author; such a wretch as I must lay claim to nothing that hath any the least appearance of good in it."*

These statements may be most strictly applied to the "worse and less hopeful supposition" mentioned p. 155, above, and therefore, by stronger reason, to other cases of a dubious character.

* Howe's Works—Edit. Hunt. 1827. vol. viii. p. 189, abridged.

Note A B.

——— would have in them a generous self-sacrificing quality, not apparent in any revealed act, nor, I think, conceivable by us (that is, as a *truth*, if redemption by a divine Saviour were *not* a truth), in any unrevealed act of the Creator. Page 71.

——— nothing analogous would be known to exist, or *known* even to be *possible*, in the acts or counsels of the Perfect Being. Ibid.

——— as far as we can imagine, its only possible exemplification, to man———by a veritably peerless and godlike model. Page 72.

Although the reasonings in which these passages occur, approve themselves to my mind, yet (as Dr. Pye Smith has expressed himself in a disquisition on the Trinity)—"I feel the awful ground on which I have advanced;" and shall be prompt to retract or modify these views, if any fallacy or dangerous consequence shall discover itself as involved in them.

Since these sheets were printed, I have seen a work, not previously known to me, but apparently valuable to the interests of religion, in which the statement of some "systems of divinity" and of "certain preachers"—"that there never was, and never will be, through all the ages of eternity, so wonderful a display of the divine glory as in the cross of Christ,"*—is censured, and I think with reason, as "a presumptuous assumption."—Yet it is not impossible that some of the above phrases, or others in the passages from which they are taken, may be misconceived to intimate that very "assumption." The expression "a veritably *peerless* model"—

* Dick's Christian Philosopher, p. 503, and p. 532.

will scarcely be so understood, when the limitation "to *man*," in the preceding sentence, is noticed.

As to some other expressions above cited, although I do not believe that any display of divine attributes so wonderful and glorious, would have been "conceivable by us" as real, "or known even to be possible," had it not been for the fact and history of man's redemption,—yet might unnumbered such displays (similar or entirely dissimilar, but of equal or even superior extent and efficacy) have nevertheless taken place, or be as yet to come, in the immense dominions and endless reign of Him who is "Love." A very singular theory,—arguing the *actual* occurrence of *similar* redemptions in *all* other worlds,—was communicated by a nobleman, (characterized as of "great learning, taste, and judgment,") to Dr. Olinthus Gregory, and inserted by him—though not, it seems, with unqualified approval—in his "Letters on the Christian Religion."* I cannot accede to that theory, (unless there were scriptural evidence to confirm it,) because, besides a different objection to which it may be liable, it would imply an extent of moral evil in the universe which I feel that we have no right to assume, and much reason to recoil from.

Nevertheless there is nothing in the above reasonings which would be at variance with it.

That the true and perfect Divinity should "assume a passible nature," and be thus "in purpose and act, the prototype of *suffering* virtue," † would not, I apprehend, (as has been already stated in different terms,) have even been conceived by us as a credible fact, in reference either to our own or any other race, antecedently to the promulgation of the gospel; but now, having once attained the conception and belief of such a fact, we can never be in the least entitled to conclude that wonderful divine interpositions of "generosity and heroic love" *cannot* have taken place on behalf of other beings; nor even to affirm that this is improbable.

* Vol. i. pp. 304-9. † Page 73, above.

Note B.

" Extracts from the conclusions of some writers on prophecy, more particularly as to the fulfilment of predictions relative to the *corruptions* of Christianity.

———which show the impression on *their* minds resulting from such an examination.

Page 294, note.

Dr. Hartley gives, in a summary manner, his impression on this subject, as follows.

" The fourth branch of the prophetical evidences are those which relate to the Christian church. Here the three following particulars deserve attentive consideration:

" First,—The predictions concerning a new and pure religion, which was to be set up by the coming of the promised Messiah.

" Secondly,—A great and general corruption of this religion which was to follow in after times.

" Thirdly,—The recovery of the Christian Church from this corruption, by great tribulations; and the final establishment of true and pure religion.

" The predictions of the first and third kinds abound everywhere in the old prophets, in the discourses of Christ, and in the writings of the Apostles.

" Those of the second kind are chiefly remarkable in *Daniel*, the *Revelation*, and the Epistles of St. *Paul*, St. *Peter*, St. *John* and St.

Jude. In how surprising a manner the events of the *first* and *second* kind have answered to the predictions, cannot be unknown to any inquisitive serious person, in any Christian country. At the same time it is evident, that the predictions of these things could have no foundation in probable conjectures when they were given. The events of the third class have not yet received their accomplishment; but there have been, for some centuries past, and are still, perpetual advances and preparations made for them."

David Hartley, Works, vol. ii. p. 161.

The learned author of "Discourses on Prophecy," delivered of late years in the Lecture of Bishop Warburton, thus comments on St. Paul's prophecies in 2 Thess. ii. 3-10, and 1 Tim. iv. 1-4.

———"In the predictions of the corrupted state of the Christian faith which we are now considering, there are definite signs of a foreknowledge very different from the deductions of probability, calculated on the general principles of human weakness or human depravity. The prophetic criteria are precise; and they are such as must be thought to have militated with all rational probability, rather than to have been deduced from it."—*Davison, Discourses*, p. 479.

And the same writer thus sums up his review of the parallel predictions in the Apocalypse: "The complexity of things in this single piece of prophecy is sufficiently manifest. And since the complex whole has, point by point, been fulfilled, and that not in an obscure corner, but in the heart of Christendom, and in the most conspicuous station of the Christian world, the inference from that completion is not to be evaded."

Ibid. pp. 481-2.

A modern writer of great research (the Rev. C. Forster) remarks, "Daniel has clearly foreshown the appointed fate of the Jewish polity and people. He has also unquestionably foretold the fortunes of the *western* church: and has drawn a full and exact por-

traiture of the spiritual tyranny, which should arise and prevail in that portion of Christendom. This being the case, the analogy of Providence and that of Scripture would seem alike to require a corresponding prophetic attention to the parallel events which were to occur in the *eastern* portion." * He then proceeds to show at large that the eighth chapter of Daniel is distinctly predictive of Mahometanism.

In the subsequent section of his work, the same author gives, with his own views, those of some others, concerning the predictions of the "eastern horn," or Mahometan Antichrist, as contained both in the book of Daniel and the Revelation of St. John.

"We proceed" (he writes) "to connect those remarkable prophecies of the book of Daniel, which have been applied to Mahomet and his followers in the preceding section, with the strictly parallel and still ampler predictions, delivered concerning them in the Apocalypse of St. John. 'In the prediction of Daniel,' observes a learned writer of our own times,† 'Mohammedanism alone is spoken of; its two principal supporters, the Saracens and the Turks, are not discriminated from each other: a general history of the superstition, from its commencement to its termination, *is given*, without descending to particularize the nations by which it should be successively patronized. In the revelation of St. John this deficiency is supplied: and we are furnished with two distinct and accurate paintings, both of the Saracenic locusts under their exterminating leader, and of the Euphratean horsemen of the four Turkish Sultanies.'

"With one slight correction, this statement may be received as a just representation of the case. Daniel, we have seen, *had* already described the two distinct powers in question, under the titles of 'the King of the South' and 'the King of the North.'‡ But his descrip-

* Mahom. Unveiled, vol. i. Sect. 2. p. 167. † Faber.

‡ "Dan. xi. 40. contains a well-known prophecy, received by interpreters, with one consent, as a joint prediction of the Saracenic and Turkish empires, under the titles of the King of the South and the King of the North."—Ibid. p. 193.

tions want characteristic national traits, to bring them home to the Saracens and Turks; which traits, as might be reasonably expected in a revelation so much nearer to the event, the ninth chapter of the Apocalypse appears to embody in its symbols. Interpreters are justly struck with the historical exactness of these delineations: but none have done the subject more justice, in the expression of their admiration, than the late learned and exemplary Dr. Zouch. —'The prophetic truths comprised in the ninth chapter of the Apocalypse are of themselves sufficient to stamp the mark of divinity upon that work. When I compare them with the page of history, I am filled with amazement. The Saracens, a people which did not exist in the time of St. John, and the Turks, a nation then utterly unknown, are there described in language the most appropriate and distinct.'"*

I have selected this passage, as conveying in a small compass the general impression made on *three* able inquirers by the correspondence of the modern events referred to with those ancient writings.

* Mahom. Unveiled, vol. i. pp. 210-12.

Note C.

——— that the "heaven of heavens," the central glory,—
Page 306.

Lavater, in a passage which I abridge from his "Aussichten in die Ewigkeit," ("Prospects into Eternity,") thus refers to the "heaven of heavens."—"All the systems of worlds, judging from analogy, have probably a great common centre, round which they revolve, as the planets round our sun. This centre of the immeasurable universe we may conceive to be the most perfect scene of material existence, unspeakably exceeding in grandeur and beauty anything which we can represent to ourselves in this our dark abode.

"This central world may be deemed the 'heaven of heavens': the region where the Infinite pours forth the utmost plenitude and riches of his majesty; which the immortal author of the Messias has thus glanced at," *—

* Lavat. Aussicht. t. i. pp. 246-7. The original of the lines which follow (as quoted by him) will be found in Klopstock's Messias, Ges. i. ll. 197 and 230. The version is from an attempt to translate the first canto of that poem into English *hexameters*; communicated by me to the London Christian Instructor of 1821, [pp. 248, 300, 361, 461,] an attempt which, perhaps, in the judgment of most readers, would confirm other proofs that such a metre cannot be successfully adopted.

" No faintly glimmering planet
Nears the destroying blaze: in pale obscurity, far off,
Cloud-wrapt nature revolves scarce seen: or visible only
All her worlds minute, as when, by a wanderer's foot-step,
Earth's low atoms, the haunt of worms, are scatter'd in sunshine.
—— Round from that central heaven a thousand avenues radiate
Of unseen extent, with bordering suns environ'd.
* * * * * * * *
There, 'mid encompassing suns, beams forth that 'heaven of heavens;'
One unmeasur'd sphere; creation's archetype; treas'ring
All perceptible beauty; which thence in fast-flowing torrents
Through the encircling realms of wide infinity fluctuates."

Cramer, in a note on this passage of the Messiah, observes that "Klopstock's imaginations were always consistent with astronomical possibility."

A speculation of astronomical science was, probably, in this instance, the direct source of his and of Lavater's views; for "Dr. Halley conceived the whole solar system, together with all the systems of the stars, to be in motion round some point, which is the centre of gravity of the whole." *

I add, on the subject of that "supposition" with which the present note stands connected, that since motion, and rapid motion, of some kind, is a prevailing, and perhaps (according to Halley's theory) a universal law of celestial bodies, there can be at least nothing contrary to analogy in supposing that a nebulous orb (such as comets are observed to be) † may form the majestic

* See Bonnycastle's Astronomy, p. 308.

† "The nucleus of the comet is usually enveloped in a dense nebulous stratum." In many of them, however, the nucleus "seems wanting, and they present only a nebulous mass, having a gradual condensation towards the centre." In some cases, (as in the second comet of 1811,) "the whole nucleus presents only a globular mass of nebulosity." In the comet of 1811 the depth of this "shining envelope at one time amounted to no less than 25,000 miles." "The

moving abode, or vehicle, of Him who "cometh in the clouds of heaven," *—"with his mighty angels, in flaming fire," †—"with power and great glory." ‡

Still this has been introduced, (let me again observe,) as a *mere* supposition, and simply with a view to meet one particular mode of unbelieving sarcasm. I am aware it may be said—you have attached an arbitrary meaning to the ambiguous word "quickly," which the sarcasm itself would not convey; as if it had been intimated—your Master promised to come *quickly*; that is, He promised a rapid though progressive approach:—whereas, in fact, it was only meant to say—your Master promised to come *soon*; (whether instantaneously or gradually;) but the interval is already long.

I answer,—certainly it appears to me most likely, that the advent of our Lord, with an angelic retinue, will be not instantaneous but progressive, however rapid. We may indeed conceive of a miraculous transit, even of created and embodied agents, *instantaneously* from heaven to earth; and of occasions where this has occurred, and would again be probable; but the idea of progressive approach, on that *grand* occasion, seems to my mind more august and appropriate.

Let, however, the whole supposition be disapproved, or dismissed;—let it also be expected,—(an expectation which that supposition no way contradicts, and which some interpretations of prophecy, and some "signs of the times," appear much to favour,)

tail is only a continuation of the nebulous envelope." "The tail of the great comet of 1680 was computed to be no less than one hundred millions of miles in length." "The comet of 1744 had a tail above seven millions of miles in length." [1]

* Daniel vii. 13.—Revelations i. 7.—Matthew xxvi. 64.

† 2 Thessalonians i. 7, 8.

‡ Matthew xxiv. 30.—Luke xxi. 27.

[1] Milne's Prize Essay on Comets, pp. 6, 8, &c.

—that the second advent will not be very long deferred: still those views of time and space which have been thus brought before us, may tend, meanwhile, to illustrate St. Peter's declaration that "a thousand years are with the Lord as one day:" and that we must not measure celestial *eras*, any more than celestial motions and velocities, by our narrow earthly scale. Is it not probable, that even to created beings, who have existed millions of years, the term of man's life on earth appears almost ephemeral;—his afflictions as the lot of some hours, if not of "a moment;"—or the whole continuance of our era, thus far, as a period rather of eighteen weeks, than of eighteen ages?

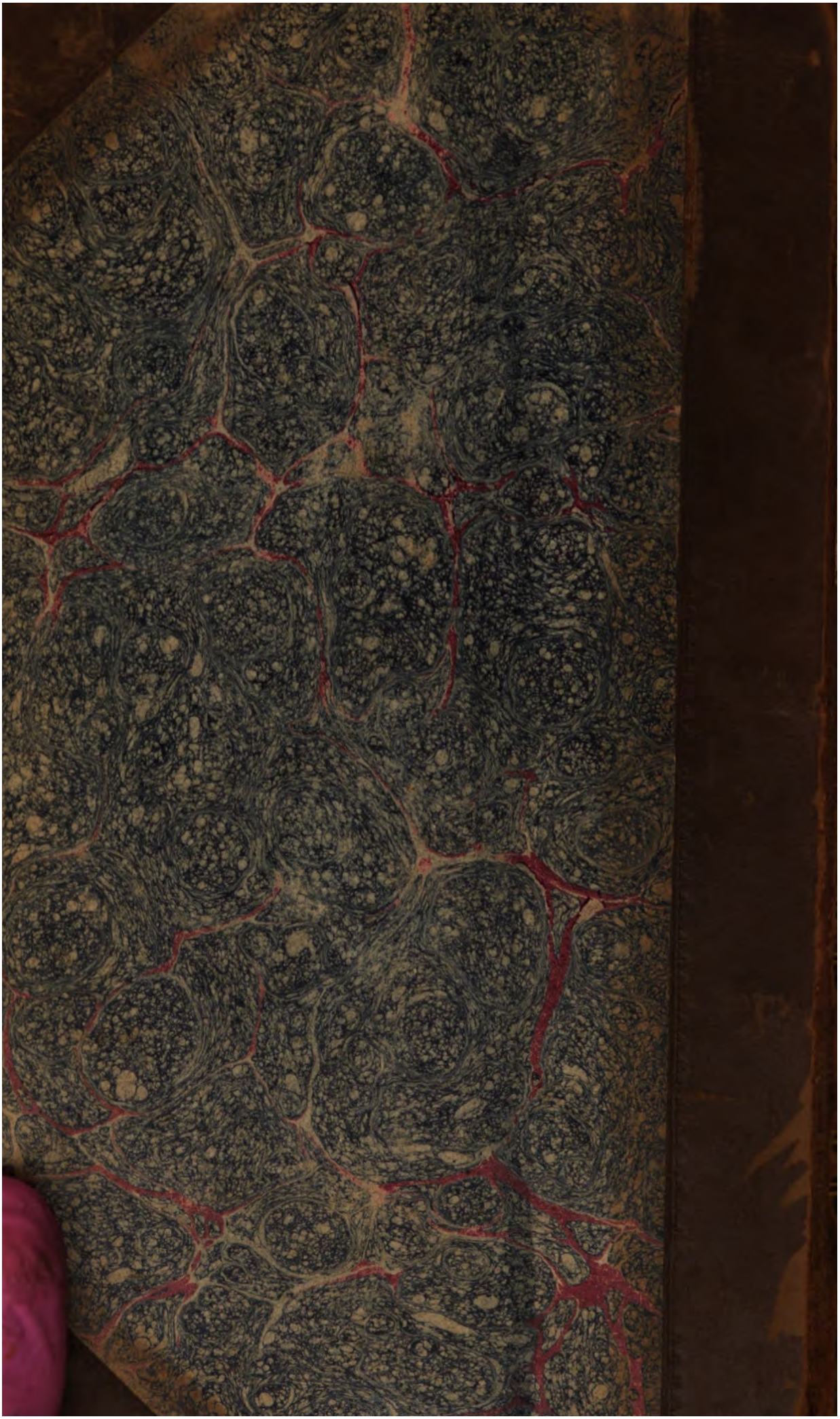
May not also the "days" and "weeks" by which years and periods of years are prophetically expressed in Scripture, involve some allusion to that sort of extramundane reckonings; and do they not, if thus viewed, assume a new kind of fitness or impressiveness, as more approaching to the language of celestials, or of a higher sphere? Of course such reckonings may differ vastly more from any proportions we have suggested, than those, which have now been vaguely supposed, severally differ from each other: but the whole speculation may serve to convince us how little "the times and the seasons," in the great course of divine dispensations, can be expected to accord with, or be measured by, our personal estimates.

Note D.

"God said, let Newton be."

Page 311.

Since writing this passage, I have met with a very similar kind of reference to Pope's well-known epitaph,—though the direct or chief application of the thought here urged be there less general, being limited to the particular "providential blessing" to be recognised in the rise and "genius of Bacon," and of "Newton" himself. It is contained in a valuable lecture "On the Advantages of the present Times with regard to Freedom and Knowledge," by Mr. John Bullar of Southampton. (Longman, 1832.)

I have not thought it expedient, even had the coincidence been still more close, to rescind the above passage. Such resemblances of thought and illustration must become more and more numerous as books and discourse are multiplied; and it may perhaps only need (as I have elsewhere intimated*) a larger acquaintance with them, to be convinced that *all* our thoughts and expressions, with some variations, have been anticipated.

* In Thoughts on Devotion, Note D. p. 303. 6th Edit