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Clarion

PRICE NINEPENCE.

HOME SERMONS.

SERMONS

BY

PROTESTANT DIVINES.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH,

FOR

HOME READING.

BY

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PART I.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

The object generally kept in view in the following Translations has been literality rather than elegance ; occasionally, however, for the sake of clearness, a slight change of construction has been made.

From their plainness, as well as their Evangelical tone, the Translator hopes that these sermons may be found peculiarly appropriate for being read by the Head of a Family to his Household. "To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen."—Rom. xvi. 27.

HEATHENISM AND CHRISTIANITY COMPARED.

S E R M O N I .

“The times of this ignorance God winked at ; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.”—ACTS xvii. 30.

THUS spoke St. Paul at Athens, in the midst of Mars' Hill. The text we have just read forms part of that sublime discourse which the Apostle there delivered on the subject of an altar dedicated “to the Unknown God.” Having been brought to Areopagus, to render an account of the doctrine which for several days he had been preaching to the Athenians, “touching Jesus and the Resurrection,” Paul deemed it expedient to arrest the attention of his hearers by means of the inscription which he noticed, in making it serve as the basis of the speech he was about to make to them. “Ye men of Athens, I perceive that you are in all things somewhat beyond the common* addicted to the worship of invisible powers. For, as I passed by, and beheld the objects of your worship, I

* The import of this expression is ill rendered by our version “too superstitious,” nor is it bettered by substituting “religious” for “superstitious.” St. Paul could not call their idol worship religion, and he was too skilful an orator to offend his hearers in the very commencement of his discourse. St. Paul's piety is aided by prudence and sound judgment, and his zeal is tempered with discretion and practical good sense ; he does not flatly assail favourite notions without reserve, but tries to find common ground, giving full credit for every particle of truth, and eschewing unnecessary reproach, which might rather array the passions of his hearers against their reason, than suggest excuse for past error.

found an altar with this inscription, 'To the Unknown God.' Whom therefore, without knowing him, ye reverence, Him declare I unto you." Having set before the Athenians the primary truths of natural religion, the Apostle, in the words of the text, passes to the truths of Christianity—truths entirely new to his hearers; and he begins by demonstrating the grace and mercy displayed by God towards the heathen world.

God, in the works of nature, had so clearly revealed Himself to men, that, in seeking after him, they could not fail to find him. "The invisible things of him, even his eternal power and Godhead, are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood of the things that are made." (Rom. i. 20.)—But instead of glorifying God, and giving him thanks; instead of rendering homage to his power, his wisdom, and his goodness so vividly portrayed in the works of nature; instead of adoring Him as the only God, the Creator of the universe, superior in an infinite degree to the works of his own hands,—men "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things," (Rom. i. 23,) and thought "the Godhead like unto gold and silver and stone, graven by art and man's device." (Acts xvii. 29.) Notwithstanding, God endured with patience this outrage done to his glory, and not only so, but he even promised to pardon these guilty mortals, provided they would repent and turn themselves from dead idols to serve the living and true God. "The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent." The reason for this the Apostle assigns in the following verse: "Because He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained: whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."

In elucidation of the words of the text, we shall consider, in the first place, the state of the Gentiles before their conversion

to Christianity ; in the second place, we shall lay before you the mercy and goodness of God displayed towards these sinful nations.

PART I.—The times of that ignorance of which St. Paul speaks, are those which preceded the calling of the Gentiles, and their conversion to the Gospel of Christ. Scripture, in speaking of these unhappy times, compares them frequently to a night of darkness, in which one cannot walk without groping. It calls those blind who lived in that dark night : it says that they sat in darkness, and in the region and shadow of death, and in the text the Apostle gives us the precise idea which we ought to entertain of those times, in terming them “times of ignorance.” Yet, although he thus characterises those bygone days, we must not imagine that the Apostle means to say, that men were then without knowledge, ignorant of those arts and sciences which do honour to human nature, and promote the well-being of society : that they were, in short, sunk in the abyss of absolute and universal ignorance. Unquestionably, the Apostle means no such thing. He himself, in his Epistles, frequently speaks of the wisdom of the Gentiles. He makes mention of their teachers, philosophers, and poets : of “the wise, the disputers of this world.” (1 Cor. i. 20.) St. Paul himself had been instructed in the wisdom of the Greeks, no less than in that of his own nation at the feet of Gamaliel. We may remark, moreover, that at no period had the world been more celebrated for philosophers and wise men, than during the times which preceded the Gospel dispensation. In these days it was that the arts and sciences were invented. So far back as we trace, we find both the arts and sciences zealously cultivated by the Chaldeans and the Egyptians. Moses, the most ancient of all writers, “was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.” (Acts. vii. 22.) From the Egyptians the arts and sciences were handed down to the Greeks ; by the Greeks they were conveyed to the Romans, and by the Romans to us. It was in the days anterior to the Gospel that there flourished so many sages, celebrated philoso-

phers, legislators and historians ; as Thales, Pythagoras, Socrates, Aristotle, Solon, Lycurgus, Xenophon, Thucydides. It was then also that there appeared the various sects of Philosophers who were the founders of those illustrious schools of wisdom, the Lyceum, the Portico, and the Academy.

But it was not Greece alone which was fertile in wise and great men. There was scarcely any part of the world which had not its own. Egypt, Chaldea, Persia, Assyria, India, Scythia, had likewise their legislators, their poets, their philosophers ; so that in place of saying that these were times of ignorance, we should rather term them, as it seems, times of light. Notwithstanding, if we consider them with respect to religion, we shall find on the other hand, that although men were wise and enlightened in all that concerned nature and society, they were wholly in the dark as concerning the things of God. And it is moreover in this respect that St. Paul calls these times, "times of ignorance." "The world," says he, "by wisdom," that is, by its false wisdom, "knew not God." (1 Cor. i. 21.) "They were," says he, in another place, "without God in the world." (Eph. ii. 12.) What then ! were men in those days wholly ignorant of that truth so natural, the first of all the truths which present themselves to reason, which conscience dictates, which nature preaches—the truth, to wit, that there is a God ? Not so, without doubt. Our Apostle declares formally in another place, "that the heathen knew God." (Rom. i. 21.)

1. But if they could not but acknowledge God's existence, they had no knowledge of his unity. So far from this, they acknowledged and introduced several gods ; yea even so great a number, that some of their wits could not refrain from making this plurality of gods the subject of their raillery : one bewailing the fate of poor Atlas, who groaned under the weight of the Gods he had to carry ; another declaring that in Athens it was easier to find a God than a man.

2. If they knew that there was a God, they knew not either

his name or his nature. They wisely supposed that they ought to have another deity besides those divinities who were the objects of their worship, but not knowing who that deity was, they raised an altar to him, with this inscription—"to the unknown God."

3. If they knew that there was a God, they knew not his attributes or his perfections. They had no knowledge of his eternity, seeing that they made him mortal; nor of his omnipresence and greatness, seeing that they enclosed him in their temples; nor of his independence and sovereign power, seeing that they subjected him to fate. If they knew God, they knew him not as the Creator of the universe. The Epicureans attributed the origin of all things to chance; Aristotle and his followers pretended that the world had never had a beginning, but that from all eternity it had existed in its present state; even the wisest of them represented God as merely a workman, who laboured on matter already prepared, meaning that God had only given symmetry and order to materials pre-existing—as to his Providence, it was denied by some, limited by others, and received with doubt by the greater number. In a word, "if they knew God, they glorified him not as God. In likening him to beasts and beings the most contemptible, they robbed him of his majesty and greatness; in making him resemble man, by attributing to Him man's imperfections and failings and vicious propensities, they dishonoured his holiness; and by giving him a corporeal shape, by statues of gold and silver and stone, graven by art and man's device, they entirely destroyed his spirituality.

But were there found in those days minds, too enlightened, too wise to entertain notions so extravagant, so unworthy of the deity? Yes, such were found: but how small was the number! And is it by so small a number that we are to judge of the state of religion in those days? Is it not rather from the uniform practice of the multitude? Besides, did not these pretended sages, with all their wisdom and enlightenment, and their mockery of the opinions and practice of the vulgar, basely

conform to these opinions? Did they not adopt this maxim, that it behoves men to profess the religion of their country, and on no account to innovate on established customs? When they were accused of denying the gods whom the multitude worshipped, did they not defend themselves from the accusation, as from a crime? After all, did not some of the wisest among them candidly confess their ignorance, and the impossibility of attaining by themselves to a knowledge of God? This was the formal avowal made by Socrates, the most celebrated amongst them; and he declared that it was solely for this reason that he believed himself to be wiser than others, because he felt his own ignorance; and on this account it was that the Oracle had styled him the wisest of men. In a word, was not this public confession made by ancient Athens, a city which all the world revered as the school of wisdom, in raising an altar with this inscription, "to the unknown God?" Was not St. Paul then, in some measure justified in saying, that these times, illustrious though they were, were times of ignorance? And, if we are permitted to judge of manners by religion, how dreadful must have been the corruption in those days! What purity, what sanctity, what virtue could be expected from a people who professed to adore deities whom they represented as subject to passions the most dishonourable, as sullied by vices the most infamous, and whom they imagined they could not more highly honour than by imitating their vices to excess? Nothing can be more depraved than the sketch which St. Paul gives us in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. "Having known God, they did not glorify him as God, nor give him thanks; but became infatuated in their reasonings concerning the worship fit for the vulgar, and in consequence their unintelligent heart was darkened. Vaunting themselves to be wise, they became fools in their public institutions of religion, and they exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and of four-footed beasts and creepings things. (Rom. i. 21, 22, 23.) And this profound ignorance, adds the Apostle, had corrupted their affections and desires; so that they committed

all those crimes which he enumerates. Such, in regard to religion, were the times which preceded the Gospel dispensation. We come now to show what was the conduct of Almighty God with respect to those times of ignorance.

PART II.—“The times of this ignorance,” says St. Paul, “God winked at.” Several meanings have been given to the term which is here translated “winked at.” According to some, it means *to be indignant at, to be angry with* : and, following these interpreters, the meaning would be that these times of ignorance had provoked the indignation and wrath of God. According to others, the word signifies *to disregard, to have no respect to, to view with indifference* : and in this sense, the meaning of the Apostle would be, that God took no cognizance of these times, suffering men to follow their own ways, and wander according to their own devices. Some there are who render the term *to pardon*, and others, *no longer to tolerate*, these times of ignorance ; that is to say, that God could no longer endure to look on these times, nor permit them to continue.* We take this term “winked at,” in the sense of *patience and forbearance* ; and we say, that God tolerated or bore with the times of this ignorance into which the whole heathen world was plunged, not being willing to display towards them His just vengeance and indignation. And here we must recall to mind the dealings of Almighty God towards the Old World, “when all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.” (Gen. vi. 12.) God treated them with forbearance and consideration : but at length the wickedness of man being great in the earth, and the cry of their iniquity having reached to heaven, God sent the deluge, which buried in its waters this earth defiled by crimes the most abominable.

The second world rendered itself no less hateful in the sight of God. It must have been more so, seeing that it was more culpable. In the first world, there was no *idolatry*. At least,

* The phrase has been differently understood, though hardly any reasonable doubt can be entertained, that it signifies, “to overlook,” “to regard with lenity.” Compare Acts. xiv. 16.

such is the general opinion, and certainly, the Scriptures declare nothing which would lead us to suppose that the inhabitants of the Old World were idolaters. That with which the Bible reproaches *them* is a universal corruption of morals, a licentiousness the most unbridled, and disorders the most frightful; but in the second world, idolatry the most gross and revolting was joined to a corruption the most inveterate and excessive. The Apostle himself acquaints us with the fact in his Epistle to the Ephesians, where he says, that the Gentiles were *darkness*; “having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling,” and every fear of God, “have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” (Eph. iv. 18. 19.) Does it not appear to us that it belonged to the holiness and justice of God no more to spare the second world than the first; and that his glory was interested in treating the one with greater severity than the other, as being by far the more culpable of the two?

It is useless to endeavour to plead in behalf of these degenerate times; and to allege their ignorance as their excuse. For with respect to ignorance, there is a distinction to be made: it is, that there is an ignorance which is wilful, and one which is not wilful. Ignorance is involuntary, when the means of instruction are wanting. Ignorance is wilful, when the knowledge of that which ought to be known is wanting, although the aids for obtaining such knowledge are abundantly supplied. The one excites compassion and pity; the other, anger and indignation. The one is an object of pardon and indulgence; the other is without excuse.

Now the ignorance of the heathen world was not involuntary, but wilful. In fact, that which causes involuntary ignorance is the total want of revelation. But had not God clearly revealed himself to men in the works of nature, and could they not easily have found him? “For the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and Godhead, are clearly seen from the creation of the world, being understood by the things

that are made." (Rom. i. 20.) "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handywork." (Ps. xix. 1.) How, then, could the ignorance of the heathen be involuntary? Was it difficult for them to open their eyes, and contemplate the wonderful spectacle which nature everywhere presents? Was it difficult to understand that the heavens, and the brilliant stars with which they are studded—that the earth, and the riches it produces—the fruits which spring from its lap—the animals it cherishes—the human race which it sustains,—that all these things did not exist of themselves, and that He who made them behoved to be a being of infinite intelligence, wisdom, power, and perfection: that this infinite Being, in his nature and perfections, could not be fashioned by the hand of man,—that he could not be "like unto gold or silver, or stone, graven by art, and man's device;" that he could not be bounded by time, nor circumscribed by space, nor be subject to the passions, the vices, and the failings of the human race? So true is this, that several of the heathen avowed it. Some of them acknowledged the unity, the spirituality, the holiness of God. All of them acknowledged his existence. Some there were who ridiculed a plurality of gods; who mocked at the various shapes in which men pretended to represent the Supreme Being; and who declared that to worship an idol is as great folly as to speak to a wall. Now, this knowledge, which some of them possessed, was it not in the power of them all to acquire? How then can we excuse the idolatry of the heathen on the plea of ignorance? Furthermore: Had they not a law to regulate their conduct? Had not God revealed to them their duty? St. Paul expressly says, that "when the Gentiles, which have not the law of Moses, do by the light of nature what a law assumed to exist among them would instruct them to do,—these persons, though they have no divine revelation, are a law unto themselves; inasmuch as they exhibit what really amounts to a revealed law written upon their hearts, their conscience bearing witness unto it, as also their reasonings one with another, praising the good, and

censuring the evil among them.' (See Rom. ii. 14, 15.) How can we then at all excuse those vices, those disorders, those frightful corruptions by which they were enslaved? Did they not sin in direct defiance of all the light of conscience?

Drawing, then, an inference from all that we have said, does it not seem, my Brethren, that the same Almighty vengeance with which God punished the first world, he should have allowed to fall with equal weight upon the second? Nevertheless, "the times of this ignorance," says the Apostle, "God winked at." He allowed men to walk in their own ways, and did not render unto them according to their doings. He beheld all the outrage done to his glory, without appearing to see it, and he acted as if he saw it not. It was not, however, that God felt not angry at the idolatry and extreme depravity of the human race. His jealousy is too great for him to behold, with indifference, his "glory given to another, and his praise to graven images." (Isaiah xlii. 8.) He is not a God that takes pleasure in iniquity: he is of purer eyes than to behold evil. (Heb. i. 13.) So history, both sacred and profane, informs us that from time to time, he has to nations made manifest the severity of his judgments. Sometimes he chastised the Chaldeans and Assyrians, sometimes the Babylonians and Egyptians; at one time he punished the Greeks, at another the Romans. Notwithstanding, we may with truth affirm that God winked at these times, because he preserved the world in general, and allowed it to exist. These chastisements which God from time to time inflicted on the people were rather special than general visitations. But the universal visitation which destroyed the first world, he inflicted not on the second. He dealt not with them after their sins, nor rewarded them according to their iniquities. (Ps. ciii. 10.) What do we say? Instead of punishing and chastising them, he even extended towards them his tenderest care, and the most sensible marks of his bounty. He changed not the course of his Providence; "he left not himself without witness," to use the words of the Apostle, "in that he did good to men; and gave them rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling their hearts with food

and gladness." (Acts xiv. 17.) And not only did he shower down, without interruption, the ordinary blessings of his Providence; he many a time displayed extraordinary bounties. When we read the history of the various nations we have mentioned, we find among some the most astonishing prosperity; among others, triumphs the most illustrious, and success the most fortunate. It is therefore, true, my Brethren, that God imputed not unto them their trespasses, that the times of this ignorance God winked at.

What then is the reason which induced the Almighty to act in such a manner towards a world so guilty? This point, not to carry this one to too great length, we shall examine in another discourse, if God will, and we shall conclude for the present, with a few reflections on the point we have considered.

We have seen how gross and disgraceful was the ignorance of these times which preceded the blessed days of the Gospel. Let us suppose, at first, that it had pleased God not to reveal himself to men by the Gospel; that he had allowed them to walk according to their own light; that he had abandoned them to their own ways, and their own counsel; in what state, we ask, do you think *we* should be with respect to religion? The patron of Reason will say, without doubt, that *it* alone would have kept us from such thick darkness—that it would have lighted us through these absurd opinions, these revolting ideas, these impure and superstitious practices,—that it would have discovered truth, and by the aid of its torch would have triumphed over the error, the ignorance, and the corruption, of which men, during so many ages, were the slaves. But since reason, although aiding the efforts of the great men we have before mentioned, could not secure so mighty a triumph, on what grounds should we presume that she would be more powerful at the present day? Do the great spirits of our own days, our modern philosophers, in their speculations and discoveries, show themselves superior to the ancients on the side of penetration and judgment? And if we at all compare the works of these master-minds with the productions of the pre-

tended sages of our own days, will not the comparison be more than mortifying, to the chagrin of the latter? Ah! in order to be convinced that reason is not more capable now than it was formerly of leading us to the true knowledge of God, go back for a moment in thought to those nations who had then, and have now this reason solely for their guide—on whom the light of the Gospel has not yet shone; and what shall you then find but a new confirmation, a proof still more humiliating, of the feebleness of human reason, its darkness, and its corruption? Do we not see that instead of enlightening mankind, reason only confirms them in their ignorance, and leads them farther into error, and superstition, and darkness?

These things being so, can we put too great a value on the mercy God has shown us in having blessed us with the revelation of Himself in the Gospel: in not having abandoned us to our own reason, but having made amends for its inability, by the succours of His own word; dispelling by the brilliancy of its light, the darkness of ignorance? Can we, members of the Protestant Church!—can we sufficiently thank God who, as He delivered the heathen from the darkness into which they were plunged in a state of nature, and caused to shine on them the wholesome rays of His Gospel, so has in like manner freed us from that gross darkness which during several ages enveloped Christendom, and has taught us to profess in its purity the religion of Jesus, so that we have as it were to bless God for a twofold deliverance from darkness, and a twofold introduction into His Kingdom of Light?

But, in the next place, consider, my friends, if we feel not the happiness of our state, and neglect to profit by the advantages with which God has favoured us; how shall we be less culpable than the heathen? If they were to blame in being the slaves of ignorance and corruption, what shall be said of us who are children of the day and walk in the light, if we are imitators of their follies and their vices? Would it not have been better for us never to have had a revelation from God, than, having enjoyed a revelation, to set it at nought? Shall not that be a new reason for our condemnation being aggra-

vated? “ Woe unto thee, Chorazin, woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, at the day of judgment, than for you,” (Matt. xi. 21, 22.)

God, it is true also, bears with our misdoings. He does not yet exercise sentence against our evil works. (Eccl. viii. 11.) He displays his patience towards us; but it is only for a time; his forbearance, how long soever it may be, has bounds which it shall not pass. Death is always its limit: and in the judgment which must follow, God’s justice shall make its rights appear on all them whom his patience but served as a pretext for persevering in their impenitence; and when that notable day of the Lord shall come, he shall exercise judgment upon all; and prove in the face of heaven and earth what it is to pass from the hands of a merciful God into those of an inflexible Judge. Let us, Brethren, anticipate this formidable judgment by repentance and conversion. To-day, if we will hear his voice, let us not harden our hearts, but work the works of grace; so that withdrawing from the paths of darkness, which lead to the region of death, and bringing forth fruits meet for repentance, we may find mercy and deliverance in that day. Amen.

HEATHENISM AND CHRISTIANITY COMPARED.

S E R M O N I I .

“The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.”—ACTS XVII. 30.

“Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.” (Acts xi. 18.) Such was the answer the Christians of Jerusalem gave to St. Peter, after having heard that Apostle’s account of the conversion of Cornelius, the centurion, who was a Gentile. Praised be God, said they, who to the Gentiles, as well as to us, hath given grace to repent; who hath preached unto them repentance, that they may obtain eternal life. That happy event which caused so great joy to the saints of Jerusalem, ought to be matter of equally great joy to us; seeing that we are no less interested therein. Who are we, but the descendants of those same Gentiles to whom was preached the doctrine of repentance? And what should we have been, if God had not made manifest to them his grace? Should we not still be “strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world?” (Eph. ii. 12.) Blessed then for ever be the God of mercy, who having winked at these times of ignorance, now commandeth all men every where to repent! The words of the text gave occasion to us, in the former sermon, to consider the state of the Gentiles before their conversion to the Gospel, by setting before you their profound ignorance, and extreme corruption:

after which we remarked on the dealings of Almighty God with these times of ignorance. And we doubt not you were surprised to see how God bore with these times of ignorance and corruption, and how far he carried his forbearance and patience towards such erring mortals. Is it possible, you have said, perhaps, to yourselves—is it possible that this great and jealous God, that this holy and righteous Being can have tolerated, during so many ages, so great idolatry—idolatry so revolting and universal? How can a God who is “of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,” have suffered, for such a length of time, so many disorders and impieties to exist? Is not the wrath of God revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men? Why then did he not avenge his glory so vividly outraged? Why did he not display his formidable judgments on the idols and the idolaters? Behold, nevertheless, Brethren, a subject worthy of our admiration! Not only did God tolerate with patience these vessels of iniquity: not only did he preserve and spare them; but he wished to make them objects of his mercy, and for this purpose he condescended to lead them to repentance, to offer them grace, peace, and pardon for all their crimes, provided they would abandon them, and turn themselves from their former evil conversation to the living and true God. “The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent.” It is this grace bestowed upon them, this merciful dealing of God towards a corrupt and guilty world, which we have now to consider, and the remarks we shall make on the subject will divide our discourse into three parts:—

I.—We shall consider, in what consists the command which God has given to all men to repent.

II.—We shall consider the universality of that command.

III.—We shall make manifest to you, the value, the greatness, and the excellency of that grace which God has shown to a guilty world, in calling it to repentance.

PART I.—There is not one of us, Brethren, who is ignorant of the conduct which a prince ordinarily pursues in regard to those of his subjects who have the audacity to take up arms against him, with the design of withdrawing themselves from that obedience which is due to him, and who thus render themselves guilty of revolt and open rebellion. He orders them to lay down their arms, and return to their allegiance, promising them an amnesty; pardon and peace to those who submit to his clemency; but threatening with his wrath, and the most terrible punishment, those who persevere in their rebellion.

Such is, in a measure, the conduct which God was pleased to pursue towards a world which was guilty of the most crying rebellion. I mean idolatry and impiety.

1. He declared to men that he could no longer tolerate the affronts and outrages which they, in so many ways, offered to his divine Majesty: that he had for some time been pleased to bear with them; but that he owed it to his own glory no longer to continue his clemency and forbearance; that the time past of their lives ought to suffice them to have wrought their own will, when they walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revelings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: (1 Pet. iv. 3.,) but that it was time for them to change their mode of life, and that he commanded them to repent, that is to say, to renounce idolatry, “to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world:” (Tit. ii. 12.)

2. He declared to them that, how great and atrocious soever may have been their disorders and crimes; how monstrous soever their idolatries; how grievous soever the outrages done to his Majesty, he was quite ready to extend to them grace and pardon, provided they repented and turned to him in sincerity; and that, as a God of love, he was willing to accept their repentance.

3. *Thirdly*, He declared to them, that if they refused to respond to his offers, to his invitations, addressed to them purely out of mercy; if they would not profit by the grace which called them to repentance, he would most assuredly take vengeance on their obstinacy and hardness of heart; that he had borne with the times past, because they were times of ignorance: but that now he revealed to them his will, he called on them to submit to it, and that, if, resisting these promises, these threatenings, they still persevered in their rebellion, they might no longer expect mercy, but that he would bring on them the punishment due to their impenitence. “The times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent:” *all men every where*, says the Apostle, without distinction of clime or people, God commandeth to repent. The universality of this command, we shall now consider.

PART II.—There is nothing new in these declarations, by which God bears testimony to his hatred of sin—in these invitations, and promises, and threatenings which he makes to sinners to induce them to repent. Frequently he has made himself heard in this way; and we all know that the books of the Old Testament, and especially those of the Prophets, are full of God’s invitations to repentance. “Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes: cease to do evil; learn to do well: seek judgment.” (Isaiah i. 16, 17.) “As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” “If the wicked turn from his wickedness, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby.” (Ezekiel xxxiii. 11, 19.) Behold, Brethren, what God has, times without number, declared by the mouth of his Prophets. But these declarations, these promises and threatenings, had respect properly to that people who were his chosen, and whom he had honoured with his covenant. “He shewed his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel: he dealt not so with other nations: neither had the heathen know-

ledge of his laws." The mission of the Prophets had for its object, the Israelites alone: the Gentiles had no part therein. True it is, that God sent the Prophet Jonah to Nineveh, to preach repentance to the guilty inhabitants of that great city, and to threaten them with a sudden and total destruction, if they repented not. But that is the only instance in which God saw fit to act thus towards a people who were strangers to his covenant; and while he continually raised up Prophets in Israel to preach unto them, he permitted the rest of the world to walk in their own ways, and follow their own imaginations. But *now*, the revelation of his will is not confined to one people; it extends to all. The saving grace of God has not appeared to the Jews only; it is made manifest also to the Gentiles. "Now, indeed, God is no respecter of persons;" there is no longer in his eyes, any distinction of people; "there is neither Greek nor Jew, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free." God has to one and all, opened equally the gates of repentance: he has given to one as well as the other, grace to turn from their evil ways, to enter on the way of salvation, and obtain eternal life. "For God commandeth all men every where to repent."

It is needless to detain you, Brethren, to show you how, and by whom, God has made known to the world his declarations, his offers of grace. It must be well known to you, that the Apostles were his heralds, the messengers of these good tidings, and that God committed to them the glorious "ministry of reconciliation." "Go ye," said their Divine Master to them, "and preach the Gospel to every creature:" "preach repentance and remission of sins among all nations:" "whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." "And he constituted some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers, for the work of the ministry, which is to perfect the saints, and to edify the body of Christ." (Eph. iv. 11, 12.) And on this account, the Apostle says: "We are ambassadors for Christ, and he hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing unto them their tres-

passes. We pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God." (2 Cor. v. 19, 20.) Of a truth, Jesus Christ had enjoined his apostles to address themselves first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. He had given them express orders to commence their preaching at Jerusalem, to address, at first, the children of the promise. During our Lord's sojourn on earth, too, they were forbidden to enter the land of the Gentiles. But after his resurrection, he gave greater range for the work of the ministry which he had entrusted to them: their commission was without limits, it extended to the utmost parts of the world. "Ye shall be witnesses unto me," said he, "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts i. 8.) They were commanded to invite not only the children, but strangers also; not only those who were near, but those who were afar off; they were ordered to go not only into the public streets, but also into the lanes and high-ways; to invite all whom they met, of whatever condition, of whatever rank; to constrain them, to exhort them by reasons the most persuasive, to solicit them by motives the most powerful, to enter forthwith into the sheep-fold. "Now God commandeth all men every where to repent. "Now we know that God is not only the God of the Jews, but doubtless of the Gentiles also." (Rom. iii. 28.) Now we know "that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him, and repenteth, is accepted of him." (Acts x. 34, 35.) It is this universal calling of the Gentiles which God, during so many ages, had so solemnly promised by his prophets. He had predicted to Abraham, that "in his seed should all the nations of the earth be blessed:" to Jacob, that "unto Shilo should the gathering of the people be." He had foretold that "upon them that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them should the light shine;" that "from the rising of the sun, even unto the going down of the same, his name should be great among the Gentiles;" that "in the last days," that is, the days of the Gospel dispensation, "the mountain of the Lord's house should be established on the top of the mountains, and be exalted above the hills, and all nations should

flow into it, saying, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths." He had predicted, that in the last days, he would make a new covenant, in virtue of which, he would remember their sins no more, and their iniquities should be blotted out. He had declared, in fine, that he would give the Messiah to be "a light to lighten the Gentiles," and that all the ends of the earth should look unto him, and be saved. Behold, then, Christians, the blessed accomplishment of these majestic oracles, of these magnificent promises: now "God commandeth all men everywhere to repent."

Will any one say that this declaration was useless, since nature itself teaches us, and leads us to this duty? We acknowledge that nature teaches us to repent, when we have done a bad action. But can nature assure us that God will accept that repentance? Does *it* furnish us with the motives for repentance? Certainly not. Nature may well suppose that since God is good, he is also inclined to be merciful towards the guilty, and that he may pardon them: but nature cannot give us the least assurance to that effect. Revelation alone, the express declaration of God himself, can alone satisfy in that particular: so that it is a mark of signal and extraordinary grace that God has commanded all men everywhere to repent.

Will any one affirm, again, that it is going too far to say, that this declaration has been made to all men every where, seeing that at this day there are so many people to whom it has never been made known? True it is, that there are nations which are still plunged in the darkness of ignorance, and that there is an abundant harvest to be gathered. But we cannot deny, 1. that there is an immense number of people to whom the Gospel of peace has been preached, so that we may say with truth, that "its sound has gone into all the earth, and its words unto the ends of the world." Nor can it be denied, 2. that the Gospel is daily spreading, and that we can scarcely name a region or climate into which its light has not either

penetrated, or is about to do so. In fine, the marvellous success which it has had in its establishment and propagation, even to our own days, gives assurance of the progress which it shall continue to make: this is our warrant for the entire accomplishment of the promises of God, and a pledge to us that one day the doctrine of repentance shall be preached to all nations. It remains for us to show you the greatness, the value, and the excellency of the grace of God displayed towards a guilty world in calling it to repentance.

PART III.—If we cannot, without astonishment and admiration, behold a prince who is injured by rebellious subjects, offer them pardon provided they return to their allegiance; if no praise seem to us too great to bestow on so merciful a prince; how can we express and sufficiently feel the value of that grace displayed by Almighty God towards a world after the idolatries and impunities of which we have seen it guilty; by a God who not only would not take vengeance on mankind: but who was entirely ready to forgive them, if they returned to him by repentance! Besides, there is no comparison to be made between the Monarch of the universe, and the most powerful prince in the world; there is a mighty difference between the mercy which a prince extends to his rebellious subjects, and that which God extended to a guilty world, during so many ages of fearful rebellion against him. On what is the clemency of the former founded? Most frequently on policy, on interest, on want of power. It is not convenient to lose so great a number of subjects, it is wise policy to quench at its commencement a flame which might cause a general conflagration; it is wisdom to suppress, at a favourable moment, the symptoms of a revolt which might have a fatal termination: it is necessary to obtain the character of being a good and merciful prince; it is needful to gain over, by mildness, subjects whom there might be a chance of being unable to subdue by force. Such are the motives and principles which every day compel princes to dissemble, to treat with mildness their rebellious subjects, and to prefer acts of clemency and pardon to those of rigour and se-

verity. But was it from such motives that God acted towards an idolatrous world? Had he need of that world for his good, and was his glory concerned in its preservation? Whether the world repent or not, would the Supreme Being be less happy, or less glorious? Did he want the power and the means of destroying the world? Is not all nature subject to his laws? At his word, are not all things ready to execute his vengeance? Or, on the other hand, did the world seek the favour of God, by its return, its repentance, its conversion? Did it renounce the multitude of its disorders? Convinced of the vanity of the idols which it adored, did it break them in pieces, and turn to the worship of the living and true God? On the contrary, impiety, irreligion, idolatry were reinforced, evil was daily on the increase. Corruption had reached its height. And yet, in so miserable a condition, this world became the object of God's compassion. God, instead of executing vengeance on mankind, invited them to repentance. O the richness of the goodness, the mercy and loving-kindness of God! What words can worthily celebrate his praise! The world by wisdom knew not God, but was given up to ignorance and corruption: nevertheless the times of that ignorance God winked at, and commanded all men every where to repent, that they might obtain pardon and life. Can we sufficiently admire this goodness, this mercy of Almighty God?

We, my Brethren, have great reason to make it a subject for joy, that we are interested in the grace which was manifested to the Gentiles, and that which the Jews said of their extraction, that their father was an Amonite, and their mother an Hittite, (Ezek. xvi. 3.)—we may also declare, we who are descended from the Gentile world—so rebellious, so idolatrous and corrupt. We reap the happy fruits of that declaration so merciful, which was made to those Gentiles of whom we are the descendants, and who turned themselves by faith and repentance. If they had been permitted to continue in darkness, how much greater must have been the darkness in which we should now be wandering? We are in the light, because on them the light shone; we are in the covenant, because God

mercifully admitted them. Can we acknowledge sufficiently such sovereign grace ?

Christians, God has bestowed on us grace still greater, more precious still. He is not contented with having commanded those who lived in the times of that ignorance, and who were strangers to his covenant, to repent ; but what is more astonishing, that repentance he announces to all those who are lightened by the light of the Gospel, and who enjoy the blessings of the covenant ; and he promises them, that, if they should offend him, and break his laws, he is nevertheless ready to pardon and restore them to favour, if only they repent and turn unto him. What excess of love and mercy ! That God should have shown mercy to the heathen in opening to them the gate of repentance, is without doubt an illustrious testimony of goodness, mercy, and compassion ; but are they, who, after having known so clearly his will, have wilfully violated it ; are they who fall into sin after being enlightened, after having tasted of the heavenly gift, after being made partakers of the Holy Ghost, after having tasted the good word of God ; are they who having the knowledge of the truth, yet act in opposition to the truth ; are they who, although knowing their master's will, yet do it not ; are these, we say, worthy of such grace ? Do they not rather deserve to be beaten with many stripes ? Such, however is the covenant of God, such his mercy, that he is pledged to remember no more our sins, provided we repent of them with unfeigned repentance. "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John i. 9.) "My brethren, these things write I unto you that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous ; and he is the propitiation for our sins," (1 John ii. 1, 2.) in virtue of which propitiation, God receives us not at the tribunal of justice, but at his throne of grace ; in order to show mercy upon us, and give us grace to help, in time of need. You see then, Brethren, that God still commandeth all men every where, all sinners without distinction, to repent.

Let us remember, however, that the repentance which God

requires, is not merely grief, regret, and displeasure at having offended. True it is, that repentance always supposes such regret, and that it ought to include grief for what has been done amiss ; but repentance no less includes change for the future, conversion of heart, newness of life, and reformation of conduct. This is that in which repentance consists, and it is to this alone that God promises pardon.

Let us beware moreover how we imagine that, since the door of repentance is always open to sinners, we have only to persevere in our sins, and that, provided we adopt the firm resolution of repenting in earnest at the close of our life, we can promise ourselves, that of his abundant mercy God will assuredly pardon us. An illusion, alas, too generally prevalent among Christians, too obstinately entertained by most ; but an illusion the most fatal and dangerous of all. God has indeed promised, that the sinner who truly repents shall obtain pardon and grace ; but he has at the same time denounced the most rigorous penalties against impenitence and hardness of heart. God has positively promised mercy to every sinner who bewails his sins, and at the same time renounces them ; but he has no where promised, that although the sinner continue in his evil ways, although during the whole of his life he despise and trample on all the invitations to repentance, all the offers of peace and grace which are made to him, nevertheless God will receive him. What an opinion should we have of the Supreme Being ? Where would be his wisdom ? Where his holiness and justice, in such a case ? We believe that if such a man were truly converted, God would give him grace and favour ; but such a man, by Brethren, could not be converted. He may make vows and resolutions of amendment ; he may bewail bitterly, and from the bottom of his heart his past transgressions ; he may bewail their number and atrocity, he may detest them, and sincerely wish he had never committed them. But to repent, my Brethren, is to become a good Christian ; to become a good Christian is not merely to desire to become one, it is to show one's self so ; it is to practise the duties of a Christian ; it is to do all those good works which the Gospel prescribes and

so strongly enjoins. Now, at the close of life, on the bed of death, is a man capable of doing all this? Where are the virtues of a dying sinner? where his holy affections, his heavenly habits, which characterize the true Christian? where are the proofs and the effects of that faith and that confidence which he flatters himself he has in the grace of God, and in the merits of Jesus Christ? Do you not perceive the more than three-fold difficulty of a death-bed repentance? Are you not persuaded that it is madness to delay repentance until the last days of our life? Let us then forsake our sins; let us work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Let the time passed of our lives suffice us to have lived according to the thoughts of our own hearts. Forsaking all ungodliness, and all the unfruitful works of darkness: let us walk as children of the light, by living soberly, righteously, and godly. Thus shall we bring forth fruits meet for repentance, meet to glorify that God who has visited us in mercy—fruits which are agreeable to him in Christ Jesus; and so having received of him that pardon which a father extends to his child, we shall at the last obtain salvation everlasting in his heavenly kingdom. Amen.

THE RESURRECTION.

SERMON III.

“If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.”—1 THESS. iv. 14.

Among all the proofs which we find in Scripture of the *resurrection* of the dead, the chief is that with which we are furnished by the *resurrection* of Jesus Christ. This is *the* proof on which St. Paul particularly insists in those parts of his epistles wherein he treats of this important article of our faith; especially in the xvth chapter of his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians. “Now, if Christ be preached,” says he, “that he rose from the dead, how say some among you, that there is no resurrection of the dead?” (1 Cor. xv. 12.) This proof of which he shows the force in the chapter we have mentioned, he also makes use of in the words of the text. “If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.”

These words have an intimate connexion with those which precede them. In the beginning of this chapter, St. Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to holiness and brotherly love, urging the importance and necessity of these virtues: then from the verse before the text, to the end of the chapter, the Apostle writes on a subject in which the Thessalonians had great need to be instructed. They, in common with the greater portion of the Christians of their times, entertained an opinion respect-

ing the second coming of the Lord, which caused them to meet death with sorrow, and to mourn with unbecoming grief the loss of their brethren. They believed that the coming of Christ Jesus in glory, to judge the world, was nigh at hand ; and this belief arose from their thinking the destruction of Jerusalem meant the end of the world. Our Lord, in the 24th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, had predicted the former of these events, and its attendant circumstances, (applicable also to the latter,) in such terms, that the first Christians inferred from thence, that the second advent of the Lord, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the end of the world, were to follow each other in quick succession ; and the more so by reason that Christ had declared that that generation, that is to say, those then alive, should not pass away till all were fulfilled. (Mark xiii. 30.) Now this opinion which these Christians held respecting the second coming of the Lord—this opinion, *we say*, caused their grief to be extreme when their parents or friends died, and was the cause of their dying themselves, mourning and lamenting that death should soon seize upon them, because they all earnestly desired to be witnesses of the coming of the Lord in glory. The Apostle, in the line of reasoning of which the text forms part, offers consolation to the faithful, by assuring them that the lot, both of those who shall be alive, and those who shall have been some time dead, at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, shall be equally happy ; that both the one and the other shall have the joy and consolation of witnessing the triumphant advent of their Redeemer.

The Apostle, having said in the preceding verse, " But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope ;" adds, in the words of the text, " for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

In elucidation of the text, we shall—

I.—Explain these words.

II.—We shall prove the proposition they contain, and

III.—We shall dwell on the comfort and consolation to be derived from them.

God grant that our meditations may make us deeply feel the obligation we are under of living conformably to the greatness of our hope! Amen.

In order to explain the text, we may remark, that an expression must be supplied, of which the idiom of the Greek allows the omission; although that omission, in our language, renders the meaning of the Apostle somewhat obscure. The original, word for word, gives the translation according to the authorised version: "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." You perceive, I am sure, my Brethren, that there is some obscurity in this reasoning; but that obscurity vanishes, when we render the sentence in the following terms: "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so also, we believe, or we ought to believe—(words which are not found in the original, but which we supply to make out the sense)—even so also we believe, or we ought to believe, that them which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him." The belief, (such is the Apostle's meaning,) the belief which we hold that Jesus died and rose again, ought to fill our minds with the belief that, "them which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him;" that is to say, will raise again in like manner. The resurrection of Jesus is a certain pledge to us of the resurrection of the just.

2. Another remark we have to make, in explanation of the text. Some phrases are easily understood; others require elucidation. Of the number of these latter, is the phrase, "Them which sleep in Jesus." This expression is of frequent occurrence in Scripture. By "*them which sleep*," the Sacred Oracles mean, in general, those that are dead, the good as well as the bad; and by the expression, "*them which sleep in Jesus*," is

meant, those who have died the death of the righteous ; whether their death has been according to the course of nature : or whether it has been like that of martyrs.

It was long ago remarked, that the sacred Penmen have hallowed the style of heathen writers, at the same time that they have adopted it. One of the most common modes by which the heathen combated the fear of death, was by refraining from the thought of it, by avoiding even the pronouncing of the name. Though it is not possible to live on earth, without being compelled to speak of death, yet, to suit this necessity to their feelings on the subject, they expressed by paraphrase that which they had so great a repugnance to name. In place of saying *to die*, they said, *to depart*, *to yield to fate*, *to fall asleep*. O fools ! as if to change the name of an object of horror were to diminish its power. The divine writers, however, have made sacred that style, in adopting it : they have termed *death*, *a sleep* ; because they regarded it as a *rest*, in relation to “ the resurrection,” by which it shall be followed. We may add, that the ancients termed the *grave* a place of repose or of sleep, and that the Scriptures, although they apply that term indifferently to the death both of the just and the unjust, yet most frequently mean thereby the death of the *former*. “ The righteous,” says Isaiah, “ is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace ; they shall *rest* in their beds.” (Isaiah lvii. 1, 2.) “ Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may *rest* from their labours, and their works do follow them.” (Rev. xiv. 13.) So in the text, St. Paul speaks only of the faithful, of “ those who sleep in Jesus,” that is to say, who die in the faith of Jesus Christ. The expression which the Apostle employs, is of frequent use in Scripture. We there find the phrases, “ to be in Christ,” “ to live in Christ,” which means, to be his true disciples. Again, “ to die with Christ,” “ to rise with Christ,” “ to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus,” signifies, *to renounce sin, to rise from the death of sin to a life of righteousness*. In the text, “ to sleep in Jesus,” is to die in the faith of Jesus Christ ; in

that faith which is fruitful in good works, and which the spirit of Christ produces in our hearts. It is apparent that Paul has here in view *the Martyrs*, those who died *for* Jesus Christ, *for* the cause of Christ. And the reason why the Apostle here alludes only to the resurrection of the just, is, that he is only addressing such. It is their consolation and support in the faith of Christ, which is the subject of his discourse. “If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so,” we also believe, or we ought to believe, that “them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him;” that is to say, the belief which we have in the death and resurrection of Christ, is sufficient cause for our believing that them also which sleep in Jesus will God raise up in like manner with him. In a word, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a sure pledge of our resurrection. This truth which St. Paul declares in the text, we shall endeavour now to prove—

PART II.—“If we believe,” says the Apostle, “that Jesus died and rose again.” Why does he make mention of the *death* of Christ? Would it not suffice to speak only of his resurrection? Would his reasoning be therefore less conclusive? My Brethren, the truth, the reality of the resurrection of Jesus depends on the truth, on the reality of his death. If Christ’s death was true, then, his resurrection which followed, was true also. It was not in appearance only that he rose again, as some of the ancient heretics pretended; and we are enabled to take his resurrection as the assurance of our own. This truth St. Paul establishes with so great force in the 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians. He there connects our resurrection with that of Jesus, in such a manner as to assure us that the whole certainty which we can have of the one, depends on the assurance we have of the other; and he almost declares, that if there be no resurrection for the Christian, then Jesus Christ himself is not risen; the preaching of the Gospel is vain, and the faith of the Christian is vain also; and the Apostle repeats this argument three times in the chapter, so solid an argument did he find it to be. We are not only

assured of our own resurrection, seeing that Christ is risen ; but we are moreover so sure of it, that if there be no resurrection for us, then all that is affirmed respecting the resurrection of Christ, is but falsehood and fable. Our resurrection is so intimately connected with our Lord's, that the one is impossible without the other.

But whence arises this intimate connexion which exists between our resurrection and that of Christ ; or to express ourselves with St. Paul in the text, how is it that our belief in the resurrection of Jesus ought to make us believe that God will also raise us with him ? It is because the resurrection of Jesus Christ proves to us that he can and will raise us likewise.

1. We say, in the first place, that it proves to us, that he can raise us. Christ himself is risen from the dead ; he has then the power to raise us. The conclusion is just. If he has power to rise from the grave, does not this same power enable him to raise others also ? This supreme power of which he is possessed, which he employed to raise himself, he will hereafter employ to raise us.

2. In the second place, not only is Christ able, but he is also willing to raise us up again at the last day. We are enabled to come to this conclusion, from the love which he bears towards us, of which he has given such abundant proof by the many things he has done for our salvation. What ! shall that Saviour who left his abode of glory, who came down to earth, who lived here a life of poverty and misery, who suffered death upon the cross, and all to rescue us from death and condemnation ; shall that Saviour, having the power to raise us from the tomb, shall he permit us to remain for ever in the grave, a prey to worms and corruption ? Besides, the Scriptures assure us, that Christ Jesus is willing to raise us up again. Although we had only the one declaration in the text, we could not, for a moment, doubt of the fact : St. Paul makes the declaration by command of his Divine Master. " If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so also we ought

to believe that them which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him." Add to this another proof which the same Apostle gives us in the 15th chapter of the 1st Corinthians. He remarks, that "Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept." He means not to say, that Jesus Christ is the first who has risen from the dead. Elijah and Elisha raised the dead: our Lord himself restored to life a great many. But the Apostle, in saying "that Christ is become the first fruits of them that slept," alludes to the first fruits the Jews offered to God, and which were a pledge of future harvest.* In this sense Christ Jesus risen from the dead is called "the first fruits of them that slept," that is to say, he gives assurance of that general harvest which shall take place in the end of the world, when the Son of Man shall send his angels, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." (Matt. xxiv. 31.) We can thus understand that which the Apostle says, that Jesus Christ being raised from the dead, "is become the first fruits of them that slept;" we may explain the meaning in another way, which also proves that which we wish to establish, to wit, the certainty of our own resurrection: by the term "first fruits" St. Paul indicates the intimate relation between Jesus and believers, the expression representing both him and them, as forming part of the great work, of which he is the beginning, and they the completion.

The resurrection of the Saviour is the first part of that triumph over death and the grave, of which *our* resurrection shall be the consummation; according to that which St. Paul adds, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; after-

* *The first fruits* were an handful of the *first ripe corn*, which being carried through the streets of Jerusalem to the temple, and offered to God, publicly announced that the *general harvest* would soon be gathered in. (See Lev. xxiii.) The Apostle represents Christ as the first fruits of a glorious and universal harvest of all the sleeping dead. Is he accepted of God as a holy offering? (Lev. xxiii. 11,) then shall every sheaf that hath grown up with him be taken from the earth and sanctified in its proper order; *afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming.*

In this sense, Christ Jesus risen from the dead is called "the first fruits of them that slept," that is to say, he gives assurance of that general harvest which shall take place in the end of the world, when "the Son of Man shall send his angels, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." (Matt. xxiv. 31.) We can thus understand that which the Apostle says, that Jesus Christ being raised from the dead, "is become the first fruits of them that slept;" we may explain the meaning in another way, which also proves that which we wish to establish, to wit, the certainty of our own resurrection. By the term "first fruits" St. Paul indicates the intimate relationship between Jesus and believers, the expression respecting both him and them, as forming part of a great work, of which he is the beginning, and they the completion. The resurrection of the Saviour is the first part of that triumph over death and the grave, of which *our* resurrection shall be the consummation; according to that which St. Paul adds, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." (1 Cor. xv. 22, 23.) This union between Jesus and believers, the Apostle depicts elsewhere in another manner. He compares it to the union which exists between the members of the same body. He calls Jesus Christ "the head of the body, the Church." (Col. i. 18.) Now where the head is, there must also the members be. Jesus is our head, and we are all members of Jesus. But Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. He is, body and soul, in heaven; have we not then all the reason in the world to believe, that our body, as well as our soul, shall be hereafter admitted to the courts of heaven? And since Christ is raised from the tomb, shall he not likewise one day cause us to rise in like manner? Such is the assurance we have of our future resurrection: Christ can and will raise us up again at the last day. The proposition contained in the text is therefore incontrovertible: the belief which we hold that Jesus died and rose again, ought also to fill our souls with the assurance that

“them which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him.” The resurrection of Jesus is a pledge and assurance of our own. “If we believe that Jesus died, and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him.”

PART III.—We come now to consider the consolation to be derived from this truth. St. Paul speaks here, as we have already observed, only of the resurrection of the just: he addresses himself to none but those who are such: it is their consolation which is the subject of his discourse. Yes, my friends, this truth which the Apostle establishes in the text, is calculated to console believers.

1. And to begin with that which occasioned the reflections which St. Paul makes in this and the following verses, the certainty of the resurrection of our bodies is well fitted to assuage the grief which is occasioned by the death of them we love. “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.” The Apostle does not wholly condemn such sorrow: it is natural: Jesus himself has proved it to be so. The death of Lazarus moved him: he groaned in spirit, and wept in going towards the grave of his friend. But that which Paul condemns in this sorrow, is its excess: into this error the heathen fell: the Apostle exhorts Christians to avoid excess of sorrow, and the argument he employs is that which he makes the subject of this discourse, the certainty of our resurrection which is founded on that of Jesus Christ. Be not grieved, says he, beyond measure. This separation, which seems so cruel, shall not last for ever: a blessed resurrection shall re-unite you to those whose departure you now bewail. You shall find them again one day, but in a state infinitely more blessed than that which united you to them in this life. Here you were subject to continual fears, lest death should come and deprive you of the objects of your affection. A day shall come, when joined to them in heavenly places, far above all the changes and chances which characterize our sojourn

here below, you shall there enjoy their society through endless ages, with that excess of pleasure which your mutual happiness shall bestow. Such is the motive for consolation with which the Apostle furnishes the faithful, a motive efficacious for all Christians who make use of it.

The resurrection of our bodies is moreover peculiarly fitted to arm each one of us against the terrors of death. It is an idea which causes sorrow, which fills us with horror and dread, that we should cease to live; that our eyes should be for ever shut to the light, that our bodies should be motionless and lifeless, enclosed in the grave, where they are to become the prey of worms and corruption. The certainty of our resurrection, however, fortifies us against this revolting thought, it assures us that it is but for a time that our earthly frame shall be reduced to this sad state; that there is a day to come in which God shall restore to us our bodies, but perfect and glorious—a day in which the enemy who last conquered us shall himself be conquered, when “death shall be swallowed up in victory;” when all that are in the graves shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth. Behold then the promises of the Gospel: behold that of which the resurrection of our Saviour gives us assurance: know then what ought to soothe our minds at the thought and the approach of death. If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so also we believe that them which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. How ought this truth also to furnish us with the most powerful consolations with regard to the ills of life! The resurrection shall for ever free us from these. On issuing from the tomb we shall cast off for ever those seeds of feebleness and corruption which we brought with us on our entrance into life, and which expose us to such a multitude of sorrows. We shall rise from the grave immortal, incorruptible, and instead of this body so fragile, so perishing, we shall possess a new body, the force and vigour of which shall never be impaired. This is the doctrine of the Apostle: “so also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. As

we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly, that is, of the Lord Jesus Christ. "He shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body." Christians! Should it happen that languishing on the bed of sickness, you have to struggle with sharp sufferings; turn always your thoughts to this happy resurrection. That your patience and fortitude may respond to the greatness of your hopes, and when you feel your frame sink under the weight of your afflictions, animate yourselves by meditation on the glorious promises of a resurrection sealed to you by that of your Saviour: since you believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so believe that God will bring you also with him.

2. But in meditating on the consolation which the resurrection affords us, let us give good heed to the remark we have already made, that it is only the faithful that St. Paul is here addressing; that it is their comfort only of which he speaks. As the resurrection of the righteous shall be happy, so shall the resurrection of the unrighteous be miserable.

Ah! what hope, we pray you, can spring up in their hearts to banish or calm the affliction, the grief, which accrue to them from the death of those they love; to arm them against the terrors of death, to soften the feeling of those evils and sufferings which they undergo! Whatever may be the lot of those whose loss the wicked man deploras, can the idea of a future resurrection banish that sorrow with which their death inspires him? Will not this thought on the contrary cause him the greater grief? If the objects of his love rise again in glory, will a resurrection such as his must be, if he persist in his wickedness, re-unite him to them? Will it not separate him from them for ever? And if their lot be no better than his, what must be his despair to find them again, and to be re-united to them, in the abode of misery! The idea of a resurrection consequently, instead of protecting him from the fears of death, must, on the contrary, double their horrors. Far from comforting him in the afflictions which he may endure,

the thought of a resurrection will but aggravate their bitterness. For what shall be his resurrection? It shall be but an accumulation of woe. Then shall be the time when God shall fully execute that sentence which he has pronounced against the impenitent. Instead, therefore, of wishing for the resurrection, instead of comforting himself by waiting for it, the ungodly man must hope that it may never come to pass. He would prefer to suffer to eternity the woes which overwhelm him, or to be for ever shut up in the tomb, rather than, on the morning of the resurrection "to fall into the hands of the living God." Knowing then, Brethren, the terrors of the Lord, shall we not flee to faith and to repentance, the only means of avoiding these terrors! Having such glorious hopes, shall we not make use of them for our consolation? Shall we conduct ourselves as those who have no such hopes, as if our destiny were confined to this earth, as if after this life there were no other life, as if the grave were to be our last home? Is not such conduct that of the generality of Christians? They believe in a resurrection, which will cause them to appear before the presence of the sovereign Judge of quick and dead, and yet they take no steps to secure his favour. They believe in a resurrection which shall make them pass a life of everlasting happiness or misery, according to the good which they have done, or the evil they have committed, and yet they do nothing which shows that this awful alternative either moves or alarms them; or if this truth troubles them, their feelings on the subject are but transitory; they arise in their minds along with that dread which seizes them on the prospect of death. Their sickness vanishes, so does this fear also; the resolutions which they made, the promises which they vowed to God, are gone and forgotten, and they sink, as before, into security. On the other hand, these feelings come too late. There is no hope of good resolutions being matured. The fatal moment has arrived. Then all that religion has taught of a resurrection and a future state, till now but folly in their eyes, presents itself to their soul, and fills it with agony and anxiety. Now they would profit by the consolations of reli-

gion ; now after having all their life disregarded its promises, *now*, they wish to embrace them.

In the name of God, sinners that we are, let us not flatter ourselves, that the promises of the Gospel can be saving to us in our last moments, notwithstanding our having set them at nought during the whole course of our lives. Let us fear lest, after having so often despised the offers of our God, his exhortations, his promises, his threats, and having rejected this merciful God, he should reject us at the last, even though we seek him. "Oh! seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him whilst he is near." Knowing, believing, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, "both of the just and of the unjust, let us exercise ourselves to have always a conscience void of offence, towards God and toward men." Since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and since we believe that them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him, let us hope to be of that number. Let this hope be at all times our companion, let it be the rule of our lives, our thoughts, our words, our actions ; let it conform us to the resurrection of Christ Jesus in raising us up to newness of life. Let our love and gratitude to Him who has given us this consoling hope, always abiding in us, cause us to exclaim ; "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus, which, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Amen.
(1 Peter iii. 1.)

THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

S E R M O N I V .

“ And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation ; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.”—ACTS XVII. 26, 27.

God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation ; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.* Of all knowledge, the most necessary, the most indispensable, without contradiction, is the knowledge of one's-self. So the ancient sages, convinced of its utility and importance, especially recommended the acquisition of this knowledge. “ Know thyself ” was one of their favourite maxims. And to this knowledge we are particularly directed by holy men endued “ with the wisdom which is from above,” and guided in their writings by the Spirit of God. “ Examine yourselves,” say they : “ prove your own-

* There is an allusion here to the account given by Moses of the peopling of the world. (Gen. xi. 8. Deut. xxxii. 8.) St. Paul intended to show that all the minutest events of man's existence were ordered by a superintending providence.

“ That they might seek the Lord, &c.” Now the great design of man's creation, was that he should be a religious being ; that men should look after him that created them and worship him. And though they were left through their sins, as in the dark, in gross ignorance, yet was God so palpably to be discerned, that by feeling or groping, as blind men, in that darkness, they might, if they would but seek, find him, who is indeed very near every one of us, even as the soul that animates every one.

selves. Know ye not your ownelves?" (2 Cor. xiii. 5.) Thus the first duty incumbent upon man, so soon as he is capable of exercising his reason, is to study himself, to become acquainted with his nature, his origin, and to ask himself the question; What am I? what is the end of my existence? who has given me the place I occupy? what am I doing? what am I called upon to do here? But this is not all: having considered his origin, and the excellency of his nature, it behoves man to reflect also on the end, the aim of his life, and to seek after his chief good.

It is with this interesting question that the Catechism commences. "What is the chief and highest end of man?" And since the answer is, that man's chief end is the knowledge of God, it behoves us,

I.—To examine what the knowledge of God is.

II.—To show the end for which man has been created and sent into the world.

III.—To prove that since man has been created for a certain end, it is his duty to act agreeably to that end, seeing that this is his chief good.

"Whom have I in heaven but thee, O God? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee? It is good for me to draw near at all times unto God," Amen. (Ps. lxxiii. 25.) What then is that knowledge of God, which ought to be the chief end of man? Is it a knowledge of the Deity merely speculative? Does it resolve itself into a mere belief that he is all-powerful, all-just, all-good, and all-wise? That his perfections are infinite? Does it consist in knowing only the relationship he bears towards us as our Creator, our Benefactor, our Master, our Sovereign Judge? Doubtless this is a knowledge absolutely necessary, and so much so, that, without it, we can have no religion. How, indeed, shall we serve God, if, in the first place, we are not assured of his existence? How

shall we render unto him appropriate homage if we have not right notions of his nature and attributes? "He that cometh unto God," says St. Paul, "must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Heb. xi. 6.) But nothing is more vain, more useless, than that knowledge which has no influence on the heart and conduct, which produces no sentiment of piety, no act of virtue; and the Scriptures declare that they whose knowledge is of this kind have not the knowledge of God. "He that saith, I know God, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar." (1 John ii. 4.) "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels; and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, and have no charity, I am nothing." (1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2.) It is not therefore sufficient to *know* God; it is necessary for us also to *serve* him.

The knowledge we have of God's goodness ought to inspire us with a love to him without bounds. The knowledge of God's will ought to engage us to put it in practice. Such is the knowledge of God which ought to be the chief end of man.

But why does the Catechism make man's chief end consist in this knowledge? Why does it say simply, that man's chief end is to know God?

1. First, my Brethren, in this the Catechism expresses itself in accordance with Scripture, which always describes the *whole* of religion by *one* of its chief or essential parts. And since the knowledge of God is one of the fundamentals of religion, hence it happens that the Scripture speaks of religion as knowledge merely, and that it says, that those who are righteous *know God*, and those who are unrighteous *know not God*. But further,

2. One proof that, by "the knowledge of God," the Catechism means religion, is this, that in the last article it explains in what this knowledge consists, and it says, that it is in faith, in obedience, in repentance, and confession. And since these are the chief parts of religion, we conclude, that man's chief

end consists not in the simple knowledge of God, but in the practice of all true religion. This is the truth which we come now to prove in our—

PART II.—Why then ought the knowledge of God, or religion, to be the chief end of man's life? Because it is God who gives us life, and since he is the beginning of it, he ought also to be the end—

1. It is from God, we say in the first place, that we derive our life, and he alone can bestow it on us. Of this you will feel convinced, my Brethren, when you consider what man is.

Man is composed of body and soul. Nothing is more wonderful than the structure of the former; the harmony, the order, the proportion of its various parts: but the soul which animates it, which gives it life, which guides and governs it in its operations, includes properties still more wonderful: I mean perception, thought, freedom, and sentiment. Who but God only could form such a being? Assuredly we ourselves could not do so. For, for us to give life, we must have existed and lived before we were in being, which is the greatest of absurdities. Neither did our parents give us life: seeing that in order to bestow life, it is necessary to have in one's-self that which our father and mother had not, having themselves received life from another. Much less are we the production of chance. For being destitute of life, of feeling, of intelligence, of liberty, of wisdom, how could chance have formed a body in which we observe so much order, so great proportion? How could chance have produced a soul which possesses the most wonderful faculties, which thinks, which reasons, which understands, which is master of its own actions, which acts according to its pleasure in the body, and is obeyed by it? No, Brethren, man can acknowledge as his Creator a Being only who has life in himself, who is eternal, all-wise, all-intelligent; who is a Spirit, and who possesses all perfections: and since God alone is such a Being, we aver that none but God can be the author of life, and that he alone has given life to man.

To him it is, that the Scriptures exhort us, in most pressing terms, to pay homage. “ Know ye that the Lord he is God : it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves.” (Ps. c. 3.) God is “ the God of the spirits of all flesh.” (Numb. xvi. 22.) It is “ in him we live, and move, and have our being ; for we also are his offspring :” God “ hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.”

2. This principle then being laid down ; that it is God who has given us life, what is the inference, but that he ought to be the chief end of that life ? For to whom ought we to dedicate our life but to him of whom we hold it ? And since it is to God alone, as we have seen, that we owe our life, that life we are bound to employ in the knowledge and service of him only.

And this will be more manifest, if we show you that God has not, and could not have created man, but for a certain end, and that religion is the chief end which God has in view in giving man life. We do not say, mind you, that this is *the sole* end for which he was created. We know that man was created for divers particular ends, one for one thing, another for another ; but we speak here of the principal, the general, the end common to all, and we maintain, that that end is religion. In order to be convinced of this, we have only to prove these two points.

I.—That God could not have created man but for some end.

II.—That God could not have created him but for an end the most noble, the most worthy of him, and that the end most noble, most worthy of him is religion.

1. God, we say, could not have made man, but for some end. In fact, if there is no workman who has not some object in view, in his work ; who can believe, that God, a Being in-

finitely wise, and, to use the words of St. Paul, "only wise," can have made man, without some end in view?

Besides, my Brethren, cast your eyes on the universe; survey the various classes of creatures; shall you find a single one amongst them which has not its destination, and which serves not for some end? Now, of all creatures man is undoubtedly the most excellent, and holds amongst all others the most distinguished rank, having been made but "a little lower than the angels." Man is the chief workmanship of the Creator. In man we behold, as it were, the universe in miniature. All the qualities, the perfections, which are *distributed* amongst the creatures are *united* in him. Not only is he provided with a body marvellously formed; God has further blessed him with a spirit endowed with the most admirable faculties. And if the Creator has assigned an end to the rest of the creatures, even the very vilest, what shall be said of man, who surpasses all others in dignity? Who can deny that man has been evidently created for some end?

Further, that which permits us not to have a doubt on the subject, is the *manner* in which he has been created. All the creatures sprung out of nothing at the word of the Creator; but when he proposed to create *man*, God deliberated, he held a council: "Let us make man," said he. And as that which is done with deliberation, supposes that some important design is meditated, when we are assured that God deliberated in the creation of man, is it not evident that man was created for some end?

2. But if it be evident that God made man for some end, it is no less evident that his wisdom must have destined him for an end the greatest, the noblest, and the most worthy of him. And what can we conceive more noble, more worthy of God, than the creating a being capable of practising the duties of religion? This is the defect in this universe. Among the prodigious varieties of creatures which fill it, there is not one which can lift itself up to the Creator; not one capable of being the witness, the admirer, the worshipper of the omni-

potent God ; not one which can know him, which can adore him in the greatness of his works, and celebrate the glory of his kingdom. So noble an employment requires an intelligent being. Behold, then, the end appointed for man. God has not only given him a body like the rest of his creation,—he has moreover given him a soul, and along with that soul, an understanding, and a will. And he has endowed him with noble faculties, that he may be known by him, may be loved and glorified as his Creator : it is then clear that the chief end of man is to glorify God.

This truth St. Paul establishes in the words of the text, “ God hath made of one blood all nations of men, that they should seek the Lord.” And since, in the language of Scripture, *to seek the Lord* is to seek to know him, to seek his favour ; to seek to please him ; to adore him ; to call upon his holy name ; to render him religious service ; it follows, that man was created to glorify God.

This truth experience confirms. It is in fact a remarkable thing, that, of all the nations, of all the people who compose the human race, there is not one which does not acknowledge a God, and pay him worship. Now, how could mankind be so unanimous in acknowledging and serving a Deity, if religion were not the chief end of man ? Is not this a sure proof that God hath made all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth, in order that they should seek the Lord ?

Man’s chief end then is to devote himself to the practice of religion : for the creature ought of necessity to follow the design of its Creator, and respond to the end of its creation. And since we have seen that it is to know and honour the Deity that man was created, it follows that man should direct his whole life to this one end, a consequence which naturally follows from the reflections we have made. But the better to feel the force thereof, let us consider the reasons which engage us to reply to this end of our creation. These we shall unfold in our—

PART III.—Three principal reasons induce us to respond to

the end of our creation, and to acquire "The knowledge of God which is godliness, (Tit. i. 1.) 1st, Its excellence; 2d, its necessity; 3d, Its advantages.

1. Its excellence. What knowledge can equal in value the knowledge of God? Is the knowledge of nature, and all its wonders, of the arts and sciences, of the history of peoples and of nations; is such knowledge to be at all compared with the knowledge of God, of that Being "so great and greatly to be praised; whose greatness is unsearchable," (Ps. cxlv. 3,) is worldly knowledge to be compared with the knowledge of God's perfections, his virtues, his infinity, his goodness, his love unbounded, his mercy incomprehensible? with the knowledge of his will, of our duties, and of the road which leads to true happiness? Ask you of Solomon, whom His light and wisdom have made so celebrated, and he will answer you, that human knowledge which men value so highly, is "but vanity, and vexation of spirit;" but that the knowledge of God "is the beginning of wisdom;" that to fear God, to love him, and to keep his commandments is the whole duty of man, his perfection, his happiness, his glory. (Eccl. xii. 15.) If then the knowledge of God excels all other, if it is more excellent, is it not the duty of man, with all his power, to labour to acquire it?

2. That which also is an inducement thereto, is the necessity thereof. The knowledge of God is the base, the foundation, the principle of piety and religion. Such is the necessity of it, that without this knowledge we can possess neither piety nor religion, or at any rate, only a blind religion, a piety false and vain. How, in fact, can we come to God, unless we believe that he exists? How call on him, unless we know that he is willing and able to hear us? How can we apply ourselves to do his will, if we are not instructed therein? How place our confidence in him if we are not assured of his goodness? How can we fear him, if we are ignorant of his power, his holiness, his justice, his threatenings? How can we hope in him, if we are not persuaded of the truth of his promises? How render him the ho-

mage which is his due, if we are ignorant of the relationship he bears towards us of Father, Creator, Redeemer, Legislator, and Judge? How, in a word, can we discharge the duties of piety, justice, and temperance, if we are uninstructed therein? "He that cometh to God," says St. Paul, "must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Heb. xi. 6.)

But besides the necessity of acquiring the knowledge of God, it is necessary to join piety thereto; a piety sincere, fervent, habitual; and to glorify God by a lively acknowledgment of the benefits he confers on us, by an unreserved obedience to his laws, by a firm reliance on his promises, by an entire devotion to his service, by the sacrifice of our souls and bodies; in a word, by holiness of life: for to whom should we live but unto him who has made us; and to whom ought we to consecrate our life but unto him who has given it?

If we had made ourselves, it would rest with us, doubtless, to live according to our own desires. If we hold our existence of chance, we might equally live to chance, without proposing to ourselves any other end than that of pleasing ourselves; but since it is from God that we hold our life, we are no longer our own, but we belong to God. We have, then, no right to dispose of ourselves, to live according to our own will, and the thoughts of our heart; but we are bound to live and act according to our Master's pleasure, and in accordance with his will. This is St. Paul's reasoning. "None of us liveth to himself: but we live unto the Lord." (Rom. xiv. 7, 8.) Now God is our Lord and Master, both by the right of creation, and by virtue of our redemption. It is therefore to him and him alone that we ought to live. "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit which are God's." (1 Cor. vi. 19, 20.)

3. But what, if we prove to you that man is in search of the sovereign good, and that religion alone can procure it for us? Will you not be convinced of the obligation we are under to make religion the chief aim of our life? Nothing is

more certain than this, that we are all in search of *happiness*. This is *the* great object of the desires of all men, the one end of their existence, of their toils, their troubles, their enterprises. This is what the miser, the ambitious man, propose to themselves; this is what the philosopher, the merchant, is in search of. Ask of each of these to what end their occupations, their studies are directed; "it is the chief good we are in search of," will be their answer, with one accord. This is a general desire which manifests itself in all men without exception: which is a proof that it comes from nature, or rather from the God of nature, who has implanted it in our souls to be the end and aim of all our actions.

Observe, too, that this happiness, this object of our desires, is not a passing, a limited, an imperfect good. The heart of man is too great, too noble, too vast, to be contented with imperfection. Nothing less than infinity and eternity can satisfy man's soul. And since this sovereign good is only to be found in heaven, in God himself, and in an eternal possession of it, behold we the happiness of which we are all in search. It is the perfect bliss which is to be found with the Supreme Being, in the abode of his glory. A bliss which consists in the sight of this adorable Being, in communion with him, in enjoyment of, in likeness to him. We speak in the terms of Scripture: for it says, that "we shall ever be with the Lord," (1 Thess. iv. 17); that "we shall see him as he is," (1 John iii. 2); that "we shall see him face to face," (1 Cor. xiii. 12); that "we shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory," (2 Cor. iii. 18); "O happiness unspeakable, life eternal, a glorious immortality which Jesus Christ hath brought to light through the Gospel!" (2 Tim. i. 10.)

But what do we say? Is a being like man capable of glory so great, and can he hope to enter into the abode of blessedness? "Lord, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him, or the son of man, that thou makest account of him?" (Ps. cxliv. 3.) Yes, Brethren, and the reasons why we indulge this hope, are—

