

# **SERMONS**

OF

**SAMUEL STANHOPE SMITH, D. D.**

LATE PRESIDENT OF PRINCETON COLLEGE, NEW JERSEY.

TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

**A BRIEF MEMOIR**

OF HIS

**LIFE AND WRITINGS.**

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**DAVID CALDWELL.**

*Clerk of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania.*

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# SERMONS.

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## HISTORY OF THE GOLDEN CALF.

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And all the people brake off the golden ear rings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf; and they said, these be thy Gods O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.—*Exod.* xxxii. 3, 4.

THERE is in the human heart a strange perversity and disposition to forget God our maker, which, if it were not so common, not to say universal, would be almost incredible. The richest mercies of divine providence, which, at the moment, perhaps, have awakened all the powers of gratitude, soon escape from the remembrance of men; and the most awful displays of the majesty and justice of God, when they are past, speedily cease to leave behind them any traces of those deep impressions which once appeared as if they could never be effaced. The idolatry of Israel at the very base of Mount Sinai, affords a striking exemplification of these remarks. They had seen the mountain enveloped with clouds, convulsed with thunders, and all on flame with lightnings, while God, from the midst of these tremendous tokens of his presence, proclaimed to the trembling na-



tion that holy law, the fundamental principle of which is the unity of the divine nature, and the crime of idolatry. Yet, hardly were these dreadful signals from heaven past, when they relapsed into the idolatrous habits of Egypt, and their early prejudices in favour of a visible God. Moses had not yet been forty days in the summit of the mountain, (along with Joshua his friend, and the future commander of his armies) receiving the details of the moral, civil and religious laws by which Israel was to be governed, when they had already erected an idol, and were dancing round it with a frantic joy, after the example of the pagan nations, and, particularly, of their Egyptian masters in the worship of Apis their principal god. Their leader was absent beyond the period which they had fixed for his return; his word no longer instructed, his presence no longer controuled them; little susceptible as yet of those spiritual ideas which Moses endeavoured to impart to them of the divine nature, the grossness of their minds, and the prejudices of early habits and examples, demanded some visible symbol of the Deity on which they might fix their reverence, and which their imagination might animate with a divine intelligence, and invest with a mysterious power. They besieged Aaron with their clamours *to give them Gods who might go before them.* Aaron, through weakness, yielded to their importunity or their menaces: or, perhaps, not yet sufficiently instructed in the spirituality of that new law which prohibited every material representation of the Infinite and Eternal Mind who cannot be imaged by any visible form, thought he was not departing far from his duty by offering to the senses of a gross people some object which might at-

tract and fix their devotion.\* *He*, not less than the body of the nation, had the principles of his religion, in a great measure, yet to learn from Moses, who was the sole interpreter to them of the will of God. He seems to have forgotten that all visible symbols, instead of elevating the mind of a gross people, in a holy and spiritual devotion, to the Supreme Deity, soon attach its veneration to themselves. He forgot that great and reasonable, and immutable command which forbade him to make any image of the Deity, or *the likeness of any thing in heaven or on earth*, to be worshipped for him; and this under the most rigorous denunciations. He accordingly called for the golden ornaments of the people, he framed the mould of a calf, or a small ox, for the original term may signify either, and cast in it that detestable image which awakened the just displeasure of Almighty God, and kindled even an unholy anger in the breast of the meekest man upon earth. After he took it from the rough mould, he perfected the figure and all the nicer lineaments by the tool of the engraver.—Moses, at the command of God, descended from the mountain, (along with Joshua,) to arrest the growing spirit of idolatry, and that dangerous defection from his laws which had so soon sprung up in the camp of Israel. When he saw the base idol, its altar, and its deluded votaries shouting and leaping round it with that wild frenzy which only became the scenes of riot and debauchery; bereft for a moment of his usual

\* The word translated *Gods* in this passage is *Elohim*, in the plural number, indeed, but the same which is translated *Lord* in the fifth verse; and which is usually employed, before the publication of the name *Jehovah*, to signify the God of Israel.

moderation, for the sacred writers impartially record their own faults, he forgot even the awful presence of God, and the majesty of that holy law the tables of which he was bearing in his hands; he dashed the tables to the earth and broke them to pieces, and *he spoke unadvisedly with his lips*. Moses had nursed this people as a father his children, he had redeemed them from bondage, he had made them a nation, he had exposed himself to dangers, and submitted to toils for them, he had instructed them, protected them, comforted them in their trials, and was guiding them to perpetual habitations; yet with vile ingratitude, they so soon forgot his admonitions and himself. God had displayed in their behalf the most astonishing wonders, he had promulgated to them his holy law in the midst of the most dreadful tokens of his power, and his justice, yet with monstrous impiety, they so soon violated that law, and transferred his glory to the image of a brute! Moses, whose soul was all enlightened with the beauties of divine truth, and inflamed with a dutiful and holy zeal for the glory of God who had deigned to honour him with such familiar intercourse, was struck with horror at their act, and knew not how to pardon the baseness of their crime.—Although his zeal, at first, partook too much of the impatience and weakness of humanity, yet the crime was of so high and dangerous a nature, tending to overturn the whole system of government which he was so anxiously labouring to establish, that, in his most cool and deliberate moments, he determined that it was necessary to inflict an exemplary public justice on such an act of treason and rebellion. It was not a civil offence, which could be brought before the ordi-

nary tribunals of the ancients established in their respective tribes; it was the revolt of a great part of the nation against the fundamental principle of the government, which was a theocracy: of a nation constantly under arms in the midst of hostile regions, and subjected to military discipline. Moses therefore resolved on a military execution, and three thousand men\* perished for their fault. These were but a small proportion of those who were embarked in the treason: but they were sufficient for a terrible example to all those who were disposed to disobedience and mutiny. And every mind that reflects dispassionately on the state of that people, will be convinced that such an example was necessary. Subjected to new laws, and to a discipline different from that of all other nations, grown up in habits and prejudices opposed to that better order of things under which they were now placed, submitting reluctantly to institutions too pure for their gross minds, with arms in their hands, they were peculiarly liable to be misled by the artifices of those designing men, who were ever ready to excite them to revolt, unless they saw the terrors of divine providence, or the sword of military vengeance, continually suspended over the heads of the offenders. On this occasion Moses called for volunteers from the army, whose pious zeal, and whose ardent patriotism would dispose them to execute the sentence. The sons of Levi presented themselves to their general, who ordered them to gird on their swords, to pass through the camp from gate to gate, and to kill every man his brother, his friend, his neighbour;

\* Voltaire, to aggravate the pretended cruelty of Moses, says 30,000.



that is, whomsoever of the idolaters he should meet in his course; for every Israelite was neighbour and brother to every other. The order amounted to this,—let no considerations of private sympathies, or of your social feelings on this great and interesting occasion, arrest the course of public justice. The orders being given, the culprits would naturally flee and endeavour to conceal themselves;—but few were met by the band of volunteers who traversed the camp, and three thousand only, of the vast multitude involved in this transgression, fell victims to the just vengeance of the law. This punishment, to inattentive or uninformed readers, seems severe, and it has often served as a subject of declamation to the ignorant or designing enemies of religion, who have not considered that the sin of abandoning the worship of the true God involved in it also, such was the constitution of their government, the crime of rebellion against their supreme executive and legislative power, and that a nation *encamped*, though it enjoyed also its civil tribunals, was necessarily subject to military law. This punishment was entirely equivalent in its nature, although different in the mode of execution, to one which frequently took place in the Roman legions, in the case of mutiny, and was stiled by them decimation. Every tenth man was drawn by lot, and ordered for execution. It is probable that, in the punishment inflicted by Moses, still a smaller proportion than every tenth man suffered death. And it has this analogy with the Roman that it was wholly accidental which of the offenders fell under the sword of military justice. This awful and salutary example being given to the trembling and astonished nation, Moses cast the

golden calf into the fire, and reduced it to a fine powder, and mixing it with the stream of Horeb, which still followed them, it formed, in this way, a most bitter and nauseous draught, which he compelled the remainder of the rebels to drink.

The just displeasure of Almighty God, however, was still ready to break forth against an impious generation. Moses, penetrated with the most deep and poignant grief, and remembering his character of intercessor with God, as well as of legislator of the nation, again retired to his holy obscurity, and entered that awful cloud, which still covered the top of the mountain. There he poured out the most fervent supplications to heaven in behalf of an offending people. *Oh! Lord! if thou wilt forgive them!* (a curt form of expression for, *I beseech thee to pardon them;*) *and if not, blot me I pray thee out of the book which thou hast written!* This is a prayer which has given rise to much critical discussion. Some have carried their ideas to such a pitch of extravagance as to imagine that Moses prayed to be blotted out of the book of eternal life;—and have asserted that it is even a reasonable test of genuine piety and zeal for the glory of God, and the interests of religion in the world, to be willing, if necessary, to suffer eternal damnation to promote them. These wild visions of a heated brain it would not be necessary to refute, even if we could give no other interpretation to the words. But they evidently imply a prayer that, if God did not spare his people, he would then blot out his servant Moses, also, from among the living,—that God would take him out of this miserable life; as all his glory, his pleasures and his hopes,—all the objects for which he could desire to live, would



then be at end.—The people of Israel preserved registers and genealogies of all their citizens, and records of the actions of all their public men, for the information both of the present and future generations. Hence, to express the knowledge which God possessed of men, and their transactions, it became an easy and familiar figure to say that they were recorded by him in a book—to be blotted out of the book written by him, is to be taken from life, to be blotted from the records of the living.\* The importunate prayer of this great intercessor, the type of him who is intercessor for the sins of the world, was successful; God promised to suspend the dreadful execution of his justice. But, that they might not grow secure and presumptuous, he threatens still to bear it in remembrance in their future crimes. *Now go and lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to thee; nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them. I will visit upon them this sin.*

Having presented to you, with great brevity, the history of this extraordinary transaction, I proceed to answer some inquiries which arise out of it, to reply to some objections which have been made to this part of the sacred writings, and to propose some pious and practical reflections which may be suggested by the whole view we shall have taken of the subject.—In the first place, then, what could have tempted the people of Israel, or what could have so sunk and degraded the human mind in any nation, as to induce it to offer to a vile and senseless ox, that worship which is due only to the Infinite and Eternal Spirit who made the heavens

\* See Isaiah v. 3.

and the earth, and who fills the universe with his presence?—Israel probably borrowed this idolatry from Egypt where the supreme deity was worshipped under the form of a living ox. This ox, which was denominated Apis, was required by their laws to possess certain qualities very rare and difficult to be found in that species. And when the beast with the requisite characters was discovered, he was introduced into the temple amidst the highest exultations of the deluded people, and there nourished and served with the most profound veneration. Animals of various kinds, and even vegetables were adored in Egypt. Do you ask farther, whence could spring this monstrous debasement of reason? It was the natural offspring of ignorance and superstition combined with the peculiar customs of the country. Ignorance, whose conceptions are all gross and material, demanded, to aid its devotion, sensible images, which should stand as representations of the attributes and perfections of the Deity: superstition soon transferred to these images themselves, the veneration which was due only to the Creator. I said it was the offspring of ignorance and superstition combined with the peculiar customs of the country. Egypt was the region of hieroglyphic, in which, before the general use of alphabetical writing, all moral, political, and theological science, and even the properties of the divine mind, were represented by sensible objects, by animals, by vegetables, by mathematical figures, whose properties were supposed to bear the greatest analogy to the ideas for which they stood as the signs. Among these, the ox seems to have been chosen, for his strength, and for his utility, particularly in agriculture, to be the hiero-

glyphic, or representative image of the power and the beneficent providence of God. The image, at first, was innocent, and employed merely as a sign, as, in symbolical pictures, to this day, we see the lion employed as the emblem of strength and courage, the cock of vigilance, the pillar of stability. But superstition seizing, abused it, as it is prone to abuse all sensible images in divine worship; and the Apis became the sovereign Deity in Egypt. The Israelites received the superstitions of their masters, and in spite of all the wonders which were displayed before their eyes, and all the lights which were poured upon their minds from heaven, they were continually prone to return to their former habits, and their former errors. Ah! how hard is it for a fallen nature, for a degraded reason and a corrupted heart, to receive the pure and spiritual lights of truth! How many ages has the light of revelation been combating with the darkness of Paganism; and with what difficulty, at last, has it established those noble and sublime ideas of the divine nature which every where prevail in the Christian world, in the room of those gross conceptions which, in the ancient and Heathen world, raised it but little above the human; which often sunk it, indeed, below the brutal! This consideration may lessen, in some degree, our wonder at the stupidity, the perverseness, and the crimes of Israel.

M. Voltaire, whose historical accuracy has never been much esteemed, and whose wit is certainly much superior to his science, has proposed two objections to the history of the golden calf, one which he thinks plausible at least, another which he esteems irrefragable. But, like most objections against the sacred writings, a little

attention, and a little knowledge are sufficient to resolve them. He asserts, and this is his plausible objection, that it was impossible for a band of poor and fugitive slaves in the wilderness, to find gold sufficient for the casting even of a small ox. The philosopher of Ferney forgot the size and weight of the golden ornaments worn by all classes of people in those rich countries—he forgot that the host of Israel consisted of near three millions of persons—and that they came loaded with wealth, which they either borrowed, or seized, as the reward of their long and cruel servitude in Egypt.—He says farther, and this is his irrefragable argument, that the story of Moses reducing the golden calf to a fine powder, rendered potable with water, is a falsehood and absurdity, because the thing was impossible. Yes, profane wits! it is such an absurdity as you often impute to the Bible, it rests in your own ignorance;—you publish your ravings, and then think you have demolished the authority of the sacred scriptures. He says, with triumph, there is no human art which can reduce gold to such a powder. Voltaire, before he denounced Moses with such arrogance, should have examined more accurately the sphere of his own knowledge. Voltaire lived in the infancy of chemistry, and he was surely no chemist or he would have known that two very common substances, (sulphur and the salt of tartar,) united in proper quantities, will operate this effect. As a natural historian he should have known that there is a substance, the natron, which grows commonly on the banks of the Nile, and with which Moses must have been well acquainted, which operates the same effect. This example shows the danger of resting too much weight on



objections against the history or the doctrines of the scriptures merely because our knowledge of antiquities, or of nature, may not be sufficient to resolve them. If this objection had been proposed before chemical science had been sufficiently advanced to afford its solution, would it not have afforded a triumphant argument, in the opinion of certain enemies of religion, against the authority of the great and inspired legislator of the Jews? And yet we now see that it would have had its origin only in the ignorance of its author, and derived its weight entirely from the ignorance of his readers.

But is it not strange, is it not unaccountable, if the people of Israel saw the tremendous tokens of the divine majesty upon Mount Sinai, if they heard the trumpet, if they beheld the flames, if they felt the earthquakes which shook the mountain at the presence of its Maker, and, under the impression of all these terrors, offered their vows to heaven and confirmed their national covenant, that they should so soon relapse into idolatry, and violate that law which they had heard proclaimed by the voice of God? Does it not bring, with reflecting men, the reality of these miraculous histories into doubt? No, reflecting men who behold the corruption of the world, who see the thousand follies, crimes, enormities of the human heart every day, will know that there is no impiety of which it is not capable. Let me confirm this observation by our own example, do we not daily behold more magnificent spectacles of divine power and wisdom in the heavens and the earth, in the sun, the moon, and the stars, than Israel saw in all the terrors of the burning mountain? And yet, does not the *fool* continue to say in his heart *there is no God?* Does he not pro-

claim his being with a voice which reaches through the universe? and yet, do not you, with ungrateful Israel, forget him? Is not the law written on your heart by his own finger, confirmed by all the glorious evidences of his justice and his power in the works of creation which surround you? And yet, do you not thoughtlessly and impiously go,—do you not go with a bold profanity in the midst of all these wonders to violate it?—Do you say that the cases are not parallel? that the wonders of creation have lost their effect by their familiarity? Take then, those more rare and awful displays of his justice and his terrible majesty, in which every heart appalled, confesses and feels his presence. Pressed under the hand of God have you at some times apprehended the approach of death? Has pestilence invaded the city; and does every face gather blackness and despair? Can you forbear in these cases to acknowledge the hand of God which, by its terrible chastisements, would recall you to your duty? Have you not trembled? have you not sent your prayers to heaven? have you not confirmed your duty by ten thousand vows? Have not crowded churches, and solemn assemblies, attested the universal conviction that God was present as upon Mount Sinai? But let him deliver you from death; let his mercy hear the prayers of the city and drive far from it the destroying plague; and do these awful impressions any longer remain upon the heart? Are the promises, the vows of affliction remembered in health? Alas! what scenes of dissipation have been known to pass almost over the graves which a few weeks before seemed to open to the terrified sight the mouth of the infernal abyss? Was Israel more forgetful, more impious even



at the foot of the mountain of God?—No, my brethren, sinners may behold the most glorious or the most awful displays of the divine majesty and power; they may tremble, they may pray, they may bind themselves by the most sacred vows in the moments of their terror; yet hardly are these signals of heaven past till the unsanctified heart returns to its former channels, the sinner to his lusts, the idolater to his Gods.

If these reflections account for the crime of an ungrateful and undutiful nation, they do not however justify it. The principles of this crime, alas! are deeply seated in human nature; but this, instead of being their apology, only presents to us a more dark and humiliating view of the human heart. It is a truth too often illustrated by melancholy experience, that *the heart of the children of men is fully set in them to do evil*. The conduct of the people of Israel,\* is but a picture of the world. Do you not see mankind ungrateful like Israel for the beneficence of divine providence, rebellious like Israel against the authority and the laws of God, unmoved like Israel by the most awful displays of his power, almost insensible to that sublime spectacle which the universe every where presents of the presence and the glory of its Creator. But shall I refer you to the example of mankind? Hearer! do you not perceive the shameful truth in your own heart; in your own heart, which is but an image of the world? Learn by acquaintance with yourselves, to observe and deplore the corruption of human nature. And, my brethren, when we see, in the history

\* It frequently shocks us the more by the details of forty years being crowded, in the narration, into a narrow compass, and seeming to press on one another in such close succession.

of ungrateful Israel, so many subjects of reproach and condemnation, let us turn our thoughts inward and see, considering our superior lights and mercies, still greater causes of humility and repentance in ourselves.

This portion of the sacred history may suggest to us another reflection, of very serious import, on the nature and the guilt of that crime which drew on that people such an exemplary vengeance from their great legislator, moved and guided by the authority of heaven. Not only was it a direct rebellion and revolt against God who acted as the immediate ruler of that nation by responses, by oracles, and by a particular providence; but it went to corrupt the principle of the national prosperity, and even the national existence, which was religion. When their religion was violated, and its authority denied, their laws were overturned, the foundations of the public virtue were destroyed, internal anarchy ensued, they became a prey to their foreign enemies. My brethren, a like providence is extended over all nations by general laws, of which Israel, by the particular dispensations exercised towards her, gives us only a more visible and striking example. It is still true as it was among them that *righteousness exalteth a nation*, and that *sin will prove the calamity*, and, finally, *the destruction of any people*. Whatever, therefore, augments the general mass of vice in a nation, whatever tends to impair or undermine the public virtue, whatever denies, corrupts, or weakens the influence of religion, which is the only solid basis of the national morality, certainly and necessarily exposes a people to those calamities which are the sure indications, and the just effects of the divine displeasure. If the hand of heaven is not seen among

us so visibly lifted up, if its judgments are not announced by prophets, and executed by angels, if we must trace it through second causes, it is not less certain and awful in its operations. The divine government over the people of Israel was the visible model of that secret dominion which is extended over all the kingdoms of the earth. Immorality and irreligion are the grave of empires and of nations. If the judgments of God are delayed; if they frequently appear for a moment and are suspended, yet will they fall at last with accumulated vengeance on the head of the guilty. He is continually saying by his providence, *nevertheless, when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.* Sins which now seem to be passed over, sins, the punishment of which is suspended, waiting for their repentance, shall be recorded in a book, they shall all be remembered, at length, to aggravate the fearful and exterminating strokes of my justice.—Consider this all ye that forget God. The truth applies to individuals as well as to nations. The suspension is not the renunciation of judgment. The day of retribution will come. It will come with the greater terror both from having been delayed, and from not having been expected. Renounce your sins by repentance, yield your hearts to the grace of the Redeemer, seek your refuge beneath his cross. AMEN!

## PATRIOTISM.

*Delivered on the 28th of September, 1808, the Sunday  
preceding the annual commencement.*

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If I forget thee O Jerusalem! let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.—*Psalm*, cxxxvii. 5, 6.

MOSES infused the whole force of religion into his political institutions; and along with the most profound respect for its public rites, incorporated the purest principles of patriotism in the system of education which he prescribed for the youth of his extraordinary republic. Every consideration which could inspire them with the love of country, and make them glory in the name of Israel, was assiduously inculcated upon them from their earliest years. The book of their law, which embraced in one code their political, civil, moral and ceremonial institutions, was carefully preserved, and continually read in every family; they were required frequently to assemble at Jerusalem to hear it solemnly expounded by ministers peculiarly designated for this purpose; the chief fervor of the patriotic sentiment they directed towards the capital of their religion, and their country, in which was their temple, their altars, and the ark of the covenant which God had made with their fathers; they were taught to respect themselves as enjoying the wisest laws, the purest, and sublimest conceptions of God, and of human duty, of any nation upon



earth; sprung from the same blood, they identified the ideas of country, and of kindred; and every Israelite, in his fellow citizen beheld his brother; their polity, their laws, their religion, and their common ancestry formed to them but one great and proud idea.

It has been ignorantly objected as a reproach to christianity by its enemies, that the virtue of patriotism is nowhere prescribed among its moral precepts. On the contrary, we see throughout the Old Testament, the love of country, of the laws, institutions, religion, and people of Israel, which forms the true notion of patriotism, enjoined as a duty, or recommended as a perfection, in the whole system of the Mosaic legislation, in the writings of the prophets, and in the history of the pious and conspicuous worthies of that favoured nation. If it is less directly inculcated in the discourses of Christ, and his apostles, it is because they were not addressing the people of any particular country, who had laws and a government of their own. Besides, all the world was at that moment sunk under a violent and unrelenting despotism; and discourses of that nature, would perhaps have tended only to tumult and insurrection. But our duties to our country, no less than those to our families, result from the whole spirit of that benevolence which is the fundamental principle of the gospel.

This psalm seems to have been composed by some pious Jew, during the captivity of the nation at Babylon. The captives often wept at the remembrance of their country, always dear to them, but now more dear, since they were exiled from it. Being required by their enemies, in derision, to sing one of the songs of Zion, accompanied, as they always were, with the melody of

the harp; this profane insult served only to renew the recollection of their city, of their temple, and the worship of Jehovah with increased tenderness.—If I forget thee O Jerusalem! says the devout and inspired poet, let my right hand forget her skill to touch this hallowed instrument, which should be employed only in the solemn worship of the king of Zion. Rather let it hang silent on the willows of Euphrates. Rather let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, which used to be vocal only in the high praises of our God.—These words contain a warm and patriotic effusion, expressive of the zeal of the sacred author, for the glory of Jerusalem, the capital of his beloved country, the centre of its religion, government, and laws. His heart was penetrated with deep affliction for the desolations in which it had long lain. He was dissolved with grief at the mournful recollection of its past prosperity and his own happiness, when he came up with the assemblies of his kindred nation to worship in its holy temple. His grief was the irresistible impulse of a patriotic love of his country. It was all the expression of it which, in his humbled and exiled condition, he had it in his power to give. We see here a pure and sacred example of the spirit of patriotism expressed with peculiar fervor. This sentiment, so noble and honourable in itself, and recommended by so great and holy an authority, I purpose to make the subject of our reflections in the present discourse, in which I shall

I. In the first place, explain the principle of patriotism, by which a good citizen is attached to his country; and in the next place,



II. Illustrate the obligations that result from this relation; or point out the primary duties of a good citizen.

I. True patriotism, the principle of so many other virtues, is a complicated and powerful affection, which attaches us to the region in which we have received our birth, to the people with whom we have become assimilated by common ideas, common manners, and common interest, and to that form of government and system of laws which preside over our union, safety, and happiness; and serve to connect us in one great political body. Our country may not possess greater advantages of soil, of climate, of cultivation, it may not have arrived at a higher state of refinement in arts and manners than other portions of the earth; in the career of improvement, it may yet be even far behind. But being endeared to us by residence and habit, by being the scene of our early pleasures, and all our best enjoyments, and containing the objects of our dearest affections, it blends itself with all the finest feelings of the heart, and holds us bound to it by the tenderest and the most numerous ties. The men of other nations may be no less worthy our esteem than our own countrymen; but we are best acquainted with human nature as it is exhibited in the manners and habits of the latter, and appears in them cast in the same mould with ourselves; we therefore mingle our affections more easily and cordially with theirs, and more easily enter with them into those benevolent and sympathetic feelings, which most closely and agreeably connect man with man. Many causes tend to throw the inhabitants of different nations at a distance from one another, and to impede the free course of those mutual sentiments, which so much en-

dear to us our friends, and fellow citizens. A thousand nameless pleasures on the other hand, a thousand powerful interests, a thousand delicate sympathies, serve to attach men to their native country, which, generally speaking, they cannot feel towards other portions of the world. And it seems to be the intention of the Supreme Author of our being, by thus circumscribing our affections and our duties within a sphere to which our limited faculties can extend their operation with complete effect, more certainly to promote the happiness of the whole.

The spirit of the gospel requires that we should be ready to comfort and assist human nature wherever it presents an object to our benevolence which needs our aid, and which we are able to relieve. But the entire mass of mankind forms a system too vast to be the direct and immediate end of our actions. This immense sphere is subdivided into many inferior circles; and when each man circumscribes his labours to promote the interests and improvement of one, the prosperity of the whole is the result of the well directed efforts of all. Country embraces, perhaps, the largest portion of mankind which can be the direct object of our public affections and actions. And, combining so many great and interesting ideas as it does, patriotism, next to our duty to heaven, forms the noblest and most powerful object and principle of action in a generous and virtuous breast. Still should it be so subordinate to the universal principle of philanthropy, as to check that contempt and aversion towards other nations which is apt to arise in contracted and ignorant minds; and above all, to repress that injustice to which the pernicious, and cruel pas-

sions of ambition and avarice so often give birth. Let it be the study of every good citizen to promote the improvement, to seek the perfection, to defend the rights of his country. He may be permitted to indulge a generous pride in her glory, but it should ever be with that liberal candour which is ready to acknowledge the merit of every other nation; with that rigid justice which will never lend his aid to infringe their sacred rights; with that philanthropy which never forgets that all nations are our brethren.

It is but occasionally, however, that the patriotic principle becomes the immediate spring of action in the mass of citizens; when certain general operations of the state, or when some great crisis present its interests directly to the view of the great body of the people, and call for their united exertions. The republic, like the world, is again divided into subordinate spheres, embracing each man's domestic circle. Here the father of the family should sit like a presiding angel, charged with its happiness. His ordinary duty is to promote the comfort and order of that narrow sphere, immediately entrusted to his care, and to make it move in harmony with the general system. By judiciously presiding over its welfare, he fulfils one of the most interesting duties which providence has assigned to man, and contributes in the most effectual manner to general good. The aggregate of happy families constitutes the happiness of the great community of the republic. At the same time, the love of country should hold such high and commanding influence in his soul, that, to promote her interest, or her glory, when she demanded his aid, he should be ready to consecrate his time, his talents, or his fortune, in her

defence; when endangered by the injustice of her enemies, he should be ready to devote his life. Such is the law, such is the generous impulse of true patriotism. The interests of each man must be dearer to himself than those of his neighbour; but the accumulated interests of a great nation, to which we are attached as members to the body, form a vast and complicated object of affection, fitted to rouse and engage all the best passions and powers of the soul; and to swallow up all private considerations, in great and noble minds. The love of country, called into high and vigorous action on great occasions, is the sublimest impulse of our nature. It has accordingly attracted the highest admiration of mankind in all ages, and formed the noblest subject to the pen of the historian, and the fancy of the poet.

II. Having spoken of the principle of patriotism, I proceed briefly to illustrate the obligations which result from it; or to point out some of the principal duties of a good citizen.

These duties I shall embrace under two heads—virtue and piety; the former comprehending those duties which tend by a direct influence to the public prosperity; the latter, those which more indirectly or remotely contribute to the same end, by promoting good morals, and obtaining the favour of God, in whose hands are the destinies of nations.

That virtue which is the basis of the prosperity and stability of free states, consists in public spirit, in industry, frugality, temperance and justice. Justice and industry are the surest foundations of social order, and of the general prosperity. These virtues, when they form the distinguished character of a people, are among



the most certain indications that effeminacy and dissolution of manners, and the corrupting love of pleasure, which rot at heart the strength of nations, have not yet invaded them. And when united with temperance and frugality, their sister virtues, they produce a people firm, resolute and hardy, whose aims are not basely absorbed within themselves; but who have reserved the full energies of their souls for the defence and service of their country, when her exigencies require their aid. They are capable of enduring the most arduous self-denials, of making the noblest sacrifices to the safety or the glory of their country. Such a people is invincible.

But, it is my purpose chiefly to make a few observations on public spirit, which is the peculiar virtue of free governments, and which, indeed, in all others, would be useless or pernicious. A republic, forming but one political body, should be animated by one spirit—a fervent attachment to the common weal. As a wise and prudent self-love is continually studying the happiness and perfection of the individual; the perfection and happiness of the community, is the object of the patriotic principle. It aims at the public interest, in opposition to all factious views; it is solicitous to preserve pure the sources of legislation and of justice; it is anxious to promote not only the more solid interests of the country, but its convenience and ornament; it is concerned to enlighten the nation, as the best mean of preserving its liberties; and, finally, it is prepared to defend with ardour, and at every hazard, the existence, the rights, and the true glory of the republic.

It aims at the public interest in opposition to all factious views. Faction is the bane of republican states.

Its leaders are ever actuated by proud and ambitious, or by base and mercenary motives, and the ignorant and misled populace are unwillingly made the instruments of their own disgrace, and of the ruin of the state. No men hold the understanding and the interest of the people so cheap as those who play upon their credulity and their passions, to render them the tools of their own designs. The ancient republics have left an instructive and a dreadful lesson to posterity, if posterity would ever receive instruction from the errors and misfortunes of those who have preceded them. At the periods at which they seemed to have attained the summit of their glory, their liberties perished in the vortex of faction. The wretches who conduct and inflame these disorders, are always the pretended friends of the people. Always some popular watch-word is given out to their followers. And, although they should begin their career with patriotic motives, mistaking or disregarding at length the true interests of their country, their patriotism forever ends in a criminal ambition of power. Having tasted the sweets of power precedently, they are unwilling to relinquish them; and to maintain the control which they have once acquired, no means are deemed unlawful. The public good is sunk in individual interests; and, by degrees, the violence and bitterness of party feuds rise to that implacable degree that, for victory or vengeance, they will rather throw themselves into the arms of an enemy than yield to the superiority of a rival. Athens unhappily affords not the only example of a republic destroyed by the corrupting arts of a Philip, seconded by the blind credulity and absurd devotion of internal faction.

If you would preserve the sources of the legislation, and the justice of the commonwealth pure, which is the next object of public spirit, it is of high importance that you should conscientiously exercise that portion of the general sovereignty entrusted to you by the constitution in the public elections. The rights of suffrage are a sacred deposit committed to every citizen, to control the ambition, avarice, or caprice, of those who are invested with the temporary powers of legislation, which he should neither neglect to use to their proper end, nor exercise without the most scrupulous caution and the most serious reflection. That ground, so often, to the reproach of republics, made a scene of tumult and disorder, should be approached with reverence. In the primary assemblies of the people, may be said to originate the laws on which the most sacred interests of life and property, and liberty and national prosperity depend. They ought to be regarded as grave and solemn conventions, whence clamor and passion, and party violence ought to be banished; to which should be admitted only prudence, calm consideration, and enlightened discussion. When the best citizens desert the elections, ignorance and low intrigue, and the partisans of dishonesty, who have always their motives to be active, acquire the direction of the popular voice. In a corrupted state of the commonwealth, when faction drives the wise, the prudent and discerning, from the assemblies of the people, the elections exhibit the low scenes of brothel violence and riot, or become a stormy sea, agitated by adverse tempests, which never subside till they sink in the dead calm of despotism. The populace, flattered and inflamed by their demagogues till

they can no longer bear the mild control of the laws, will, with their own hands, prepare a master for themselves.

I said, in the next place, that public spirit, imitating the private affection, is solicitous not only to increase and strengthen the more solid interests of the state, which consist in agriculture, commerce, the arts of peace, and the necessary means of defence in war, but to promote, likewise, its convenience and ornament. Nor is this contrary to another and acknowledged maxim of republican government which requires plainness and simplicity in the accommodations and manners of private citizens. At Athens, in the flourishing periods of that republic, while the houses of individuals were of the simplest structure, nothing could exceed the majesty of their temples, the convenience of their port, the beauty of their gymnasia and their academies, the elegance of their porticos and public walks, the multitude and perfection of their statues and paintings. In this capital of Grecian learning and elegance, all the arts were enlisted to give splendor to the city, to give majesty to religion, and to reward the patriotism of her illustrious citizens. Each one, simple in his own habitation, frugal and temperate in his own enjoyments, was contented to reserve all his magnificence for his country. While he opened his own door by a simple latch, temples, columns and statues, rose to the honor of their gods and their heroes; poetry and history were employed to extol their praises in the public assemblies, and to consign them to immortality. Hence Athens enjoyed the double advantage of bestowing splendor on her citizens, without effeminating their manners, and of



calling forth all the talents of the republic in her service, without corrupting them by the rewards she bestowed. The love of glory and of country, not avarice, became the ruling passion of her patriots.

To this example might I point as a lesson to our country: perhaps I might point to it as her reproach, when we reflect that the great Washington lies undistinguished by any monument or any trophy, covered by the simple turf on the margin of the Potomac. But Washington will find a monument in the heart of every good man; his trophies shall exist in the eternal page of history.

But, besides the grand and noble works of public utility undertaken by the state, for its own aggrandizement or interest, it is greatly to be desired that the laws and customs of the country could invite the wealthy to voluntary expenses for the same end. If, instead of lavishing their wealth in ostentatious equipages and splendid decorations of their persons, in sumptuous palaces, and menial trains, which only attract envy, corrupt the public taste, and sink the rich in effeminating pleasures, they would employ it on works of public benefit, which procure a sincere and unenvied glory; on monuments, to reward illustrious merit; on libraries for the public use, in which to collect the wisdom and experience of ages; on institutions to diffuse the sacred light of philosophy and truth; on public ways by land or water; and even on gardens, galleries and walks, to promote the innocent and elegant amusements of the people,—it would be a noble and patriotic taste in expense, which would not deprave the heart, and would surround the generous author with a higher

glory, and impart to him a sincerer transport than all the proud distinctions of rank, or all the voluptuous enjoyments of luxury. Such a taste introduced into society, would furnish the best remedy of the evils which necessarily spring from the unequal distributions of fortune. Behold, then, a duty which the wealthy owe to the country which protects their fortune. Behold a duty which they owe to themselves, to their reputation, to their fame, to their legitimate influence in the commonwealth.

A genuine spirit of patriotism is still more concerned to establish and extend among the people the means of general and useful information. The ancient legislators made the education of the youth of the republic, so as to prepare them for discharging honorably the peculiar duties of citizens, much more an object of their political institutions than the moderns have done. By these it has been too much abandoned to ignorance and caprice, or to total neglect. An enlightened people cannot easily be enslaved; and the extensive diffusion of knowledge through the mass of a nation; greatly augments the sum of public happiness. I am not about to propose any general plan of education for the state; but may be permitted to say, that it is what every great and free people owe to themselves, to make ample provision for the cultivation of the sublimer sciences, and to afford a generous encouragement to the improvement of the liberal arts. Such was the noble idea cherished by the great father of his country, equally the friend of letters and of liberty. And it is of still greater importance to provide for the common education of the citizens, and to carry a certain degree of useful, practical

knowledge home to every man's door. All the youth of the republic should be taught to understand that constitution of government under which they live, and to be made acquainted with the outlines of those laws which guard their property and their lives, and preside over the public peace and safety. No legislative care could contribute more to public order, and to the preservation of that constitution and those laws so necessary to the public liberty and happiness. The state, assuming the care of her children from their earliest years, should endeavour to render them worthy of her. Genuine public spirit, in the last place, is ever prepared to defend with ardor, and at every hazard, the existence, the right, and the true glory of the republic.

In the ancient republics, every citizen, trained to arms, and hearing, from his infancy, the interests and the glory of his country continually sounded in his ears, was taught to hold life, and every thing that he possessed, subject to her call. The same high and generous sentiment nourished in the breast of every citizen, mingled with his first ideas, and blended with his earliest habits, would form the strongest bulwark of the republic, and be to her instead of ramparts and of armies. Closely connected with this principle is another indisputable maxim of sound policy: That the republic, while she studiously represses a spirit of conquest and love of war, should always be preserved in a complete and active condition of defence. The love of peace becomes the humanity of a republic: it is in peace, when it can be preserved with honor and with safety, that she will enjoy the greatest happiness. But the ambition and injustice which have constantly disturbed

the world, have imposed it as a duty on every state to be always prepared to protect its own rights. A government which adopts a feeble and timid policy, and resorts to cunning rather than to open and manly counsels, and depends for her defence on the contentions and rivalships of other nations rather than on the vigor of her own genius and the energy of her own arm, will be insulted and despised; and however she may escape, for a time, the common fate of a pusillanimous people, must change her policy, or become the victim of her own weakness.—Americans! if you would preserve yourselves from insult and aggression, present such a front of war on the land, and on the ocean, where you equally live, as will compel the most contemptuous and unjust of your enemies to respect you. Surrounded with your fortresses, both fixed and floating, you should resemble your own eagle, who, securely building his nest in the summit of his rocks, relies on his courage to defend his habitation and his offspring. Infatuated must you be, seeing, as you have seen, all the foundations of national faith overturned by the perfidy and crimes of the present age, oaths committed to the winds, treaties made with knavery to be torn by force, if you can any longer make useless appeals to the justice of nations who have no religion but ambition, or rely on parchment contracts, if your own courage does not impress the seal, which your courage will defend.

I will ask leave only to add further, in this place, that there are many works of public utility, too great for the enterprize of individuals, which true patriotism will not hesitate to make objects of national expense, or to facilitate by aids from the national treasury. Such are har-



- bors for the reception and defence of our navy and our commerce, public ways by land and water, in order to connect more closely the distant parts of this extensive republic. Whatever adds to the national security, or promotes internal communication, contributes to national wealth. And every public way which is improved, every canal which is opened, every river which is rendered navigable, bestows augmented value upon the whole property of the nation.

Politicians of narrow minds, who cannot comprehend a system of enlarged improvement, nor extend their view to remote results; and others of base spirits, the sycophants of a low popularity, who estimate national glory by farthings, continually sound in the ears of the people, that, though so rich in our resources, we are not competent to the expense of such works of improvement or defence. Let us examine this idea. It is true that money sent abroad for which there is no return, is a real and substantial loss to the nation. But the nation is never impoverished, but commonly much enriched, by her works of interior improvement and defence. While money circulates at home, hands it may change; but in every hand, it equally composes part of the public wealth. Its value is even augmented in its passage. The strength and riches of a country, do not consist in the quantity of stagnant wealth which it contains, but in the active circulation into which it is put. One shilling is multiplied in its value in proportion to the number of hands it passes through in a day. The state is a gainer, then, while she quickens its progress, by every spring of industry which she sets in motion, by the very circulation she creates in providing for her

own defence; by every facility which she gives to foreign and domestic communication; by every protection and assistance she affords to useful individual enterprise; and even by the profit she may draw from every prudent application of the public revenue in aid of objects of general and permanent utility.

I have now spoken of the general obligations of virtue: another, and certainly one of the highest duties of a good citizen, is to cultivate in his own heart, and to diffuse, as far as possible, throughout society, a spirit of pure religion and devotion. As an immortal being, religion is the most important concern of man: it is not less an object of his duty as a member of the civil state. An irreligious man is always a pernicious member of society. He contributes, what in him lies, to extend those principles, and create those manners which radically corrupt the prosperity and stability of nations. The order of providence embraces empires as well as individuals; and although other nations are not subject to the theocracy of Israel, yet are they equally under the universal government of God; and it is not less true in this, than in any former age, that, *righteousness exalteth a nation, and that sin is the reproach, and ultimately, the ruin of any people.* By a certain and infallible order, vice leads to the dissolution of society, virtue promotes its strength, and prolongs its duration. But virtue, which does not rest on the basis of religion, cannot long preserve its influence over the public mind, and the national manners. Nay, when impiety has infected the mass of any people, it is always seen connected with extreme licentiousness of morals: the passions are let loose from every curb. And, indeed, if there is no God; or,

which in its effects is the same, if he is totally disregarded and forgotten, if we are not endued with an immortal principle of life, if there is no judge, no tribunal, no future retribution, if we possess, in common with the brutes, only a sensual and perishable being, why submit to the painful and useless sacrifices of virtue? Why endeavour, by arduous self denials, to rise above our nature? If, after a few moments of mere animal sensation, we sink into the dust and again become nothing, why attempt to enoble that being which is to be no more? Why should the insensible clod aspire even to posthumous fame? Why not devour the present moment, and plunge into brutal and corrupting pleasures, which alone would be worthy of a degraded nature, but which soon dissolve all the bands of civil society? Better were a false religion, than a total destitution of religious principle. Religion, at least, gives the stamp of a divine authority to those moral principles on which society must be founded; it adds the sanctions of eternal justice to the feeble sanctions of human laws. It personifies the sublime idea of moral perfection in the Deity, so that, in the very acts of our worship, it serves to plant the seeds, and to strengthen the growth of every virtue in the heart.

One of the first and highest duties, therefore, of a genuine friend of his country, is to promote the knowledge and extend the practical influence of true religion. But, besides the natural connection of religion with virtue, and of virtue with public happiness, the analogy of divine providence, and the explicit declarations of the word of God, lead us to expect his peculiar blessing on national piety, and his peculiar judgments on national

dereliction of religion. *The nation which will not serve thee, saith the holy Psalmist, shall perish:* And the prophet Isaiah proclaims, *Open ye the gates that the righteous nation, which keepeth righteousness, may enter in;* for to such a people, *salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.* And what are the denunciations which he hath pronounced upon iniquity, impiety and profligacy of manners? *Ah sinful nation! a people laden with iniquities! a seed of evil doers! children that are corrupters! your country is desolate; your cities are burnt with fire; your land, strangers devour it in your presence.* Such is the destiny, ultimately prepared in the order of divine providence, for every nation which forgets God. It is often delayed, indeed, or mitigated, for the sake of that sounder part who *weep for the transgressions of their people*, and who have not departed from the rock of their salvation. *Ye are the salt of the earth*, said Christ to his disciples, for whom the world itself is preserved. And such is the influence of piety, that even five righteous persons would have saved the devoted city of Sodom. It is *a salt* that preserves; it is a leaven *that leaveneth the whole mass*; it is a powerful intercessor with *the God of armies*; the Judge of all the nations of the earth. The highest service, therefore, christians, which you can render your country, is to promote, by your piety and your zeal, that holy spirit among your compatriots and fellow citizens. The republic founded on the basis of religion and virtue, will be immortal. For thus saith the Eternal, the fountain of truth: *I will show mercy to thousands of generations of them that love me and keep my commandments.*



I might represent to you the security of *that people whose God is the Lord*, and the blessings which will be poured out to them from his benignant hand; I might depict, in strong colours, the fearful *judgments* which a guilty nation is treasuring up for itself *against the day of wrath*; and the addition which every sinner and every sin is making to that mass of iniquity which must be brought into account in the day of retribution: but it is more than time to address myself to the peculiar duty of this day, and to which you will now indulge me to turn.

## ON THE BEING OF GOD.

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The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handy work: Day unto day uttereth speech; night to night teacheth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.—*Psalm xix. 1.*

THE existence of God is the basis of all religion. Revelation does not prove but presuppose it. It is one of those primary and original principles which nature has taught to all mankind. For all men, those who reason least, as well as the profoundest philosophers, the most savage, as well as the most civilized, have admitted this truth. *The invisible things of God, his existence, his nature, his perfections, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made and do appear.* They are visible to the whole human race, if they will reflect and inquire; so that those who deny his being, or who violate his law, remain *without excuse*. Such also is the proof which the Psalmist, in my text, gives of the existence of a supreme, infinite and eternal cause. The heavens enlightened with the glories of the sun; the firmament shining with innumerable stars; the day and the night, the harmonious vicissitudes of times and seasons, all demonstrate his being to the reasonable mind. *There is no speech nor language, says our translation, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out into all the world, and their words to the ends of the earth.* The original is more beautiful: *They use no*

*voice nor speech*; silently they convey this truth to the heart: yet the *laws and the instructions* of the mute volume of nature, *are gone out into all the world*; they are seen, they are read, they are understood by all nations.

I purpose, then, to illustrate this elementary and interesting truth that there is a God, the creator, and the righteous governor of the universe, that I may prepare our hearts for those practical reflections which naturally arise to a serious and attentive mind out of the belief of this sublime doctrine. I say to illustrate this truth rather than to demonstrate it; for the idea of God is one that can hardly be said to wait the slow process of reasoning and deduction; but forces itself irresistibly upon the mind from the contemplation of the works of nature, either in ourselves or in the universe around us. It is an instantaneous and almost intuitive impression, congenial with our nature, and that seems to form a part of our existence, till torn from it by vice, or the false refinements of philosophy. Ingenious men have, indeed, attempted to demonstrate the existence and the perfections of God by a train of abstract speculations, which it would be useless here to repeat; but it was only when they began to speculate that they began to doubt. The pride of human reason aspires, like the Deity himself, to pierce at one glance through metaphysical truth; but it is too weak and limited in its powers, and its feebleness and blindness often leave it in the attempt involved in innumerable and inextricable errors. One principle appears clear: that an original and eternal Cause must exist, itself uncaused, unchanged, incapable of succession, though the source of all that partakes

of succession and change. The human mind, indeed, is lost and overwhelmed in the profundity of these ideas; yet constrained to admit them from the palpable absurdity of supposing an eternal succession of mutable beings. Simonides, when asked by the prince of Sicily *what God is*, demanded, at first, one day to consider the subject; he then requested another, and another. At last, said he, the more I reflect, the more I am confounded. The mysteries of eternity confound the mind. The mysteries of the divine existence are inscrutable to our limited and imperfect reason. These difficulties have sometimes tempted the arrogant spirit of philosophy to deny his being; and sheltered vice from its own reproaches, when the fool has dared to say in his heart, *there is no God*. The latter dreams of accident or fate, in the room of a supreme intelligent Creator and Judge of the universe. The former is willing to encounter all the absurdities of an everlasting matter already organized from eternity, and everlasting revolutions in the heavens and the earth by the necessary and successive impulses of matter. Instead of making a Creating Mind the source of being, they make all mind, even the original and supreme, the result merely of material organization. Flying from difficulty, they plunge into absurdity; in avoiding what is incomprehensible, they embrace what is contradictory. These metaphysical proofs of the being of a God, may serve to exercise ingenious minds, but they are too subtle to produce a strong conviction even in them, or to be always clearly comprehended; and, being liable to be encountered by rival subtleties, they are often more fit to perplex than to illuminate the understanding. Least of



all are they fit for popular instruction. Those are the best and strongest proofs which are equally applicable to all mankind, which all can comprehend, and which have been admitted by all from the beginning of the world. They are those to which the scriptures appeal, and which, in every nation, leave both the ignorant and the sinner without excuse. We find them in the structure of nature; in our own consciousness; in the wishes and hopes of all good men.

I. In the structure of nature, throughout which order and harmony, and fitness and beauty reign. Wherever we behold these perfections, we instinctively inquire after a cause; and are led irresistibly to ascribe them to a cause intelligent and beneficent, as well as powerful. Did we see a temple, did we see a palace constructed with all the beautiful proportions of art, the various parts of which were perfectly fitted to their several ends; did we see even the meanest cottage in a desert, adapted to the habitation of man, could we persuade ourselves that they had risen by accident? Would we not recognize in them the hand of an artist; the plan and direction of a superintending reason? What we dare not pronounce, then, concerning the humblest work of human skill, can we believe of the glorious fabric of the universe? Contemplate the grandeur of its orbs, the harmony of their movements, the regularity of the seasons. Add to those beauties which strike the senses, the discoveries of modern science. Contemplate in every star the solar center of another system of worlds which it enlightens and animates; and beyond them, countless myriads more buried from our view in the immeasurable depths of space. Descend from these

sublime objects to the earth which we inhabit; contemplate the distribution of lands and waters; the atmosphere which surrounds and vivifies the whole; the vapours of the ocean transferred to the mountains, and thence, after refreshing the surface of the fields, returned to the ocean again; the wonderful organization of animals and plants; the adaptation of their parts to their various ends; the multiplicity and beneficence of their uses; and their powers of prolonging forever their respective kinds; and say, is all this magnificent order, this admirable harmony the effect of chance? Are all these appearances of intelligence and design the fruits of a blind and fortuitous impulse? Impossible; the man must be stupid or perverse; disordered in his mind or sunk in profligacy, who can deny his Creator in the midst of that evidence which blazes upon him from the heavens and the earth. It is impossible, in a discourse like this, to pursue nature into her details; but every view which we can take of her works, from the sun in the firmament to the clod in the valley; from the cedar in Lebanon to the hyssop in the wall; from the whale that disports in the waves of the ocean to the microscopic animalcule, so minute that even its drop is an ocean to it; from man, proud in his wisdom, to the heath in the wilderness that knoweth not when good cometh—all declare the existence and the glory of God. They speak in mute accents, indeed, but they speak deeply to the heart.

II. But, need we go farther than ourselves, who are only a small part of that universe which we behold for irresistible evidence of an intelligent, holy, just and merciful Creator? I speak not now of the human body,

so *fearfully and wonderfully made*, which penetrated Galen with such profound sentiments of Deity; but of that intelligent and conscious principle within, that indicates his wisdom, that attests his goodness, and even appeals to his justice against ourselves.

Shall man possess intelligence and wisdom, and shall there not exist a supreme and intelligent Creator? Shall wisdom arise out of unconscious matter? Or shall it, throughout the vast extent of the universe, take birth by accident only in the human brain, just to enable man to find fault with nature? Oh! folly! Oh! extravagance of error and vice! For, nothing but vice could so corrupt the lights of nature; could so pervert the plainest dictates of reason.

But it is conscience which most powerfully attests at the bottom of the soul the existence of a just and holy God, the rewarder of virtue, the avenger of crimes. It has erected a tribunal in the breast of man that secretly points to a judge in the heavens, and derives from him all the majesty and authority of its decisions. Conscious virtue looks up to him as its consolation, its hope, and the rewarder of its actions.—Conscious guilt trembles before him—when affliction overtakes it, or when death approaches, it announces his existence in thunder to the soul. Indeed, without the idea of God, virtue and guilt would be names without a meaning. From these internal feelings we derive the knowledge of a God holy and just as well as powerful and wise—of a moral governor as well as a supreme Creator. They perfect, if I may speak so, the idea of God, as well as the evidence of his existence. Omnipotence and intelligence shine in all the works of nature; but holiness,

justice, goodness, are reflected back on him from our own hearts. Here then is the true and complete notion of a divine being; here begins the true homage and worship of a reasonable soul. The effects of almighty power, and infinite wisdom, in the structure of the universe may astonish and confound us; but in his moral attributes, his holiness and justice, his benignity and goodness, we find the foundation of religious awe, of filial confidence, of devout affection, of sanctity of life, of immortal hope. The proofs of a God of righteousness and truth we draw from within our own breasts; from these sentiments of probity and rectitude, of truth and justice which have been implanted there by the hand of nature and mingled with our being; from those eternal laws of virtue and goodness of which we are conscious, which form the glory of our nature, which we cannot cast off without being condemned by our own sentence. As long as these laws maintain their dominion over my heart, or as long as I feel their obligation, so long shall I feel an inward and intuitive conviction that God exists. It is sin, it is corruption, it is profligacy only that can extinguish or impair this truth. *The fool saith in his heart there is no God.* Self-love blinds the reason of sinners for a moment; the passions drag it after them a reluctant captive; but when affliction, when disease, and the decline of nature, has quenched their fires and weakened their force, reason returns to its energy, and the fool, who, in his delirium had denied him, finds with dreadful conviction that *there is a God*

III. Finally, we find a proof of the divine existence in the wishes and hopes of all good men. He is the consolation of virtue—virtue seeks in his approbation



its supreme reward. If, instead of being the children of a just and holy father who is in heaven, we were mere fortuitous excrescences from the earth, the sport of accident, or the miserable subjects of a rigorous destiny, to what would all morality be reduced but a base and worldly prudence? What restraint could be imposed upon the passions? Would not he be the happiest man who could riot in the transient pleasures of sense with the most unsatiated appetite? Society would be dissolved. Self would reign over all. Did not atheism precede the ruin of the Grecian states? Did it not accelerate the fall of Rome? Does it not forever augment the depravity of manners in which it has its birth? Is not utility, then, an argument of truth? Is it not from this, that is, from the interests of society, as well as from the instincts of nature, that all nations have acknowledged a Deity, and have cultivated his worship? Ah! what would be the good man's recompence for all his labours, his self-denials, his arduous conflicts with himself, his generous sacrifices for others, if there were no God to approve, no immortality in which his ripened virtues would gather their reward? The victim of his own noble ardor and greatness of soul, might he not say in dying, like an ancient pagan philosopher, *Oh! Virtue thou hast deceived me!* What! the hopes of piety and virtue all deceitful! What! the same destiny to the righteous and the wicked! What! the same eternal night of oblivion equally cover the wretch who has been the pestilence of the earth, and him who has lived only for the blessing of mankind! No; impossible! To suppose it, is a crime against truth and reason, against human nature, as well as against thee, O holy and

merciful God! whose existence all thy works continually proclaim. For, *the heavens declare thy glory; day unto day uttereth speech; night unto night teacheth knowledge; mute is their voice; silent is their praise; yet their line is gone out into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.*

But why attempt to demonstrate a truth which is so obvious? Why prove that which no hearer denies? I arrest myself. I have designed only to suggest to your consideration a few of those ideas that should continually recall to our minds the Creator of the universe, the Father of our spirits, and awaken to him our holy and devout aspirations.

Let me now deduce from this great doctrine, some useful and practical reflections. Is there a God? which all his works declare, which our own hearts attest? What a consolation to piety, to reason? The universe appears more glorious, enlightened by this idea; it becomes a more delightful habitation for good men. Every part is animated with life, is directed by wisdom, discovers a moral tendency and design. But if we saw in it only an immense fabric reared by a blind unconscious destiny, and in ourselves nothing but the wretched children of necessity or chance, sprung into being, we know not by what power, shortly to be blotted out of it, we know not for what end, what gloom, what despair, must cover our state? Being would be joyless; affliction would press with tenfold weight upon its miserable victim, who could have no resource under it; this world would be the horrible dungeon of a despot; death would be still more terrible, because it would be without hope. But the good man looks up to the

heavens, and abroad upon the earth, and sees every where an intelligent and animating spirit, an almighty and benignant power, a gracious and merciful parent. Is there, then, a God whom he adores and loves? Every blessing of life he tastes with greater sweetness as the gift of his Father who is in heaven. Is there a God who rules over all? Then affliction springeth not from the dust; it is not the hard and rigorous chain of a blind and inexorable tyrant; but the gentle chastisement of a parent, pointed to some good end, and tempered by his love. Is there a God! What a solace in suffering! Patience and resignation to the divine will is the greatest softening of all our sorrows. Are you in pain? Pain loses its force in proportion as divine love inflames the heart. Are you in poverty? But have you not in God a treasure which the world, in its highest prosperity, could not yield you, and which its most afflicting vicissitudes cannot take away? Are you left to weep over the graves of your dearest friends? But you grieve not as those who have no hope. And when you approach the awful term of life yourself, will not the light of his countenance be your support and consolation? Equally present in heaven and on earth, the grave cannot divide you from him. The valley of the shadow of death grows light before you, when you feel the soul approaching to him.

Again, is there a God? Contemplate his power, his wisdom, his benignity, as often as you look abroad upon the works of nature. Frequently retire into your own breast, and contemplate his moral attributes displayed there as in a new world. Worship him in his glorious temple of the universe; worship him in the assemblies

of his saints; adore him continually in your retired meditations. Cultivate with him that sweet and ineffable communion which pious souls may enjoy with the Father of Spirits. Shall the highest enjoyments which we taste on earth arise from that sweet intercourse and sympathy of souls which takes place between those who sincerely love? And shall not communion with God, that spirit who is every where present, be a reality? Shall it not furnish to a good man his sublimest and his purest pleasures, as well as his most powerful motives to duty? O Deity! how delightful is thy influence which strengthens in the heart the principles of virtue, and assimilates man to his Creator who is holy!

Is there a God? Remember that, existing every where, he is the witness of all your actions; he is intimate to all the thoughts and purposes of your soul. Consider yourself as always in the holy of holies, before the immediate image of the Divine Glory. As the garments of the high priest were required to be clean, and his person to be pure, so let no crime dishonor your life; let no sin pollute your actions; let no impurity defile your heart in that holy presence: for you are always before God. Regard the monitions of your own conscience as his voice, speaking to you profoundly at the bottom of your soul; let it continually say to you as it did to Jacob, *surely God is in this place; this is no other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven!*

Finally, is there a God! Tremble, O sinner! before his justice, while you may take refuge in his mercy. Although he conceals his terrors now, and forbears your crimes; yet will he shortly be revealed in flaming fire, taking vengeance on all those who do not acknowledge



or obey him. If you deny him, he also, O! tremendous destiny! will deny you, when seated on the throne of judgment. But ye righteous, rejoice! You are not left as orphans and outcasts in nature; you have a father who is in heaven. He who turns the spheres, and presides over all the movements of the universe, has taken you under his protection. No event happens but by his permission. He has formed you for virtue and happiness. Confide in him; he will more than fulfil all your prayers, your wishes, your hopes. He will shortly raise you above all the troubles of this world, and bring you, through the road of holiness, to his immortal glory.

Oh God! whose existence the whole universe proclaims, whom all nations adore, whose voice we continually hear at the bottom of our hearts, never suffer us to forget thee, or to depart from thy laws! O Holy Spirit of truth! enlighten our minds more and more in this great truth! Let our hearts be thy temple! Let the holiness of our lives be thy perpetual worship! AMEN!

## ON DIVINE PROVIDENCE.

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His kingdom ruleth over all.—*Psalm ciii.* 19.

THE universal government of divine providence, is a doctrine clearly established in the sacred scriptures, and the belief of it is of so great importance in the system of christian morals, that it is of the highest importance to cultivate and cherish it. Men have risen in this, and in every age in which morals have greatly declined, who have denied a truth so consolatory to mankind, and endeavoured to account for the existence and the revolutions of the universe, merely by the eternal and necessary laws of matter. But it is the comfort of a good man to believe that a supreme and intelligent mind has given birth to the universe, and forever continues to preside over the infinite variety of its boundless operations. *His kingdom ruleth over all.* The words of the text need no explanation. They contain an assertion of the Almighty Power, and the universal government of the Creator over all his works. The Psalmist begins this sacred hymn with an elevated ascription of praise to God, and with a recapitulation of various examples of the goodness of his providence; especially *to such as keep his covenant*, and to those *that remember his commandments to do them*. He then lays down the general principle in the text; and concludes in a high strain of poetic praise, calling upon all nature to celebrate and bless the universal King.

My purpose, in the following discourse, is, in the first place, to establish the truth of a divine providence over the world: and in the next place, to point out the practical and pious improvement which we ought to make of this beneficent doctrine.

I. The belief of the universal government of Providence, rests on the same principles with the belief of creation. The greatness, regularity, and beauty of the universe, the exact and admirable relations of its parts to one another, demonstrate that it has derived its origin from a wise and omnipotent Creator. The continuance of the same order and harmony, afford a similar and equal proof of his universal government. The revolutions of the heavens, the changes of the seasons, the regular vicissitudes of nature, are manifestly guided by the same hand by which they were at first established. By the same power are arranged all the moral changes of the world: and the rise and fall of empires, and the fortunes of individuals, however they may be traced to secondary and proximate causes, ought ultimately to be referred to the Divine will.

Creation implies the dominion of Providence. The Creator, in giving existence to all things, imparted to them their respective powers, and fixed their mutual relations; and all the possible effects that could result from the infinite combination of powers which he himself has formed, must have been understood by him from the beginning, and all those effects which have actually taken place must, consequently, have, in one view or another, been intended. Whether, therefore, we say, with certain writers, that the Creator originally endued all things with their respective powers, and im-

parted to them all their changes, by which they continue to operate in a certain train independently on his farther interposition; or say, with others, that the preservation and the changes of the world are in consequence of a continued exertion of his creating power, conducted, as by infinite wisdom they ought, according to fixed and uniform laws; on either supposition, we preserve the idea of a divine providence. Direction and design reign through the whole system of nature. His wisdom, from eternity, conceived the plan to which in time his power gave existence. All his works must have been present to the view and intention of the Deity from the beginning; for nothing can exist without him; and, in their successive development, he is continually present to all his works.

But, perhaps, a deeper impression of this truth we derive from the sentiments of the heart than from the abstractions of reason; from feeling than from speculation. Even the belief which we have of the being of God, is more a sentiment than a deduction; an instantaneous impression that forces itself irresistibly upon the mind from the contemplation of the universe, than an abstract conclusion pursued through a connected chain of anterior truths. Hence the people, in all countries, are not less, are perhaps even more, firmly persuaded of these doctrines than the philosophers. The impressions of nature are strong, and lead to certainty; the refinements of speculation often leave the mind entangled in scepticism. The one is the work of God, the other involved and deranged by being blended with the work of man. It partakes therefore of the frailty and imperfection of every thing that is human.



To this powerful sentiment, not properly corrected and defined by reason, or enlightened by the spirit of revelation, is probably to be ascribed the belief of that multitude of local deities who were supposed, by the ancient pagans, to people the heavens, and the earth, their forests, their rivers, and their seas, and were probably the fragments of a just original opinion. Conscious of God in every place, but incapable of extending their views to one infinite and sole Cause and Governor of all things, they substituted for this grand idea, a crowd of inferior agents, whose existence and powers did not exceed their narrow comprehension.

Hence, perhaps, the general consent and concurrence of all nations in this important doctrine: and this consent forms a new and solid argument of its truth. Our merciful Creator, knowing the imbecility of human reason, and how easily it is misled by prejudice, and deranged by passion, has not committed the great and radical principles of duty and conduct to its slow and dubious deductions; but hath worked them up, so to speak in the constitution of the human mind, or made them be the effect of immediate impressions from considering the nature and state of things, which are therefore universal. Being dictates of nature, they enforce a strong belief. They indicate the hand of God: and every principle which is common to mankind, may be considered as a dictate of nature, and therefore as the word of God, and as declaratory of some truth essential to their happiness or their safety. Has not the doctrine, then, of a divine providence over the world, composed an article in the belief of all nations? Has it not entered into the philosophy of all sects, except, perhaps, of

a few, the extravagance of whose opinions, or the corruption of whose lives, have afforded a melancholy proof, at once, of the weakness of human reason, and the depravity of the human heart? Is it not attested by the festivals and lustrations, the auspices and prayers, the altars and the sacrifices of the pagan, as well as by the worship of the christian world?

But the christian receives a more complete assurance of this truth from the sacred oracles of his religion. It is directly asserted, or inculcated by obvious consequence, in almost every page of the holy scriptures. The history of mankind, till the age of Moses, is the history of divine providence. Moses founded his institutions entirely on this idea; and the nation of Israel presents to us a continued illustration of the government of God; a government that, equally exercised over all nations, is there alone rendered visible by the spirit of inspiration. The predictions, the promises, the denunciations of the prophets, constantly hold up to our view the absolute dominion of the providence of God over nations and individuals. We are not left, however, to derive this interesting truth by implication or deduction. It is every where directly proclaimed throughout the sacred writings, and the greatest of teachers hath extended its influence to the minutest events and the minutest objects in nature: *The very hairs of your head, saith he, are all numbered, and not a hair can fall to the ground without your heavenly Father.* The providence of God moves and regulates the whole system of the universe. The progress and decline of empires, and the fortunes of individual men; the highest orders of spirits, and the lowest combinations of

matter; the minutest atoms and the greatest systems, are all equally subject to its inspection and government. God is forever present with us, and operates around us and within us. Such an idea of the universal government of God, presents a view to the pious mind the most sublime and interesting. It spreads over the universe a face of solemnity that invites our devotion; and makes the ordinary events of life, that appear to others so trivial and indifferent, convey to a believer the most important lessons on the subjects of his dependence and his duty. God, who rules among the host of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth, orders every minute affair in the whole system of our acts. He is witness to the most secret movements of our hearts, and will shortly bring them into judgment.

Objections have been raised against these ideas of divine providence, the consideration of which will lead us into farther views of the doctrine. It has been said to be unworthy of the Deity to suppose that he is obliged continually to exert a divine power for the preservation of his works, or that he should extend his attention and care to every atom that floats in the wind, or that falls to the earth. It would, indeed, be unworthy of God to imagine that the conduct of providence requires of him either the efforts of labour, or the pains of attention. These are ideas derived from human weakness. With infinite ease he sustains the immense frame of nature, inspects the minutest atoms, and the most fleeting thoughts, and gives impulse and direction to its boundless movements. Some of the ancient schools taught that the Creator, having exhausted himself in one infinite effort, has, since the beginning of time, wrapped

himself up in indolent inaction. The gospel teaches us, on the other hand, that created beings, produced, at first, from nothing, cannot continue to exist but by the constant energy of the same cause that gave them birth. If it is lawful to judge, in any measure, of the divine from human nature, we might say, perhaps, that constant action is essential to the Deity, and forms a necessary part of his supreme felicity. The power, therefore, which created the universe, may reasonably be supposed to be continually exerted to preserve its existence, and to conduct its operations. And its invariable laws, which have suggested to short-sighted man ideas of fate, of necessity, and even of chance, are proofs of that intelligence from which they spring, and are invariable only because they are the result of infinite wisdom.

Another objection against a divine providence is founded on the disorders that exist in the world. This is an argument that would go to the denial of creation as well as of providence. But of disorders in the works of an infinite Being, we are wholly incompetent to judge. Our rash opinions have been compared by one of our greatest writers to the judgment of a fly alighting on the column of a magnificent temple, and pronouncing on the beauty and design of the whole from the seeming irregularities presented to his imperfect vision on the little portion of surface on which he sits. In the economy of the infinite Creator, we have reason to believe that no evils are permitted to exist which are not subservient to a higher good; and what appears to be disorder, in the narrow sphere in which we are placed, would be seen to be harmonious and beautiful



if it could be viewed in relation to the universal system. A few of those beneficial effects lie so near us that even our feeble sight is able to discern them. Does not the imbecility of childhood, for example, serve to strengthen those sweet and delightful ties that connect together parents and their children? Do not the wants of mankind tend to cultivate their amiable sympathies, and contribute more closely to unite them in a humane and friendly intercourse? Regarding the world in general, can an evil be pointed out, of all that afflict the lot of man, that may not be shown to have an useful tendency to improve his wisdom, his courage, his fortitude, his humility, his benevolence, the perfection, and ultimately, the happiness of his nature? For, by strengthening his virtues, his capacities of happiness are enlarged, and it is continually rendered more independent on all external circumstances. If it was right in the Creator to form a being so limited in his powers as man, he must derive his wisdom chiefly from experience—experience, in an imperfect nature, must always be mingled in a less or greater degree with error; and error can correct itself only by the evils which it draws after it. Perpetual pleasure and contentment in a being, constituted as man is, would lead to indolence and selfishness....he is prompted, to the exertion of all the faculties of his nature, principally by the evils that surround him....and exertion improves, at once, his powers, and his virtues. Many other instances we might produce to justify, even to our limited reason, the constitution and the ways of providence. How often do we see storms purify the atmosphere, and the pains and sufferings to which we are subject, correct the

errors and vices to which we are exposed from the weakness and corruption of our nature? How often do we see them stimulate to industry, create prudence, sharpen ingenuity, improve knowledge, chastise folly, promote wisdom, cultivate virtue? And, if we could extend our view to that endless chain of being of which man is only a single link....to that universal system of which this world is an inconsiderable wheel....and to that eternal duration for which time is only a preparatory discipline, have we not reason to believe that innumerable proofs of wisdom and of goodness would rise to view which are now concealed in the darkness of this terrestrial sphere, and the ignorance of our imperfect state. Do you ask why we were created with such weakness? Every *creature* might ask the same question.

I must beg the indulgence of many of my hearers for introducing so many abstracted reflections into a discourse intended for popular instruction. I designedly omit many others which a satisfactory elucidation of the subject might require. But trusting that you sincerely believe the doctrine of a divine and universal providence, as it is revealed in the holy scriptures, I hasten,

II. To point out the improvement which we ought to make of the doctrine, to strengthen in our hearts the principles of piety, and to promote our progress in all the habits of holy living.

This doctrine presents to a good man a comfortable, and an instructive view of the universe. The ideas of fate and of chance in the government of the world are equally gloomy. They leave man nothing to hope, and every thing to fear. And showing in nature neither Creator, Parent, nor Judge, lead him to despair, or give

him up to the momentary indulgence of his passions as his only remaining good. A sincere believer, on the other hand, looks upon the heavens and the earth with delight, and sees in them a glorious monument of infinite intelligence and goodness. He beholds the Creator present in all his works; and he feels himself continually surrounded by the protection of a parent. Ideas of goodness and intelligence in the Creator, impress on the face of nature its principal charm; and are, to a virtuous mind, the most delightful subjects of his contemplation. To all the comforts of life, the consciousness of the presence of God, adds their chief enjoyment; and if he suffers misfortunes, the remembrance that they are the inflictions of his heavenly Father, takes off the edge from suffering, and tends to reconcile him to his lot, while he believes, according to the divine promise, that *all things shall work together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to his purpose.* In the revolutions of empires, in the calamities of nations, in the clouds that sometimes cover the church, in the dangers that threaten religion, in famine and pestilence, in the most dark and disastrous aspects of providence, where the human mind is confounded, and the ordinary spectator sees nothing but desolation and despair, he calmly confides in him whose *kingdom ruleth over all*, and whose providence will, by unsearchable ways, *bring good out of evil, and order out of confusion.*

In the next place, the belief of a divine providence affords a view of the world and of the train of events, full of pious instruction. They are all subject to the government of God; and being arranged by his power and wisdom, must contain, to a serious and attentive

observer, many indications of the divine will, and of our duty. We shall be liable to mistake, indeed, in attempting to interpret too minutely the intentions of providence; yet frequently its combinations bear upon them such visible impressions, as cannot easily be mistaken by one who is concerned to understand his duty. He will often see in them the course of life which he ought to chuse; the object which he ought to pursue; the pursuit which he ought to relinquish; the duty which obviously arises out of the occasion; the service which he has it in his power to do for God, or for his fellow men, and often he may discern, as David did, in the chastisements of a righteous providence, the sins and errors of his past life. If it be asked how we shall know the duty required of us by the dispositions of providence? It is that which prudence will collect from a just comparison of things, and a careful estimate of the circumstances in which we are placed. Many persons seem to imagine a difference between that conduct which prudence and which providence points out; and that the latter often requires a sacrifice of prudential motives. Prudence consists in judging rightly of the ends which we ought to pursue, and the choice of those means which will most probably conduct to their attainment. These being all arranged and disposed by God in the order of his providence, the conduct which is indicated by this order is the same which a prudent man will pursue, who is, at the same time, animated by a holy zeal to discharge his duty. But prudence, as it is a worldly principle, leaves the ordination and the will of God too much out of view, and relies only on itself; using for its advantage the order of providence; but for-



getting, in a degree, the great Disposer of all events: as it is a christian grace, it piously regards the divine will in all things, and pursues the course which they indicate in obedience to God. The one withdraws the heart from the supreme Creator; the other centers it on him, and, by a sacred reverence for his authority, controls the influence of those passions that often mislead the reason, and impose a false bias on the mind in judging of duty. It adds diligence to wisdom in accomplishing every good and useful end; imploring his aid whose blessing alone can give success, or make success redound to our own benefit or to his glory.

In the next place, belief in a divine providence may well produce patience under affliction, and resignation under all the sufferings that distress our lot in life. He is the sovereign of the universe, and has a right to dispose of men, and to fix their respective conditions according to his pleasure. But he is our Father also, and doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. Every correction from his hand points to some merciful end. It is the chastisement of some sin, in order to lead us to repentance; it is the destruction of some idol that was withdrawing the heart from its supreme good; it is the trial of some grace, in order to strengthen and perfect it; it is designed to blast this world to our affections, in order to prepare the soul for her heavenly destination. *Affliction springeth not from the dust.* It is the minister of God; but it is his minister for good to those who study to learn the lessons which it conveys. Are your sufferings almost ready to crush your spirit, and seem to leave you nothing more to enjoy upon earth? Bow submissively before his awful sovereignty,

as did his servant Job, when the Almighty addressed him from the midst of the terrible displays of his almighty power. *Lord! I am vile! what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth.* Has he broken your earthly fortunes? It is that you may seek a heavenly inheritance. Hath he snatched from you your beloved, perhaps your idolized infant; the partners or the pledges of your love? It is that you may transfer your love to him alone to whom it is due. It was he who gave, and it is he who, in his wisdom, hath taken his gift away. The language of faith on such an occasion is the language of the aged and afflicted priest of God: *It is the Lord! let him do what seemeth him good!*

Belief in the universal agency of divine providence will be, in the breast of a good man, the parent of pious trust in God. This spirit implies such confidence in his paternal care and goodness, as frees the mind from disquieting apprehensions concerning the future progress and events of life. If we are faithful, as becomes the disciples of Christ, in the discharge of every duty of our respective callings and relations, his word has given us reason to expect that he will succeed our moderate and lawful hopes. Or if he deny the success which we most desire, it will be for some wise and good end which shall probably be fraught with greater blessings to ourselves; which shall, at least, be worthy his wisdom, and his fatherly kindness, and with which an humble and pious spirit ought to be contented. If he finds it necessary to chastise his children, whatever storms may vex the world, whatever clouds may involve their own lot, confidence in his wise, though, perhaps, mysterious providence, will impart to them pa-

tience and fortitude in suffering, and sustain them in the midst of the most afflicted scenes: *yea, though they walk through the valley of the shadow of death, yet shall they fear no ill; he will be with them even there*, and the rod and the staff of their Shepherd will at once comfort and defend them. There is a sinful indolence and neglect of duty that is sometimes dignified with the name of trust in God, as if providence stood pledged for the success or comfortable provision of idle and lazy pietists, however wanting they may be in industry, or imprudent in the management of their affairs. This is not wisdom, but weakness; is not piety, but folly. The plan of providence is already laid by infinite wisdom, and is not to be altered to favour either the infirmity or presumption of foolish men. A pious and well-founded trust in God must be united with prudence and discretion in conduct, and with fidelity and industry, not in one or a few, but in all the duties that are incumbent upon us. This doctrine will furnish to a good man continual subjects of thankfulness and praise to Almighty God. From his benignity all our mercies flow. *He giveth to all life and breath, and all things.* And piety will look through every intermediate cause to him, and will recognize his hand in every blessing we enjoy; in a cup of cold water that comes to a disciple in the name of his Lord, as well as in all the splendor and prosperity that crowned the state of Solomon. We are, on all sides, surrounded with the abundant fruits of the divine goodness; and every moment comes to us laden with some proof of the beneficence and care of our heavenly Father. How many subjects of continual adoration have we to him who is the author of every good and

perfect gift. Our existence, our preservation, our early advantages of instruction and example, our admission into the bosom of the church, the means of grace that are applied, the hopes of immortality that are cultivated there, our privileges as christians, our liberties and interests as citizens, our domestic comforts, our social pleasures, all are the gifts of his providence: a grateful spirit will multiply them a thousand fold; piety is an habitual act of praise to God. And the contemplation of divine providence affords perpetual food for this holy and heavenly disposition. Under these delightful impressions it was that the sacred writer composed this psalm of praise: "Oh! give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever! Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me bless his holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul! and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction, who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies! The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all. Bless the Lord, ye his angels that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word! Bless the Lord all ye his hosts, ye ministers of his that do his pleasure! Bless the Lord all his works in all places of his dominions! Bless the Lord, O my soul!"

Finally, this doctrine presents at every moment to our view one of the most powerful principles of universal holiness in heart and life....the continual presence of God our maker. It is only when we forget this great and solemn truth that our passions and appetites, those



principles of evil, obtain the ascendancy over us. Our most secret sins, which endeavour to hide themselves even from our own view, cannot escape the view of God; and then consciousness of his inspection, brings them both to light and shame. A good man will blush and often be overwhelmed with confusion at those evils to which no human being was witness, and of which he himself was hardly conscious when he remembers the inspection of his Creator and his Judge.

The divine presence also, like a warm and genial sun, gives growth and vigor to all the graces of a sincere christian. To be seen and approved of God, is the most animating motive of duty. Holiness appears more beautiful and excellent when contemplated in his perfection: and the majesty of his presence adds unspeakable authority and force to his law. It weakens the strength of temptation....it diminishes the influence of the world....and encourages the believer, in every conflict with the enemies of his salvation. Cultivate, then, the sense of the divine presence, that it may impose a restraint upon every sinful tendency; that it may invigorate all the principles of good in your hearts; that it may comfort and cheer you in your pilgrimage; and that it may ripen and bring to perfection all those graces and habits of holy living that will qualify you for his immortal presence in the kingdom of heaven. AMEN!

## ON CHRISTIAN VIGILANCE AND PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

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Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.—*Mat.* xxv. 13.

As we are, in this world, only in a state of trial for an immortal existence....as the period of our probation is short and infinitely uncertain....and the sentence of the Supreme Judge is eternal and irrevocable, the faithful improvement of time is to us a duty of the last importance. It is not less our interest than our duty, to stand always ready for that decisive moment which, at once, finishes our discipline, and fixes our destiny. This interesting truth is taught us in the beautiful parable from which my text is taken, and which is founded on a known and familiar custom among the Jews. The folly of those who neglect, or postpone the cares of their salvation, and presume upon the continuance of life, is imaged by that of the foolish virgins who made no preparation to meet the bridegroom till the moment they were called to attend him. The tumult and confusion of these negligent servants at the approach of their Master, and their final exclusion from his presence, paint to us the consternation of sinners at the approach of death, and their terror and despair when God shall have closed against them the gates of mercy. *Watch, therefore, saith he, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.* You have a work of infinite

moment to accomplish....your everlasting state is suspended on your vigilance and fidelity....the uncertainty of life renders every instant of it precious, and gives an unspeakable energy to the exhortation of your *Saviour* to be always prepared for his appearance as your *Judge*. Time rolls away with a rapid and incessant current....life is hastening to a close....ten thousand accidents may accelerate its period. All beyond is immutable misery to the sinner. When mercy has exercised itself to its appointed limits, justice fixes its inexorable seal upon his state. These are the affecting ideas presented to us in this passage. Let us, then, consider, in the first place, the duty enjoined by our *Saviour*....and secondly, the motive by which it is enforced. The duty of vigilance, and the motives of vigilance will form the principal objects of the following discourse.

I. This duty, then, implies an habitual expectation of the coming of our Lord....and habitual preparation to meet him.

But, what do we mean by his coming? He is said to come at the end of the world to dissolve the present system of things, and to fix, by an irreversible judgment, the eternal destinies of mankind. But he is said also to come at death, when our probation is closed, and we enter on our eternal existence. It is this latter event chiefly which is intended in the parable; for then the season of trial and of hope is past to the guilty, and the destiny of every individual is sealed. A holy and christian vigilance, then, is opposed to that dangerous spirit of slumber, that profound forgetfulness of their latter end, which has seized the greater part of the world.

See their busy cares, their dreams of pleasure, the illusions, the agitations, the anxieties, the perpetual whirl in which they live; and have they not forgotten that it is not their abiding place? Would not an admonition of death in the midst of their pleasures be deemed strangely unseasonable? Would not an image of death presented to them in its true form unnerve both business and pleasure? Therefore they study to exclude it from their thoughts. God is to them as though he did not exist....the eternal world as though it were not a reality; and death itself is viewed merely as a contingency that may affect others, not as a solemnity that concerns themselves. Can it be the object of their desires, or the subject of their meditations, to be prepared to leave the world, when their only study is, how to accumulate it, how to enjoy it, how to establish themselves in it forever? Can it be their concern to be prepared for death, when it is their great endeavour to forget that they are to die? In opposition to this fatal oblivion, to these vain, excessive, and criminal pursuits, we are required to cultivate serious and habitual meditation on our latter end. Nothing like the idea of death quenches the guilty fires of the passions; or tends to rouse us from the security and slumber of sin, so hazardous to the soul. Nothing like the contemplation of our approaching dissolution, and of the judgment of God which then awaits us, tends to ripen in the heart the hopes and affections of heaven, and to engage us earnestly in the practice of every duty in which we would be found at our Master's coming. Continually, then, let it mingle with all our employments to give them a wise direction....with all our pleasures to sanctify them, and



preserve them from the intoxication of excess....with all our devotions to animate them, and render them more fervent. Watch, to meditations of this kind, that is, seek opportunities to indulge them....Let every thing contribute to recall to your mind the frailty of our nature, the uncertainty of life, the speedy termination of all these mortal scenes, the supreme tribunal, the irrevocable sentence of the Judge. Such serious views of life and of death, of time and of eternity, could not fail to awaken all the holy energies of the soul, and to preserve it in a state of constant expectation, and of devout and vigilant preparation for the coming of the Lord....Of preparation for his coming.....this is the second duty implied in the text. But, how shall we be prepared to meet him like virgins girt for their office, and waiting, with their lamps in order, for the coming of their Master? By having made such a just estimate of the world, that we shall be always resigned to the call that requires us to leave it; by having the affections supremely placed on heavenly things, by being ever vigilant over the state of the heart; by making a just estimate of the world....its vanity, its dangers, its transitory condition, so that the heart may not be unduly attached to it. But when men have regarded it as their supreme portion....when they are bound to it by all their senses, their interests, their most flattering expectations, how hard is it at last to break the ties which connect them with it? With what reluctance they look forward to their final separation from it? They banish the idea of death from their minds; they endeavour to forget it. When, therefore, it arrives, it comes in all its terror, without being prepared for, without being ex-

pected. Oh! horrible surprise! Dreadful tumult and confusion of soul! The world is perishing, and they have no other portion. The Judge is approaching, and they have never thought of their account!

Cultivate, in the next place, the affections and the hopes of heaven. In proportion as these high and holy principles reign in the soul, the world loses its influence, and a pious man will expect, with pleasure, the moment that will separate him from the frailties of the body, from the conflicts of the passions, from the doubts, the obscurities, the errors of reason, from the sins that mar his duties, from the griefs and troubles of time, from all the imperfections of a fallen and corrupted nature; that moment which will bring him nearer to God, and give him possession of his supreme good. In a word, if his happiness is in heaven, he will always be prepared to meet his Saviour with a pure and affectionate heart. Even the doubts and fears which hang over the grave....the reluctance with which nature descends into it....the secret apprehensions with which an imperfect soul must always appear in the presence of her Supreme Judge, will stimulate his diligence, and, by reanimating his devotions, and all his religious duties, will assist his preparations for a moment so decisive, so awful, and to a believer so glorious.

III. Another, and most essential mean of preparation, is habitual vigilance over the state of the heart. The heart is the source of good and evil; on it the temptations of the world make their impression. Ever be watchful, therefore, of its tendencies. If it is pure, death is no longer an enemy; the coming of Christ is no longer an object of terror, but of joy. It is not suf-

ficient to shun gross and flagrant vices against which the heart revolts. Many are the evils to which it is secretly prone, which insinuate themselves under more plausible appearances, and more decent names, which however pollute the conscience; evils which the manners of the world justify, and which we easily slide into by imitation; evils to which we are strongly led by some prevalent propensity, and which, therefore, self-love is ever studious to vindicate, to palliate, to protect from our own censure; evils which spring from ignorance, from prejudice, or even from false ideas of duty and religion. But, under whatever form sin is admitted, it corrupts the heart, and poisons the fountain of peace. Under whatever flattering and illusive disguises it may be concealed now, it will disturb the tranquillity of your dying moments, and render the soul both unfit and unwilling to appear before her Judge. Therefore watch over the principles of your actions; bring them to the most rigorous test of the law of God, and the spirit of Christ. Nay, watch over the minutest elements of vice, the first tendencies to sin in the heart; for these, indulged, or even neglected, often grow up insensibly into crimes that inflict the deepest stain upon the conscience; and sink it, with regard to death, to judgment, and eternal things, into the most fatal lethargy.

Watch, likewise, over the temptations which are continually making upon it the most dangerous impressions; temptations that seduce by pleasure, that persuade by interest, that deter by difficulties, that insinuate themselves under the cover of custom and fashion, that find advocates in our own hearts, that conquer even by our indolence. The heart is like a city besieged by numerous

active and vigilant enemies. It is not sufficient that you defend it against their open assaults; you must watch their secret operations, their most disguised movements, their intrigues with traitors within; you must be continually on guard lest you be surprized. Learn especially to acquire an intimate knowledge of yourselves, of your weaknesses, of your predominant passions, of those inclinations most favourable to the enemies of your virtue and your peace. Come not near the temptations which inflame them. Avoid the places, the occasions, the societies which awaken them. Learn a lesson of prudence and wisdom from the melancholy example of David, who, with all his sensibilities, did not shun the sight of the beauty which ensnared him, and filled the remnant of his life with shame and bitter repentance. Alas! how many, from the same cause, have often brought an indelible blot on their profession? have deeply wounded the peace of their own minds? and, above all, have prepared for themselves clouds and darkness, consternation and terror, when suddenly called, in the midst of their wanderings, to meet their Lord?

Finally, be awake and watch to every duty. Not only flee from sin, not only shun temptation, but cultivate every grace of the Spirit, every holy affection, every christian virtue. It is only when we fervently love the Saviour that we shall rejoice in his appearance; when we are in the actual habit of all pious and heavenly affections, that we shall meet his coming with alacrity; be ready to present to him the lights which he himself hath kindled in the heart; and to enter along with him to the feast of immortal love.



But if you watch not for his appearing, O careless and imprudent soul! he will come in an hour that you look not for him; and the consternation and dismay of that terrible and unprepared moment, shall be only the prelude to that eternal despair which shall seize you when he has shut against you the door of mercy.

II. Listen, then, to the motives with which he urges upon you this duty.

*You know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.* The motives are the importance of his appearance; the uncertainty of the time of his appearance. The importance of his appearance, *When the Son of Man cometh:* Cometh—for what end? To put a period to our probation; to fix, by his eternal judgment, our unchanging condition. Death is a serious, and to the greater part of mankind an awful moment: the close of this brief portion of our existence is filled with the most affecting and momentous considerations. Then ceases forever all that affects our senses, all that occupies our cares, all that interests our affections in the world. Our pursuits, our projects, our worldly hopes are buried with us in the tomb. The whole condition of our being is changed. Extinguished is the sweet light of life: amidst the sighs, the tears, the agonies of disconsolate or distracted friends, we look down into the dark and noisome chambers of the grave, and say to corruption, *Thou art my father; and to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister.* If these ideas are gloomy, considerations infinitely more important open upon us beyond the grave. There are the tribunal, the Judge, the everlasting destinies of saints and sinners; that tribunal from which there is no appeal; that

Judge whose eyes search as with flames of fire the most hidden recesses of the heart. On one hand you behold the kingdom of the Redeemer, in all its glory, the habitation of righteous souls; on the other, the furnace of the wrath of God which burns with unquenchable fires, the chains of everlasting darkness prepared for the hopeless prisoners of justice. O my soul! how awful are these prospects to human frailty! But, perhaps, the chief terror that accompanies them to sinners, is the immutability of the decrees of the Supreme and Almighty Judge. Imprudences, errors in life, we may correct; the destinies of eternity are unchangeable. *As the tree falls, so shall it lie.* When the bridegroom has entered, *the door shall be shut.* And though, afterwards, the idle and foolish who are now perishing, knock and cry with importunity, the door, once shut, remains closed forever. What, do you ask, are then the treasures of infinite mercy exhausted? Will the miseries of his creatures no longer move the compassion of the Eternal? My brethren, compassion and mercy in the Most High have nothing in them in common with the sensibilities of human nature, which depend on physical temperament. They move on eternal and immutable reasons. Let us not cavil with the decisions of eternity. *Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.* And the divine goodness is vindicated, in bestowing and prolonging to us this precious season, with all its calls, its instructions, its aids, its gracious influences, its secret admonitions, its public ordinances. But if you have rejected the grace of the Gospel, by that act, you submit your destiny to the holy, the inexorable justice of the law. Is it not then his immutable decree, *Let the*

*filthy be filthy still?* And is it not his unchangeable word, *These shall go away into everlasting punishment?* My brethren, let no false reasonings, let no vain suggestions of self-love deceive us: these *shall go away into everlasting punishment*. Oh! tremendous, unfathomable gulph! Away, fugitive ideas of time! Let my soul be occupied only with eternity. Boundless prospect! interminable revolution of ages! infinite idea in which I am lost! The mind cannot look with steadiness into its fearful abysses; yet, O careless soul! will you dare to plunge into it without thought? Will you brave all the terrors with which it is filled to the guilty? Awake, then, to considerations so serious and interesting. This awful moment demands all your solicitude. Heirs of eternity! the Judge is calling for you. Foolish virgins! the bridegroom is on his way; every instant you may hear that terrible cry, *Behold he cometh, go ye out to meet him*. Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.

II. This is the second motive, the uncertainty of life.

What is life but a vapour which every breath may dissipate? Is this a trite and common observation? Yes, my brethren; but shall we ever cease repeating what is so soon and so constantly forgotten? Great God! do thou speak with our words; speak to the heart; and no longer suffer to be forgotten a truth that so deeply concerns us! Frail mortals! then, is any period of years.... is any degree of health, of prosperity, of power, your security against death for a single instant? Alas! are you not surrounded with ten thousand invisible causes which are continually working for the grave? Shall I

Speak of accidents, of unwholesome atmospheres, of the contagion that flies unseen in the wind? Nay, may not an imprudence, an excess, an indigestion, a breath, bring us to our end? How often have men passed from their table to their tomb? Have they lain down at night to rise no more till the resurrection of the last day? Nay, how often have they dropt from the very midst of their crimes into thy hands, living and eternal God? But, my brethren, let us question experience still nearer. Do not your own griefs and sorrows speak to your hearts and attest the certainty of death, the uncertainty of life? Who of you has not mourned a parent, a child, a husband, a wife, a brother, a sister? or participated in the afflictions of those who have recently lost these dear and tender connexions? At every period, from infancy to the ripest age, have they not been cut down by the spoiler Death; and taken at those moments when you, and perhaps they, least expected the fatal stroke? How many voices then call to you from the grave.... from the grave that contains those remains still so dear to you, and proclaim the uncertainty of life? Go, then, and converse in silence with the beloved dead; go and weep over the cold turf that embraces them.... There recollect that you are dust and ashes,...that they shall not return to you, but you are hastening to be united to them. Let these reflections take deep possession of your souls, till, filled with the views and the hopes of immortality, you will be waiting, and even longing for the appearance of your Saviour. *What I say to you, I say to all, watch; for the Son of Man cometh at an hour when you look not for him.* What shall I add in the conclusion of the whole subject. Time is short and rapid,



hastening to reunite itself with eternity, and demands to be diligently improved. Where are now so many ages that have passed away like a tale that was told, and left nothing real behind them, except the account which mortal beings have to render at the supreme tribunal? Where are the countless millions of men who were once busy on the face of the earth, but are now wrapt in the oblivion of ages? Where shall we shortly be? Forgotten upon earth, and remembered only in eternity. The grave is continually enlarging its maw, [Lowth's Isaiah, ch. v. 10.] and down go into it together the prince and the peasant, the hoary head, and the infant of a day. And we have no safety but in being always ready. These reflections, at all seasons proper are peculiarly so at the period and commencement of those great divisions into which time has been thrown. Another year, another century is now merged in the abyss of ages, and that on which we are just entered is rapidly hastening to follow them. How many of our fellow mortals have gone, in the past year, to their great account, who began it with hopes as flattering, and prospects of health as fair as we now can boast? Ah! how many shall never see the close of the present? And yet, are we secure because the event is not marked with the same precision as the vicissitudes of day and night? My brethren, if God, in some audible manner, should announce to us that five, that two, that but one in this assembly should die within the year, what alarm, what solicitude would it create in every breast? What inquiries, *Lord is it I?* What self-examination, what prayer, what fervor in duty, what diligence to be prepared? But is it not almost equally certain that, within

that period, some who hear me shall be called in their turn? Has a year ever passed which has not borne with it some victims of Death? And shall the bare possibility of doubt which hangs upon it, reverse all your good purposes and resolutions, silence conscience, stifle your self-examination, suspend your prayers, quench your lamps, or leave them extinguished till the terrible moment in which your Lord himself shall call for you? Oh! the folly, the infatuation of the human heart. Great God! awaken us from this fatal lethargy in which the world is buried! speak deeply to our hearts! arouse us to the all-important cares of eternity, that, at thy coming, we may not be unprepared to meet thee. AMEN!

THE PROMISED SEED OF THE WOMAN: OR,  
THE POWER OF EVIL DESTROYED BY  
JESUS CHRIST.

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It shall bruise thy head....*Gen. iii. 15.*

THIS is the consolation which the merciful and righteous Judge of man mingled along with his dreadful denunciations on our fallen and wretched first parents, to save them from sinking into absolute despair, and to sustain their minds in the prospect of the miseries which surrounded them, and the calamities which they had created. It looked far forward into time, and faintly revealed the Saviour who should destroy the power of evil, which now seemed to have obtained a complete and universal triumph over the works of God. No one can believe that such a solemn tribunal could have been erected in Paradise, and that its decrees could have been pronounced in such an awful tone by the Supreme Judge, merely to foretell that ordinary serpents should be crushed by the heel of man. No one can believe that so wise a legislator and historian as Moses could narrate such a circumstance with all this historical gravity, if it had no farther meaning. Such a supposition has been left only to those enemies of religion, who, equally indecent and impious, hope to effect by ridicule what they have not been able to accomplish by manly and solid argument. It is true that reference is made to the common fate of these reptiles in the sentence, but it is in order that it might be the

vehicle of a much more sublime and interesting truth. There is a strong tendency in human nature to convey instruction by symbolical representation; and these symbols may consist either in the pictures of objects in which some analogy is found to the instruction to be conveyed, or in the objects themselves from which such pictures are taken. This latter mode was especially adapted to the early stages of society, (before the arts of painting or writing were brought to a high degree of improvement) and to the eastern nations, whose imagination has always been peculiarly fervid and glowing. God has been pleased frequently to accommodate his manner of instruction to this tendency of the human mind, and its strong susceptibility of sensible impressions. Such a symbol he gave to Noah after the deluge....such a symbol he impressed upon the posterity of Abraham....such a symbol taught Jacob the necessity of perseverance and importunity in prayer by the wrestling of an angel with him during the whole night....such a symbol we see in the yokes which Jeremiah was ordered to send to the neighbouring kings as an emblem of their approaching subjugation....such a symbol also was contained in the fate of the serpent. He was condemned to crawl upon his belly, and to lick the dust, that he might be a perpetual emblem to man of his degradation, of the grossness, the earthliness, and sensuality of his nature. He was destined likewise to be continually crushed by the offspring of her to whom he had been the organ of seduction, that his daily catastrophe might be a perpetual figure of the final destruction of the power of evil by him who was emphatically styled *the seed of the woman*. On the



former part of this sentence it is asked, if the serpent has not always moved as he now does? What then could be the meaning or the propriety of the curse, *upon thy belly thou shalt go*? It is believed that this animal was, originally, a much more noble creature than he is at present; that he moved upright, supported by wings, and that he touched the earth only by a few gyrations of the tail. This opinion is rendered probable by the existence at present of a species in the heart of Arabia, which still move in the same manner, and whose splendid and flaming colours reflected in the sun, made them an inviting object even in Paradise, and give good ground to suppose that they are the fiery serpents which are said to have attacked the children of Israel in their journey through the desert. Such a serpent coming out of a globe was the Egyptian symbol of the Deity. And Archbishop Tennison has rendered it probable that the Seraphim, an order of angels, have derived their denomination from Saraph, the Hebrew name of serpent, from some resemblance which they bore to the form and splendor of this animal in the appearances which they made as divine messengers to our first parents. As they were condemned to sink from this glorious form, and to crawl upon their belly, they were doomed also to be crushed by the foot of man, as the type of the final destruction of the power of evil, by him who was to spring from the being who was now the unhappy victim of his arts.

Do you ask if this is not merely an agreeable fiction; the work of a fond and religious imagination, without any basis in scripture, in history, or the state of the world? And, if giving such a loose rein to fancy, is not

even injurious to the interests of rational piety? I confess, it would be injurious to religion, and an unwarrantable liberty with the word of God, if the interpretation which I have given to this symbolical prediction did not rest upon a solid foundation. I propose, then,

I. In the first place to support this interpretation by the evidence of history and fact.

II. And, in the next place, to explain the import of a prophecy so full of consolation and hope, both to our first parents and to their posterity.

I. To support this interpretation, the argument which has been already used will carry great authority to those who entertain a just respect for the sacred writings. The literal application of the words, if that were supposed to express their whole meaning, would not be worthy of the solemnity of the divine judgment, nor the wisdom and majesty of the divine historian. But, that Adam understood it to relate to a future Saviour, appears from the new name which he immediately gave his wife, signifying she shall be the mother of a living posterity, and from the whole current of ancient prophecy, which descends from him to the time of the Messiah, and from the traditions of all nations who ascend up nearest to the origin of time. God, doubtless, in consoling the first man, and directing his faith to the true means of his salvation, illustrated to him more distinctly than Moses has done in his brief narration, this curt and enigmatical prediction: and he, as a wise and pious man, imparted the tradition to his children, and through them to the numerous nations which sprung from him. No other reasonable and adequate account can be given of the uniformity of ancient tradi-

tions among people the most remote from one another, and all concurring to foretell a heavenly messenger who was to come into the world....a divine prince who was to appear upon earth, under whose reign vice should cease, and expiation be made for the sins of men. This prince was to be born of a virgin, agreeably to the remarkable style of the text, that the *seed of the woman* should bruise the head of the serpent; and agreeable to the prediction of the inspired prophet, *a virgin shall conceive and bear a son*. Permit me to make a few references to history with relation to the whole Mosaic historical picture of the primitive age. They will be found not unimportant to the present subject. Afterwards, I will endeavour to be more practical.

In the Roman poets, and particularly in the celebrated author of the *Metamorphoses*, you discover in the popular traditions which they recite concerning the creation, and the golden age, the evident wrecks of the sacred history. A famous Grecian historian, who has written the expedition of Alexander to India, informs us that this great captain sent one of his learned companions\* to consult an illustrious Bramin† on the subject of their mythological opinions. In the report which he brought back from this distant region, you would think you were reading Moses but a little disguised. The same accounts our christian missionaries have found in China, at the other extremity of the globe. Persia, Chaldea, Phœnicia, Arabia, Greece, every country possesses some traces in its mythology which are perfectly analogous. Take as a type of all the rest, the tradition

\* Onesicritus.

† Calanus.

of Egypt. In the beginning of the world, say they, under the reign of Osiris, who was their second God, and apparently their first mortal, *the earth was fertile and beautiful, and men were innocent and happy. But Typhon, who was their evil demon, and was represented under the form of a huge and dreadful serpent, slew Osiris, and spread disorder, misery and vice through the earth. In the end, however, Osiris shall live again, and obtain a complete victory over the principle of evil.* Who sees not in this fable the innocence and the fall of Adam; the fatal success of the serpent; and the final triumph of the seed of the woman? Nay, so nearly was the time and the place of the Saviour's appearance designated in these traditions, that, at the moment of his birth all nations were erect with the expectation of a divine personage, who was to bring the world to peace, and free it from crimes. The remotest East looked for him from the West; the extremities of the West expected him from the East. The Magicians of Persia, or the sages of Arabia, immediately recognized his star, which appeared over the land of Judea. It is a remarkable fact, lately discovered in the sacred books, and the annals of the Chinese, that they style this expected Saviour "The beautiful man of the West." And about sixty-five years after the birth of Christ, fatigued waiting for the accomplishment of this traditionary prediction, one of their emperors sent a solemn embassy to inquire among the nations of western Asia if the Holy One had yet appeared. They proceeded as far as India, and, finding there the worship of the idol Foe recently established; and presuming that this was the God whom



they had been sent to discover, they ceased their progress, and carried back the idols into China.

The Sybiline verses deposited in the capitol at Rome, concerning which so much fruitless inquiry has been raised by learned men, had fixed this event with so much accuracy, that, a very few years before the appearance of the Messiah, the greatest of the Roman poets speaks of it as an event just at hand, and though he applies it in a strain of flattery to one of his patrons, on the birth of a son, he expresses himself in a style hardly unworthy of a Jewish prophet. Apollo was to be their incarnate God, the expiator of the sins of the world.\* And thus proceeds the sublime poet....The last time is arrived, sung by the Cumæan Sybil; and the mighty order of ages recommences. Now justice returns to the earth, and the innocence and happiness that reigned in the beginning of time. A new progeny descends from heaven. The iron age of *vice* shall cease, and the golden reign of peace and virtue shall overspread the world. Now let thy Apollo reign. The time is just at hand. Enter on thy great honors, dear offspring of heaven! O mighty Son of the Supreme Deity!" What suprizing predictions! What astonishing coincidence with the whole strain of Jewish prophecy! Is it not a proof that the traditions existed before these prophets themselves? That they were handed down from the father of the race, through the medium of wise and pious men in every nation? That they indicate the interpretation which Adam put on the gracious prediction, the consolatory promise in the text? The enemies of christianity, among whom we may particularise the celebrated

\* Hor. Ode 2d, Book 1st.

Bailly and Voltaire, have acknowledged the universality of these traditions, and their resemblance to the sacred history; but endeavour to account for them in every way except that which will reflect honor on the divine word. But the most extravagant of all accounts is that of a late writer,\* who, with an ostentatious parade of profound, but most false learning, pretends to derive the history of the state of innocence, of the temptation, of the fall, and of the future peaceful reign of the Messiah, from a fanciful interpretation of the sphere of the zodiac, framed by the Egyptian astronomers, as if they meant no more than the succession of the four seasons of the year. Spring was the age of innocence....winter of vice and misery. What will not the effrontery of infidelity propose and defend? If christians were obliged, with such arguments and suppositions, to maintain the authenticity of the foundations of their faith, where would its insults, its triumphs end?

Are you surprized, however, at such strong features of resemblance in the mythology of so many and such distant nations? They are evidently derived from the pious care of their common father, who instructed his immediate descendants in all that he knew of God, of the past history of his providence, and of the future hopes of faith. They were preserved in no inconsiderable degree of purity, till long after the age of Abraham, in different countries, by such pious patriarchs as Melchisedec, and Jethro, and Job, who were continually rising among them: and before they became entirely adulterated and obscured by fable, they were recorded by their learned men in books which are still revered

\* Volney's ruins of Palmyra.

by the nations as sacred. At length, however, the popular mind became overwhelmed by the mass of superstitions which were added to the truth. An effect not unlike that which we have seen take place in the church since the purer light of christianity arose. Do you ask what advantage then we enjoy over those nations? We possess that fountain pure and uncorrupted from which it is manifest so many streams have flowed to them, and which have become more or less contaminated in their course. We possess that source of light from which so many rays were shot out into the surrounding darkness that covered the ancient world; and which broke forth with new effulgence on the nations at the period destined by sacred prophecy, and pointed out even by their own traditions; since which time their oracles and their expectations have ceased. Then was born that long promised Messiah....that chosen *seed of the woman*, who was to deliver mankind, by his righteousness, from the evils which she had contributed to bring upon them by her transgression. Jesus Christ, that precious seed, the Son also of the Most High God, appeared upon the earth as a Prince and a Saviour, to rescue it from the destructive power of sin. Thus it appears that Christ himself was the object of this early and consoling prophecy to our first parents. I have now arrived to that point which I proposed in the next place,

II. To illustrate the import of the prediction, *He shall bruise thy head.*

The whole is a prediction conveyed under natural symbols; and, in this symbolical language, the *head* always implies *power and dominion*. *He shall bruise thy*

*head*, therefore, is to say, he shall break thy power, he shall destroy thy dominion, and repair all the evils which thou hast introduced into the world.

Wherein, then, are displayed the power and the evils of sin, that we may thence learn the office of the Saviour, the compassion of the Creator? It subjects us to the curse of the broken law; to the slavery of sin; to the most corrupt and gloomy errors of a base superstition, to the miseries of the world; to the dominion of the grave. To the curse of the broken law; which consists in the alienation of God from the soul; in eternal separation from his presence, who is our life and our chief good; and in suffering his severe and everlasting displeasure. Jesus has removed this fearful curse, by *being made a curse for us*. He is our Intercessor to restore us to the favour of our offended Maker and Judge; our Mediator to remove our distance; he is the divine victim who endured for us all the fires of divine justice. The whole storm of vengeance, if I may speak so, that we had incurred by our guilt, he has borne, and has conquered our enemy by sustaining it. Instead of the terrible denunciations which issued out of the mouth of an offended and inexorable Judge on fallen man, we hear nothing but the invitations, the promises, the hopes addressed by a merciful Saviour to man restored. By the fault of Adam, the curse of death hung over all his posterity; we were born heirs of perdition: by the merits and the perfect righteousness of the glorious Redeemer, we now enter into existence amidst the promises of forgiveness, amidst the consolations of mercy, amidst the hopes of salvation. They are profered to us in this precious Gospel, which



daily sounds in our ears; they are confirmed to us in the first moments of life by the sacred rite of baptism; the seal of their truth and grace is impressed upon our forehead. Hear the benevolent voice of the Gospel: no infant is now condemned to eternal death for the original transgression; every man is answerable to the justice of heaven only for his actual crimes, omissions and imperfections; and the guilt of these is obliterated to the penitent and believing by the same grace and merit which has removed the condemnation of the first. Behold, then, the verification of this divine and original promise! The infernal power of sin stood triumphing in the ruin he had created; he thought to have destroyed the work of God, and to have plunged man irretrievably into the same misery with himself: but see his prey rescued from his grasp, and his dreadful power crushed by that glorious *Seed*; who, in the moment of her extremity, condescended to spring from that afflicted and miserable woman whom he had destined his first victim.

Sin had obtained another victory over man in the corruption of his nature; it had enslaved him to his appetites and passions. The seed of the woman, the desire of all nations, the light of the world, vanquishes its power over the heart by a new creation, by renewing and sanctifying the sincere believer in all the habits of his soul. How does he effect this important victory; this mighty change which converts man from being an enemy, to become the friend of God; which raises him from the depths of sensuality and corruption to the purity of a spiritual, of a holy celestial life? It is by the power of grace, by the influence of truth, by the agency

of the Divine Spirit which gives that truth effect upon the heart. What is that grace then which possesses such a mighty and happy power? It consists in the proffers of mercy; in the hope of eternal life; and the means which Christ has instituted in his church to enable us to attain our everlasting salvation. If man had been held under the rigor of the law, the hopelessness of his state would have hardened him in his crimes. But mercy awakens his gratitude, and encourages his efforts; and gives such energy to a believer in his conflicts against sin, as enables him, under the conduct of the Captain of his salvation, to subdue, at last, the enemy which had enslaved him. Thus is the dominion of sin broken in the soul, the serpent's head is crushed by him who has brought the victorious light of truth, and the hopes of mercy, into a dark and guilty world, and who holds in his hands the residue of the Spirit, to impart it to those who sincerely seek him.

Another effect of the dominion which sin had gained over man by the fall, we behold in the innumerable afflictions with which the world is filled. In these also we witness the sovereign and gracious power of him who has all rule and authority in heaven and on earth committed to him for the sake of the church. Not that he has exempted believers from pain and disease, and the thousand afflictions to which human nature is heir; but he has sanctified these evils to them; he has made them the means of delivering the soul from the sinful and corrupting influence under which it was held. He has taken the arms, if I may speak so, out of the hands of the destroyer, and converted them against himself.

But I can only touch at so many ideas as crowd upon the mind on this important subject. Christ also delivers the world from the darkness, the errors and delusions with which the enemy of God and man had covered the nations. He had erected his throne amidst the darkness of idolatry and superstition. Mankind had almost forgotten the true God, in the multitude of demons which were every where adored. And, under the influence of degrading superstitions, which fostered and licensed the passions, vice and impurity had grown to their height, when the Sun of Righteousness first lifted his beams upon the earth. He dispelled the darkness which formed the chains that bound and enslaved the human mind. The light of divine truth confounded the idols; their temples were deserted; and Satan was dethroned from his usurped dominion over the greater portion of the universe. Instead of the foolish or the abominable rites which were offered to him on innumerable altars, men have learned to worship the only living and true God in spirit and in truth. Half his empire fell when idolatry was destroyed. Truth is gradually extending its omnipotent force: and divine providence is preparing those combinations of events which will carry peace and righteousness along with the truth to the extremities of the earth. Then will be effectually crushed the head of the serpent...the power and kingdom of that *wicked one* so long established over the subject nations.

But the victory of the Redeemer will not be completed till he has broken the chains of death. Death has extended his power over all. And, if we were to look no farther than the grave, sin would seem to have

gained an absolute and final triumph over both God and man. Christ entered into the grave that he might spoil that dreadful spoiler in his own dominions. By the cross, says the apostle, [Col. ii. 15.] he spoiled the principalities and powers of darkness, triumphing over them, and making a show of them openly. There it was that he inflicted on the serpent, the tempter and destroyer of mankind, that mortal wound which, eventually, shall put an entire period to his life and his dominion. And there it was, that in the dreadful conflict, the Saviour himself received that temporary wound which is intended in the prediction when it is said, *Thou shalt bruise his heel*. He revived; but the enemy died. He rose again from the dead in the name of all his people, leading captivity captive; and the nations that now sleep in him, are waiting for his second coming, to rise with him to glory and immortality. Then shall cease forever the empire of death....then shall finally be destroyed the power of evil....the world, desolated by sin, shall be repaired....there shall rise from its ruins *new heavens and a new earth, wherein eternal righteousness and peace shall dwell*....Eden shall flourish once more....Paradise shall be planted again with everlasting beauty....and innocence and felicity shall reign in it under the second Adam, which can never be lost or shaken by temptation. Such are the prospects of faith, and the early import of that promise, the consolation of our first parents, and the hope of the church in every age.

Christians! review the goodness and mercy of God from the first moment of our transgression....the condescension and love of the Redeemer. Let them awa-



ken in your hearts unbounded thankfulness and praise, deeply feeling your unworthiness and guilt, let your faith earnestly embrace the promised and chosen seed as your advocate and intercessor with the Father; as the all-prevailing sacrifice for your sins; as the immovable rock on which are bottomed your immortal hopes. Behold the power and dominion of Satan destroyed by the Captain of your salvation....rejoice with all the redeemed over the restoration of a ruined universe....and, to animate your own virtue and holiness, look forward to the everlasting habitations of purity and joy, where the glory of God shall continually shine upon them like the sun, and the emanations of his love form their interminable and boundless felicity. AMEN!

## TRUST IN GOD.

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I will trust in the covert of thy wings....*Ps. lxi. 4.*

THE frailty of man would often render him a miserable sport to the storms of life, if he had not a higher protection than his own arm, in which he is encouraged, and entitled to trust. When clouds and darkness begin to cover the heavens, and difficulties, and objects of distress and fear are every where multiplied in his path, his ignorance of the nature, the number, and the issue of the dangers and troubles which surround him, serves to augment his fears, and his distress, unless he has some guide on whose wisdom and experience he can rely. In all the calamities of the world which may fall upon a good man, in the midst of the darkest scenes in which he may be placed, in the deepest despondencies which may arise out of the consciousness of his own frailty, or his limited views of the issues of things, the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of God form an object of his tranquil and assured confidence and trust. An irreligious man is left to struggle with difficulties, and to combat with dangers, in his own strength; and when, after being delivered over from one conflict to another, he comes to sink into the land of shadows, he enters it under the tortures of terrible forebodings, or the anguish of the most afflicting doubts. But the pious man always has a refuge in the protection of heaven; even in the *valley of the shadow of death*,

the crook and the staff of the great *Shepherd of souls* is his defence and his comfort. The sacred poet David, in this psalm, employs various interesting images to express his security and consolation in God, under his severest afflictions. He had been banished from his throne and the capital of his kingdom; he was overwhelmed with the crime and ingratitude of a rebellious son; and with the many calamities which naturally press upon the decline of life. From the extremities of the land of Israel, whither he was driven *from the ends of the earth*, as it is expressed in our version, he cried to God, his Saviour, and his confidence, and his consolations were renewed. *Thou wilt lead me to the rock that is higher than I. Thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy.* The rock is an image drawn from the mountainous region of Palestine, in which elevated rocks and precipices were, in an age in which there were few artificial fortresses, the most secure, as well as the most natural means of defence. But his finest image is taken from religion,....*I will abide in thy tabernacle forever: I will trust in the covert of thy wings.* To enter into this image, it is necessary to remember that the tabernacle constructed by Moses was to them instead of a temple; thence issued their oracles; and while the worship of God was maintained there in purity, a power went forth from within to confound their enemies. There was the holy of holies, in which the Cherubim, with outstretched wings, overshadowed the ark of the covenant, the depository of the law and the promises of God, and the seat of that oracular power, so tremendous to his enemies, so consolatory to his friends. To this symbol of the Deity he

seems to have a reference in this beautiful figure, *In the covert of thy wings will I trust.* The wings of the Cherubs were outstretched in the midst of the Schechinah, the splendid and visible emblem of the divine presence. There reposing his trust, there delighting to dwell in the affections and meditations of his heart, he would enjoy both the protection and the consolations of that holy sanctuary in his afflictions. Or if he had a reference to the protection which a parent bird affords her young, the image is still extremely beautiful. When danger threatens the young birds, timid and weak, they run to her for shelter, and couch coveting beneath the wings of their dame; they feel themselves secure. Such is the happy consequence of a rational and pious trust in the God of nature, in all the evils and calamities to which we may be exposed in the world. It is the high and the comfortable privilege of the people of God to trust in him: and the object of this discourse is,

I. In the first place, to illustrate the nature of this duty; and,

II. Secondly, to point out the encouragements which a christian enjoys to confide in God.

I. A rational and pious trust in Almighty God, implies, as its foundation, a deep conviction of the universal government of divine providence, of the wisdom of its plans, and the beneficence of its ends. If the evils of life were the result of blind and inflexible necessity, or of equally blind and capricious accident, our submission must be dumb despair; or the indifference of gamblers on the happiness of life, who hope that one unfavourable cast may, in ordinary cases, be compensated by another that is more fortunate, but who have



no resource within themselves in extreme affliction. But, when we believe that intelligence and goodness preside over the order of the universe, submission is the resignation and duty of a child who confides in a parent's love, and is assured of his beneficent designs. If his father even smites with a rod of severe correction, it is part of a discipline equally gracious and wise. God will not suffer a good man to be crushed by his afflictions: but *to the upright in heart, light shall arise in the midst of darkness*, by the consoling belief that *all things shall work together for good to those who love God*. The tears which are shed, are tears of duty; the pains which are endured, are the pains of repentance; if the child weeps beneath the rod, still he appeals under the scourge to a father's protection, and throws himself on a father's compassion. A sincere and pious trust in God implies not only a belief in the wise and beneficent order of providence, but a just estimate of the goods of this world. Conveniences, comforts they are, while divine providence permits us to enjoy them; but they are not essential to the happiness of a good man, whose supreme portion is in God. But if pride, effeminacy or avarice, have rendered a certain fortune, a certain rank in society, certain indulgences, or a certain measure of homage and respect from the world absolutely necessary to our happiness, the foundation of divine trust is removed. Does confidence in the mercy and the promise of God imply that he will supply all the wants of vanity or sensuality? Does it imply that we shall be exempted from any of the afflictions incident to human nature? No, it implies only that we shall certainly possess, in our pilgrimage through life, whatever is necessary to a good

man, who has not placed too high a value on the world, and who has all his passions and his appetites under perfect regulation and subjection: it implies that under affliction we shall be sustained by the secret aids of divine grace, and that afflictions themselves shall ultimately be numbered among our blessings: it implies, in a word, that whether in abundance or poverty, whether in prosperity or suffering, the consciousness of virtue and the true dignity of human nature, the inward sense of the divine favour which is above all reward, and the certain and triumphant hope of immortality, will support the heart, and shed through it ineffable consolations, which the world in all its prosperity could not yield, nor shall all its sorrows be able to extinguish. Do you trust in God, then? At the appearance of every danger, under the pressure of every calamity, you will flee to the covert of his wings. There you will find a defence from the danger which you feared; or a solace in the calamities which you endure. Their shade will protect you from the intensity of the fires of affliction, and you will draw divine comforts from the ark of the covenant, from the law, the testimony, and the promises, which they cover. Do you trust in God? You will not sink into despair like the men of the world when they have lost their chief good; when, like Micah, they exclaim, *Our gods are taken away, and what have we more!* Your afflictions will be sanctified, and you will come forth out of the furnace seven times purified. By prayer and by faith, taking hold of the throne and the promise of God, you will be kept unmoved in this sea of troubles, and at length be enabled to mount above them all to the land of everlasting peace.

As a pious trust in God rests, as its basis, on a firm belief in the wise and merciful agency of divine providence over all things, it is necessary to correct an error on this subject, which is apt to insinuate itself into the minds even of some good men: it is the unreasonable expectation of some secret but immediate interpositions of heaven in their favour, independently on the established and universal laws of nature. Those have been fixed by infinite wisdom, and are, therefore, immutable: their operation is the agency of God, to whom all things from the beginning to the end of time are present as in one instant. Those laws are so constructed as to accomplish the ends of his wisdom, of his justice, and his grace to every individual of the children of men. Shall an indolent man, then, expect from divine providence, the rewards of industry? Shall a vicious man pursue his inclinations, and say, If I am a chosen vessel of mercy, heaven will interpose to rescue me from destruction? Are these results conformable to the course of nature, which is the will of God? Ah! unwise and foolish men! you shall both reap the fruits of your folly. Do you ask, then, if we should regard only these fixed laws, and look no farther than our own skill to take advantage of them? This is the difference between good men and bad, between the faithful and the unbelieving; these terminate their view on second causes, those in the causes behold the agency of God, who sets in motion their first springs, and holds in his hand their infinite chain.

II. Not only does this grace imply a firm belief in the wise and beneficent government of God over the universe, it is a just estimate of the things of time, but a

confidence in his mercy and protection in every situation in which we may be placed, and in every evil which may befall ourselves. The eyes of a pious man *are continually towards the Lord*; and in health or in sickness, in abundance or in want, when success has raised him to power and influence, or when the arts of his enemies have prevailed against him, his reliance will be ever and only upon God. In one case, it will keep him humble, in the other it will render him tranquil. God is infinite in perfection; therefore, though all the world should abandon him, his Creator and his Saviour will be to him an all-sufficient good. God is omnipotent; therefore, in the greatest fury of the elements, in the convulsions of dissolving nature, his children and servants will be safe *beneath the covert of his wings*. *Though I pass through the valley of the shadow of death, saith the psalmist, yet will I fear no ill, for thou art with me*. And, with the greatest majesty of description, he expresses his confidence in God in the most fearful commotions of the universe. *God is our refuge and our strength, therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, and the mountains shake with its swellings, the Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge*. How noble and sublime is this language of confidence in God! How great and elevated are the sentiments which it inspires! They do not swell and elevate the heart in circumstances of prosperity only, when the feeblest mind may feel itself elated; but they raise up piety from the deepest humiliations. Let me point you to great examples for our encouragement and imitation. Abra-



ham, though led on from pilgrimage to pilgrimage, wearied and disappointed in his expectation of that illustrious promise in which God had caused him to trust, still continued *to hope against hope* till he at length received its glorious accomplishment. Job, cast down from the state of a prince to a loathsome dunghill, covered with disease, robbed by one stroke of all his ample possessions, and by another of all his children, does he despair? does he repine? does he murmur? No; but behold the firm, the sublime confidence of piety! *though he slay me*, saith he, *yet will I trust in him*. It is thus that we should rest all our hopes on God, even in those moments when his mercy seems to have departed.

It is true, when calamities press us, and the world begins to wear those colours of gloom, in which affliction and disappointment paint it, it is natural for a tender and sensible heart to turn its views to heaven, to pour itself out in ardent prayers to the Father of mercies, and to seek its happiness from him in proportion as all its earthly sources are dried up. But these fervent movements of the soul are only occasional in their exercise, and temporary in their duration. Trust in God is a more tranquil and habitual state of the mind. It rests upon him with a composed and steady assurance, which saves it from the troublesome agitations of the world: and in the midst of difficulties, the most overwhelming distresses, and apparent repulses from heaven, it demonstrates its power, in the perseverance and confidence of prayer. See, as an example, the happy importunity and the successful assurance of the woman of Canaan. If God defers to answer the peti-

tions of his children, it is to try their faith, to confirm their grace, and to make them feel their dependence upon him. It is not given to man to know the times and the seasons which are laid up in his own breast. Therefore, saith the prophet, *if the vision tarry, wait for it.* (Hab. ii. 3.) *Wait on the Lord*, saith Solomon, *and he shall save you.*

III. Another character of genuine trust in God, is diligence and fidelity in every duty. God has not, by any promise, charged himself with the care of the idle, the imprudent, or the vicious. Sometimes, indeed, he curses them with undeserved prosperity. Curses, I say, for their enjoyments, from the use which they make of them, are far from proving blessings. But he sanctifies every event to those only who receive it with pious dispositions. *All things*, saith he, *shall work together for good*; but to whom? *To those only who love God.* *All his ways are mercy and truth*; but to whom? *To those who keep his covenant and his testimonies*; that is, to those who obey all his commandments. Trust in God on any other ground is presumption. It is the claim of sinners to the boon of his people. My brethren, we resemble children cast on a desert and dangerous shore; but still under the care of a wise and experienced parent. Amidst all their dangers they feel themselves secure in his wisdom and protection; but each must perform with alacrity the task which his father has assigned to him for the safety and comfort of all. On no other terms can they be secure and happy. For what end, indeed, has the Creator given us laws, but that we might obey them? For what end has he endued us with powers, but that we might employ them in his service,

which is the service of ourselves, and of one another? Genuine trust in God springs from a principle of piety in the heart, and tends in its turn to strengthen within us every pious disposition. To assist us in the progress of holiness, to encourage man to fulfil his duties, have been given *those great and precious promises* in which the Spirit of Truth hath *caused us to hope*. To this end are pointed all those rays of light which are continually breaking upon us from the bosom of the darkest clouds of affliction. Confidence in God, and piety to him, an enlightened confidence and fidelity in every duty are united together by eternal and indissoluble bonds.

Let us now consider for a moment how little this duty is understood, and how much it is violated by the indolent, the imprudent professor of religion, and by the impatient worldling. Hardly is there a greater contradiction than an idle christian; a greater reproach to religion than an idle professor of the gospel, who, under the pretence of devotion, of religious duties, of trusting providence, is negligent of his own affairs, indulges a base and degrading indolence of character, and does not fill up his time, and employ his talents, to the proper purposes of life. Would he have his Saviour rain manna on him from heaven, or bring his drink from the flinty rock? Would he have him work miracles for the encouragement of vices which would bring ruin on society? How often does imprudence charge its unhappy consequences upon providence! For example, do you neglect your children? Do you expose them to temptation and to vice? Do you suffer them without instruction, without the inspection of wisdom and experience, without a prudent and careful discipline, to frequent the

scenes of dissipation, to associate even on the Lord's day only with those of equal inexperience and folly with themselves? And do you hope to preserve them from contagion while they are permitted continually to breathe an infected atmosphere? Is this trusting providence with their virtue and safety? No, it is the most imprudent and unchristian dereliction of duty; and providence, in giving effect to its own laws, will punish severely, and sometimes dreadfully, such mistaken and impious confidence.

An evil directly contrary to the preceding is that impatience for the world which is perpetually demanding, *What shall we eat? what shall we drink? and wherewithal shall we be clothed?* Forever anxious about the future; plying with eagerness the means of success, they resign nothing to the supreme and all-directing will of God. *Consider the lillies of the field how they grow. Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of them: and shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith.* Diligence is a virtue; anxiety is a vice. When we have used every proper mean to acquire success, or to ward off evil, trust in God for whatever is then necessary, is a high christian grace. But remember there is little which is really necessary. A pious mind should be so superior to the world as not to be solicitous when any of its goods are withheld, nor to repine when they are taken away. It should inhabit, if I may speak so, a sphere above the agitations of the world, solacing itself supremely in God, and the hope of immortality. This is the proper disposition for pious trust. What is necessary we shall receive; what is withheld will not render us unhappy; what is bestowed we shall enjoy with



thankfulness; what is taken away we shall resign without regret; what we suffer we shall endure with patience, assured that from all the sufferings, the griefs, and changes of the world, we shall shortly find a secure and peaceful asylum in the bosom of God. Noble, and even sublime are the sentiments of an ancient stoic philosopher on this subject. "Lift thy view," saith he, "to that great Being; raise thy heart to thy God. Say to him, Lord! dispose of me at thy pleasure. Thy will shall be mine. I refuse nothing that seemeth good to thee. Raise me to public employment, or still leave me in a humble condition; let me be banished from my country, or let me find in it a peaceful habitation; bestow on me riches, or leave me to struggle with poverty; whatever it may please thee to do, I accept it all, for thou best knowest what is good for me."\* And who is this who speaks with such resignation; who reposes such trust in heaven? Epictetus, a heathen; a man who had received from nature a deformed person, who was reduced to extreme poverty, who was torn from his country and enslaved to a hard and cruel master. Yet, behold his admirable patience! Ah! shall a heathen teach us our duty! Let shame give vigor to the high and spiritual precepts of Jesus Christ. My brethren, I delight to quote such examples. They may serve to stimulate our faith, while they expand our charity. They show us the kingdom of God extended beyond the limits which our prejudices, perhaps, had fixed to it; and point out to us heathens, virtuous by the lights of nature or tradition, and redeemed, like the patriarchs of the old world, by a Saviour whom they had not yet known.

\* Epictetus in Arrian.

Such, christians, and, if possible, more perfect still, be your confidence in the mercy, your submission to the will of your heavenly Father. Unite the patience of submission with the activity of duty. So estimate this world that your supreme care shall always be to obtain the kingdom of God, and to cultivate that righteousness which will prepare you for it, and lead you to it. He may not crown your industry with wealth; but you shall not want food and raiment, and it is impious to murmur for other wants. He may not raise you to honors and distinctions among men; but you shall have that honor which cometh from God. He may not exempt you from afflictions; but he will convert them into blessings. You must sink into the grave; but there he will hide you beneath the covert of his wings, till, at last, surmounting the ruins of death, and the dissolution of the universe, you shall rise to live for ever with the Lord. *O taste, and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man who trusteth in him!* AMEN!

## ON DEVOTION.

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It is good for me to draw near to God....*Ps. lxxiii. 28.*

TRUE devotion, to a pious mind, is a source at once of the greatest pleasure and the greatest use. It contributes to increase our comforts, to strengthen our virtue, and, in many ways, to meliorate our condition even in the present world. The scriptures are replete with promises to this effect. And every good man finds his peace and happiness promoted in proportion as he worships God in spirit and in truth. This is the import of the declaration in the text, in which the acts of devotion are, by a just and natural figure, styled drawing near to God. For although he penetrates, pervades, and fills all things, yet, an undevout man does not discern him. Ignorance and blindness seem to remove him to an infinite distance. Even piety is less sensible of his presence during the ordinary train of life, than when, in the immediate acts of a fervent worship, it brings this truth home to the bosom, and gives the sentiment of his existence and perfection a more lively impression on the heart. Always equally near to God, in whom we live and move and have our being, devotion renders us sensible of his presence, and we seem to approximate him in proportion as we perceive and feel him.

The text is a reflection of experience. The psalmist had felt the influence of devotion in improving his vir-

tue and augmenting the satisfactions of life; and, in the numerous disasters that befel that pious prince, he had found it the greatest alleviation of all his afflictions. Every devout and judicious christian will be able himself to verify the reflection of the sacred writer, from the tendency of devotion to strengthen the habits of piety and virtue....from the happy aspect which it has even on his temporal interests....from the direct and immediate pleasures it imparts to the heart...and from the relief it affords under the pressure of affliction.

These are the truths which I mean to illustrate on this subject. But because they seem to be contradicted by the experience of those who perceive neither the benefits nor the pleasures of devotion, I shall strengthen the argument, in the next place, by pointing out the reasons why devotion is unprofitable and unpleasant to those who do not experience its comforts or its use.

I. The benefits of devotion appear,

I. In the first place, because it strengthens the habits of piety and virtue, which are the chief sources of happiness to a good man.

How doth it strengthen these habits? By impressing the mind with deep reverence of the majesty and holiness of God; by preserving it from temptation; and by being itself the animated exercise of every virtuous and pious disposition.

I. When the devout mind is prostrate before the throne of God....when it is overwhelmed with the infinity of his nature, and penetrated with the grandeur of his justice....when it feels itself annihilated in the presence of him before whom the universe is nothing, what deep impression do these ideas give of the holi-



ness and the obligation of the divine law? Do they not add force to every precept of duty? Do they not impose the most effectual restraint on every vice? The infinity of the divine nature spreads itself on all the perfections of God. His holiness, his justice, his goodness and his truth, derive hence their greatest influence on the human mind. And the motives of reverence and love unite their force to procure obedience, and impress submission to his laws. Overwhelmed with his presence and glory, is there a wish that revolts? is there a thought that wanders? is there an affection that solicits an improper object? Devotion is peculiarly fitted to call up these ideas, and to give them their greatest efficacy. The mind suspended from worldly attentions is filled only with God....excited by the solemnity and fervour of the act, and by the greatness of the object before it, it is capable of greater conceptions than usual. Collected within itself, and more conscious of its own movements, it seems more open also to the inspection of infinite justice. The fear combined with the love of God gives greater energy to the principles of piety and virtue in forming the heart.

II. Devotion assists the progress of virtue by preserving the soul always vigilant against the access of vice. Penetrated with the justice and holiness of God while it is before his throne, the impression cannot speedily be lost. It passes with us into the world; it mingles with the business of life; it operates at once as a motive to virtue, and a check to temptation. The greatness of the object that fills the mind in devotion, rouses its powers; the fervor of its action makes it capable of greater exertions in its conflicts with vice. The

holiness of the Divine Nature, and our interest in his favour, which, at those moments, we feel with the greatest force, render it more vigilant and attentive to every duty as it rises. Can an honest man pray for the improvement of virtue in his own heart, and then, with insincerity and falsehood, neglect the necessary means of its cultivation? Can he pray against the access of temptation, and then voluntarily throw himself in its way? Will not its deformity and its dangers be magnified while he contemplates them in the presence of God? Will not his resolution both to shun and to combat them be increased? Will not the grateful acknowledgement of mercies at the throne of grace, while it creates a higher estimate of their value, more effectually preserve them from abuse? Will not the penitent confession of sin preserve him humble and dependent on the grace of God, which, while it animates his own diligence, will prove his most effectual aid to subdue it? Yes: by the power of devotion sin will be most vigorously resisted; its access will be most vigilantly remarked and repulsed; and its dominion will be gradually, indeed, but effectually subdued.

III. Devotion, in the last place, strengthens virtue by being itself the animated exercise of every good and pious disposition. The love of God, and the love of man compose its spirit: and as every particular duty is, in succession, the subject of contemplation, or of petition at the throne of grace, its principles are of course brought into action. Do we not believe, in praying for the increase of our faith? While we confess and deplore our sins, are we not cultivating the spirit of repentance? In worshipping him who is the origin and

sum of all that is beautiful and perfect, can we fail to be touched with the love of infinite beauty, and infinite perfection? Love that prompts us to aspire after union and conformity with it? Love that assimilates us to the perfection we adore? The exercise of all the affections of piety that, in succession, take possession of the heart in adoration, in prayer, and in praise, tends to strengthen virtue in its principles. This is true of every virtuous and holy emotion of the heart, even in the ordinary train of life. But, in the immediate acts of devotion, do we not perceive a warmth and vigor of soul, a liveliness and fervor of conception, that gives to every idea its most active force, and most assimilating influence. Habit at length confirms every affection, and fixes every principle. It makes them a part of our nature, and weaves them into the whole texture of the heart, and the whole conduct of life. Thus does devotion tend to promote the virtue, and, in that, the happiness of every good man. Unspeakable and unfailing source of happiness! Philosophy has long sought its supreme satisfactions in virtue; in the moderation and the just direction of all the passions. This source devotion improves to its greatest perfection. But it adds superior pleasures of its own, in the contemplation, the love, the *enjoyment*, shall I say? of infinite beauty, wisdom and goodness. Is it not, in some degree, participating the divine image. And can any source of happiness be superior to those heavenly affections that render us like to God? Sincere worshipper of God! what sweet effusions of heart have you felt before his throne! What inexpressible happiness in contemplating, and being penetrated, as it were, with infinite perfection,

in loving and being beloved! Cultivate the spirit of devotion. Your improvement in virtue and the pleasures of piety, will often constrain you to repeat, "It is good for me to draw near to God."

II. A devout man will be able to verify this reflection, in the next place, from the happy aspect which this spirit has even on his temporal interests, and his enjoyment of the world.

Does devotion, it will be demanded, contribute to advance our earthly fortunes? Or does the promise of hearing prayer imply success and prosperity in all our worldly pursuits? The principles of piety do not reverse the ordinary laws of nature. Both in physical and moral subjects, means are equally necessary to attain the end: and in both, perhaps, prayer, as a secondary mean, operates with equal success. It improves the habits of sobriety, temperance, and conscientious industry, which are so favorable to fortune; and in some way, which we cannot explain, procures on our efforts the blessing of heaven: at least, the train of natural causes may have been so laid in the infinite foreknowledge of God, as to answer the prayers of his people in such a manner as to his wisdom seems best. The narrow understanding of man, however, which is unable to embrace in one view the present and the future, cannot determine, in reference to the whole of his being, what is good for him. It becomes him to believe that the order of providence is merciful and wise, and to receive with submission and with thankfulness, as the best answer of his faithful prayers, the portion which God bestows, whether it be large or small. 'It ought, however, to be remembered, that ample fortune or honors



are not always the happiest state for a christian; nor do they afford him the best enjoyment of the world. How often do its anxieties overbalance its pleasures. How often do its doubts, its disappointments, and its pains, its envies, its jealousies and competitions disturb and canker all the happiness it is able to bestow? A devout mind, in submission to the will of God, feels that contentment that gives a relish even to the pittance of the poor. The enjoyment of life does not depend so much on the quantity of our possessions as on the habits of the mind, and its accommodation to its state. These ends are greatly promoted by a spirit of devotion, and by resignation to the wisdom and goodness of providence with which it is always accompanied. Devotion adds, besides, many sweet satisfactions of its own to our worldly blessings that increase the enjoyment they afford. Do not the delightful emotions of heart which a good man feels at the throne of grace; the fervent contemplation of the divine glory; the consciousness of the favour of God; and the hopes of eternal life which appear more lively and certain when the soul is warmed and elevated by the spirit of devotion, spread serenity and satisfaction over the scenes of life, and bless the moderate portion he possesses? The mind, composed and sweetened by the power of religion, is freed from those agitations and miseries that spring from passions that are not well regulated, or are too much attached to the world. Even the afflictions that are mingled in his lot are forgotten or relieved, in the presence of God, and converted to a pious and an useful purpose. And the penetrating and grateful eye of devotion discovers innumerable blessings in the minutest objects, that by a

cold and unthankful mind are never observed. Life appears more richly replenished with mercies, when, in the presence of God, the divine goodness seems to transfuse itself through all: and a spirit of humble and grateful devotion really gives a good man the best enjoyment of the world.

III. The pleasures also which devotion directly imparts to the heart, confirm, to a devout man, the reflection of the sacred writer, 'That it is good for him to draw near to God.'

Christians! I must appeal to your own experience. This is the proper verification of every principle that depends on sentiment and feeling. What pleasures flow from the exercise; what pleasures are enjoyed in the object; what pleasures result from the effect of devotion?

Is not this exercise the action of all the sweetest powers of the soul, adoration, wonder, confidence, hope, trust, gratitude, and love? what pleasing astonishment fills the mind, when, from the depth of human imperfection it surveys the boundless glories of God! What exquisite emotions of heart does a child of piety feel in the presence of his heavenly Father, while he recognizes his goodness, and reciprocates his love? With what tranquillity and security amidst weakness and dangers can he rely on the wisdom, the power, and the stable promise of the Saviour? What tears of joy flow at the throne of grace on the recollection of forgiven sin? What pleasures does hope shed through the soul when, from the foot of the throne, he looks up to the glory that is to be revealed! We want language to express these delightful sentiments and flowings of the

heart. Do they not afford enjoyments the most pure, the most exquisite, and superior to the world? Cherish, believers! this heavenly source of joy.

Do not many pleasures, likewise, arise in this act from the contemplation of the object of devotion? If beauty and greatness in the works of nature, if wisdom and goodness in the moral creation, afford the highest pleasures which we know among men, how much richer, more noble, and perfect, are these qualities in the Creator? His works are but shadows of his glory, addressed to the feebleness of sense. When devotion warms and elevates the soul, and faith is enabled to penetrate beyond the shadow to the substance, beyond the streams to the source, then are these enjoyments tasted in their highest degree. In him, moreover, you contemplate a Creator, a Parent, a Saviour, and, what comprehends all, a God. These ideas contain whatever is most interesting to the human heart. In the tide of love that often fills it in his presence, the world and its enjoyments, at other times so precious, seem to be absorbed and lost, or to derive their only value from their relation to him. Is it not the nature of love to occupy the soul with one object, and to draw all its powers into one action? Then are we most happy: and, christians! have you ever been so blessed as in those moments when God was all in all? In devotion, also, much benefit and happiness result from its immediate effects.

Is not its tendency to strengthen the habits of piety and virtue? Is it not indeed the epitome of religion?—piety collected, as it were, to its warm and active centre? Devotion is the inward and the fervent action of

every holy disposition. From the mount of prayer, therefore, we will return more conformed to the image of God. We shall descend into life more fitted to discharge its duties, and better prepared to endure its trials. It introduces into the affections that moderation, and that just direction which are most subservient at once to virtue and to self-enjoyment. Are not impatient desires and turbulent passions calmed before the majesty of God? Are not relative attachments heightened and endeared while we view one another in those interesting lights in which religion places us before the presence of God? Is not charity to human kind increased while we contemplate them all as children of one universal parent, and are imploring grace and talents to enable us to serve them? Is it not an exercise peculiarly calculated to promote and cherish the flame of divine love? Yes, virtue, purity, holiness grow and flourish in the divine presence as under their proper sun. These qualities form the dignity and happiness of man: and every sincere and fervent act of devotion is a new gradation towards the final perfection and felicity of human nature.

IV. It is good, in the last place, to draw near to God, because it is a relief and comfort under the afflictions that spring out of the general order of providence in the world. Affliction is the certain portion, and, perhaps, the necessary medicine of a frail and depraved nature. But as no affliction, for the present, seemeth to be joyous, but grievous, it is an object of high consequence in life to find a proper and sufficient source of consolation under its pressure. This is furnished in general by religion, but especially by the power of devotion. The



glory of him whom we adore takes off the mind from the consideration of its own suffering: confidence in his paternal goodness enables us to view them in the light of eventual blessings: and the hope of eternal life, which is cherished at his throne, affords the best consolation under them by anticipating their glorious issue. Do we not find, in innumerable instances, superior pleasures lessen or absorb the sense of inferior pains? Devotion contains within itself sources of the highest enjoyment; it presents an object whose glories occupy all the powers of the soul; it draws forth those delightful affections that suspend the pains of affliction, or even improve them into a spring of joy. They heighten the sensibility of the heart, and, assisting to detach it from the world, give its whole force to the pleasures of devotion. Christians! when, at the throne of grace, you are occupied in the contemplation of the divine nature; when you feel your soul penetrated with the love of God; when you are lost, as it were, and swallowed up in the admiration of his infinite glories,—how little appear all those causes of suffering which the want of faith alone had magnified! Cherish devotion, therefore, into habit. Make it your constant resource under every affliction; it will prove to you the surest spring of consolation upon earth. Confidence, in the next place, in his paternal goodness, will enable you to view them in the light of eventual blessings.

In the present moment, indeed, is it not a great relief to the heart to be able to disburthen itself by venting its sorrows, and pouring its tears into the bosom of a father? But you have his promise, likewise, that “all things shall work together for good to those who love

God, to those who are the called according to his purpose." Is not a parent often more kind to a child in what he withholds than in what he bestows? Are not his chastisements designed to separate the affections from objects that would insnare and mislead them? Doth not a devout faith, in like manner, sometimes discern our greatest mercies in the afflictions we endure from the hand of God? Confident, at least, in the beneficence of all his designs, it serves to reconcile the mind to its portion, and often to make it acquiesce with patience in sufferings, the end of which it cannot immediately perceive. The humility that is cultivated in the presence of the majesty and holiness of God contributes to compose the soul to resignation. We are, through weakness, incapable of judging what is best for us; and, through guilt, unworthy to be happy. How much more, we are ready to exclaim, do we deserve to suffer? Under this humiliating conviction, are not the mercies that remain in the midst of our afflictions, enjoyed with a gratitude and sensibility that greatly mitigate the rigors of suffering?

Are not all the preceding principles verified in the experience of a devout christian? In the moment you are enabled to say with sincerity, "Our Father who art in heaven!" do you not feel your heart more weaned from the corrupting pleasures of the world? Do you not perceive the force of temptation more broken? Do you not discover his mercy as well as justice in your afflictions? Yes, in affliction the devout soul adheres more closely to God as its portion and its hope. Devotion is animated by the sensibility that grief awakens, and by having the heart withdrawn from every other object:

hence, it becomes a richer source of consolations. Philosophy has long considered suffering as the school of wisdom and of virtue. To the afflictions, indeed, that are in the world, we are, perhaps, chiefly indebted for the prudence, the goodness, and consequently the happiness that is in it. But devotion more effectually directs them to their proper end; and mingles with them, moreover, alleviations and comforts that can never be enjoyed by philosophy alone.

Finally, the hope of eternal life, which is contemplated by a devout mind as the end of all its sorrows upon earth, affords it the greatest relief under their pressure. The eye of faith looks forward to a period of rest and happiness which encourages the heart to wait, and strengthens it to suffer. They are intended by God as an useful discipline to prepare his children for the possession of that immortal inheritance: they relax the ties that hold us to the present world: they awaken the aspirations of the heart after that holy and happy state where sin and sorrow obtain no admission: they cultivate its affections for those pure enjoyments that reign there. When, therefore, we contemplate, at the throne of grace, the period of trial and affliction, do not the bright and immortal hopes that open on our faith, tend to lighten its weight, and to render the mind resigned and patient? Do not the blessings that result from affliction, by weakening the power of vice, and preparing us for the world to come, impart serenity to submission and cheerfulness to patience? Doth not the hope of the glory to be revealed, which affliction brings nearer to our view, even, sometimes, crown with joy the pains which are only hastening its possession? Under the

pressure of grief, therefore, to what refuge can a good man resort, with so much certainty and comfort, as devotion? Devotion kindles and enlightens the prospects of future happiness. Cultivate this spirit, then, believers! as the sovereign remedy of all your sorrows. If misfortune hath frowned upon your hopes in this world, doth it not open to your view a more secure and blessed inheritance in the world to come? If your dearest connexions are torn from you, do they not here seem to revive to your embrace while you look forward to a more permanent and happy union with them in heaven? If you suffer from the obloquy of tongues, do you not here behold your innocence vindicated before the Judge of all? If sickness or pain oppress you, do you not find relief and consolation when you remember that land where "God shall wipe away all tears from your eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." (Rev. xxi. 4.) In pure and fervent devotion, an exquisite feeling is awakened that gives to all these ideas their greatest beauty, and their greatest force. In its holy fervors and its comfortable views, let every afflicted christian seek his consolation.

Such, my brethren, are the benefits and pleasures of true devotion; of that devotion that touches and sanctifies the heart, and is not wasted in cold and inanimate form. Forms are useful, principles of truth are necessary; but devotion ascends above them all, seizes the affections in their source, occupies, warms, dissolves and changes the heart. Shall I recapitulate its uses? It tends to strengthen the habits of piety and virtue, by



impressing the mind with reverence for the majesty and holiness of God; by checking the influence of temptation, and by being itself the animated exercise of every virtuous and pious disposition. It has a happy aspect on our temporal interests by promoting good habits, and by procuring the blessing of heaven; and it gives a good man the best enjoyment of the world by creating contentment, serenity, hope, and by mingling with it the higher pleasures of religion. It imparts many pleasures directly to the heart in its exercises, in its object, and in its immediate effects; and, finally, it is the most certain relief, and the highest comfort under every affliction. Cultivate therefore the spirit of devotion: “My soul wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him.” (Ps. lxii. 5.) “Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your hearts before him: God is a refuge for us.” (*ib.* 8.) “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” (Is. xl. 31.) So do thou be pleased, most merciful God, to dispose our hearts! for Christ’s sake. AMEN.

## IMMORTALITY CLEARLY REVEALED ONLY BY THE GOSPEL.

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Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord! to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.—*John vi. 68.*

ONE of the most powerful principles and ardent desires in human nature is the desire of continued existence: and mankind, in all ages, when their moral habits have not been extremely depraved, have discovered a pre-sentiment and a lively hope of a future state of being. Whether this has arisen from some deep impression on the heart by the hand of the Creator, or from any other cause, the fact is clearly established from the moral history of man. But it is not less clear that reason alone cannot furnish any satisfactory conclusions on which the hope of immortality can rest; and the ideas which tradition, and the different religions of paganism afford concerning it, are infinitely vague and obscure. On this, as on many other subjects of the utmost importance to the duty and happiness of men, nature gives certain pointings to truth; reason, pursuing these feeble lights, draws from them probable rules of conduct, and probable hopes and encouragements that lead to duty; but certainty can be attained only from the spirit of inspiration. The doctrine of immortality, to which the gospel has given the strongest evidence, and on which, perhaps, it has imparted the clearest ideas that the human mind in the present state of existence is capable of receiving, is infinitely precious to

us, both as men and as sinners. It confirms the hope of being so dear to those who have not, by their vices, made it their interest not to be: it removes that anxious and painful uncertainty that rested on the close of life to the best of men in the heathen world; it delivers the conscience of the penitent from those fearful forebodings that harrass the latter end of guilt: it opens to the pious the blessed prospect of unutterable, interminable felicity, rendered infinitely more precious by comparing it with the endless miseries of which we were heirs by sin, and from which we can be delivered only by him who is the Author of eternal life. The hope of immortality, and the revelation of the way in which it is obtained through Jesus Christ, are among the most invaluable fruits of the knowledge of the gospel. How much do we owe to the Saviour, who has enlightened the shadow of death, and who has offered to man, and who alone is able to confer it, everlasting life and felicity on the pure in heart. Without the knowledge of this truth, how disconsolate would be human nature in the midst of its manifold afflictions! how fearful the approach of death in the midst of our ignorance and apprehensions of that gloomy and terrible futurity which follows. To whom, then, shall we apply for instruction or consolation on this interesting subject? Shall we look into our own breasts? They are covered with darkness, and agitated with doubt. Shall we ask of the philosophers or the priests of antiquity? Alas! neither the schools nor the temples can afford us any satisfaction. Jesus alone hath brought life and immortality to light. Such seem to have been the ideas of Simon, when our blessed Lord, after the defection of part of his

disciples, asked those who remained if they also would go away. *To whom shall we go? saith he, thou hast the words of eternal life.* This answer, worthy the zeal of the most fervent of the apostles, is full of instruction. Let us, in this discourse, consider its import, and those useful and practical lessons, which, in the course of the illustration, it may suggest for the regulation of our faith and conduct. It implies, then,

I. That from no other teacher could they derive any certain hope of immortality, or any knowledge of the means of attaining it;

II. And, in the next place, that the revelation of this doctrine forms the ground of the most affectionate and inviolable attachment to the Saviour.

I. In the first place, from no other teacher but from Christ could they derive any certain hope of immortality, or any knowledge of the means of attaining it. To whom should they go for this end? They could apply only to the institutions of paganism, the schools of the philosophers, or the laws of Moses. From all these they must return unsatisfied and disappointed. They possessed no principles on which the mind, anxious to preserve her existence, and to look into futurity, could securely rest. The popular fables, under which the ideas of immortality were conveyed in the pagan temples, were too absurd to satisfy a rational mind that sought for some solid ground to support her hopes. They resembled the empty and fleeting shadows of a dream, or the wild visions of a disordered fancy. The philosophers, perceiving the weakness and folly of the public superstition, set themselves with ardor to discover some more reasonable foundations both of duty



and of hope. But, it is a subject on which the human mind is soon lost. We can gain no principles on which to build a demonstration. We are not sufficiently acquainted with the nature of the soul, or of its connexion with the body, to trace its existence after that union is dissolved. The best criterion by which to determine what reason can do, is to examine what it has actually done in the wisest of men. The philosophers could not agree upon principles, it is no wonder then that they ended in the most contradictory conclusions. One made thought an attribute of matter, which was therefore dissolved with the body. Another supposed that it was a discription from the divine essence, into which it is again refused at death. A third, but without any other proof than tradition, imagined the soul to be an individual being, and separable from the body. But all equally rested their systems upon hypothesis, which left the mind a continual prey to uncertainty and doubt. The most moral of the philosophers, relying on the pointings of nature, on the suggestions of the heart, on the hopes of virtue, on the fears of guilt, on the traditions of nations, on the general apprehensions of mankind, accumulated probabilities, and endeavoured to fortify in their breasts this delightful hope, but probability was all that they could attain. The best and most virtuous hoped; others were torn by the most cruel anxieties; but the great majority circumscribing their views within the sphere of this world, studied never to look beyond it. If to us reason seems more clearly to point out a future and immortal existence than it did to them, it is only because that, being nursed in the belief of this doctrine, on the authority of revelation, and ac-

customed to admit the conclusion as an infallible truth, we are prone to ascribe to the principles that lead towards it, more evidence than they possess. The lights of revelation have given us a confidence in them which the wisest men of the pagan world would not repose. But why demonstrate the infirmity of reason upon this subject, when the greater part of those who profess to worship it, and who arrogate to themselves pre-eminently the title of philosophers, not only do not deny but glory in the fact. It is their boast and their triumph that they are to perish at death, and that having lived the life, they shall have the same end with the beast, and religion no more be able to persecute them with her self-denials and her terrors.

Leaving, therefore, the doubts of the schools and the absurdities of the temples, should the twelve, like those false disciples who forsook their master when he preached to them the high and spiritual doctrines of the cross, have returned to the law of Moses, in which they had been educated. It was doubtless a better guide; but all its future hopes were involved in shadows....It was a system of *carnal ordinances*, to use the language of the apostle, which only pointed to *good things to come*; to a purer and more heavenly dispensation; to that Messiah who was then their master and instructor.

But had the institution of Moses been originally much clearer, it was now corrupted by the commentaries of the rabbins, and the vain traditions of the elders. They had obscured the glory of Moses: and though the doctrine of a future state was received among their tenets, it was so clouded by fable, and the way that leads to eternal life was so obstructed with

frivolous, and burdensome, and useless rites, that the weary pilgrim knew not where to rest, and scarcely could discern whither he was going. *Ye hypocrites!* saith our Saviour, *ye neither go into the kingdom of heaven yourselves, neither suffer ye those who are entering to go in.*

These faithful disciples, therefore, unable to derive either light or consolation from any other Master, adhered to the blessed Jesus with the most affectionate zeal as *a teacher sent from God*; and the only teacher of this sublime and interesting truth who deserved their confidence. *To whom shall we go?* say they. Shall we go to the temples of paganism, where we can find no principle on which a rational mind can repose; where human reason has been prostrated by the most absurd superstitions; where men have placed upon the throne of God all the passions, and served them with all the vices? Shall we go to the vain schools which contending philosophers have erected? They lead us only from doubt to doubt; they shock us by contradictions; they involve the mind in greater uncertainties than ever; they leave us nothing on which to stand but the weak grounds of conjecture that continually tremble under our feet, and threaten every moment to plunge us blindfold into the unknown and fearful abyss of eternity. Shall we, finally, go to the law of Moses, and, amidst its obscurities again submit to *a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear*? No, blessed Saviour! we abandon all these imperfect and fallacious sources of hope, and cleave only to thee. We have heard thy gracious voice; we have seen thy divine

works; we believe that *thou art the anointed, the Son of the living God; and that thou only hast the words of eternal life.*

Christ taught them this doctrine, not by bringing to light new principles in our nature from which to reason; not by giving them more ingenuity and skill in the *management* of those which are known and common to mankind; but by stamping upon the truth a divine authority and sanction.

If it had been an object of reason, it would probably have been left with other branches of science to have been discovered and perfected in the slow progress of human improvement. Perhaps the principles on which it rests, are not within the comprehension of the human understanding, in its present state of knowledge. Perhaps there is no natural and necessary connexion between the mind of man, or indeed any created mind and immortality. Or if there be, as we have lost our title to this blessing by the fall, and the consequent corruption of our nature, its restoration being an act of pure gratuity and mercy in God; the knowledge of it must be a subject purely and exclusively of divine revelation. In each period of existence that is preparatory for a following and higher one, there may be ideas necessary to be known, to the investigations of which the mind in its first stage is not competent, and for which it must depend upon authority. Thus, in childhood and youth, how many truths are there which we must receive on the authority of parents and instructors, before the understanding is ripe enough to discover them itself? Much more must the human mind, in the present state, be incompetent to form just ideas concerning a future and invisible con-



dition of being, and must, therefore, depend for them upon a divine authority. Our first care, then, ought to be to establish the authority of that revelation that professes to be from God, and when that is done, it becomes our duty, implicitly, to receive its instructions on all those subjects that must be acknowledged to be above the present reach of the human powers. The great object of our Saviour's mission into the world was to bring life and immortality to light, as the sublimest motive and reward of duty, and as the sweetest consolation of affliction; it was, by his power, and the sacrifice of himself, to confer it on those whom he should redeem from guilt, and the original curse of our nature. The end of the gospel is to restore to man that immortality which he had lost by the fall; and to impart to him the knowledge of this inestimable mercy, which he had no other means of obtaining, having lost the very principles of life by his sin. When this truth shines with full lustre upon the mind from such a divine and infallible source, it is pleasing then to compare it with the probabilities that nature had antecedently suggested, and to see all the tendencies, the desires and hopes of virtue confirmed with such glorious evidence.

The discourses of our Saviour are full of this sublime and consoling doctrine. It is the spirit that animates his public instructions, his private conversations, and the whole of his mission upon earth. But the evidence of its reality and the proof of his own divine character, are the same. It consists in those works which no other man could do, which were worthy of God, and indicated the power of God every where attending him. An evidence addressed, not to the speculative powers

and doubt; but to their senses, which, therefore, became as clear to them as first principles: no less evident than their own existence, or the existence of any of the objects of sense. But the greatest of his works, and the most unquestionable evidence of the doctrine, afterwards exhibited to the same disciples, was his own triumphant resurrection from the dead. He demonstrated his power over death by breaking its chains: and, by that act, has given assurance to all the faithful that he will also restore their imprisoned dust from the grave, and re-animate it with life that shall never be extinguished. He has ascended to heaven in the name of his people, to prepare a place for them; and, in like manner as they have seen him ascend, will he come again and receive them to himself. And so strong was their persuasion of this precious truth, and so clear their conviction that it proceeded from a teacher sent from God, that, to attest both, they were continually ready to lay down their lives, thereby giving us the surest pledges of their own veracity, and of the certainty of that omnipotent control which Christ possessed over the whole system of nature.

Not only has the Saviour announced to us this blessed hope, and confirmed it by his divine works, and, above all, by his own glorious resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven, but he has strengthened the grounds both of our faith and our consolation, by showing on the cross the purchase of our salvation. A consideration of the highest importance to enable the soul with tranquillity and confidence to embrace the hopes of eternal life. Guilt is naturally timid and distrustful: and it could not rely with composure and

firmness on the promises of divine mercy, unless it could discern, at the same time, the expiation of its crimes, and the complete satisfaction of divine justice. But when the penitent believer beholds the spotless holiness, and the most rigorous justice of God magnified in the exhibition of the richest and most unmerited grace; when he sees before him the price of his redemption in that heavenly sacrifice, there is no more room for distrust or doubt. He rests the hope of his immortal salvation on the immovable foundation of the merits as well as the promise of the Saviour. Jesus, who hath purchased it, *hath the words of eternal life.*

II. The language of the text implies, in the next place, the most affectionate and inviolable attachment to the Saviour, from this consideration, that he is the author of eternal life. In the idea of immortality are included the noblest prerogatives, and the highest felicities of our nature. What would human life be deprived of this blessed hope? A succession of momentary sensations destined to be extinguished in their birth. The most effectual motive of virtue would be taken from mankind. Their great object would be to increase the poignancy of their sensations while they lived; and the maxim would be as just as it would probably be universal, *let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.* Man would be a particle of animated dust, made conscious, for an instant, of the pleasures of existence, only, that he might suffer the miseries of losing them for ever. To enjoy even his appetites and his senses, he must cease to think. To a reflecting mind, would not every pleasure be marred by the apprehension that we are, the next moment, to be blotted

out of being? What a gloom would be spread upon the close of life, if we could persuade ourselves that we were to *be* no more! What affliction would pierce the bosom of surviving friends to think that all that they valued, and loved and cherished with so much tenderness, was going to vanish for ever from their embrace, to be dissolved into dust and air, and mingle again with the unconscious elements! Ah! what a cold philosophy, hostile to every fine and moral feeling which connects man with man, and absolute death to all the sweet and tender pleasures that unite the dearest friends, is that which annihilates the human soul; which represents the generations of men as successive bubbles blown up upon the stream of existence, and continually bursting and perishing, which takes from us all our purest joys and most delightful hopes, and degrades man, born to be immortal, into a corrupted mass of sensuality, fit only to be the vile food of worms!

There are few, however, who can adopt these cold and immoral speculations with perfect tranquillity; or, who can calmly approach death with the cruel assurance in their hearts that they shall cease to be. The conscience of guilt, which had so often troubled their repose in life, becomes then more importunate and loud in its remonstrances and alarms. Without the lights of revelation to guide it, it knows not what to hope, or what to fear; it is agitated with the fiercest tempests; an eternal duration is before it: but ah! what is its destiny?—to be?—or not to be?—not to exist—or to exist in misery? It is plunging into a dark! dark! and horrible abyss! and, if the fears of guilt prevail, an abyss more horrible than the despair, dreadful as it is,



of annihilation. Oh! in that moment, how invaluable the immortal hopes of the gospel of Jesus! how precious the lights of religion that should enable us to penetrate the veil of death; to contemplate, without an obscuring doubt, the boundless regions of eternity; and to behold all full of light, of glory and felicity to the pure and pious soul!

With how much reason, then, did the apostles, by the mouth of Peter, profess their attachment to the Saviour and to his blessed gospel, in that fervent interrogation which expresses infinitely more than could be done by any simple declaration: to whom shall we go? Every where else reign doubt, and darkness and hopeless forebodings. *Thou hast the words of eternal life*; of that hope so dear to us, so anxiously sought by us. Jesus has given to existence its sweetest relish, by the hope of living for ever; he has taken away its terrors from the grave, by enlightening with his Holy Spirit those immortal habitations that lie beyond it; he has exalted and refined the moral ties that bind the world together, by the prospect of eternal unions with our virtuous and pious friends, in a state infinitely more pure and perfect than can exist upon earth; he has strengthened the motives of virtue by the exhibition of its high and everlasting rewards; he has warranted the good man to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory in the prospect of endless and supreme felicity; he has pointed out the way in which the guilty, notwithstanding their offences, may attain eternal happiness; he is himself the way, the truth and the life; the power is solely in his hands to deliver his people from death, the wages of sin, and to confer on them life and

immortality. Blessed Jesus! who shall not love, who shall not confide in thee above all others? To what other teacher, to what other lord shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. There is no other solid foundation but thy promise and thy power, of that precious hope without which existence would cease to be a blessing.

My brethren, compare the dreary and horrible waste of annihilation with the hope of everlasting being; compare this land of affliction and mourning with those blessed regions in which there shall be no more tears, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; compare the endless miseries of guilt, of which we were heirs by sin, and that fearful gulph from which the smoke of its torments shall ascend for ever and ever, and that was destined to be our everlasting prison, with those rivers of pleasure that flow at God's right hand, with that celestial Eden in which peace and joy eternally dwell, with that heavenly city which hath no need of the sun, or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of the Lord doth enlighten it, and into its holy streets nothing that is impure shall ever enter, and say how much do you owe to the ever blessed Saviour of men, who hath purchased with his blood this great salvation, and who is invested with all power to bestow it on your faith and your virtue. Away with that sensual reason, that false and presumptuous philosophy, which would sink the nature of man to the level of the brutes; that would deprive piety of this sublime and precious hope in death; this consolation under the afflictions of life; this high encouragement and reward of duty; and which, in depriving us of the chief pleasures

of existence, at the same time, dissolves all the moral ties of the universe! Oh! gloomy habitation of the grave! if there is no prospect of happiness beyond it.... Oh! dreadful moment of dissolution! if we are to be torn for ever from the light of existence, and from all the sweet sentiments that unite us to friends, to being, and to God. More fearful still! if we are to be eternally abandoned to the distracting apprehensions of guilt, and to its tremendous punishment in hell. Saviour of men! Eternal Son of the Living God! thou art the rock of our salvation; we follow the lights of thy Holy Spirit; we forsake the darkness of a misguided philosophy that covers the mouth of an horrible pit; we renounce the vain and dangerous lessons of the world, which lead only to death; we confide in thee; we confide in no other but thee; for thou hast the words of eternal life! AMEN!

## THE PROGRESS OF VICE.

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Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly; who standeth not in the way of sinners; who sitteth not in the seat of the scornful.—*Psalm* i. 1.

OF the social connexions of youth, none are more hazardous than intimacies formed with idle and vicious companions; and no temptations are commonly so fatal to their innocence as those which assail them in these societies. Pleasure is always the lure which is presented in them to their inexperience, by which they are attracted to folly, and finally conducted, by almost imperceptible advances, to certain, and often to sudden destruction. Deceived by that harlot face of seductive gaiety which she is made to wear in the eyes of those who have not yet severely suffered by their indiscretions, they give themselves up to indulgences which, for a time, enchant the fancy and intoxicate the heart, and seldom are they awakened from their dreams of joy to sober reason and reflection, till roused by the disgrace and misery into which she has plunged them.

It is rare, however, that youth arrive at once at this extreme iniquity. They do not immediately cast off the modesty and simplicity which usually forms one characteristic of this early period of life; their deference for age and experience; their regard to the counsels and the hopes of parents; and to the principles and habits of their domestic education. But step by step, and



by almost insensible advances, they are attracted to the fatal precipice, whence thousands are precipitated into irremediable destruction.

To indicate the gradual progress of vice, appears to have been one object in the intention of the sacred writer, in the language of the text....*Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly*; that is, who doth not form his conduct on the example, nor govern it by the maxims and advice of ungodly companions. *Who standeth not*, in the next place, *in the way of sinners*; who doth not voluntarily throw himself in the way to meet with them in framing their plans of folly, or associate himself with them in their criminal pursuits. And, lastly, *who sitteth not in the seat of the scornful*; an expression probably designed to characterize one who hath arrived at the consummation of his vicious course; so as to become, at length, a leader in iniquity, as well as an open advocate of its pernicious principles. A figure borrowed from professors in the public seminaries of instruction, who assume the seat or chair whence they pronounce their lectures to their disciples. In like manner, these adepts in impiety have arrived at the audacity of disseminating among their companions the maxims of irreligion, and openly or insidiously corrupting the moral principles of the youth whom they have unfortunately been able to seduce into their dangerous purlieus. *They mount into the seat of the scornful.*

Let us pursue this train of thought; and contemplate, first, the unsuspecting youth, beginning to be initiated in the paths of folly. You behold him listening with complacency to the *counsels* of his *ungodly* associates;

then inclining a favourable ear to their solicitations; and, at last, drinking in with avidity the false but specious reasonings, by which they pretend to deliver him from the irksome restraints of religion, and to open the way to the pleasurable indulgence of all his passions. You see him, in the next place, after having overcome his first reluctances, freely mingling along with them in their criminal meetings and their profligate pursuits: and, at last, after he has become depraved in all his habits of moral action, concluding his career in standing forth a bold and impious leader in the scenes of iniquity, a scorner of religion, and an adept in the unhappy arts of seduction.

I. To trace the natural progress of moral corruption in the society of vicious companions.

II. And, afterwards, to address to the youth in this assembly an earnest dissuasive against forming these dangerous connexions, embrace the whole object and plan of the following discourse.

If we observe a youth beginning to turn aside from the simplicity of his early manners, to follow the suggestions of thoughtless companions, or yield to the impulses of associates incautiously chosen, seldom does he proceed, in his first enterprizes, to actions which deeply wound his own sense of duty, or grossly offend against public sentiment. He hesitates to rush into all their follies. He walks with caution amidst the snares which they lay for his innocence, till, acquiring confidence by time and by experiments of his own talents in iniquity, he ventures to lend an indulgent ear to the imprudent recital of their criminal exploits, and, at length, to the insidious suggestion of principles, whose whole

aim is to corrupt the imagination and to inflame the passions. In the meantime, his deceived heart flatters itself that he is still innocent, because he sees others farther advanced in their fatal career; and he has not yet risen to the foremost ranks of profligacy. Little aware that entertaining the temptations of sin, is the departure from virtue already begun; listening to the song of the Syren, is only the prelude to being drawn into the vortex of her charms, and at length absorbed by her whirlpools, and dashed to pieces among her rocks.

Let me ask, then, further, what is the avowed object, or the insidious tendency of *the counsels of the ungodly*? Of all that is heard in their unhallowed meetings, of the solicitations which they employ, of the maxims which they sport, of the pictures they continually present to the fancy? Is it not first to inflame a vicious appetite, and then to justify its criminal indulgence? Is it not to inspire a disgust at the restraints of order, and the self denials of religion; and even at the necessary cares of your own improvement? Are not the serious offices of piety treated with derision, or represented to a depraved imagination in the most gloomy and unpleasant colours, and as worthy only of the contemptuous slight of strong and generous minds? Are not the admonitions of prudence regarded as the dull rules of age that has long forgotten the true enjoyment of life? Are not prodigality and excess vaunted as proofs of a spirit becoming your years; scorning the sordid maxims of that cold and calculating period of life? Is not pride, revenge, and murder, if it be only perpetrated with a certain fashionable formality, justified under the imposing plea of honor? Above all, is it not here that

you listen to the eternal justification of pleasure? and that it is studied, if possible, to merge you continually in the delirium of her dalliances, or sink you in the pollution of her embrace? Nay, is it not here that *Nature* herself, a title by which they designate the infinite and adorable Author of all *being*, is boldly pronounced to be the accomplice of our lusts, by the appetites insinuated into the very structure of our frame, and the passions with which he has inflamed the human heart? Ah! how easily does this poison slide into the young mind, which is, alas! but too well predisposed to receive it! How fatally, but almost insensibly, does it corrupt every principle of moral action?

If conscience sometimes raises its reproaching voice; if some veneration yet remains for the counsels of experience, and the principles of a virtuous education; if religion, for a moment, makes its authority be felt, what do you hear in these profligate circles? That conscience is an idle terror....that education is the mother of prejudices....that religion is only a system of craft to keep the world in awe. Away with these phantoms of superstition! The world is now grown wiser!

Hardly is it possible that youth, with all its inexperience, and with the warm current of pleasure circulating in its veins, should escape the snares laid for it by these bold and artful deceivers, and come uncontaminated from their society. Hardly is it possible that it should withstand the specious sophistry which has already all the heart on its side.

Can we persuade ourselves, however, that these fallacious reasonings do ever seriously impose themselves for truth upon an ingenuous mind, even in



the earliest periods of youth? Is it by assailing the understanding that these seducers succeed in betraying into their toils their unthinking prey? Alas! this deep perversion of reason is the work of a heart already depraved in all its affections. It has yielded, and perhaps slowly yielded, to the force of repeated solicitations, which the soft and easy temper of this age seldom has firmness enough to resist. It has been hurried along by the torrent of example which possesses such a mighty control over the sympathies of youth, or bewildered in the fascinations of pleasure which they continually spread before the imagination. Often it falls beneath the irresistible point of ridicule, which attacks youth by its most delicate sense of modesty and shame, and converts those precious sentiments, which were designed by our Creator to be the guardians of our early virtues, into ministers of sin.

Ah! how hard is it for a young man to withstand the sneers of his companions! In how many profligate enterprises will he not sometimes engage, merely to demonstrate to those who know how to take advantage of this weakness, that he has the courage to be guilty? He is ashamed of the maiden modesty of his inexperience and want of knowledge of the world. And, like men whose character in a party is yet doubtful, he is willing to go even farther than his seducers, in order to place himself at once beyond all the derisions to which ingenuous duty and his unpractised virtues might expose him.

By so many pernicious arts, and by taking advantage of so many natural, and even ingenuous feelings of the youthful heart, do vicious young men corrupt their

thoughtless and inconsiderate companions, till, forgetting the admonitions of parental prudence, and the warnings of our holy religion, they proceed from *walking in the counsel of the ungodly*,

II. *To standing in the way of sinners.*

Instead of shunning, as their duty and their safety demand, they are inclined to court their ensnaring society; to meet them in their wayward paths, and places of resort; and to associate themselves with them in their profligate pursuits.

Let us contemplate the daring youth, who has arrived at length to be distinguished in the circles of dissipation, and remark his progress. The useful force of domestic habits may have impeded, for a time, his entrance into this disordered career; but, being once initiated, he tears from his heart, one by one, the restraints of his early education, his respect to the feelings and sentiments of his family, and even that modest and virtuous deference to public opinion, which is commonly the last check to vice which a young man casts from him. He began with only the slightest departures from the honorable paths of order; and probably, with only occasional intercourse with dissolute companions. If you had suggested to him, at that period, the tendency and issue of his course, and the hazards growing out of his present imprudent connections, if you had admonished him of the possibility of his becoming, in time, just such a man as he now is, would he not have regarded the suggestion as a cruel and unmerited reproach? an unjust and ungenerous suspicion? But allured, and led on insensibly, pausing at each step as he advanced, and familiarizing and justifying to him-

self the progress he has already made; invited by new scenes, urged by fresh solicitations, emboldened by the participation and example of others, and intoxicated with delight, he makes another step in this fatal career, and then another, and another. At each succeeding point, conscience, more and more polluted, loses its delicate sense of right and wrong, and is prepared to make the next step with less reluctance. Sins which had commenced with timidity and been prosecuted with caution, become at last bold and presumptuous. Follies which had sought to escape the observation of the world, appear, at length, without blushing; and the offender, hardened by repeated and multiplied derelictions of duty, now glories in his shame. Having attained this elevation in his unhappy ascent, he is prepared to mount the last grade in the scale of iniquity; which is,

III. *To assume the seat of the scornful;....* and is hastening to precipitate himself into that awful gulph which Almighty God, in the righteous destinations of his providence, often opens in secret, before the secure and unapprehensive sinner. The sure and terrible characters of the consummation of his guilty career, he displays in his diligence to disseminate the principles of impiety, and to make religion and sober morals the constant objects of his licentious scoff. Ridicule is a weapon, in the hands of vice, of most dangerous force, employed against the modesty and sensibility of youth. And the more dangerous, because it often requires neither wit nor talents to employ it with mischievous effect; but only a certain audacity in crime. "It is," says Rousseau, "the weapon which vice employs to weaken the ties of virtue."

And certainly it is that engine which adepts in iniquity most successfully wield in their attacks upon religion. What young man can continue to be the advocate and friend of sobriety, modesty, chastity and piety, when, among his familiar associates, they are made the perpetual objects of derision and scorn? Seldom, however, do these daring partisans of iniquity restrict themselves to the light gaieties of wit, or to amusing pleasantries, in their endeavours to wound the virtue or hasten the ruin of their young companions. Often, alas! do we see them employing their utmost efforts to eradicate from the breast the deepest foundations of religion, by the most impious blasphemies, and studying to make their inconsiderate friends participate in the guilt of their own destruction. That reverend name, which fills the heart of every good man with holy fear, and which strikes the highest angels in heaven with awe, is tossed from their tongues with the most indecent levity, and made the constant seasoning of their licentious mirth. That precious name which has been the hope of ages, is made the subject of jesting and scoff in the midst of their profane orgies. The horrible recital makes the blood involuntarily run back with coldness to the heart! Behold them in their scenes of profligate debauch, which, as yet, your innocence can hardly realize. Hear the language of hell burst from their lips in the midst of intemperance and riot! And do they not carry on their foreheads the fearful characters of their reprobation? Yet, O my God! let me recall this horrible denunciation, for *thou art slow to anger, and of great mercy*. And often have we not seen thine infinite grace reach even to the verge of the infernal world to rescue



the most abandoned of mankind in the moment of sinking into perdition! But tremble, Oh! beloved youth! who art yet only entering on these hazardous scenes; tremble at the warning voice of the holy preacher, who was also the wisest of men, and thoroughly acquainted with human nature and all its avenues to ruin....*A companion of fools shall be destroyed.* Yes, my young friends, destroyed will be all the fruits of an early happy education; destroyed will be the fond and anxious hopes of parents, who must thenceforward be left to tears and anguish; destroyed, in time, will be the manly and noble qualities of the soul, the vigor of the intellect, the strength of the memory, the purity of the affections, the virtues of the heart: at length, when vice has completed its course, the symmetry and perfections of the body will be lost, diseases will begin to prey upon its strength and beauty. Then will be seen the stupid roll of the eye, the raw and scalded eyelids falling asunder upon the emaciated cheek, the frail and tottering limbs now moving with difficulty under the feeble remnants of its sins; and, finally, the most disgusting of all objects which ever present themselves to our view in the very dregs of human pollution; sensual and brutal desires still rioting in the breast, and stimulating the jaded fancy, whilst exhausted nature is impotent to carry the decayed sinner to the fulfilment of his wishes. Oh! what a painful, what a melancholy void of all that was once so promising and charming in youth!

Having thus far traced the natural progress of vice in the society of *ungodly* companions,

II. Suffer me, in the next place, to address a serious and earnest admonition to the amiable youth who hear

me, to guard their innocence and inexperience against the fatal hazards of imprudent associations; and, on all occasions, to employ the utmost circumspection in the choice of their friends and companions.

*Be not deceived, evil communications corrupt good manners. He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.* These are the infallible oracles of the Spirit of truth. If you frequent, unnecessarily, the society of the idle, the vicious, and profane, they will infect you with some taint of their own character. Sinful example, by familiarity, contributes to diminish that tenderness and delicate sensibility of conscience which ingenuous youth ought always to cherish with regard to every *appearance of evil*.

Examine the experience of those who have arrived at the summit of their licentious course. They entered this ensnaring society with a certain respect for religion; with a certain deference for the opinion of the world, and for the counsels, the wishes, the hopes of their parents. These dutiful sentiments began insensibly to be impaired. They met the eye of their parents, or of instructors who stood to them in the relation of parents, with less confidence. The advice or remonstrance which opposed their pleasures, became at last distasteful, and excited only their resentments. Virtue and order now appeared less amiable. Every restraint upon their actions was considered as austere and harsh. In the commencement of this career, they yielded to the solicitations of their companions with reluctance, and entered the scenes of dissipation with a hesitating reserve; but, at every step, their past compliances emboldened them to proceed to farther indulgences. Re-

morse and shame, in the beginning, often followed their open and palpable violations of order; at length they become ashamed only of their modesty. They learn boldly to justify all their irregularities, and impelled from one shape of folly and excess to another, they leave themselves, at last, no interval for reflection.

Having proceeded to this extreme, the light of divine truth is no longer suffered to enter the mind; the most solemn and interesting motives of religion no longer touch the heart; and they enjoy an imaginary triumph over the power of conscience, which has ceased to disturb their guilty repose. An imaginary triumph, indeed, it is, and short-lived it will be. The time is coming when justice will resume its rights; when truth will force itself to be heard; when their sins will appear in dark and dismaying colours before the trembling conscience, the avenger of guilt, and fill it with deep and poignant anguish. Ah! unhappy man! the charm which now enchants you will shortly be dissolved in the sure and awful course of divine providence. It will be dissolved by the calamities which so often press upon the close of a misspent life. It will be dissolved by the diseases and pains which sinful pleasures will have planted in a ruined constitution. Above all, it will be dissolved by the approach of death, and the near prospect of the eternal world, which is just about to receive the miserable remnants of a body and a soul which your vices have left.

My young friends! suffer me seriously and earnestly to address you who are just ready to advance into the commerce of the world; whose passions are beginning to unfold, and who are daily exposed to those sollicita-

tions to disorder which peculiarly assail your age; if you would escape the destructive snares which surround those who voluntarily *stand in the way of sinners, and walk in the counsel of the ungodly*, shun the first steps of folly. But, above all, abhorred be the society of those who study to impair the sentiments of duty in your hearts, and who spread temptation in your paths. Spurn the pernicious commerce of those who make religion, its sacred duties, and its precious hopes, the constant subjects of their profane scoffs. Alas! so weak is human nature, so prone to error, so in love with delusion, that the best safeguard of youth consists in fleeing from temptation. How often, in company, in the moments of levity, have you found yourselves almost irresistibly impelled against the better sentiments of your minds? How often have you been led into excess from which, in retirement, your reason, your prudence, your principles would have restrained you? How often have the profligate and artful known how to take advantage, in order to lead you into sin, of the very ingenuousness of your hearts; which, under proper cultivation, might have been made the happiest soil of virtue and religion? Alas! how many young persons have I seen, who once promised to be the comfort and pride of their parents, and blessings to society; who have been first led astray, and then ruined, not by criminal intentions, originally, but by imprudent associations.

Ask of those who have been most distinguished in the annals of vice, and have grown old in iniquity, whose decrepid limbs, whose brutal appetites, and impotent sensuality, exhibit the disgusting picture of all that is most loathsome in the conclusion of a profligate



life; where did they first lay aside the amiable simplicity of their youth? Where did they learn, at length, boldly to trample on the laws of God, and even on the decencies of society? Was it not among companions whose example, whose persuasions, whose continual ridicule of religion, and sober morals, gradually effaced the impressions of their early education, and by almost imperceptible advances, led them, at last, to that gulph of vice and of foul ignominy into which they are fallen?

Ah! beloved youth! beware of *walking in the counsels of the ungodly, or standing in the way of sinners!* It commonly ends in mounting into the *seat of the scornful*. If you have not actually formed connexions of this dangerous and insidious nature, shun them as the most destructive pestilence; knowing that they lead to the loss of all your virtues first, and ultimately to the perdition of the soul. They promise you liberty, but are not they themselves the *servants of sin*? They profess to be your friends; but, can any solid friendship exist in the pursuits of sin? If you have formed, as I trust you have, the happy purpose of renouncing these hazardous intimacies, execute your resolution with promptitude and decision. Temporizing measures, in a case like this, are ruinous. He who deliberates, who hesitates, on the boundary line between virtue and vice, between duty and pleasure, is lost.

But, are they sinful companions alone which ought to be avoided by a virtuous youth? Are not immoral and impious writers, of whom the abuse of genius, in this period of the arts, has furnished such an unhappy superfluity, no less to be dreaded? What a deluge has the press poured upon this age, of those writers who,

with all the graces of style, and the fascinations of wit, study only to weaken the restraints which religion imposes upon the passions? We see a poignant and incessant ridicule levelled, not only against piety, but against all the moral ties of civil and domestic society. More baneful to the young mind than the most mortal infection is its familiarity with these seductive writers. Seldom, indeed, have youth been more exposed than at the present period, to imminent and fatal dangers, on every hand, from example, from books, from the general manners of the age.

Ah! in what a loud and earnest tone do these afflicting truths call upon all guardians of youth, and especially on all parents, to redouble their vigilance and inspection over those whom nature or the laws of society have committed to their protection! By diligence in forming their manners, and filling their minds with virtuous and with pious principles, by the sanctity of your example, and by faithfulness in every parental duty, arrest, if possible, the progress of the kingdom of darkness, and rescue these precious victims from everlasting death.

But, in what tone shall I address those unhappy men, who are the deliberate corrupters of youth, blasphemers of the name of the Most High God, despisers of the sacred authority of religion, and ever prepared to instigate that dissipation which is already the reproach of our age; who, themselves enslaved to the lusts of the flesh, are labouring to extend the circle of our corrupted manners. If there be one such daring sinner in this assembly, to him let me solemnly announce this awful boding;....The victims of your seductions shall perish;

but, from their tombs their indignant spirits will cry for vengeance on their destroyers. Does the blood of innocence lie heavy on the conscience of the murderer? Does it kindle a fire in his bosom, which he shall never be able to quench? Oh! what accumulated horrors, then, shall overwhelm that miserable wretch, on whom divine justice shall charge the perdition of so many immortal souls, and who shall forever see, in the place of torments, the victims of his guilty arts!

Great God! who art terrible in thy judgments, as well as glorious in thy mercy, penetrate with conviction, and prostrate, in deep repentance, before thy throne, the bold and scoffing transgressor! Arrest, in the first moments of error, and save these precious youth, the hope of their parents and of thy church, from the *counsels of the ungodly*, and, finally, from the perdition of the impenitent scorner! AMEN!

## HISTORY OF MOSES.

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It is a night to be much observed to the Lord, for bringing them out from the land of Egypt; this is that night of the Lord to be observed of all the children in their generations.....*Exod. xii. 40.*

Moses, by numerous miracles, and by dreadful displays of a divine power, had repeatedly humbled the pride of Pharoah; but, when the infliction was removed, that haughty king had as often returned to his crimes, and hardened his heart against the sentiments of humanity and justice. The last terrible stroke, the death of the first-born throughout all the land of Egypt, had brought him more sincerely to listen to the terms proposed to him by the leaders of Israel. The whole nation of Egypt, trembling with apprehension, besieged the throne with entreaties that these destructive guests might be permitted to depart. And to hasten their departure, their ancient masters were willing to lend them, poor and enslaved as they were, every accommodation which could contribute to their convenience, their comfort, or their ornament; so that they went out amply equipped for their march, and even loaded with wealth. The terrified Egyptians were willing to give them all that they asked, provided only that their own lives were spared. And in taking whatever was offered, the people of Israel were conscious of no dishonesty; inasmuch as it was only the wages of their long and laborious services. But on the eve of their departure, and



of that dreary night when the exterminating angel was filling all the families of Egypt with death and mourning, and in the habitations of Israel was seen nothing but the tumult and hurry of preparation, Moses, by the order of God, instituted a solemn festival to be the memorial of these great events to all generations. On the fourteenth of the month Abib, corresponding nearly to our March, and which was henceforward to be the commencement of their ecclesiastical years, as Tisri was of their civil, each family was to kill a lamb which had been selected on the tenth. The blood of the victim was ordered to be sprinkled on the sides and on the top of the door, with an assurance that it should prove a protection to all in the house, from the fury of the destroying angel, who, on seeing this sacred sign, should pass it over in his career of vengeance. The sacrifice was to be roasted with fire, and then to be eaten with bitter herbs and unleavened bread, the whole family standing round with their loins girt, with shoes on their feet, and with staves in their hands like men in haste, prepared to march. Of this sacred victim not a bone was to be broken, and if after the festival any parts remained, they were to be consumed with fire. On this subject many reflections deserve to be made; many inquiries have been proposed. Why were the fragments ordered to be burnt? Probably because it was indecent that any thing consecrated to God should be left to corruption or exposed to the hazard of being afterwards seen or used without respect. The relation of the most trivial object to him surrounds it with a peculiar veneration. Why was it commanded that not a bone of this victim should be broken. Perhaps it was

that, even in so small a circumstance, it might be the more perfect type of that great sacrifice which taketh away the sin of the world, of whom it was prophesied that, notwithstanding the custom of the Romans to break the legs of their crucified malefactors, yet of him, though destined to suffer along with such culprits, not a bone should be injured. Heaven has been pleased to descend to particulars so minute, and apparently so trivial, to show with what clearness the spirit of prophecy looks through the most distant ages. Prophecy, and every type is a prophecy, seems to have selected this circumstance, though small, because it is combined in such a manner with so many others as to render it an important prediction, designating with much minuteness the person of the suffering Saviour. It points to the manner of his dying, which was on the cross; it points to that custom of the Romans which has been already alluded to; it points to his being associated in his death with malefactors whose bones were actually broken, while his were suffered to remain unhurt: astonishing minuteness at the distance of seventeen hundred years! But there are other inquiries with regard to this paschal sacrifice which deserve a moment's attention, without entering into such as relate to circumstances more minute in their nature, or more obscure in their meaning. Why was it eaten with bitter herbs and with unleavened bread, and in the attitude of men already on their march? These were symbols of their affliction, and the hardships of their servitude in Egypt, and of the haste with which they were preparing to escape from the land of their slavery. All these rites composed a striking memorial to every following age, of

the great and interesting occasion on which this festival was instituted. Its denomination is derived from the angel's passing over the tents of Israel when he went through the land of Egypt to destroy all the first-born. This chosen people, retired within their habitations, and resting under the protection of the blood of the lamb sprinkled on their doors, the emblem of the blood of the everlasting covenant, were secure from harm, and the voice of health and joy was heard in them, while nothing but the sounds of death and mourning re-echoed from all the palaces of their oppressors. Thus was the first passover celebrated, the model of that annual festival which was to keep up, to all future generations, the memorial of the deliverance of the chosen people, and the church of God, from the slavery and persecutions of Egypt.

Moses, who foreknew the effect which this last stroke of the vengeance of heaven would produce upon their tyrants, had previously issued his orders to all the nation of Israel to be prepared at a moment to assemble under their proper leaders, and to enter on their march, as soon as the expected decree for this purpose should be received from the court. Pharaoh, with all Egypt, bleeding under the sword of divine justice, was now not only willing, but urgent for their departure. Hardly had the decree arrived, when they were already assembled on the plains of Rameses, loaded with the voluntary spoils of the Egyptians. They were six hundred thousand men capable of bearing arms, besides women, children, and such as were above the military age. A prodigious increase since the period in which Jacob descended into Egypt with a family consisting only of

seventy persons: yet is it not beyond the bounds of credibility, as the calculations made by many ingenious men have amply demonstrated. A whole nation moved at once.\* Moses, by pursuing a northern direction along the coasts of the Mediterranean, might have conducted them by a route, not very tedious, to the promised land. But in that course they would have been compelled to encounter the armies of Egypt behind, and the hostile nations of Palestine in front, before they themselves were disciplined and trained to the arts of war under the auspices of their great and heroic leader. Besides, Providence had other views. It designed miraculously to destroy the innumerable hosts of Pharaoh, and, thereby, to confirm the confidence of Israel in their heaven-inspired general. It designed afterwards to place them in a state of discipline and education in the wilderness, in order to prepare them for the reception of those civil and religious institutions which God intended, by the ministry of Moses, to establish among them when they should have acquired a country. Therefore Moses directed his course towards the East, so as to interpose between him and the deserts of Arabia, a narrow tongue of the Red Sea, in which the Egyptian armies were, by the agency of heaven, to be destroyed. Do you ask if the same supernatural aids might not have been granted to Israel on the nearer and more convenient route, to enable them to vanquish the

\* Although I have adopted the usual language of commentators and critics with regard to the numbers of the people of Israel, yet I am disposed to believe that the sacred historian, in the 12th chapter of Exodus, means all of both sexes who had attained the age of puberty and were able to travel; which will greatly diminish the numbers of that multitude who came with Moses out of Egypt.



mighty hosts of Egypt and of Palestine in battle? Yes; but is it not probable that, through pride and self-love, forgetting the aids of heaven, they would soon ascribe the victory to their own arms, and become more refractory and disobedient to their lawgiver and protector than they afterwards proved? But when they saw the immense armies which threatened them with inevitable destruction, whelmed in the waves of the sea, the divine power, which accompanied the word of Moses, could no longer be denied or doubted. Touched with gratitude, suspended in astonishment, Moses would be to them in the room of God. Their humbled minds would be ready to receive his instructions, and to obey his commands with the more prompt submission. The most sublime and striking miracles, indeed, were necessary at this period to procure from them a voluntary and cheerful obedience to the dictates of reason, and the precepts of religion; as well as a patient acquiescence in the will of their leader, under all the dangers and difficulties which they were called to encounter in this extraordinary march of a nation through a vast and barren wilderness. Consider a prodigious multitude of nearly two millions of souls, the greater part of commentators raise their numbers to three millions, just emerged from extreme slavery into liberty, without habits yet prepared to enjoy freedom, and prone to the impatience and excesses which usually accompany such a sudden transition. Consider how liable such a multitude is to be inflamed against their rulers at every attempt to restrain them within the reasonable bounds of subordination, at every hardship which arises in their way; and how many ardent and discontented spirits

among them are ever ready to practise upon this weakness, and, on the slightest occasions, to throw them into a flame. Consider how difficult was the task to gratify so many humours, and to furnish such an immense host with every provision, and every accommodation which they wanted in an arid and unfruitful country, and exposed, at the same time, to innumerable foes. Could so many millions of men, rather in a multitudinous than an organized state, be governed by reason alone, and by continual appeals to their own prudence and wisdom? For Moses had not yet time or opportunity to establish among them civil government or any effectual system of military subordination to procure submission to his orders. As yet obedience must flow purely from the conviction of their own minds: and how was that to be produced? By cool and deliberate reasoning on the subjects of their duty and their interest? Let the example of the populace of Paris in the first transports of their liberty; let that of the populace of London when scarcity and want awaken their discontents; let that of any multitude which has recently cast off the restraints of government, and is not yet accustomed to submit to a new order of things, answer this question. None rule in this state of things but those who are most furiously opposed to all rule; who are most hostile to every dictate of prudence and temperate reason. The nation of Israel, though chosen to be, hereafter, the depository of the oracles of God, partook of the same nature, and were impelled by the same passions, as the rest of mankind; and Moses frequently experienced the attempts of sedition against his authority. How then, I

ask again, was that conviction to be impressed on the minds of such an immense populace which was to supply the place of law, and of the established means of compulsion under an organized government? Could it be effected by less than the mighty power of God, so often displayed at the words of Moses, and so often repeated when former impressions began to be effaced? That Moses was able to govern the people of Israel under such circumstances is one proof, not inconsiderable, of the reality of the illustrious miracles by which it was accomplished; and the necessity of such miracles vindicates the wisdom of God, who led their armies, not by the nearest and most practicable route, but through the sea, which was to be made the grave of the hosts of Egypt.

Having made these observations, which I thought necessary to the general illustration of the Mosaic history, as well as to satisfy some inquiries, or to resolve some doubts, which might arise in the mind of a serious and reflecting hearer, let me return to the march of Israel by Succoth, and Etham, towards Pihahiroth, on the coast of the Red Sea. Strange to behold! God himself erects a banner for them, to go before them and guide them in their march. It had the appearance of a pillar of clouds in the day, and of a lofty and resplendent flame during the night. Under such guidance and such protection, they could not but march securely, although Pharoah, repenting of the liberty which he had granted, and enraged at the loss of so many myriads of slaves with all their property, which he was likely to sustain, determined to pursue them with all the forces of his kingdom. At Pihahiroth he overtook

them, where their situation appeared to be the most hazardous in which an army could be placed. Environed by steep mountains on the north and west, and by the sea on the east, the only passage by which it seemed practicable to escape, and which lay towards the south, was already occupied by the forces of Egypt. Nothing seemed to await them but destruction by the sword or by famine. And here their illustrious leader experienced the first effects of that complaining and seditious spirit which, afterwards, so often tried and almost exhausted his patience. They boldly and insolently demanded, *Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness?* They basely added, because their spirits had been broken by slavery, *Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians.* Their fears had overcome their faith in the wisdom and power of Moses, though resting on so many wonders performed in the land of Egypt. Moses, all tranquil, and confiding in God, who had deigned to honor him with the most familiar intercourse, replied with his characteristic dignity and mildness, *Fear not, be still, and see the salvation of God: the Lord shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.* The sublime prophet waved his rod. A mighty wind from the east divided the waters, and laid bare the channels of the sea. The cloud which had hitherto conducted the army, removed, by the command of God, behind the camp, and covered Israel from the view of the Egyptians. At the appointed signal, they proceed forward, and in the place where winds and waves had so often conflicted in dreadful storms, they securely march on the naked sands, the waters serving them on each side the pur-



pose of impregnable ramparts. All night they continue their march. And, at the dawning of the day, the Egyptians, seeing their prey escaped, and being hardened and rendered presumptuous by disappointment and rage, rush impetuously on into the deep uncovered bed of the sea. The angel of the Lord troubled their host and retarded their march, till the sea, returning in its strength, buried them all in its angry billows. No language can better describe this scene so magnificent and so awful, than the sublime song of Moses, sung by all Israel on the shore covered with the arms, the chariots, and the carcasses of the myriads who had perished in the waters. This song, which is, by many centuries,\* the oldest morsel of poetry remaining in the world, and which is certainly one of the noblest efforts of poetic genius, presents to us a scene among the most awful and grand which have ever taken place in the history of man. The sea divided, and the march of a nation across its channels, laid bare by the power of God. The greatest monarch in the world, with millions in arms and in his train, swallowed up by the enraged billows; and millions on the shore celebrating this great event, and thundering to heaven their shouts of triumph and of praise. Of this noble song, listen only to a few extracts. With the loudest acclamation, with the highest transports of joy, every Israelite sung, "The Lord is my strength, and my song, and he is become my salvation. Pharoah's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea; the depths covered them; they sank to the bottom as a stone. Thy right hand, O Lord! is

\* Supposed to be about seven centuries and a half anterior to the *Iliad* of Homer.

become glorious in power. With the blast of thy nostrils the waters were gathered together, the floods stood upright as an heap, and the depths were congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy said, I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil. Thou didst blow with thy wind; the sea covered them: they sank as lead in the mighty waters. Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the Gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders!" Let us, my brethren, elevate our hearts with them, to extol and praise the glorious majesty of him who has ordained the laws of nature, and arrests them at his pleasure; who has formed the universe, and condescends to be called the Redeemer of his people. Let us place ourselves on the margin of the mighty flood, to behold and adore the wonders of Jehovah.

Here we pause again in this interesting history, and conclude the present discourse with a few reflections on that portion of it which we have just reviewed.

Many commentators and travellers have searched with great pains for natural causes of this division or recess of the sea, to take away the miraculous nature of this event, or to diminish the greatness of the wonder. But, after all their labours, still it remains one of the greatest miracles recorded in the sacred scriptures. And if a miracle, what is to be gained by attempting to diminish it, except it be to gratify the spirit of incredulity in approaching nearer to those who deny entirely the existence of every miraculous operation? Can any thing be great or difficult to him who rolls the planets in their orbits, and who daily lifts the ocean from its bed, and makes it again retire to its place? Is it not as

easy to Omnipotence to divide the tongue of the Egyptian sea, as to make its waters recede one hair's breadth from the natural course of its tides? Are there, then, any vestiges in the history of Egypt, of an event so marvellous? The greatest events of the ancient world have been sunk in the oblivion of time, and the undistinguishing ravages of barbarians; yet this is one of the few the memory of which has not been wholly lost. And, although it is not necessary to the truth of the sacred records, that they should always be supported by correspondent narrations in pagan story; yet it is a gratification to the inquisitive mind to be able to collect from antiquity collateral and undesigned vouchers to the facts of the scriptures. Artapanus, an ancient Greek writer,\* and a heathen, who had examined the antiquities of Egypt within the country itself, found both at Memphis and Heliopolis, the tradition of this important event, but related in different ways in these two great cities. "Those of Memphis," says he, "relate, that the leader of the Jews, being perfectly acquainted with the country, knew exactly the periods of the flux and reflux of the sea; and, that, taking advantage of an extraordinary ebb, he had led over his people on the land deserted by the waters, while the Egyptians, less skilled, and attempting to follow them, were swallowed up in the return of the flood. They of Heliopolis, on the other hand, say, that with a rod he struck the sea, which, retiring to a great distance, the Israelites were enabled to pass over dry; but the Egyptians, being dazzled and impeded by fires till the waves returned upon them, all perished either by the waters,

\* Fragments of whose works are preserved by Eusebius.

or by fire." It is easy to conceive that traditions of the same event should vary from one another, and from the truth; but here is the substance of the fact preserved in the history of the country.

It deserves to be remarked, in the next place, that the institution of the passover itself is a strong authentication of the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt, and of that terrible infliction of heaven on the Egyptians, by which it was finally accomplished. An annual festival instituted for the celebration of any great and national event, purporting that it has been continued down from the commencement of the æra, and accompanied with an injunction as this was, *when your children shall say, What mean ye by this service? ye shall say it is the Lord's passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians*, is one of the most undoubted historical evidences of the existence of the fact. For when could such an institution be introduced and received by a whole nation, saying, it has always been observed by us and by our fathers? No, the festival of the passover must have dated with the fact; and the fact must have taken place to have given existence to the rite. But the paschal lamb was a type of Christ, our passover, who was slain for us. What then are the spiritual instructions which it conveys to us?



**THE LOVE OF GOD**  
**IN GIVING HIS SON**  
**FOR THE REDEMPTION OF THE WORLD.**

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God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.—*John* iii, xvi.

THE benignity of the Creator shines with a resplendent evidence in all the works of nature; and our own experience confirms the testimony given on this subject by the whole universe. The care of his providence, the protection afforded to our infancy, our food, our raiment, our education, our friends, the innumerable and nameless blessings of every day, continually testify the benignity of our Father who is in heaven. Afflictions, themselves, under his wise and gracious direction, are turned into blessings; recalling us, as they do, from the illusions of the world, and redeeming our frailty from error and vice. But, it is principally in the gospel that we behold the essential benignity and mercy of God displayed in its richest glory, and its widest extent. Not confining its view to the provisions of this mortal life, or to the limits of time, it extends its cares to eternity; it shows us the purchase, and plants in our hearts the seeds of immortal life. In estimating the mercy of the gospel, we are not to consider man-

kind as the pure, unfallen offspring of God, but as children degenerate, corrupted, lost; as children who had forfeited, by their guilt, all the privileges of their father's family, and were condemned to eternal death by the holy and immutable decrees of his justice. Still farther, to enter into just views of the benevolence and mercy, it ought to be remembered that the attributes of God are not mutable in their nature, or dependent on the exercise of sovereign will; that is, it does not belong to Deity itself to forego their claims. Infinite Holiness essentially abhors, Eternal Justice is essentially determined to punish sin. They possess a nature as necessary, as immutable as God himself. In extending his compassion, therefore, to the ruined race of man, the rights of his holy and unchangeable law, were inviolably to be maintained. Our guilt opposed apparently insuperable barriers to the overflowings of divine mercy. Mercy, if it could ever save the race, must penetrate to the depths of our guilt; it must quench the flames of divine justice. Atonement must be made for transgression; satisfaction must be made to that law which cannot relinquish one jot, or one tittle of its claims till all be fulfilled. A mighty sacrifice must be offered for the sins of the world, which shall be commensurate with the deep atrocity of human guilt, and with the boundless glory of the offended Deity, and with the infinite and unchangeable rectitude and holiness of his law. In the full view of these sublime truths, of the greatness of this sacrifice, of the malignity and depths of this guilt, of the riches of this mercy, our Saviour himself has said; *God so loved the world*

*that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

Suffer me then, christians, to direct your meditations for a few moments on those astonishing manifestations of the love of God exhibited to us in this passage of sacred writ. A rich variety of the most interesting considerations are here accumulated together in this comprehensive proposition. I will, without art or studied arrangement, present them to you simply in the order in which they lie. You behold then,

1. The unworthiness of the object on which he has deigned to fix his love —the *world* sunk in the ruins of sin and buried in the depths of its moral corruptions.

2. The grandeur, and the inestimable value of the sacrifice which he has made; he *gave his only begotten Son*.

3. The facility of the conditions of salvation now proposed to the weakness and imperfection of man; *whosoever believeth on him shall not perish*. And finally,

4. The greatness and glory of the reward conferred, in his mercy, on the believing and penitent sinner; *he shall have everlasting life*.

1. The love of God is first magnified by the unworthiness of the object to which it has deigned to stoop.

*When I look to the heavens which thou hast ordained, says the holy Psalmist. to the moon and the stars which thy fingers have framed, those glorious spheres which astonish our weak minds, but which yet are not pure in thy sight, Lord! what is man, that thou art mindful of*

*him! or the Son of Man, that thou visitest him!* Immeasurable distance! between an atom of dust and the infinite Creator! a worm of yesterday which perishes to-morrow, and the eternal Jehovah! What condescension! what grace was it in him to stoop from the throne of his glory, to look down through the immeasurable order of angels, which encompass it with unceasing adorations, to regard the wretchedness and miseries of man! Yet, it is not so much the meanness of our nature which obstructs the boundless current of *his* love, who hears the young ravens when they cry, as its pollution and guilt. His love, to flow to us, was obliged to surmount the barriers opposed to it by the claims of eternal justice, and by his own glorious and infinite abhorrence of sin. This it has done; and *God commendeth his love to us in that while we were yet enemies Christ died for us.* Who then can completely unfold this unworthy object of the divine compassion? It is perhaps impossible to portray it in colours which the impenitent who have never yet been made profoundly sensible of the depth of their guilt will recognize, or can comprehend. The true penitent alone can understand them. Turn then your view inward upon yourselves, and, in the lamented evils which you daily deplore at the throne of grace, behold an affecting image of the world which the Son of God had descended to redeem. You will perceive in the profound sentiments of your own humility, the extent and the condescensions of that boundless love which has stooped to redeem us from the ruins of our guilt. Great God! could sinful dust and ashes thus attract thy merciful regards! When I contemplate thy



immaculate purity, thy awful holiness, I see, by their light, my own unworthiness and imperfection in the deepest colours. Instead of being made the object of thy mercy, do I not rather deserve to be made the victim of that justice whose flames forever consume the rebellious angels who kept not their first estate! Oh! the condescensions of divine love! to reach such a guilty particle of earth! to penetrate the abyss of my crimes! to visit a world lying in iniquity!

2. But, if the love of God is to be estimated from the unworthiness of man, is it not to be estimated much more highly, from the grandeur and the value of the sacrifice which he has yielded for human guilt; *He gave his only begotten Son*. Not the most perfect of men who are his sons by creation; not the most sublime of the prophets, who continually pointed the views of the ancient church to the future Messiah; not that priest only in whom terminated the long succession of the priests of Israel, who were by a peculiar relation the sons of God by designation; not that king, the end of all their royal race, from whose glory their typical crowns derived their greatest splendor; not the highest seraph which burns before his throne, and with the rapidity of lightning executes the orders of his will; but the Son of God by eminence, such as was no mortal, such as was no created being; not the highest angel among the thrones of heaven; but the Son who lay in the bosom of the Father from eternity—that eternal emanation of light and love, who co-existed with him before all ages—who partakes of the same counsels, the same glory, the same essence—who has said of him-

self, *I and my Father are one*---and of whom David has pronounced, *let all the angels of God worship him*. Such was the gift of divine love to the world---the sacrifice which the mercy and compassion of God made to the salvation of man. But, alas! the powers of the human mind are inadequate to conceive, the language of mortals is impotent to express the grandeur of that victim which was offered up for human guilt, or the love of him who *spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all*. Perfectly to comprehend that love, we should be able to embrace in our ideas the being of the supreme and incomprehensible Jehovah. We should be able to understand the eternal and ineffable union between the Father and the Son, which yet admits of that separation by which the Filial Deity could unite himself to the nature which he came to redeem; we should be able to measure infinity. The devout and pious soul absorbed in the boundlessness of its subject, and dissolved in unutterable feelings, can only sigh forth its astonishment, its gratitude, and its praise; *Oh! the height, and the depth, the length, and the breadth, of the love of God which passeth knowledge!* Behold the fruits, and the expressions of that love in the condescensions of the Saviour, in the veil with which he covered his glory, in the infirmities in which he deigned to enshrine it. Behold them in the ignominy of his birth, in the labour of his life, and above all in the disgrace, the cruelties, and torments of the cross on which he offered up that mighty oblation for the sins of the world. God gave him up to the raging of his enemies, to shame, to torture, and the agonies of the most

cruel death. *As a lamb he was led to the slaughter;* as a victim he expired under the sacrificing knife. But O blessed Jesus! shame, and torture, and death, as they could be inflicted by the hands of mortals, were the smallest portion of thy sufferings! The true fire which consumed thy soul was the fire of the holy indignation and wrath of God against sin! All its flames encompassed thee on that dreadful altar! And, O my soul! who knows the terrors of his wrath when it awakes to seize upon the criminal, to avenge the violated justice of the divine law, either on the sinner himself, or on his substitute and surety! They are seen only in the cross of Christ, and in the regions of despair---in *the furnace of the wrath of God*, the dreadful fires of which, lighted up by the first sin, will continue to burn forever and ever. Some image of it we may conceive from the least of its effects which are sometimes offered to our view in the present world. When one drop of that burning death falls upon the soul which may be seen in the haunted conscience of the murderer, what desolation does it create! Despair seizes him; terror pursues him wherever he goes; the torments of Hell seem already kindled in his bosom; endeavouring to flee from himself he often hurries out of life by a horrible crime, and plunges into the gulf of eternal perdition as a painful relief from his présent miseries! If such are the desolations of soul produced by one drop of the devouring vengeance of Heaven, what, O blessed Saviour of men! were the deluges which overwhelmed thee in the garden, and covered thee with thy own blood! What was the import of that fearful cry which consum-

mated the sacrifice for our sins upon the cross. Christians! come celebrate with me, in silent, and unutterable adorations, the infinite, the incomprehensible love of God which has given up to such avenging pains, his only begotten Son.

3. Having contemplated the love of God in the atonement made for the sins of the world by Jesus Christ, let us regard it in the next place, in the gracious conditions of salvation now offered to the infirmity of human nature. *Whosoever believeth on him shall not perish.* If perfect holiness had been our only law, and the indispensable condition of our acceptance with God, we might still have despaired; we would still have been as *far from the kingdom of heaven* as if Christ had not died. But now the righteousness of the Redeemer covers all the imperfections of the penitent; the merits of the Redeemer form the plea of the believer before the tribunal of divine justice; and the aids of his Holy Spirit enable the christian to commence a life of holiness which will always, indeed, be necessarily imperfect in the present fallen state, but which is continually approximating towards that pure and sublime standard which it will ultimately attain in the presence of God.

Can any mistaken friend, or any well-meaning enemy of the gospel, suppose that this easy condition of salvation is designed to exempt the believer in any degree, from the sacred obligation of virtue and morality? No, a sincere faith in Jesus Christ is, on the other hand, the most powerful principle of morals. For what are the objects? what is the tendency of a living faith?



Does it not exhibit the evil of sin in such deep colours as are calculated to excite the abhorrence of every sincere mind? Does it not depict the terrors of the divine justice in such fearful examples as are calculated to create a holy fear of offending God? Does it not display the perfections of the Creator in such sublime and glorious lights as are fitted to inspire the most ardent love of holiness which is his most perfect image? Does it not offer the strongest motives to a sublime virtue by giving certainty to the hopes of immortality? Does it not present in the Saviour himself all that can inflame the heart with the love of the most perfect goodness---all that can raise the soul in a sublime devotion to God---all that can expand it in the most extensive charity and philanthropy to mankind? Such is the powerful moral influence of faith; such are the easy, and the delightful conditions of salvation which the mercy of God through Jesus Christ, has made in favour of our present imbecility, has offered to our sincere repentance.

Yes, delightful condition! and this is a new proof of his love to offended man, that he has made the means of regaining his lost immortality the source of his supreme happiness upon earth. The whole road to heaven he has sown with the purest pleasures to a pious and virtuous mind. Guilt and fear would disturb the peace of the best men, if they had not a sure foundation of trust in the mercy of God. That trust, an assured faith creates, by offering to the heart a God reconciled through Jesus Christ, and building the pleasures of immortal hope, on the righteousness of the Redeemer.

Faith fills the breast with the serenity of a conscience at peace with God, and at peace with itself. It enables a good man to taste all the lawful enjoyments of life with a purer relish in the presence of his heavenly Father, and elevates him above the influence of those unhallowed causes which create the deepest affliction to the men of the world. Faith opens to the penitent believer the gates of heaven, the prospects of immortal blessedness, and enables him, already to drink of those *rivers of pleasure which flow at God's right hand*. God magnifies his love not only by the gift of his Son, but in the graciousness of the condition of our salvation through him; for *whosoever believeth on him shall not perish but have eternal life*.

4. Finally, we behold in this last reflection also the love of God magnified in the greatness of our salvation?

This part of the subject may be considered in two views---our deliverance from eternal death---our possession of everlasting life. What sentiments of obligation penetrate the heart, what transports of gratitude often break from the tongue towards those who have delivered us from extreme suffering, or rescued us from imminent danger! The full tide which anguish or apprehension had collected in the heart, being now suffered freely to flow, rushes with a delightful effusion, not easily to be expressed, towards our deliverer. We magnify our obligations, we want words to give utterance to our feelings and emotions. But, christians! what sufferings, or what dangers are to be compared to those infernal horrors to which man by sin is heir, on the

verge of which he stood, when God, by this divine sacrifice, interposed his almighty power and his infinite mercy for the salvation of the redeemed sinner. It would require the colours of Hell, and the pencil of despair, to describe to you those mansions of hopeless misery—the *chains of everlasting darkness--the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone*; and to portray in the midst the miserable prisoners of wrath, *the smoke of whose torments ascendeth forever and ever*. Contemplate, O my soul! the terrors which encompassed thee; the gulfs into which thou wast ready to be precipitated, that thy great salvation may teach thee to adore and magnify the love of thy Redeemer. Has his mercy plucked thee as a brand from the burning? Has almighty God *sent his only begotten Son into the world that thou shouldst not perish*? Praise him from the gates of death into which thou wast just entering; praise him from the *mouth of the pit* into which thou wast just sinking. It is only when we see our danger, when we feel our misery, that we understand the full value of the Saviour's mercy. The penitent soul alone, delivered from the despair which was overwhelming her, and still trembling while she looks back to survey the fearful state from which she was drawn, can truly estimate the love of God. Dissolved in unbounded gratitude, unable to express, unable to sustain the full tide of her joys, she pours her transports and her tears into the bosom of her Redeemer.

But he has given his Son that whosoever believeth in him should *not perish*, but also, that he should *have eternal life*. This is the second reward of his great

salvation; the second fruit of the divine love. Yes; he shall possess eternal life. The Redeemer has purchased it for his people on the cross; he has assured it to them by his glorious resurrection; and he holds it in their name, and, as their head, till the general resurrection of the just. *But eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* Before we can comprehend it fully we must be admitted to behold the Paradise of God; *to taste the rivers of its pleasures*, to pluck its immortal fruits; to bask in its peaceful regions, enlightened by the sun of righteousness; to mingle with those glorious spirits which burn before the throne of God; and be invested with the celestial bodies of the saints redeemed from the corruption of the grave, which shine as the stars in the kingdom of their Father forever and ever. This is true life; a life of perfect holiness, a life of immortal love, a life with God, and in God, who is the life of the universe. All the imperfections of mortality will be left behind, at the mouth of the grave; all the obscurities of ignorance, all the mistakes of error, all the pains of uncertainty and doubt, shall be forever removed, and *in thy light O God! shall we see light.* Truth shall be the eternal food of the soul. An expanded and excursive intellect shall be forever gratified with the opening treasures of knowledge, and the endless wonders of the universe; for we shall know even as also we are known, and the heart, made perfect in bliss, shall be filled with the pure and celestial fires of a divine love.



Christians! you shall there have laid aside this body of sin and death, for *this corruptible must put on incorruption*, and, like the eagle, who fixes his eye, and directs his flight to the sun, you shall mount on an immortal wing towards the boundless source of light, and truth and love. AMEN!

## ON THE NATIVITY.

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Behold! I bring you glad tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.—*Luke ii. 10.*

THESE are the blessed words in which the advent of the Saviour, so long looked for by almost all nations, was announced to the humble and pious shepherds of Judea, who were waiting for the hope and consolation of Israel. The remains of an original tradition diffused through all the countries of the East, had raised an universal expectation, that about this time, some divine personage was to appear upon earth, who should rule the world in righteousness and peace; and who, putting an end to crimes, would restore the primitive age of innocence and happiness. This tradition, which flowed down with more or less clearness through all the branches of that original family from which the earth was peopled, after the deluge, was rendered more definite, and confirmed with greater evidence to the Jewish people than to other nations, by a long succession of prophets. The period of the coming of this divine illuminator and prince, which had, at first, been left undetermined, had become fixed by the spirit of prophesy. And, at this moment, this great event was attracting the attention and the hopes of mankind, when its actual accomplishment was proclaimed by a voice

from heaven in the skies of Judea. *Behold! I bring you glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all people: for to you this day is born, in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.* And an epoch surely it was of the highest joy to the universe. At the birth of Jesus, was fulfilled the pious hopes of patriarchs and devout men for so many ages. Then appeared that Son of the virgin whom so many prophecies had foretold; whom so many types had prefigured; for whose advent so many prayers had ascended to Heaven; and so many astonishing dispensations of divine providence had prepared the way. A supernatural star in the heavens was instantly understood by the pious shepherds, who followed its direction till they found the infant Saviour at Bethlehem. Angels proclaimed to them, while watching their flocks in the fields, the birth of him who was to publish to the universe the glad tidings of salvation. Heaven began the acclamations of joy, which were soon to be communicated to the earth; *and a multitude of the heavenly host were heard praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest! On earth, peace, good will to men!* And to the shepherds, the leader of this heavenly band announced *glad tidings of great joy which should be to all people: for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.*

What then were the subjects of joy with which that morning dawned upon the earth? With it a spiritual sun arose to enlighten the nations. It brought consolation to our manifold afflictions, the fruits of sin, and has given relief to the conscience oppressed with guilt,

and ignorant of the way of reconciliation with God. It has shed light and comfort into the dark and awful mansions of the grave, and opened beyond them the prospects of a blessed and glorious immortality to the heirs of death. Let us review each of these ideas. And do thou, O Sun of Righteousness! illuminate our minds with divine truth! warm our hearts with thy heavenly rays! That we may partake largely of the joy of the universe at thy rising!

In the first place: That spiritual darkness in which the world had been involved for so many ages, was dispelled at the birth of Jesus Christ. Before that æra, God, in his proper nature and glory had not been known to the greater portion of mankind. The lights of that original revelation which he had given to the father of the race had been long extinguished, or buried under a mass of superstitions, the work at once of the fears and the corruptions of mankind. Men knew not whence they had sprung nor what was to be the final destination of their being: they knew not him whom it was their first duty to worship, and as little did they understand the nature of that pure and spiritual worship which he requires. They looked round with stupid surprise or incurious indifference, on a world of which they understood neither the origin nor the end. Some regarded it as the gloomy empire of a blind and senseless, but rigorous fate: and others, as the field of sport to a thousand fantastic and capricious deities. The most venial error of a frail reason was that which mistook the sun, and the moon, and *the host of heaven* for



their Creator. But, when once the human mind had lost the true knowledge of God, it was soon overwhelmed with the most profound darkness, and sunk in the most deplorable corruptions. *The glory of the incorruptible God it changed into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things.* And to such sottishness of depravity did it at last arrive that, in its shameless deities it personified almost all the vices of a depraved heart. The service of their temples was as impure as their divinities, and conformable to both were their profligate morals. Decency forbids the recital here of scenes which often passed in the secret recesses of their most hallowed shrines. The apostle Paul draws a melancholy picture of heathen manners in his epistle to the Romans; and by some of their own writers, the portrait is charged with colours hardly less dark. “The feeble glimmerings of the law of nature, saith the wisest philosopher and greatest orator of Rome, are now so obscured in the general depravity, that hardly can you discern any more even a vestige of its primitive lights.”

Christians who have received their first notions of God, and impressions of duty under the light of the gospel, and who have been bred up and cultivated under its daily instructions, can scarcely conceive of the extreme debasement into which the human mind was sunk in its ideas of the divine nature, or of the depravation of morals which was the native consequence of this ignorance and these errors. Happy in the illumination which shines around them, they seldom turn their eyes backward on the ages of darkness that they may learn,

by comparison, to estimate the unspeakable blessings which we now enjoy. But, go to the gloomy priests of Baal! See them, as they are decribed by the sacred writers cutting themselves with knives, and covered with their own blood before his cruel altars, deprecating the wrath of the idol with frantic howlings. Go to the horrible shrines of Molock and of Saturn, and behold the agonies of infants offered as victims to these furious demons by their miserable parents, who daily sacrificed the feelings of nature to a monstrous superstition. Let me then conduct you to a different, but not less immoral spectacle, in the groves of Venus, and of Thammuz, and of a thousand other impure deities, and disclose the scenes of dissolution that were perpetrated there—Let me point you to the intemperate revellings of Bacchus, and the inmodest rites of Pan. Even in the most magnificent and venerable of their temples, in which a pompous ceremonial amused rather than gave peace to the conscience, you may see the melancholy proofs of the corruption of human reason, of the most abject humiliation of human nature in the worship of shameful statues the representatives of dead men and women, who had been in life the examples of every vice; and in the worship still more degrading, if possible, of the vilest animals, and the most loathsome reptiles! From this dark and spiritual night which covered, not one people alone, but all nations, turn at length, to the blessed light of the gospel which arose on the earth with the birth of Christ—there contemplate God in his true glory, infinite, eternal, almighty, most holy, most just, most benevolent; the fountain of being, the

source of all mercy to mankind; behold there that pure worship of the heart, that virtuous and holy practice in the life which alone can find acceptance with him; behold that perfect law of love which emanating from him whose nature is love, is the firmest and the sweetest bond of human society upon earth, and the sublimest principle of the immortal unions and blessedness of heaven; and, finally, carry forward your view beyond the grave, the grave which, to a heathen, swallowed up all hope, and enter into the mansions of everlasting purity and blessedness, illuminated by the eternal Sun of Righteousness, and then say, what a subject of joy to the world was the incarnation and birth of our most blessed Saviour. Well may we join in the acclamations of the holy angels; *Glory to God in the highest! on earth peace and good will to men!* or with the evangelic prophet when rapt in vision, he was carried forward to the day of Christ—*Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee: for lo! darkness hath covered the earth, and gross darkness the nations. But the Lord shall rise upon THEE, and his glory shall be seen upon thee; and the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.*—Yes, at the birth of our Emanuel, that profound spiritual night which had so long rested on the nations began to disappear; the idols of paganism, the idols of Egypt, saith Isaiah, were moved at his presence, all trembled on their bases; their altars were hastening to be extinguished; and their votaries fled from their falling temples. The living and true God was every where acknowledged and adored; and his worship, dis-

encumbered of victims and altars, and the frivolous pomp of festivals and auguries and oracles, was, like his own nature, holy and pure;—his only altar a penitent and humble heart,—his only incense devout and benevolent, and heavenly affections.

2. Not less reason of joy was there at the birth of Christ in the next place; when you contemplate him as that glorious High Priest, who came to *take away sin by the sacrifice of himself*, and thereby give peace to the conscience afflicted with the sense of its guilt, and oppressed by its fears. Although men had lost the true knowledge of God, and of the way by which the sinner might return to his favour, and obtain his mercy, yet did the powerful voice of conscience often break out from beneath the cloud of that ignorance, and make them secretly tremble at some unknown and terrible power, the avenger of crimes. Amidst the darkness in which they were involved, the fearful phantoms of guilt often rose up before their imagination, disturbed their pleasures, like that shadowy hand in the presence of Belshazzar, that wrote his condemnation on the wall, terrifying him in the midst of his licentious festival. They erected those phantoms into Gods that they might endeavour to appease them by shocking rites. They raised their own vices to the seat of divinity that they might protect their indulgence by the examples of their Gods.—Yet could they not quiet the voice of nature in their breasts that condemned them. Above all when they came to look down into the abyss of the grave, and forward into the eternal world, they were often agitated with the most fearful apprehensions. They knew not, indeed, at



what they trembled; for they were ignorant of God and of the holiness of his law; yet were their apprehensions not the less afflicting. They knew not by what means to appease the offended powers which their fears created. On every side they turned, to every horrible expedient they had recourse. *Thousands of rams* bled at their altars, *ten thousands of rivers of oil*, and of blood flowed in their temples; at the shrines of their dreadful idols, they offered *their first born; the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul*. Yet did these monstrous victims, instead of appeasing, serve only to increase their guilt, and their terrors. Their ordinary sacrifices, which were less horrible or less shameful, they continued through custom: a custom handed down, indeed, from the beginning of time, and having, at its institution, a most important meaning; but ignorant of the divine authority on which it rested, and of the great atonement to which it pointed, it yielded no solid repose to the conscience. Such was the state of mankind in the ancient world, and such will it ever be, when men are left merely to the guidance of nature, and are not directed by that light which cometh down from Heaven. So far had they departed from God, that reason knew not how to lead them back to him. It knew not how the corruptions of our nature might be cured, nor where to find an atonement for sin. All these obscurities have been removed, all these mysteries have been enlightened, all these horrible perversions of nature have been taken away, and human reason restored to its proper exercise by the coming of the Saviour. By the Holy Spirit shed down on the apos-

ties, and on the church, by the great atonement which he has offered for sin and by his own glorious resurrection and ascension into Heaven, he has given hope to those who were ready to perish, and opened a way for penitent guilt, to the presence and the throne of God. He is himself the way, the truth and the life. When the Day Star arose, the fears of a boding conscience and of timid superstition which had afflicted the world, through such a long night of darkness, fled before it. Peace and Consolation were bestowed on true repentance;—and man, who from the beginning, had been condemned to death by the sentence of the violated law, and expelled from Paradise by the angel of justice was, if I may speak so, led back again to the tree of life, and *the flaming sword*, which guarded the entrance to it, was taken away by the Angel of mercy.

Christians! this day invites you to rejoice with angels and with all saints at the birth of that glorious High Priest, who has repaired and magnified the honour of the divine law; who has perfectly satisfied the claims of divine justice; who has opened the gates of eternal mercy, and *sprinkled the mercy seat with the blood of the everlasting covenant*; who has given efficacy to repentance by the sacrifice of himself, and consolation to the penitent by *making reconciliation for iniquity and bringing in everlasting righteousness*.

What obligations are we not under to thee, O blessed Saviour of men! who hast condescended to assume our nature, and to become our Prophet and instructor, our High Priest, and the sacrifice for our sins!

But, christians! the humble and sincere penitent

alone can justly estimate the obligation laid upon us by these mercies. If you have seen in the true and strong colours of the divine law, the evil of sin while you have felt yourself condemned by its righteous sentence; if after these painful convictions, the light and peace and comfort of the gospel have been introduced into your soul; if you have seen the darkness of natural reason, the curse of the law, the oppression of guilt, the condemnation of death, all removed by the incarnation and sacrifice of our great High Priest; your own experience, your convictions, and your consolations, will carry to your heart more powerfully than could the eloquence of an apostle that holy and ineffable joy which the coming of the Saviour hath prepared for all who trust in his name, and obey his gospel.

As the birth of the Saviour has brought with it the only certain relief to the wounded conscience, it has furnished also the true consolation of all the calamities and sorrows of life. For under his most gracious economy and government, our sufferings are often converted into our greatest mercies; and *these light afflictions which are but for a moment, are made to work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*

3. Here you behold the last and highest blessing flowing from the advent of the long promised Messiah, in which this day calls us especially to rejoice; He came to bring *life and immortality to light.*

What could nature, what could reason do to satisfy the mind on this interesting subject? It was unable to lift the veil of death and to look with a clear and steady view into the eternal world. The wisest of the heathens

knew not what either to fear or hope for, hereafter. Dark and gloomy, indeed, is the condition of man if he has no hope of prolonging his existence, in some after state of being. But despair rests upon the grave, when, in descending into its shadows, we at the same time enter on an awful and unknown future, under all the distressing doubts of reason, and all the fearful apprehensions of conscious guilt. Before the Sun of Righteousness appeared, the world was covered with the victims and the trophies of death. It resembled the valley in Ezekiel's vision, filled only with the dry bones of the slain—his vivifying rays have quickened them, and given them a new life. Yes, christians, a glorious light has visited you after the ages of darkness. You have received *glad tidings of great joy*. Christ has not only revealed immortality, but purchased it for all who sincerely believe: not only promised to raise your sleeping dust, but confirmed your hope by his own resurrection from the dead. The path to immortal life and blessedness now lies open to repentance, and to faith, to piety, and virtue. A heavenly light has scattered the profound darkness of the tomb; and all eternity, if I may speak so, lies before the view of faith in ravishing prospect. Blessed be God! and blessed be the infant of Bethlehem! immortality is now the end of all our pious hopes, the consolation of all our sorrows in time, the encouragement and the reward of all our most arduous duties.

So many causes of joy to the world should fill our souls with a devout and holy triumph in the mercy of God. It is fit that we should rejoice with Heaven and



Earth at a nativity so astonishing and glorious, which was sung, in the beginning, by a great multitude of the heavenly host, and which will form a distinguished subject among the songs of the redeemed in their everlasting habitations. But, in what manner, christians! ought the disciples of the humble and incarnate Saviour, the eternal Son of God most holy, to testify their joy upon such an occasion? By excesses, and disorders? by the licentiousness of mirth? by Saturnalian festivals and dissipations? This were a reproachful perversion of a spiritual blessing. The moderate and cheerful pleasures of society, religion does not blame. On the other hand, it assists us to enjoy them. But shall christians ever depart so far from the Spirit of their profession, as to introduce the orgies of heathen idols to do honour to Jehovah; to celebrate the boundless grace of the ever blessed Saviour, who came to *redeem the world from these vanities, to serve the living and true God?*—Praise him by devoutly sending to his throne the incense of your holy and heavenly affections. Praise him by the profound and lively sentiments of your humility and your gratitude. Praise him by the fervor of your zeal in his service, by your diligence in duty, by your increasing sanctification. Come with gladness along with the rejoicing shepherds, to offer him your homage in his humble manger. Unite your praises along with those of the Heavenly hosts who waited on this birth,—*Glory to God in the highest! On Earth peace, good will to men!* AMEN.

## LIFE OF THE PATRIARCH ABRAHAM.

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After these things the word of the Lord came to Abraham, in a vision; saying, fear not, Abraham; I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.  
*Genesis, xv, 1.*

**MY BRETHREN,**—Few subjects of human knowledge can be more interesting and instructive than an acquaintance with ancient manners, and especially with the private and domestic history of those pious and illustrious men who adorned the simplicity of the first ages, and became the conservators of the primitive lights of revelation to their posterity and the world. Among these great men there is none who has appeared with superior distinction, or whose fame and veneration have extended over a wider portion of the human race than Abraham. He was the father and founder of many nations who boast their origin from him. And, what is a much higher glory, he was the father of the ancient church, to whom was imparted by God, the covenant of his mercy to mankind, in its first and visible organization.

Of the life of this eminent servant of God, I shall now present you with a very concise portrait. But being obliged to employ only the brief and scanty materials furnished in the rapid narration of Moses, a few capital points alone in his history can be touched. They are such, however, as merit the attention, and invite the improvement of pious men in all ages, and serve to form a regular and connected character of

the patriarch, prince, and saint; and present it to us as a consistent whole. Except his birth, which was from a distinguished and opulent family in Chaldea, and his marriage, nothing is related by the great historian, before the seventy-fifth year of his age, when he migrated with his father, his nephew, and some others of his nearest connexions, from the place of his nativity to the territories of Canaan.

At this period, idolatry, which had, hitherto, been restrained by the instructions and example of Noah, and the patriarchs who had with him survived the deluge, began to invade the nations. This second progenitor of the human race was now dead; and, at the close of three centuries and a half, mankind had so far degenerated from his pious instructions, as already to discover a strong tendency to that species of idolatry which is the most natural error of reason, the worship of the sun: and of fire, as the purest emblem of the splendor, and the vivifying power of that heavenly body. This seems to have been the reigning superstition of the native city of Abram, as is indicated by its name, *Ur of the Chaldees*: a denomination which is said, by those best acquainted with oriental literature, to signify the *city of fire*.

This distant migration of so great a prince, appears to have been undertaken wholly by divine direction. God, in the incipient degeneracy of the nations, in order to preserve from utter extinction the truths originally imparted to the parents of the human race, and through them, to their posterity, determined to select a faithful family to be the depository of his holy laws, of the

promises of his grace, of the worship of the sole and Supreme Deity, and of the hopes of the future Messiah, the Saviour of the world. For this end was Abram required to leave his country and his people, that his family, no longer mingling with idolaters, might the more certainly, be preserved from the infection of their manners. Some of the Jewish rabbins, and even the author of the Vulgate version of the Scriptures, misled by the original meaning of the name of this Chaldean city, have given birth to the fable of the patriarch's being expelled from Ur, by the persecution of the idolaters; and, with difficulty, escaping the fire which had been prepared for him. And it is still a prayer in the Latin church, pronounced over the dying, "that God would deliver them from the fire of hell, as he delivered Abram from that of the Chaldeans." This is plainly a rabbinical fancy, which has no other authority than a mistake founded on the *name* of the city.

At the command of God, this illustrious pattern of a believer's duty and faith, forsook his native country, and those early friendships, and that habitual society, and the precious soil, so dear to every man, "And went out, not knowing whither he went." At an advanced age, we see him breaking all those ties which take the deepest hold upon the human heart, and becoming a voluntary exile in a strange land. The command of God he implicitly obeyed, assured that, however the object of it might, for the present, be involved in obscurity, and the means of its accomplishment encompassed with difficulties and doubts, whatever he



required was wise and good, and whatever he “promised, he was able to perform.”

Abram was now old; and his wife, as well as himself, “was well stricken in years.” Even in the prime of her age, she had never given him the joy of a father; yet was he required to rely on the divine promise; that a posterity should spring from him, though now *as good as dead*, who should compose the future church of God; who should inherit regions at present possessed by powerful nations; and “become like the stars of Heaven for multitude.” On what ground could the faith of this humble believer rest? Simply on the word and faithfulness of Almighty God. “Against hope he believed in hope.” Glorious example of that faith which is the principle of a sinner’s hope in the mercy of the Redeemer! which sustains the heart in the deepest afflictions, and inspires it with confidence in the darkest and most disastrous circumstances of life; because God hath promised; and his promise “is an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast.”

Under the direction of the Divine Spirit, whose secret movements he followed, Abram advanced in his journey, and took up a temporary residence at Haran, a city on the confines of Canaan and Mesopotamia; the same which two thousand years afterwards, was rendered famous by the defeat and capture of a Roman army under the triumvir Crassus. Here his aged and venerable father ended his earthly pilgrimage; and Abram, after having, with filial piety, reverently deposited his remains, proceeded, by different migrations,

through that land, which, by divine promise, was to become the inheritance of his offspring. Being arrived at Bethel, his first care, according to his usual piety, was to erect an altar to the most High God.

This would seem to be a minute circumstance to be recorded with such solemnity in the history of so great a man. But, the legislator of Israel judged otherwise, and intended to convey to future ages, the sublime and instructive example of a great prince, who founded his domestic discipline upon religion, and was preparing this basis also for the government of that chosen nation, which was destined to rise from him: for no divine worship could be maintained in that age without the altar. And wherever the patriarch formed even a temporary residence, there we find his first solicitude to be for the erection of a structure so necessary for the religion of his family; and for the purposes of his civil intercourse, in his treaties and contracts, with independent foreigners.

But Abram being selected from the midst of idolatrous nations to be "the father of the faithful," and the founder of a visible church in the world, the Divine wisdom deemed it requisite to prove the steadfastness of his own faith, by many arduous trials, that he might be rendered, to all ages, the more conspicuous and instructive example of an humble, but persevering, and unshaken trust in God.

He had come from a distant country to receive possession of an ample region, promised to him as an inheritance for his posterity. And, in the plain of Mamre, the promise was again solemnly confirmed; though no

time was definitely prefixed for its accomplishment. Hitherto he was without an heir; and age and infirmity creeping fast upon him, and on the wife whom he tenderly loved, every year seemed to place an event, which he so ardently desired, still farther beyond the reach of hope. Five and twenty years he continued in this painful suspense. Always expecting; and always, when he thought he had arrived at the moment of attaining his highest wishes, struck back by some new obstacle. How firm and patient was the faith of this friend of God!

In order to impose a new trial on the steadfastness of his hope, and to draw out the peculiar glory of his character into fuller light, shortly after his arrival in Canaan, where he had promised himself to find a secure rest to his cares, the land of his future heritage was afflicted with a grievous famine, and he was obliged to abandon it, and to seek a refuge in Egypt. Thus does it often please Almighty God, by afflictions, by disappointments, by bereavements, by blasting their favourite prospects, by covering their horizon with dark clouds, to prove and strengthen the graces of his own people. Through multiplied temptations they approach, by degrees, the heavenly Canaan.

Notwithstanding the great and sublime qualities of the patriarch, selected to be the head and example of all believers, still he was a man, and we are constrained to lament, in the greatest of men, some proofs of the weakness of human nature. And the record of his imperfections, not less than of his virtues, stands as an evidence of the fidelity and sincerity of the sacred wri-

ter. Moses was his historian, not his panegyrist. Nothing would have been more easy than to make a splendid eulogium on such a character as Abram's, and entirely to sink his foibles in the lustre of his virtues: but we perceive only a simple and unadorned narrative, which bears, upon its face, the impression of truth. To escape the evils of the famine which raged in Canaan, he retired into Egypt, where his wealth, and the dignity of his character give him immediate access to the person of the prince. But, distrusting the incontinence of courts, because his wife, even at her age, was yet a woman of distinguished beauty, he suffered his apprehensions to overcome his integrity. He instructed her to conceal her marriage, and to pass herself, in what he supposed a licentious court, for his sister. He hazarded her honour to preserve his life. The same disguise he had practised in Palestine with the prince of Gerar. Literally, the declaration was true. She was the daughter of his father, but not of his mother; a connexion which, in that age, did not violate the laws of society. But, though true in terms, being used for the purpose of deception, it was an equivocation unworthy the piety and greatness of mind of this venerable patriarch. Many writers are found, who justify an equivocation of this nature, where either a great good is to be attained, or a great evil to be avoided by disguising, or even perverting the truth. But this morality is extremely lax; because it leaves to each man's self-love to decide on what occasions he may depart from the law of sincerity and candour. -I censure freely this action of so wise, and great, and



good a man, and of so sacred a character, for the more sacred interests of piety and virtue. The honour, or the truth of revelation does not require the vindication of every step in the life of its prophets, its apostles, or its patriarchs. It is an error to suppose that every prophet is so raised above his species, as to be utterly exempted from all the weaknesses of human nature. No man was ever perfect, he only excepted who was also more than man. The history of the patriarchs is the history of good men,—but still of men, in which, if some blemishes appear, they are infinitely outweighed by their virtues.

There is an important and frequent mistake made by the readers of the sacred writings, which this blemish in the life of Abram leads me to remark, in confounding the spirit of inspiration with the spirit of sanctification; and supposing that the prophet to whom God is pleased to reveal his will, must be under the special and immediate direction of his Holy Spirit, in every action of life. Revelation is interposed only on those great occasions, or in those critical circumstances, in which the order, or existence of the church is concerned: in all others, the prophet is permitted to follow the bent of his own genius, the impulse of his own temperament, the lights of his own mind, influenced, sometimes improperly, by the circumstances in which he is placed, operating upon the weakness of human nature. At the courts of Pharaoh, and Abimelec, the great patriarch swerved, for a moment, from the rigid path of virtue, having his fortitude shaken by his very natural apprehensions from the injustice and

incontinence of princes, united with the uncultivated manners of the age. His fears, however, were, in this instance, happily disappointed, by the excellent characters of the sovereigns who then reigned in Gerar, and in Egypt. Influenced by a profound sense of religion, and respecting the sacredness of the marriage tie, they no sooner learned the holy relation in which Sarai stood to Abram, than mildly, but pathetically expostulating, they reproached him with a dissimulation which had nearly involved them in involuntary guilt, and him in the deepest misery and shame. Yet, convinced of his integrity, and observing also that he was under the peculiar care of Heaven, they recognised in him that exalted merit, which had been shaded by his unjust suspicions of them.

It will not, I presume, be departing improperly from the object of this discourse, to answer an inquiry which naturally arises here;—whence is it that Abram, who had been called, from amidst the growing idolatry of the nations, to rear a church that should be the pure depository of uncorrupted truth, should find in those countries, which soon became the seats of the most impure superstitions, such eminent examples of piety and virtue? To reply correctly to this question, it is necessary to understand the state of the world at the present period.

Idolatry was, as yet, only in the commencement of its dark and demoralising career. The pious precepts and example of Noah were still preserved by a recent tradition among his posterity, who, though already widely dispersed from one another, were not far re-

moved from their common origin. Many pious families among all the nations, so recently sprung from him, still preserved the spirit of this great preacher of righteousness. At a much later period we find, in Arabia, Jethro and Job, pledges of other righteous men who existed in the various nations, in the same grade of descent from their postdiluvian ancestor. The invisible church of God, indeed, appears, in all ages, to have been more extensively diffused throughout the earth, than many good men, entertaining very circumscribed views of the divine mercy, have been willing to admit. What a consolatory idea to true charity! The real friends of God shall be seen, at last, coming from the east, and the west, the north, and the south; even from those nations which have not been enlightened by the glorious rays of the gospel; but who, like Abimelec, like Jethro, like Cornelius, have worshipped and served the living God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth, with the best lights which they enjoyed. The pious heart expands with this hope, and offers the grateful homage of its praise to him “who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe.”

Will it be asked (if such is the extension of divine grace) why was this holy man called from the land of his nativity? why were not all nations left simply to the instructions of the light of nature, or of that which has been called the original and universal Revelation?—It was to preserve the church of God from a fatal corruption in principles and manners, which was already begun, and threatened daily to extend more widely its baleful influence;—it was to preserve the precious light

of divine truth as in a sacred ark, the rays of which, feebly scattered over distant nations, were likely to be more and more obscured by the effects of time, and a growing idolatry;—it was that he might become the depository of the glorious promise of a Messiah, and restore the knowledge of the living and true God, after it should have been nearly extinguished in the worship of demons;—and finally, it was to point the hopes of mankind forward to the great sacrifice for sin, after they had been nearly lost in the sacrifices of a vain superstition.

From Egypt the venerable patriarch returned, after the cessation of the famine in Palestine, to fix again his residence between Bethel and Eli, where he had formerly erected an altar to God. Here his first care was still to provide, in his own family, for the worship of Him whom all the earth ought continually to adore. And, after the example of Abram, it is the first duty and honour of every father of a family, to erect a domestic altar to the Creator of heaven and earth. And, perhaps, there is no means more effectual to impress upon their hearts those sentiments of piety and virtue which are so essential to their happiness, than daily bringing them with himself into the presence of his heavenly Father, and bowing along with them at the footstool of that Being of Beings.

The wealth of Abram, as was usual in that age, consisted chiefly in herds, and flocks, and a numerous train of servants. In these articles of comfort, or of luxury, under the favourable providence of God, he had prospered to an extraordinary degree. His brother's



son, whom he had taken under his protection, and into his friendship, and who had hitherto been his companion in all his migrations, had been hardly less successful. Their flocks together covered extensive plains; and the masters, with their wives, composed, in a manner, but one family. There necessarily existed, however, a difference of interests between them, which daily became more visible in proportion to the augmentation of their riches. These good men, notwithstanding, could always have lived together in the same harmony which had hitherto subsisted: but it was not so with their servants and dependants. The mutual emulation of their shepherds, the partiality of these men to their own flocks, and perhaps their officious zeal to recommend themselves to their respective lords, embroiled them in frequent disputes. Hardly would it have been necessary to rest on this portion of the patriarch's history, but to remark the mildness, and amiable candour of his temper, so becoming the friend of God and man. "Let there be no strife," said the venerable saint, "between me and thee, and between my herdmen, and thy herdmen; for we are brethren." The contests of these men make it requisite for us to part; but the land is before thee; make thy selection out of the whole; "If thou wilt go to the right hand, then I will go to the left; and if thou wilt go to the left, then I will turn to the right."—Amiable condescension! admirable greatness of mind! what sacrifices is he not willing to make to peace and fraternal concord? His age undoubtedly claimed the precedence from the youth of his nephew; for, was he not as a father to Lot? distinguished,

likewise, by his intercourse with Heaven, was not the whole land his by the designation and promise of Him who is Lord both of Heaven and earth? All these prerogatives he yields to his love of peace; and is the first to propose those concessions, and contrive that plan of accommodation, which love only could dictate to a benevolent heart.

Lot chose for his portion the fertile plains of Jordan, and fixed his residence in the city of Sodom. These plains were occupied by five cities, each subject to its respective king. For, in that age, so recently after the deluge, the general veneration of the people for the mild and equitable government of some ancestral head, had, every where, given birth to monarchical institutions, which accordingly took place in single cities, or in small districts. Sodom and its allies had rebelled against their superior lord, the king of Elam, who, in confederacy with three other princes reclaimed his royal rights. A decisive battle was fought in the plain of Siddim. The confederated princes were victorious; and after the conflict, they retired carrying with them an immense booty. Among the rest, Lot was taken with all his herds, and his vast wealth. News of his nephew's captivity being brought to Abram, he immediately selected three hundred and eighteen of his servants, who, in a country filled with petty sovereigns, almost constantly engaged in hostilities with each other, were all trained to arms, and with these, in conjunction with the trained servants of three neighbouring and wealthy lords, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre, he followed the victors. The aged shepherd, grasping with ardour

his buckler and his shield, divides his little army into three bands, and treading close upon the steps of the enemy, forces their camp at night, and pursues the fugitives to the borders of Damascus. By this prompt and vigorous stroke, he recovers his nephew, and all the booty which they had plundered from the cities of the plain. The king of Sodom, in a transport of gratitude for the recovery of his captive citizens, with their property, offered him the whole spoil as a reward of his bravery. This the generous grandeur of Abram's soul refused. He conquered, not for himself, but for virtue, and for justice. He took only a recompense for his allies; the rest he restored to the citizens who had been pillaged.

We behold, in these transactions of this illustrious patriarch, the union of the greatest mildness of character, with the greatest courage; the greatest humility, with the greatest grandeur of soul; the greatest desire of tranquil life, with the greatest energy in action; the greatest love of peace, with the greatest decision in war.

In his return from this splendid exploit, he was met by an extraordinary personage, whose name never appears before in the sacred record, and is never repeated, except in a single allusion in the book of Psalms, till he is introduced by the apostle as one of the most illustrious types of our blessed Saviour. Melchisedek, king of Salem, brought forth bread and wine to refresh the wearied victor in his march; and there it is said, he blessed Abram. With other kings the patriarch had conversed on an equal footing; but to Melchisedek, who

was not only king of Salem, but priest of the most high God, he paid an unusual homage, as being due to the sacred character which he bore; and Abram gave him tythes of all that the right of conquest had put in his power. The name of this prince, and of the city over which he reigned, taken together, signify *the righteous king of peace*. The history of this event, as it is recorded by Moses, would lead us to regard him as one of the princes of the country, but a great and pious man, who had united the sacerdotal with the regal functions; and as being probably the sovereign of a city which stood on the same site on which Jerusalem afterwards was built. The apostle, in speaking of the priestly office of our Lord Jesus Christ, falls into a most animated and rhetorical strain of eulogy; and appealing to a prediction of the holy psalmist concerning him, in the person of his type Melchisedek, proceeds in such a style of lofty figure, as seems hardly applicable to any mortal.—“Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchisedek.” “This Melchisedek,” the apostle adds, “without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God, abideth a priest continually.”—This is a description so highly wrought, in the fervour of pursuing an emblematical similitude of the divine Redeemer, that not a few of the most pious commentators have pronounced, that it can be applicable to no other than to him who is from everlasting to everlasting; and who is frequently found, in the sacred history, revealing himself visibly to the patriarchs and holy men of antiquity. But the simple narration of



Moses leading to a different conclusion, and the figured style of St. Paul being capable of a different interpretation, I am disposed, with the greater number of writers, to consider this extraordinary prince and priest, as only an illustrious type of Christ: In the language of the apostle, "he was made like the son of God:" that is, he bears, in the manner in which he is introduced into the sacred history, a striking and typical resemblance to that eternal Priest who ever liveth to make intercession for us: For "he was without father, without mother, without descent." In the original, the latter phrase is without genealogy; which gives an obvious and natural interpretation to the two preceding. No genealogy of this sovereign pontiff has been preserved; perhaps did not exist, as was requisite in the Jewish priesthood to ascertain the right of succession. He appears, therefore, without any designation of father or mother, as if inheriting from them. But being king, he assumes the pontifical functions in conjunction with the royal in his own dominion. The office begins, and is continued in him alone, as long as his dominion exists; which is exhibited to us without any fixed beginning or end of days. All these circumstances seem to be intentionally recorded by the sacred historian, that this royal priest might become, by an easy figure, a more perfect type of him who possessed an underived and eternal priesthood in the heavens; infinitely superior to that of Aaron, and to the perishing rites of the Mosaic economy. All that was wanting to this eloquent apostle, for the illustration of his subject, was only a series of striking and appropriate analogies. These he found in

the history of the “king of righteousness and peace, the priest of the most high God,” pointed out already by the allusion of the inspired and prophetic psalmist; of which, like a genuine orator, he makes a most beautiful and pertinent use; and to the Jews, one would think, equally affecting and convincing.

After these interesting events, God appeared again to Abram, in a vision, to renew his assurances of mercy and protection;—“I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” But the holy man, almost impatient of so long delay in obtaining the promise, for which he had abandoned his native country, replies;—“Lord God! what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?” and my domestic servant, Eliezur, sprung from a stranger of Damascus, alone appears to inherit the ample possessions which, by thy good providence, I have accumulated round me. Although this address seems marked with a degree of impatience, little becoming the character of Abram, yet the Eternal, in compassion to the frailty of human nature without offence, deigns to repeat to him his former promise, with the addition of a posterity as numerous as the stars of heaven, who should, in future time, possess the whole land of Canaan, and hold in full and absolute property that extensive region. Abram, though still called to “hope against hope, believed God;” and that submissive, devoted, and confiding mind, the source of all other virtues and graces, “was counted to him for righteousness.” But here the good man proposes another request, which, as it is usually interpreted, seems to imply some hesitancy and doubt in his mind, little ac-

ording with the praises which have been bestowed on the faith of this patriarch:—"Lord God! whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?"—In vindication of this request, it has been said, that the faith of the holiest of mortals, put to such painful and tedious proofs by repeated delays, might begin at last to falter, and require to be reassured. And might not Abram, in the humility of his soul, believing, yet struggling with the natural infirmity and unbelief of the human heart, cry to God, as did long afterwards the disciple to our Saviour in the gospel; "I believe, Lord! help thou my unbelief!" Oh! give me one more decisive and unquestionable token of the accomplishment of this precious promise!

This, though plausible, does not appear to me to be the genuine interpretation of the passage. And, when I look forward to the transaction which immediately follows, I must conclude, with Mr. Saurin, that it has a very different meaning. God, who is the sovereign of nations, and who "determines to all the bounds of their habitation," had just promised to the patriarch, the possession of the land of Canaan, as an inheritance to his posterity. His reply indicates no hesitancy or distrust of the verity of the divine promise; but contains a request that he would now condescend to convey to him, by some visible and formal covenant, the exclusive title to that territory, which was hereafter to be the object of hope to his posterity, that it might be their encouragement and warrant, in the fulness of time, to take possession of it. "Whereby shall I know," that is, "shall I be assured of my title to inherit it?"



And it is immediately added, “ in the same day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt, to the great river, the river Euphrates.” In which expressions we clearly perceive the form of the covenant conveying the title, and the boundaries of the possession distinctly designated. To confirm this criticism, and indeed, to place it almost beyond question, we observe rites employed by God, in the transaction with Abram, of the same nature with those which were universally used, in periods of the most remote antiquity, among princes, in their covenants conveying the property of the soil or other territorial rights and privileges. “ Take me an heifer of three years old,” saith he, “ and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle dove, and a young pigeon. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece, one against another, but the birds he divided not. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.\* And, when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and lo! a horror of great darkness fell upon him. And he said unto Abram, know of a surety, that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them, and they shall afflict them four hundred years: But, in the fourth generation, they shall come hither again, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. And, it came to pass, that, when

\* This most insignificant, and unmeaning translation, is happily corrected by Bochart, who remarks an ambiguity in the original, which misled our translators.—“ And the fowls,” viz. the turtle dove and the young pigeon, “ Abram laid on the carcasses, and he sat between the parts.”



the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp (or lamp of fire) passed between those pieces. In the same day," that is "at that time, and by these rites, the Lord made a covenant with Abram;" (viz. the covenant which has been just recited.)

In this transaction we recognise one of the most ancient forms of giving validity to covenants, or contracts, antecedently to the general knowledge and use of letters. It consisted in dividing a victim into two parts, and causing the contracting parties to pass between the halves.\* In this covenant we see Abram sitting, and Jehovah passing between the severed parts of the victims, by his visible emblems, a smoking furnace, and a lamp of fire, the symbols of his presence. Thus, by a new engagement, in gracious condescension to the patriarch's request, he confirms the promise of the land, or strengthens it by a new title, which he had before repeatedly made to the father of the faithful. At the approach of Deity, a horror fell, as was natural, upon the mind of the holy patriarch. He was seized with a prophetic impulse; and foresaw the destinies of his posterity for four hundred years.

\* An example of a contract ratified in this way, we have in the 34th chapter of Jeremiah, 18th and 19th verses. And profane history furnishes us with numerous instances. Agamemnon, when he would most solemnly confirm his faith to Achilles, divided a victim with his sword, and holding the bloody weapon in his hand, passed between the parts. This ceremony was usually accompanied with an oath, sworn on the altar, or in the act of sacrificing; hence the common phrase among the Greeks for entering into covenant, "to cut an oath." A contract, therefore, became a solemn act of religion; and implied an imprecation, that he who violated it, should be destroyed by the judgment of heaven, as that victim by the sacrificing knife.

Abram had now been ten years in Palestine, and still the heir of his ample fortunes, which had been so long, and so frequently announced to his hopes did not appear. Affectionately attached to a wife, who, even at her advanced age, retained uncommon vestiges of her early beauty, he had not availed himself of a connexion with a second wife, which, in that age, was permitted to the best of men, from whom he might at length realize those anxious expectations which had hitherto so painfully disappointed him. But Sarai, either more impatient for the honours, and the expected blessings of the family, or generously regarding the sacrifices which her husband had so long, and so delicately made to her feelings, proposed to him of her own accord, to take to his bed one of those female attendants whom she had brought with her from the court of Pharaoh. Alas! Sarai! thou wast little acquainted with the human heart, or with the sensations which were to spring up in thy own breast, from this new and untried relation; and with the multiplied vexations thou wast preparing for the best, and most affectionate of husbands. Hagar, for this was the name of the maid who was to enjoy this honour, when she found that she was likely to become a mother, could no longer restrain that natural impulse in the female breast, especially in a woman raised from her humble condition to the bed of a prince, grew proud, and discovered evident and insulting symptoms of triumph over her mistress. The amiable wife who had hitherto been placid and unruffled in her temper, now became jealous and severe. Abram had the holy tranquillity of

his mind discomposed by her discontent, and the keenness of her reproaches. And Hagar, through the harshness of her treatment, was obliged to flee from her presence. Ah! this mixture and opposition of affections, and connexions in the same family, is ever likely to be productive of the utmost infelicity and disorder.

This Egyptian handmaid, in her flight, was still the care of heaven, on account of her innocent, though hitherto unfortunate connexion with him, who had this honourable testimony given him that he was the "friend of God." An angel deigned to comfort her, who was to be the mother of nations; after which, he restored her back to her lord's protection, with a mind more humbled, and with juster sentiments of her duty. But in this appearance, it deserves to be particularly remarked, we discern that Almighty angel, who is so frequently perceived hereafter in the patriarchal history: for, with a divine majesty and authority he announces his promises and consolations; presenting to her, at the same time, a distant view of her posterity to future ages.—"I will multiply thy seed exceedingly: behold thou art with child, and shall bear a son, and shall call his name Ishmael. And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man; and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." A prediction which remains to this day, after the lapse of four thousand years, conspicuously verified in all its parts. Over the offspring of this illustrious patriarch, indeed, both by Hagar, and by Sarai, a peculiar providence seems ever to have presided. And during so long a period,

in which all other nations have been so blended with one another, or so totally changed, that they can no longer be found, the Arabians and the Jews remain the standing monuments of a singular providence exercised over those people, and of the authenticity of the sacred history.

Great God! when encompassed with the monuments of thy omniscient spirit, not less than with the operations of thy omnipotent power, may we ever be ready to yield our hearts to the mighty evidence of truth.

My brethren: not only do we derive from this history a demonstration of the truth of holy Scripture, but we learn a lesson of high national importance from the answer of God to the request of Abram for a covenanted title to the land of Canaan. Although that territory was, at this time, occupied by the posterity of one of the sons of Ham, contrary to the original allotment and distribution of the earth among the children of Noah, by which arrangement it fell into the portion of the descendants of Shem, of which family Abram was; yet God, unwilling to annul a title acquired by long occupancy, and by many laborious improvements made in the soil, till they should forfeit their right by their national crimes, delayed the accomplishment of his promise to the patriarch, till after a period of four centuries, when it was foreseen that their impieties and sins would render them ripe for destruction. For, says the Supreme Ruler and Judge, "their iniquity is not yet full." This proposition leads to a principle in the divine government over the nations, highly interesting to every people. In the pro-



gress of national vice there is a point which can never be exceeded without being followed by the most fatal calamities. For, in its current, it dissolves the bands of civil society, and consumes the political body, by an internal and ruinous disease, convulsing it by faction, or preparing it for the domination of a foreign master, when human nature sinks into the lowest degradation and wretchedness. Yes, Almighty God! thou hast laid the wondrous and mysterious plan of thy providence, so as always to avenge, at length, the rights of thy violated law, upon guilty nations, no less than on profligate individuals!

We have now followed Abram through twenty-four years of an interesting period of his life from the first appearance of God to him in Chaldea; since which time he had been a sojourner, with various fortune, in a foreign land. But he was at last arrived at the eve of that great event which was to form the solace of his future life, and of his grandeur and fame to all ages. The time of the birth of the child of promise was now definitely fixed, and the next year was to see him happy in that wonderful heir who was to be the progenitor of the future Messiah, the blessing of the whole earth. Abram fell on his face before the majesty of God, and the strong emotions of his joy broke forth in visible demonstrations of his inward pleasure. Therefore, says the Eternal, "Thou shalt call his name Isaac;" a name which signifies *laughter* or *joy*. Names in the early periods of society, are commonly drawn from the circumstances of time, place, character, or other peculiar relations. On this important occasion,

the names of both Abram and Sarai were changed, in commemoration of the prediction which was at the same time graciously renewed to them: that they should be the progenitors of numerous and mighty nations. *Abram*, which signifies *glorious father*, received an addition, *Abraham*, the “glorious father of multitudes.” And *Sarai*, *my lady*, was changed into *Sarah*, a general term for *lady*, or *princess*, to denote her future relation to the great people who were to spring from her.

At this time also, the “covenant of grace,” the true foundation of the sinner’s hope, the basis of the church, and the fountain of all her precious truths, was invested with its ritual form, and was confirmed by a visible and sensible seal, which was to be transmitted to all his posterity, as a pledge of eternal life, to be bestowed on every one who believeth: A most consolatory doctrine, which could, by no means, be certainly known to mankind, by the simple lights of nature: God had before, by a formal and explicit conveyance, the ceremonial of which has already been explained, ceded, and confirmed to the patriarch, and his posterity, the whole extent of the land of Canaan. This new covenant, therefore, cannot reasonably be supposed to be merely a repetition of the same grant. Its tenor is stated in the seventeenth chapter of the book of Genesis;—“I will be a God, to thee, and to thy seed after thee.” And it is that which, by the whole nation and church of Israel, was ever styled, with peculiar emphasis, “the promise;” according to the very precise and particular allusion of the apostle on the day

of Pentecost; “for the promise,” viz. of the Messiah, and the peculiar blessings of his grace, speaking to the believing Gentiles, “is to you, and to your children.” Here, then was the *visible* church first instituted in the family of Abraham, with its initiating symbol, “the seal of the righteousness, which is by faith,” when the venerable patriarch had attained almost his hundredth year.

In pursuing the history of this eminent saint, we perceive him, in the next place, honoured to be the depository of the fearful judgment of God, ready to be executed on two most corrupted cities, as he had already been of his singular mercies to the church.

Sodom and Gomorrah, situated in an extensive and fertile plain to the south of the river Jordan, and depraved by their wealth, had abandoned themselves to all the excesses of an enormous licentiousness, and were now become ripe for those exterminating judgments which Almighty God, in some form or other, always inflicts on extreme corruption of the public morals in any nation. Three strangers appeared to Abraham, as he sat in the door of his tent about noon, according to the usage of his pastoral life. A benevolent hospitality prompted the good man to run to meet them, and press them to accept from him all the accommodations and comforts on their journey, which the kindness of his heart inclined him, and the good providence of God enabled him, to bestow. With the most amiable simplicity of primitive manners, he spread for them with his own hands, a rural repast, under the cover of the branching tree which extended its shade

over the tent in which he resided. These strangers proved to be heavenly messengers; and one of them, by the extraordinary majesty of his appearance, attracted the profoundest reverence of the patriarch. They conversed with him upon his approaching felicity, and the glorious “son of promise,” whose birth was now determinately fixed to the following year. Sarah, whom curiosity had drawn secretly to listen to their discourse, smiled at the improbability of the story, and was reproved for her incredulity. When they arose to depart, two went towards Sodom, with the gracious purpose of rescuing Lot from the approaching ruin of that devoted city. The third, who now assumes to himself the title of Jehovah, still prolonging his discourse with the holy man who is worthy to partake of the councils of heaven, reveals to him the fearful judgments decreed against that iniquitous city, and the other cities of the plain, partakers of her guilt, and now immediately impending. Abraham, filled with compassion for these miserable people, presumes to intercede for them. No where, perhaps, can we find an example of equal humility, tenderness, fervency, and perseverance, and yet submission, in prayer. In condescension to this faithful intercession, the Eternal engages, if only ten righteous persons could be found among so many thousands of reasonable beings, the creatures of God, who worshipped him—ten who were not dissolute, profligate, abandoned, he would suspend his judgments. Oh! horrible receptacles of vice, where those unnatural crimes, which indicate the last stage of degeneracy among any



people, were universal! For the purposes of the vilest species of lust, which still bears their detested name, the Sodomites sought to drag from the house of Lot, those divine heralds who had entered it under the guise of strangers. Provoked with the enormity of their wickedness, the heavenly guests smote the criminals with blindness, and urged, with the greater earnestness, the retreat of Lot and his family, from the ruin impending oversuch a seat of iniquity. Hardly had the good man made his escape from the descending flames, when suddenly, the whole territory was involved in a tremendous conflagration. Sheets of fire descending from heaven, kindled the sulphurous and bituminous substances, with which the earth in that region was impregnated, when, in a moment, the whole abyss below burst forth in a dreadful volcano. Abraham, from afar, beheld the columns of smoke and flame ascending to the skies. Lot was escaping for his life. But the imprudent wife of Lot, either foolishly lingering about the purlieus of her former pleasures, or turning, with a vain curiosity, to listen to the shrieks of the perishing, and the thunders, and earthquakes which convulsed that burning vortex, the image of hell, was caught in the pestilential vapour, and fixed to the soil a motionless statue, impregnated with the salts with which the atmosphere was surcharged.\* In the same instant these

\* This appears to be the proper explanation of that expression, translated in our version of the Scriptures, "a pillar of salt," to the great amusement of certain infidel writers. The original word for pillar, in this translation, signifies a fixture, or immovable object of any kind. And the probability is, that an extremely subtle, hot, and saline vapour issuing from the volcano of Sodom, arrested the unhappy woman, as she delayed too

guilty cities sunk down, amidst inexpressible horrors, into the flaming caverns of the earth; and the river Jordan, which formerly watered their fertile and beautiful plains, pouring its waves after them, into the tremendous chasm, filled it up with an extensive lake.\*

Here we cannot forbear pausing a moment, to reflect on the fearful catastrophe of those soft, voluptuous people, lost in the delirious dreams, and the mad pursuits of sensuality. Roused by the united fires of heaven, and the exploding bowels of the earth, from their morning slumbers, which had succeeded their midnight debauches, see them now, embraced in the bosom of devouring flames; for the soft music to which they had danced, listen to the thunders which rend the firmament over their heads:—for the lascivious songs at which they were melting and dying away in sensu-

near the flames, and penetrating her whole frame, fixed her motionless and rigid to the spot, by means of those salts with which it was copiously impregnated. And there are not a few examples, in the histories of different countries, of persons who have been thus fixed as statues by the force of subterranean or volcanic vapours. Aventinus, according to Heidegger, tom. 2, exercit. 8 No. 33 in his annals of the Boii, an ancient people of Gaul, informs us of more than fifty peasants, occupied in milking their cattle during an earthquake, who were, in this manner, penetrated by a pestilential vapour, and converted into statues, abundantly impregnated with salts. [See also, Kircher, *Mundus Subter.* tom. 2, lib. 8 sect. 2, cap 2.]

\* We have here, apparently, the just and natural account of the destruction of the cities of the plain; and of the origin of that great lake which has been called the Dead Sea, on account of a sluggish and bituminous oil with which, in many places, it is covered; or of a certain vapour said to be exhaled from it, which blasts vegetation near its shores, and is mortal to all the volatile tribes flying too near its surface.

al transports, hear the shrieks of despair, with which they are sinking down to hell! Ah! how many thoughtless mortals, though not overwhelmed with their tremendous ruin, are, in a more silent and unobserved manner, continually descending, from the midst of their guilty pleasures, to the "blackness of darkness, where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched!"

After this great event, and a few circumstances of less importance, in the patriarch's history, the next year, according to the prediction of the angel, crowned his faith, and accomplished his most flattering hopes. Sarah gave him, in her old age, and amidst transports of delight, the long expected child of promise, the heir of his ample fortunes, and the future blessing of the world. The joyful mother, having nourished this precious infant from her own breast during the appointed time, weaned him at length, with all that magnificent hospitality, and those festive demonstrations which became their exalted rank.

Hagar seeing the flattering prospects which she had entertained with regard to her own son disappointed, by the intervention of a more favoured heir, and deeply resenting the former jealous and cruel treatment of her mistress, had encouraged Ishmael, who was now about sixteen years of age, to express, by his insults, all her own angry passions. And Sarah saw him, on this joyous occasion, persecuting, by indecent mockeries, her beloved child. This mark of insolence and contempt could no longer be endured by a mistress, and still less by a mother, who lavished the virgin affections of her age, on this extraordinary infant. She in-

sisted on the expulsion of a handmaid raised above her duty in consequence of her unexpected elevation, and her long, and tender relation to Abraham. The good man afflicted by domestic jealousies and dissensions and pressed by a conflict of duties and affections, was obliged at length to yield to the torrent of his wife's resentment. A divine monition encouraged his compliance; and to console the patriarch's grief, the assurance was repeated to him of making of Ishmael a mighty nation.

Some circumstances of apparent cruelty in the beginning, attend the dismissal of this poor woman and her son. They are, however, more apparent than real. Her first difficulties arose from her inexperience. Her son was already of an age sufficient to procure them game in a thinly populated country. And the wandering life she was obliged to lead in the desert, conveys, to an agricultural and commercial people, ideas infinitely more formidable than to the northern Arab, to whom it is the most desirable condition of existence. Ishmael soon became an expert archer. And Abraham, shortly afterwards, appears to have extended to the mother and the son, a protection, which only the rapid course of the narration, has not given time to the historian to relate. That he entertained a strong and tender attachment to this outcast son is apparent, by the earnestness of his supplication to God, at the time when Isaac was exclusively announced to be his heir;—"Oh! that Ishmael might live before thee!" And Ishmael, after the death of his father, discovers a respect to his memory, and a cordiality with his brother,



in paying the last duties to his honoured remains, which could not be expected from an exiled and abandoned child. And we cannot avoid remarking, that he testified the most profound veneration for the religious precepts of his father, and transmitted to his posterity that painful symbol of the covenant which is retained by them, to this day, among their characteristic distinctions.

In the progress of this biographical sketch, we are now arrived at a trial of the patriarch's faith infinitely more severe than all which he had yet experienced, enjoined by God as the final test of his obedience, and to complete his unrivalled right to the title of "Father of the faithful." At the same time, it appears to have been the purpose of Almighty God, by this new experiment, to reward the holy man with the clearest revelation ever made to any of the ancient saints, of the future Messiah, who should "take away the sin of the world by the sacrifice of himself." The son of promise was daily increasing in every manly accomplishment, in every filial duty, and in every divine grace. And Abraham's life flowed on in such an equal and tranquil tenor of prosperity and happiness, that it has afforded no materials to the historian, till this beloved youth, according to the annals of Josephus, had attained his twenty-fifth year; or, according to other writers, his seventeenth. What an interesting period of life! Habit, added to parental tenderness, and aided by the daily disclosure of some new excellence of character, or proof of dutiful zeal, had had time to wind itself in a thousand folds about the heart of

a father; when, like a stroke of thunder upon all his joys, and his prospects, he received this extraordinary, and almost incredible command from Heaven:—  
“Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering, upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” Although this command appeared to violate all the laws of nature, and the dearest affections of the human heart; yet, certain of the reality of the divine impression by which it was indicated to him, he hesitated not; but, though all the father rose up in his breast to resist it; and though it seemed to put a final period to his hopes, and to contradict the promise of God himself; yet confiding in that omnipotent wisdom which can unravel all difficulties, and accomplish his own word in opposition to the most unpromising events, “he rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass,” according to the simplicity of the age, “and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son; and he clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up and went to the place of which God had told him. Then, on the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said to his young men, abide you here with the ass, and I, and the lad will go yonder, and worship.”—This command, which was evidently intended to prove, to the utmost, the strength of the patriarch’s faith, rendered the trial more severe to his heart by the distance of the place of sacrifice, and the time that intervened before the execution. For three days the awful transaction was continually before his mind, and

he was obliged to struggle with his parental emotions. But his piety and faith rendered him superior in this painful conflict. ‘He took the wood for a burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife, and they went both of them together.’ Here the beautiful simplicity of the narration of Moses cannot fail to arrest our attention, and awaken the deepest sensibilities of the heart. As they went “Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, my father! and he said, here am I my son. And he said, behold the fire and the wood for a burnt offering; but, where is the lamb?” Proposed in all the simplicity of innocence, how must this question have gone to the heart of a father! Nothing but the heart can interpret it.—Abraham, covering, as well as he was able, his deep emotions, replied, with apparent tranquillity, “God, my son, will provide himself a lamb.” Together they reared the altar, they disposed the wood in order, and every thing was prepared for the sacrifice. At last, the afflicted father, labouring with the divine secret with which his bosom was loaded, was obliged to disclose the dreadful purpose of his soul. And to a young man in the prime and vigour of life, who could easily have repelled, or eluded the feeble arm of age, it became necessary to demonstrate the divine authority under which he was acting, to procure a calm and patient submission to the stroke. And we cannot but behold with wonder, the pious resignation of that amiable youth. You hear from him no complaint; no effort is made to escape; he tranquilly submits to be bound an unresisting sacrifice upon the altar. In this

moment was tried all the fortitude of Abraham's soul. His darling son was before him, prepared, in all the loveliness of innocence, and meekness of submission, to die by his father's hand. Love, admiration, pity, a thousand emotions struggled in the parent's bosom. But imperious duty commanded. And as he raised in his hand the sacrificing knife, he felt all the pangs which the death of this precious victim could make him feel. His obedience was now complete. God, in his mercy, pitied his faithful servant; and in the act to strike, he was arrested by a voice from heaven:—"Abraham! Abraham!—lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me!"—But what words can express the triumphs of Abraham's soul in this instant? With unutterable emotions the ravished patriarch looks on his son, and then on Heaven; on Heaven and then on his son; and bows in silent devotion before the throne of the Eternal! A ram, providentially presented to him at that moment, he offered in sacrifice to God: and the Almighty Jehovah again swore by himself, that, "in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed." Sublime believer! thou hast received again thy son from the dead! And, in reward of thy faith, thou hast seen in him the great sacrifice for the sins of the world. Honoured to be the organ of divine mercy to the nations, thou hast also been made to understand, by thy own feelings, the infinite love of God in the redemption of mankind!

On this interesting transaction several inquiries have



been raised which go deeply to affect the foundations of our holy religion. Two only, of principal importance, I shall consider at present; and, for the sake of the serious hearer, who is candidly searching for the truth, I shall study to give them as clear, and, at the same time, as brief a solution as is in my power.

Can Abraham be justified in yielding obedience to a command which appears directly to contradict one of the most obvious and indispensable laws of the moral world? Can the command itself be justified on any principles of reason, and shown to be consistent with the moral attributes of the Creator?

With regard to the former of these questions, the solution of it depends upon the answer we may give to another.—Can God, by any immediate and supernatural communication, impart his will to the mind of man, so as to leave no doubt that the Creator hath spoken? And does not the clear and explicit indication of the divine will impose on every reasonable mind the most absolute obligation? Wherever it is known, is it not the supreme principle of duty? But, do you say, that, in this instance, the act of Abraham was opposed by another and incontrovertible exposition of the will of God, in that inviolable law of nature which unites the parent with his child? To this reflection, I may be permitted to reply that human reason can, but very imperfectly, judge, in all cases, of the limits of the laws of nature. It finds itself continually baffled and confounded by appearances in the moral, as well as in the physical world. Although those laws form, in all ordinary circumstances, a clear and adequate rule of hu-

man duty; yet, in extraordinary cases, it is impossible to pronounce, with certainty, what modifications may be made in them by the infinite wisdom of the Deity. What then was the duty of a good man situated as Abraham was? Here is a direct and explicit command from God, the authority of which I cannot doubt. But nature revolts from the act, and, to my apprehension, opposes to it another prescription of his most holy will. —O my God! conscious of the blindness of my own mind, the imperfection of my reason, I know not what modifications thou mayest, at any time, make in thy own laws; what blessings, which I cannot discern, may be couched under a requisition so severe. Sure of thy command, however painful, I address myself to obey it. Lord! I follow where thou leadest, yielding my frail reason to thy sovereign wisdom; and confiding that thy infinite goodness will never suffer me to be led into involuntary sin. Such would naturally be the reasonings of piety, humility, and faith. And under their influence, this severe act of obedience became an inviolable duty.

But, as evidently appears from the event, it was not the purpose of God to permit his faithful servant to violate those parental laws which he himself hath deposited in the human breast. It was necessary, however, to conceal the final issue of this transaction from the holy man, that he might proceed to the utmost point in the execution of it, which could be done, without involving him in the guilt of parricide. And thus far it was requisite that he should advance, in order to fulfil the design of Heaven, which appears to have been, to

convey to him, in this action, the clearest prediction of the death of the future Messiah, which was ever made to any patriarch or prophet, and, at the same time, the fullest discovery of the love of God in giving his son for the redemption of the world. In order to understand how such important and various information should be imparted, in this extraordinary manner, to the mind of Abraham, or to justify this interpretation of the act, it will be necessary to recur in our reflections to the primitive modes of imparting instruction, and recording events, by means of symbolic characters, which took place in the earliest ages of the world; especially in the eastern nations, and before the general use of alphabetic writing. Pictures were the first and natural symbols of all those objects of thought which could be sketched by the pencil. But after society became farther advanced, and intellectual, and moral ideas were multiplied, which are incapable of being depicted to the eye, they were found to be susceptible of a certain figurative representation, by the analogies they were supposed to bear to particular qualities of sensible objects. Hence arose the whole hieroglyphic art, which attained its chief perfection in Egypt. At length, the lively genius, and strong imagination of the East, added another improvement to the powers of emblematic representation, by substituting actions, on important occasions, instead of pictures, or writing, which may be regarded as a dramatic exhibition of thought. This species of drama, or animated hieroglyphic came, in time, into very familiar use. And the histories of oriental antiquity furnish many striking examples of it. It was em-



ployed especially by the Hebrew prophets to announce their solemn denunciations with the most impressive and picturesque effect. Isaiah walked *naked*, that is, stripped of his exterior garments, through the streets of Jerusalem, to be a sign to the people of their approaching calamities; and especially of the slavery and nakedness to which they should be reduced. Jeremiah sent yokes to the neighbouring kings of Palestine, as symbols of their cruel and predicted subjugation. And another prophet dug all night under the city wall, and carried out his household furniture with haste and trembling, to indicate the straitness of the siege by which the inhabitants should be distressed. On the same principles in human nature, fables, and parables have been made vehicles of instruction. A similar hieroglyphic picture may be discerned in every type. Nor is the christian church wholly without examples of the same kind, in the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper. But the most expressive of all symbols, the most instructive and impressive of all typical actions, was this parental sacrifice on Mount Moriah.

The way is now prepared to explain the purpose of God in this extraordinary command, in conformity to the state of improvement and manners in that age. The obedience of Abraham is to be regarded as a prophetic action,\* under the direction of the Spirit of God, in which was represented, by the liveliest emblem which the whole range of human nature could afford, the future sacrifice of Abraham's greater son. So lively was the emblem, that our Saviour says, with regard to

\* See an excellent dissertation on this subject in Warburton's *Divine Legation of Moses*. Vol. 2. p. 66, &c.



this patriarch, above all the other prophets;—"He rejoiced that he might see my day; and he saw it, and was glad." Isaac was a type of the suffering Redeemer, who was offered on the same mount for the sins of the world;—who suffered under the hand of a father who loved him; and who, like this precious and filial victim, suffered with his own consent, and "laid down his life of himself."

But more, as I have already suggested, appears to have been intended in this symbolical sacrifice, than merely a representation of the death of Christ. It was designed to convey to the mind of the holy patriarch, as far as human nature is capable of receiving the sublime impression, some conception of the infinite love of God, "who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." And how could a stronger image be conveyed into the heart of man? All the father yearned over his beloved Isaac. He felt all the meltings of parental love in the most tender, and anguished situation in which a father ever was placed. Hence we perceive the wisdom of not suffering the good man to anticipate his son's deliverance from the altar, or to hope the smallest relaxation in the divine command till the full force of these emotions had occupied his whole soul. The action was designed to make him understand the gospel mystery, and to anticipate this most precious science by so many ages. And, without calling up, in the father's bosom, all the tenderness, the anguish, and conflicts of parental affection, this transcendent revelation of the death of the Saviour, and of the infinite love of God manifested on that altar, could

not have been imparted to the soul of the prophetic patriarch. The divine mind, indeed, cannot suffer such paroxysms of emotion as a human parent; but was it not all necessary in a mortal to convey to his heart, any adequate idea of the gospel sacrifice; and of the love of God in giving his Son for the redemption of the world.

Such appears to have been the gracious purpose of Almighty God in this astonishing transaction. In it was made the clearest revelation, which any prophet had ever attained, of the Messiah's age. And, in the view which has now been given of the subject, every objection which has been urged with any plausible appearance of reason against the morality of this portion of the sacred history, has, I presume, been satisfactorily removed.

Waving all other reflections on that interesting scene which we have just reviewed, I shall detain the pious hearer but a moment longer, to contemplate that illustrious victim which was ready to be offered on Mount Moriah, the type of one infinitely more glorious, which was actually offered, on the same Mount, for the sin of the world. In the conflicts of a parent's love on that overwhelming moment, may we not learn to estimate the love of the Eternal Father, "who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all?" But alas! what mortal love can convey an adequate image of that heavenly benevolence "which embraced us in Christ Jesus before the world was?—Oh! the height, and the depth, the length, and the breadth of the love of God, which passeth knowledge!" And, let the frequent

meditation of this grace, although we can never extend our conceptions to its infinite sphere, confirm our humble trust and hope in the mercy of God, and dissolve our hearts in the warm effusions of thankfulness before his throne. Abraham! father of believers! what a taste had you of the love of God, when you had received again your son from the dead! What transports of gratitude! What ecstasies of dutiful zeal to him who taught you thus to estimate his love to a world perishing in its iniquities!—Believers! do you see the meek and obedient son of Abraham yield himself, without a struggle, to the sacrificing knife? Contemplate with wonder, him who established the universe on its firm foundations, who suffered himself to be “lead as a lamb to the slaughter, and, as a sheep, before her shearers, is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.” Jesus! Creator! we adore thine infinite condescension, “who being in the form of God, didst become man;” and, “being found in fashion as a man, didst humble thyself unto death, even the death of the cross;”—offering thyself a voluntary oblation for our offences! Christians! let his “love constrain us, because we thus judge, that, if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they who live, should not, henceforth, live unto themselves, but to him who died for them, and rose again.”

AMEN.

## ON READING.

“Till I come, give attendance to reading.”—1 *Tim. iv.* 13.

My brethren: This precept we find among the directions given by the most eminent of the apostles to “Timothy his son in the faith,” prescribing to him the best means of qualifying himself to discharge the high and sacred functions of the ministry of the gospel. But, I presume that we may, without using an improper liberty with the holy scriptures, give it a more general extention, and derive from it a useful admonition, not only to those who are preparing themselves, hereafter, to serve their country, or the church of Christ in the most conspicuous and important stations, but to all, even in the humblest spheres in society, who enjoy the means, or the leisure to improve, or usefully to amuse their minds by books.

In no age have these instruments of knowledge, and of the noblest intellectual pleasures, been multiplied to so great a degree, nor has a taste for reading been so universally diffused among all classes, as in the present. This great avenue to information, which formerly was accessible only to a few, is now laid open to all. The sacred scriptures, which, not long since, were a treasure as rare as it is precious, may be found, at present, in almost every cottage. The principles of morals and religion, and of almost every art, have been explained in so simple and perspicuous a method, as to be



brought within the reach of the most common understandings. Language, formerly uncouth and obscure, has, of late, been so happily cultivated, and the embellishments of style have been so richly spread over the works of genius and of fancy, that we resort to libraries, not for improvement only, but for many of our most refined and exquisite pleasures.—Like all other pleasures, however, they ought to be enjoyed with caution, and pursued under the direction of a sound reason, otherwise, they are in danger of becoming pernicious.

Few there are, who have received an education somewhat above the common standard, who do not devote a large portion of their leisure to the cultivation of liberal knowledge, and the enjoyment of the pleasures of fine writing. This prevalent taste, within certain limits, is attended with many advantages which bestow on the present age a distinguished superiority over the ages which have preceded it. It increases the general mass of intellectual improvement in society: and the refinement of sentiment and feeling to which it gives birth, when not carried to excess, is favourable to all the humane and social virtues. But it is accompanied also with its dangers. Genius is not always associated with piety or virtue. And, unhappily, there are, at all times, vain, licentious, or mercenary writers, who study, by impairing the principles, by corrupting the imagination, or inflaming the passions of their readers, to extort a shameful praise, or derive a dishonest profit from their vices. In proportion, then, as a selected and well digested course of reading is

friendly to piety, and to the improvement of the mind, both in knowledge, and in virtue, so that which is pursued without choice, or plan, which is superficial, frivolous, or immoral, is liable to dangerous abuse, and is usually followed by pernicious consequences.

In applying the precept of the apostle in that general view which I purpose to take of it, I shall consider,

1. In the first place, the objects which we ought chiefly to have in view in reading, by which our choice of books should be regulated.

2. And, in the next place, the means by which we may hope to derive the greatest improvement from this exercise.

The mind is chiefly formed by the sentiments and manners of those with whom it is habitually conversant; its health and vigour is affected by that moral and intellectual atmosphere with which it is surrounded, and which it customarily breathes. In your books you may find your instructors and friends; and your libraries, if you are addicted to reading, may, like a healthful, or infectious air, impart life and beauty to the soul, or debilitate and corrupt it by mortal disease. The authors with which you are most familiar, will naturally furnish the principal sources of your information, and contribute, in a great measure, to give their own direction to your habits of thinking. If, then, they are selected with wisdom, they will, along with the illumination which they shed over the mind, tend to introduce purity and harmony into the affections, and to settle on a firm basis our principles of piety and virtue. Whatever advantage there is in conveying instruction

by example above the coldness of speculation, by the beauty of an interesting narration, by the vivacity with which its images strike, or the authority with which they arrest the mind, we may possess in a well selected course of reading. We have it in our power continually to assemble round us the venerable dead who, in every age, have contributed to enlighten and adorn the world; and may constantly enjoy the society of the wisest and most virtuous men of every nation. Most imprudent, then, must he be, who, having leisure to read, with such a selection in his power, will waste his time on whatever writers accident may throw in his way, or the giddy fashion of the day, often guided by ignorance, may happen to recommend.

Still more does this consideration merit the attention of those whose opportunities for cultivating an acquaintance with books are circumscribed by their more necessary avocations, that these precious moments may not be worse than lost by introducing only error or folly into the mind. The prolific labours of the press, in our age, which have so abundantly brought forth the offspring both of truth and error, of inanity and wisdom, have, however, enabled almost every person, in the busiest, or the humblest circles of society, to contract an intimacy with a few, at least, of the most wise and virtuous minds who have ever lived, and to draw light and knowledge from their fountain, the aids of piety and virtue from their instruction and example.

But, by what criterion shall we regulate our choice of books, so as to derive from them the greatest profit?

Solid and useful information should be the supreme end, and, therefore, the first care of all who have leisure to cultivate their minds by reading. To know our Creator, and his glorious works; thoroughly to understand our duties and our hopes, our origin, our present state, and our immortal destination, are surely among the primary concerns of mankind. Those works, then, ought, in the first place, to be chiefly sought by us which present to the mind the most useful and important truths, and exhibit them to the understanding and the heart in the clearest and most impressive lights. If we can find the useful combined with the agreeable, and solidity of thought embellished with the pleasing colours of the imagination, true wisdom does not forbid to unite utility with delight. Nor is even agreeable fiction to be discarded, when genius, under the direction of virtue, has been able happily to employ it to exhibit nature to advantage; to awaken in the breast sympathies favourable to piety and virtue; and, by laying open the genuine springs of human action, to display the heart to itself.

Nothing can be to us of equal importance with our eternal existence, our duties here, and our prospects beyond the grave. Those writings, then, should stand with us in the highest place of honour and respect, which illustrate, with the greatest evidence, our moral relations, both with our Creator and our fellow men; which tend to establish most firmly the foundations of our holy religion; which discriminate its genuine spirit from all fallacious resemblances of it; and which awaken and cherish in the heart the blessed hopes of im-



mortality. Can any writings, then, be placed in competition with the sacred scriptures, those fountains of celestial wisdom? They have ever formed the favourite, and the daily study of the wisest, and the best of men. Here we behold the glory of God reflected in its true light—here we learn the perfect law of liberty and truth—here we contemplate the way of salvation traced out by the spirit of inspiration—here the veil which covers the eternal world is lifted up to the eye of faith, and the believer discerns beyond it, in ravishing prospect, the interminable career of the future glory and perfection of his being.

Such is the tenor of those writings which chiefly and primarily demand our attention. But the inquiries of a good man, who enjoys the means of improving his understanding, and indulging his taste, may well be permitted a more extensive range. Many other sources there are whence he may enrich the mind, and render it more capable of fulfilling the exalted duties of a reasonable being, by strengthening its faculties, and enlarging the sphere of its powers. Such are those works which make us acquainted with man by retracing his history; which promote the knowledge of ourselves by laying open the various springs of action in the heart; or which assist us to form juster conceptions of God by unfolding the wonderful structure of his works.

In the first we perceive the origin and progress of society; the revolutions of empires; the moral causes which govern the prosperity or decline of nations. We return back upon the mighty stream of time, and become spectators of that astonishing current which is

continually bearing on its bosom, men and nations into the gulf of oblivion; a spectacle calculated to teach us the most important lessons of wisdom, as they successively appear, and disappear to our sight. We become acquainted with those illustrious men who, by their talents, have enlightened, or, by their virtues, have benefited the world. We behold the manners of various people, their civil usages, their religious rites, the progress and decay of the arts, and that vast concatenation of causes which exercise a constant, invisible, but uncontrollable dominion over human affairs.—All are full of instruction to a contemplative mind; and, to the serious Christian, replete with subjects of devout reflection.

Not less estimable are those writers who, by their attentive and discriminating observation of human nature, are able to make us acquainted with ourselves; who turn our view on the nature, the dignity, and end of those faculties with which God has endowed us; who study to purge the mind of its prejudices, while they introduce in their room the most solid and useful principles of truth; above all, who conduct us into the recesses of our own hearts, and enable us to detect those innumerable deceits and windings by which we so often escape from ourselves; who portray vice in all its odious features, while they divest it of its imposing disguises, and depict piety and virtue in that beautiful simplicity, and that charming glow of feeling, which carry with them a deep conviction to the soul, that this was the genuine state of unfallen nature, and this is the true glory of our nature redeemed.

From works of the last description, we learn to penetrate, in some degree, the various and admirable structure of nature, and, from contemplation of its wisdom, its beauty, and its harmony, the immensity of its compass, and the omnipotence of its powers, we rise, amidst the emotions of astonishment and rapture to the worship of the supreme and adorable Creator. The earth, which is “filled with the goodness of the Lord,” is covered with beauty as with a robe. The heavens display a grandeur, and a glory, which overwhelm the serious and contemplative mind. Inimitable design, incomprehensible wisdom, almighty power, appear equally in the largest systems, the limits of which the eye, assisted by all the wonderful mechanism of art, can hardly reach; and in the minutest insect, which the powers of vision, magnified millions of times, can scarcely discern.—All tend to inspire a spirit of devotion, and to strengthen in the heart, the true principle of morals, by profoundly impressing it with the love and the fear of Almighty God.

I add, if some authors, willing to recommend religion and virtue by a more pleasing power, address themselves at once to the imagination and the heart by the charms of poetry;—if they depict the actions of illustrious men that we may imitate, while we admire them—if they portray the crimes of the vicious in dark and detestable colours, only that we may abhor them—if they paint the beauties of nature so as to raise the soul to its adorable Author—if they touch our sympathies for virtuous distress—if they dress in the charms of numbers, or animate with the spirit of the Muse, the precepts of

morality, or the sublime scenes of religion—these writers deserve, in their turn, to be made the friends of your retirement, the companions of your closets.

Such are the general characters of those writings, which, in the first place, deserve your studious attention, if you are so happy as to enjoy leisure from other and more necessary avocations for reading. I speak not here of professional studies, the regulation of these belongs to another place, but of those writings only from which every class of readers may profitably seek the improvement of their minds, and the cultivation of their hearts. Hitherto I have said nothing of writings designed chiefly for amusement—of those fictitious and dramatic histories intended to depict human life and manners, and to promote the elegant entertainment of our leisure, which are, at present, sought after with so much avidity by the crowd of fashionable readers. Like all other amusements, they may, to a certain degree, be lawfully mingled along with our more solid and useful pursuits. But, when they consume the greater portion of that time which we may happily enjoy to devote to the improvement of the mind, they become pernicious. They are a species of mental luxury, which indulged to excess, debilitates its powers, and corrupts its taste. A few works there certainly are of this kind, in which an elegant fancy, united with correct judgment, has been consecrated to the service of virtue, which may be read with advantage, as well as with pleasure. They are so few, however, mixed in the mass along with a much greater number of a different character, that the selection ought to be made



with peculiar caution. And it can be safely made, only after the mind has been already richly furnished with solid principles of truth, which will render it capable of detecting the illusions of the imagination, and the passions, which, in these works, are too often strengthened by false but plausible reasonings, and by the voluptuous images which they present to the fancy. In *the feast of reason*, if I may be permitted this image, the fancy should be suffered to come in with her luscious sweets, and exhilarating wines, only after the solidity of the first part of the repast has prepared the appetite to receive no injury from them. Even the best works of this kind, when too frequently resorted to for amusement, are attended with danger to all youth, especially of that sex whose vivid imagination, and whose quick and tender sensibilities, require to be preserved under the habitual restraints of a cool and sound judgment, rather than awakened by the exquisite powers of ingenious fancy. They are apt to impress a frivolous character upon the heart, to create romantic views of life, and to inspire visionary expectations, which prepare for them afterwards many painful disappointments. They contribute to strengthen passions always dangerous to virtue; and make them familiar with ideas which should hardly ever be suffered to intrude into breasts where only the purest images should be admitted. And too often they waste the amiable sensibilities of nature on low and trivial objects, while the miseries of human life can hardly excite its exhausted sympathy, and the duties of humanity and real charity remain neglected. Accustomed to the

high wrought beauties of fiction, the mind is apt to be disgusted with the plainness and simplicity of truth. The taste becomes sickly; the necessary duties of domestic life appear burthensome and dull; and many benevolent, but less elegant offices of friendship offend its delicacy. In the purest and most correct of these works, too often we find every picture exaggerated under the pencil of fancy, and almost all the objects of real life appear disguised under false colours.

What shall we say, then, of that numerous class of these productions which are not designed to elucidate, or enforce any important moral; which lead you only into a world of chimeras; and which employ all the powers of ingenious fiction, and the colours of a warm imagination to embellish trifles, and to relieve the weight of time, to those who are oppressed by too much leisure? But what shall we say of that more pernicious class, which is rapidly gaining a dangerous and fashionable currency, in which, to strengthen the licentious passions, to destroy all the fences of virtue, and to weaken our respect for whatever is esteemed venerable and sacred, is the manifest, or concealed object of the authors? What shall we say? They are impiously endeavouring to prostrate the public morals, to impair or destroy the influence of religion, and thus to dissolve the strongest bands of civil society, and overturn the surest foundations of human happiness. If they can corrupt the rising generation, above all, if they can taint the female mind, the fatal work is accomplished.

Long have the enemies of religion employed against it all the powers of reason, research, and learning: but they have found its friends more wise, learned, and enlightened, than themselves; who, possessing at the same time, the advantage of defending truth, have been enabled, in every serious conflict, to foil their antagonists, and turn against them their own weapons. Dispairing of this ground they have resorted to one which promises greater success. They attack our faith by our passions, and endeavour to corrupt and pervert reason through the imagination and the heart. On the side of vice and irreligion, they studiously enlist the pleasures, the prejudices, the wishes of the young, and of that sex especially, which possesses the most powerful influence over the manners of society. But as their delicacy, and their quick perceptions of propriety and decency, would revolt at gross immorality, and a bold and avowed impiety, proposed to them in open day, these writers often find it necessary artfully to disguise their insidious design. With vice they teach their unwary readers to be pleased in the character of some profligate hero, by associating his crime with many agreeable and generous qualities; the friends of religion they endeavour to exhibit in false lights, or in combinations fitted only to attract contempt or ridicule. Here a loose wish is guardedly insinuated; there a sneer is dexterously pointed against some religious or moral principle, which education had taught them to respect; reverence for the objects of religion is gradually impaired;—the foundations of virtue are insensibly undermined;—vice is invested with seducing charms, and

painted to the imagination in all that beauty and glow of colouring, which awakened passion knows so well how to throw over its most dangerous images. If by all these arts, they can corrupt the virtue of the sex, or impair those nice and delicate feelings of honour and propriety, or those religious principles, which are its surest guardians, the public morals, and the whole order of society are hastening to decline. And does not the present rage for these writings give the justest reason to apprehend, that the age has fallen into the snare which has been laid for it?

If works of imagination, calculated chiefly for amusement, should not be indiscriminately read, but should be selected under the strictest guards of prudence and virtue, others there are, which ought to be rigorously proscribed from the closets and the shelves of every friend of religion, or of the purity of the public manners. Such are all those writings which are professedly aimed against good morals,—which labour to undermine the established foundations of piety; or, which first awakening criminal desires in the heart, study afterwards to destroy every restraint upon their indulgence. Unhappy youth! who go to these impure fountains to draw from them a fatal contagion! if you should ever indulge your curiosity in examining these receptacles of impiety and vice, postpone it, at least till time and reflection have matured, and given stability to your principles. Alas! would you unseasonably seek your pleasure in the midst of infection? Would you amuse yourself with tasting poison?—Would you gratify your palate with a luscious draught, when death is in the bottom of the bowl?



Not less scrupulously to be avoided are all those writings, which are designed to impair your belief in the divine authority of the sacred Scriptures, unless you enjoy the leisure, and possess the talents and the means necessary to examine the question of the truth of revelation in its utmost extent. A momentous question it is, and merits the profoundest investigation, which the most wise and enlightened men can bestow upon it. But nothing can be more hazardous to virtuous principle, and to good morals, than to fill the mind with objections against religion, when either you have not the means, or you refuse to take the necessary pains, fairly to examine its evidence. If you possess the requisite qualification for investigating this important subject, it is a sacred duty which you owe to yourself and to God, to enter into the inquiry with sincerity and candour. But, if not, why should you studiously collect the objections of ignorance and impiety only to afflict your own soul with perplexity and doubt? Why should you weaken the force of that law, which is the most effectual guardian of individual virtue, and of the peace and order of the world? Why should you rob the heart of the consoling hope of an immortal existence? Why should you break from the passions the salutary restraints of religion, and thereby render yourself unworthy of that immortality for which you will then have ceased to hope? Why, in order to cherish those doubts which can only protect the short-lived pleasures of sin, will you incur the dreadful hazard of everlasting perdition?

II. Having made these observations on the proper choice of books, and the nature of that course of reading, which a due attention to the injunction of the sacred writer may be supposed to require; let me, in the conclusion, add to them a very few observations, which the brevity of your time will permit, on the best means of deriving from them the greatest profit. It will be requisite to conduct your reading with a certain method; —always to accompany it with due reflection; and to make it your principal object, not so much to know what others have thought and written, as to strengthen and enlarge the powers of your own minds, and to confirm in your hearts the principles of piety and virtue.

In the first place, it is requisite to conduct your reading in some method. The contents of books heaped together in a confused mass in the mind is little to be preferred to absolute ignorance. Principles are first to be acquired, before we proceed to those consequences, or results, which chiefly are dignified with the name of science. Let us endeavour first to make ourselves acquainted with those subjects of knowledge which are most solid and useful: we may afterwards add with advantage, the embellishments of polite literature. We seldom return back, with pleasure, or with profit, from the ornamental to the solid; from those subjects which are dressed out in the elegant and pleasing colours of the imagination, if they have occupied our first and chief attention; to such as require, in order to their elucidation or comprehension, all the energies of thought and understanding. Let the elegant amusements of

literature, which ought always, however, to be capable of some useful application, fill up those intervals of life, when the mind, fatigued by graver studies, or more important duties, has gained a title to unbend itself.

Our reading, in the next place, should ever be accompanied with due reflection.

The vanity of reading many books frequently rather mars than assists improvement. Such rapid and successive impressions, when they are not fixed by serious meditation, tend to efface one another. Too many readers have an avidity of impressions, without collecting and laying up the materials of true wisdom. They hasten from book to book; impatient to see the conclusion of every story, the unravelling of every plot, their minds become merely the passive subjects of successive and transient emotions. Gratifying only a vague and useless curiosity; giving themselves up to a succession of barren agitations, their reading is nothing but a species of mental luxury, which effeminates the vigour of the soul, while it refines, in some degree, its tastes and enjoyments.

Many there are who read through vanity, and merely to be able to quote the names and titles of so many authors; and many only to collect the materials of a superficial, and, what is called a sentimental conversation, than which, nothing is usually a more frivolous exercise of ingenuity, and frequently nothing more corrupting to the heart.

It is not sufficient, however, to read only the best authors, and those which afford the most useful infor-

mation, and the most solid wisdom, unless we can appropriate, and make it our own by profound reflection. If the subject be of a moral and practical nature, let us employ it to cultivate the habits, and to strengthen the foundations of piety and virtue, by confirming in our minds the principles of religion, which are the surest basis of morality; and by yielding our hearts to the virtuous and pious emotions, which they are calculated to inspire. If the subject be of a speculative nature, let us examine the justness of our author's principles, learn to test the accuracy of his facts, and the conclusiveness of his reasonings: by exercise, and by reflection, strengthen our own powers, and thus acquire, at length, a title even to judge our masters. Many there are, who devour books, who have never learned to think. Their knowledge lies in a confused and indigested mass in their minds, to which they have never given that clearness and order, which will enable them to produce it with facility and effect, for any useful and valuable purpose. If we would turn our reading to the best account, let us endeavour, by reflection, by conversation, and by writing, to arrange our ideas on all subjects in the most perfect order, and to acquire the entire possession and mastery of them. By meditation, and by mutual communication, knowledge is increased, ideas acquire definiteness and precision, and are disposed, at length, in that happy and perspicuous arrangement which puts them most completely under our own command. For this end, it is requisite, often to interchange reading with proper seasons of retirement and reflection; and fre-



quently, by a friendly intercourse with others, to elicit that comparison of thought which is one of the best means of correcting false, and improving imperfect conceptions; of increasing our stock of useful truths, and facilitating the communication of them to others.

Finally, in reading, let it be our chief solicitude, not so much to know what others have thought and written, as to strengthen and enlarge the powers of our own minds, and to confirm in our hearts the principles of virtue and piety.—Let it not only present to us the observations which others have made on men and manners, but let it be used so as to enable us more profoundly to enter into the springs of action in the human heart, and to discriminate the characters of men. Let it, at the same time, lay open before us the immense volume of nature, and teach us to read it. Above all, let it open to us the avenues into our own breasts, and enable us to penetrate into their most concealed recesses. To know ourselves is the first and most important science; as the truest wisdom is that which is practical, and consists in fulfilling all the active duties which result from our relations both to God and to mankind. That knowledge is worse than vain, it becomes a fountain of iniquity, which does not contribute to strengthen all the pious dispositions, all the virtuous tendencies of the soul. “If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.”

## ON FASHIONABLE AMUSEMENTS.

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I said in my heart, go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure; and behold this also is vanity. I said of laughter it is mad: and of mirth what doth it?—*Eccles. ii. 1, 2.*

It was the great inquiry among the sages of antiquity, wherever science had made any progress; what is the chief good? Where is the supreme happiness of man to be found? While some affirmed that it is placed only in temperance and virtue, and a complete command over all our appetites and passions; others conceived that it consists in a free indulgence in every sensual enjoyment. Solomon, though an illustrious, and otherwise, a wise and excellent prince, yet misled by his passions, which had long been cherished amidst the splendors of a luxurious court, was tempted practically to put to the proof the truth and justness of those principles which seek for happiness in the excesses, or the refinements of the world's joys. But his disappointed experience at length pronounced of them,—they are *vanity and madness*. I said of *laughter*, that is, of those high and constant scenes of amusement which create an oblivion of God, and of the serious duties of life, *it is mad*: and of *mirth*, or those continual levities and frivolities which dissipate the heart, *what doth it?* what is its value when the account of life is made up?

The world has, hitherto, become little wiser for the

experimental lessons of the king of Israel. If we enter the circles of fashion, and frame our estimate of human life from them, would it not seem as if God had bestowed the noblest faculties on man, merely to enable him to diversify his pleasures? Religion, indeed, teaches another lesson. But the passions, which have fashion, and general example on their side, often render her instructions vain. One simple question undoes all her reasonings;—Is not amusement, is not pleasure lawful? True, there is a degree, there is a time, there are connexions, in which every pleasure, demanded by simple nature, may be innocently enjoyed. But under this limited and modified concession, the votaries of fashion plead its innocence at all times, and in every degree. They dissipate the inestimable treasures of time, if not in absolute vice, at least in the perpetual vicissitudes of frivolity and folly.—And the melancholy issue will be found in the experience of all those who make the same proof of it which was made by Solomon, to be *vanity* and *madness*. A wise and good man will indulge himself in such pleasurable amusements only, as are permitted by reason and conscience enlightened by the word of God. The solemn considerations which religion, which the serious duties of life, which the prospects of eternity, which the inspection and judgment of Almighty God, continually offer to the pious mind, will mingle themselves with all his joys to regulate them, and to preserve them within the chaste and temperate bounds of innocence.

In pursuing the design of the royal preacher, I shall demonstrate, in the first place, the unreasonableness

and folly, or, to employ his own language, the *vanity* and *madness* of those perpetual scenes of dissipation and amusement aimed to be kept up by the fashionable world.

But, because true piety does not absolutely proscribe the amusements of society, I shall endeavour, in the next place, to assign their proper bounds; and to show at what point they become sinful.

When I speak on this occasion, of the excessive pursuit of pleasure, I would not be understood to embrace in my view those scenes of gross sensuality which violate the laws of decency, and sink into a resemblance of the brutes the nobler nature of man; I mean not those loose associations in which every thing serious is treated with indecent levity, and the most sacred subjects are introduced, like the holy vessels of the temple into the impious feast of Belshazzar, only to give additional zest to their profane mirth. I would not hold up to the view of an assembly of christians *those actions which are done of them in secret*, which disdain the bounds that religion, that reason, that modesty, that nature, corrupted as it is, prescribes to indulgence. I would fix your attention at this moment, on those amusements, chiefly, which wear the face of decency, which are recommended by fashion, and are sinful not so much by the nature of the pleasures, sought in them, as by their constancy, thereby usurping the place which God should hold in the heart of a dependent creature, which the interests of society, and sympathies of humanity should hold in the heart of a man, and which the cultivation, and improvement of his own nature should hold in the heart of a reasonable being.



That perpetual succession of amusements, and that dissipation of time, which, too strikingly mark the character of fashionable life, is incongruous with the actual state of the world; it is unworthy the reasonable powers, and high destinies of our nature;—it is inconsistent with the true enjoyment of pleasure itself;—but, above all, it does not accord with the spirit of the gospel which we have received from God as our rule of life; nor with the pious hopes and consolations of the soul at death.

1. If we consider, in the first place, the actual state of the world, and the evils which afflict the lot of human life, we must be forcibly struck with the incongruousness of that continual succession of amusements marked by the sacred writer, to the scenes of sorrow and distress which on every hand, so obviously meet the view, and address their claims to the heart of charity. Alas! doth the child of sorrow often utter in sighs to himself, the misfortunes, that prey upon my life, and waste my heart in hopeless grief, attract no attention from those joyous circles carried perpetually round in the thoughtless whirl of dissipation! Ah! little do they think how the sting, which rankles in the bosom of penury and wretchedness, is poisoned by the proud neglect of supercilious wealth, and the inconsiderate gayeties of unthinking pleasure. Ah! little do they reflect what miseries, a few moments of sympathy abstracted from this riot of the senses, or a few mites, saved from the wastes of luxury, or the ostentation of vanity might relieve! Could we, my brethren, with the eye of Hea-

ven, survey the world under one comprehensive view what a contrast would it present to us of deep affliction and unreflecting joy? On one hand, the miserable victims of misfortune, or of guilt, assailing with bursting groans, or with smothered sighs, the dull ears of pleasure; on the other, assemblies and routes, amusements and parties, from which sympathy, reflection, thought, seem to be banished. Here, thousands perishing by disease, by want, or by crimes, and thousands sinking under silent and unutterable griefs which consume the heart in secret; and there, thousands exulting in thoughtless levity, dancing over the graves of the dead, or drowning the last groans of the dying in revelry and mirth! If these melancholy contrasts, so deeply affecting to the benevolent mind, could be presented in full prospect before the most dissipated youth, would it not arrest his career, and mingle an unusual share of reflection with all his projects of pleasure? Would he not here behold, as in a mirror, the frailty of his nature, and his own manifold obligations to divine providence which has distinguished him from his suffering brethren? Would it not awaken in his bosom those emotions of charity and benevolence, which so seldom find place amidst the frivolities which make up the vacuity of the fashionable dissipation of time? Look on the calamities of the world and learn to feel your fraternity with the most afflicted of your brethren. Look; and contemplate the uncertain lot of human life. Look again, and let your sympathy turn your views to that immortal being where all must stand equally before the same impartial tribunal.

What then? shall we renounce all those pleasurable

amusements, all those light gayeties which seem so allowable in the season of youth? No; but surely even youth should be temperate in its pleasures; the levity of youth should often give place to serious reflection on the state of human life; the circulation of amusement should be often suspended to listen to the calls of humanity; the expenses of useless amusement should be consecrated to the higher and nobler offices of beneficence and charity.

2. When amusements, in the next place, follow one another in too quick succession, do they form such a plan of life, not only as religion, but as calm and sober reason would prescribe? Considered in reference to the great duties of life, and the interests of our eternal being what do they exhibit, but the thoughtless impulses of folly, which overbear reflection? but the frivolous drama of fashion that is hasting to pass away forever? Reasonable and immortal beings, have we not been formed to act a part becoming the noble powers with which our Creator has endued us, and corresponding with the sublime theatre of his glory in which he has placed us, and worthy the high destination for which the present is intended only as a previous discipline? Will a life composed of these light occupations correspond with the great and holy ends of our existence? Will it bear our own sober retrospect when we come to collect our thoughts in the presence of Almighty God! Ah! will it bear the scrutinizing review of a dying hour, when conscience, in the prospect of the last tribunal, demands its account of life?

Behold, then brethren, the cares which ought supremely to occupy life in fulfilling the high relations

which we hold to God, and to the soul; in cultivating those intellectual powers which unite us with angels; in invigorating and expanding those pure and sublime affections which ally us to God himself. Ah! what a dereliction of God, of our duties, of ourselves; what an abuse of the powers of a divine nature, to merge them all in the giddy whirl of fashionable dissipation! Powers that ought to be consecrated to the glory of God, and to the noblest interests of an immortal nature, shall they all end in an idle round of visits, of parties, of play; of insipid pleasantries; of licentious jests; of scandals, perhaps, grown vapid by repetition? Are they all sunk in the low ambition to shine in the frivolous circle; to be foremost in all its changes; to refine on the softnesses of pleasure; to perform trifles with a grace, to dress and laugh in style; and to be only the first actors in the comedy of the world? Surely the pleasures of a reasonable mind ought to be more elevated; the joys of the heirs of heaven ought to be more serious.

3. I might add that this toiling pursuit of amusement is inconsistent with its own aim, the possession of sincere happiness.

Pleasure is then only tasted with its true relish when it succeeds to useful employment, and is designed to refresh the labors of duty, which alone can form the solid basis of rational enjoyment. Pleasure that does not wait the natural returns of appetite, is insipid. When desire is forever anticipated, its gratifications become vapid and poor. The cloyed senses no longer yield those exquisite delights which are prepared



for them by virtuous employment, and by the rational abstinences of religion. How often does her toiling votary rise fatigued and languid from the dissipations of the night; when like a tired slave he is obliged to rouse his jaded appetites by artificial provocatives till the powers of enjoyment become oppressed. But not to urge this consideration farther:

4. Suffer me to ask, in the next place, is the resolution in the text, to prove the enjoyments of mirth and pleasure; a resolution so often ranked among the harmless purposes, and innocent gayeties of youth, consistent with the spirit, and the duties of the gospel, which, as christians, you acknowledge to be the rule of life, and on which you profess finally to rest your hope of salvation? What is the first view which the holy scriptures present to us of human nature? The first duties which they require of man? In every page of that sacred volume, human nature is exhibited as fallen and corrupt. The gospel is a system of reconciliation between guilty sinners and their offended Creator. The first duties to which it calls them are repentance, self-denial, humility, the mortification of the flesh, with its affections and lusts. But alas! what correspondence do we find between these humiliating views, these mortifying duties, and that life which is nourished only by indulgence, fed on ostentation and vanity? What relation between the self-denials of a penitent soul, and that pleasurable life which denies nothing to the enjoyments of sense, and the caprices of fancy? Between the state of sinful mortals who are hastening to the tribunal of God, and

must soon be actors in eternal scenes, and those perpetual calls of pleasure which indicate a mind entirely at ease, unimpressed with the solemnity of its state, and the seriousness of its prospects.

In this discipline of probation in which we have been placed by Almighty God, for a higher state of being, does not the gospel, and does not reason, require frequent retreat, meditation, and prayer, in order to break the force of the passions, which attach us to this world? But what room for self recollection, for retreat, for prayer can you find in the scenes which are hardly ever intermitted except from fatigue? What attractions has retirement for those who have no resources within their own breasts? who study to live perpetually out of themselves? who fear no society so much as that of their own thoughts?

Does not the gospel, further require that we should refer all our actions to the will of God as their rule; to the glory of God as their end? But, alas! in this vain life which knows no other rule nor end of action but its own pleasure, where do we perceive these characters of a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ? Here is its happiness—here are its hopes—here are all the joys it knows of existence.

If this constant succession of pleasurable forms is inconsistent with the spirit, and the prescriptions of the gospel, the great law of our duty, let us, in the next place, consider what aspect it will have on our preparations for death. This most interesting event cannot be far distant from any of you, my dear brethren, and it may be near very near to the youngest and most

thoughtless person in this assembly. Let me intreat you then to put this question to your own hearts—If you saw the king of terrors actually approaching, and already taking his fearful aim at your life—are these the employments in which you would be willing to be found? Would you in the bravery and hardihood of your spirit still exclaim—Live joy! strike tyrant! strike when thou wilt, still thou shalt find me in the bosom of my pleasures. Ah! would it not be esteemed the language of madness? Would not *vanity of vanities* in that moment be seen written in the colours of death, on all this drama of folly? Votary of pleasure! let nothing deceive you. Whether you perceive it or not, the arrow of this dreadful archer has already left the fatal string, winged at your heart, and on its point is borne everlasting life, or everlasting death. What influence, then will these unchastised scenes possess on the tranquillity of your last moments? Will you find in them that peace of mind which flows from a humble and sincere faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, his promises, and the all prevalent efficacy of his atonement and intercession? Will they present to you those consolations which arise from the review of a well-spent life. Let us make the serious inquiry.—What have you done for God? What for eternity? What for the interests of religion? What for the benefit of mankind? What examples do you leave for the instruction of the coming age? What good works press round the departing spirit and accompany it to the presence of Almighty God? Ah! you will find that when you thought you were pursuing only innocent pastime, and at worst, do

ing nothing, you were wasting that precious time which should have been the purchase of eternity: you were preparing the soul to descend at last into the bed of death, weighed down beneath the load of its trifles. Once more, then, let me ask—Can those amusements be innocent in which the interests of eternity are so fatally neglected? in which circling round and round in the dizzy vortex of pleasure you never look down to the dark unfathomable gulf beneath, into which the eddy is absorbing you?

But if, at the approach of death, you can derive no consolation from a review of those false joys which have supplanted the duties of religion, can you hope to obtain it at that awful period from the prevalence of prayer? Ah! can you hope in the tumults of that moment, to approach to God in the holy confidence of that duty, who have all your life, been a stranger at the throne of grace? What! shall we presume to waste the precious, the merciful seasons of life in the pursuits of folly, and then dare to hope, in the last extremity, to propitiate the righteous Judge of the universe by cries extorted by the fears of death? Mistaken soul! Are the cries of fear, prayer;—prayer, which can only be the fruit of faith, of love, of repentance, of humble and affectionate trust in the Redeemer of the world? Are the importunities of a despairing sinner prayer? The most impenitent will often shed the bitterest tears, will often utter the most piercing cries in the moment of perishing. Oh! 'tis a dangerous, 'tis a fearful reliance! By so many considerations is this eager and unintermitted pursuit of the plea-



asures of the world, of the real value of which, the sacred writer in the text, had studied practically to satisfy himself, condemned by the sentence both of reason, and religion—It is inconsistent with the real state of the world, and its innumerable afflictions—with the elevated powers, and immortal hopes of human nature,—with the serious duties of life,—with true pleasure itself—with the penitent and mortified spirit of the Gospel,—with the awful solemnity of death,—and with the religious peace and comfort of the soul in dying. AMEN!

## ON FASHIONABLE AMUSEMENTS. No. II.

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I said in my heart, go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure; and behold this also is vanity. I said of laughter it is mad; and of *mirth*, what doth it?—*Eccles. xi. 1, 2.*

In the preceding discourse, I have endeavoured to exhibit the irrationality and folly, or, in the language of the sacred writer, the *vanity* of those perpetual scenes of amusement and dissipation aimed to be kept up in the fashionable world.

But, because religion is not an enemy to the temperate enjoyments of society, I shall now attempt, according to my original proposition, to point out the limitations she prescribes to the pleasures she permits. The prince of Israel had made a full experiment of them, and, in the conclusion, he pronounces that they are *vanity*. In his deep conviction of their folly he saith of *laughter*, it is *mad*: and of *mirth* he exclaims, in the chagrin of disappointment, *what doth it?*

Man, as a moral, social, and reasonable being, stands in high relations to God; and owes to himself, and to his family, and to human society, the important duties;—relations and duties which embrace a wide compass; and in their full extent, necessarily occupy the greatest portion of a virtuous life. After these have been faithfully fulfilled; what proportion of our time will remain for indolent indulgence, or for pursuits which have no other aim than pleasure? Amusement is law-

ful; it might, perhaps by a liberal construction and in a temperate degree be embraced among our duties. But, when compared with the higher, and more imperious obligations which fill up the life of a good man, it is lawful only as a relaxation from the severer claims of useful employment; never as an ultimate pursuit. It should only be yielded to repair the fatigues of duty in order to restore nature by a gentle refreshment, while we are preparing to renew its useful labours. Such are the decisions of reason. Let us then, enlightened also by the spirit of the gospel, enter a little more into details on this subject, that, by more precise principles, accompanied with appropriate examples, we may better discriminate those important boundaries which separate the innocent from the unlawful.

1. And, in the first place, it may be laid down as a general principle of morals, that no pleasures can be innocent which, in their consequences naturally tend to corrupt the heart. I speak not here of the grosser acts of licentiousness, and profligacy, but of those incentives to the imagination and the passions, so often introduced into scenes which, more indirectly indeed, but with too certain an influence lead to the corruption of manners. In this view let us contemplate both our public amusements, and our private and social parties. And, leaving out of our consideration those dissipated and tumultuous assemblages of the high vulgar, or the low vulgar, which are drawn together for the purposes of idleness and vice, let us turn our attention to those which plead the more elegant and plausible pretences of employing the talents of ingenuity and wit, in order

to cultivate the public taste, and soften, and refine the public manners. And, if we candidly acknowledge the actual state of these amusements, are they consistent with the pure, and holy genius of the gospel, if you must frequently witness in them indecent representations; if your ears must frequently be tainted with indelicate wit; if you must often be present at scenes which call a blush into the face of modesty, or, in which modesty, alas! having lost by degrees, its delicate and lovely sensibility, has, at length, ceased to blush? Does it become the purity, or the benevolence of a disciple of the blessed Redeemer, to encourage those artists who devote life, which should be employed in useful and rational occupations, only to nourish the incentives of the passions; who degrade themselves for the entertainment of others; who, by their profession, cast themselves out of virtuous society: and, by the same causes which destroy their respectability among men, impair the foundation of their hopes from Almighty God?

Descending from public scenes to those social parties which fashion has invented for agreeably passing the time; and, leaving out of our consideration, at present, the ordinary amusement of tearing to pieces the reputation of your acquaintance, or hanging them up to writhe on the points of ridicule; let me ask if you find any greater innocence, and there can hardly be a greater crime, in those too frequent conversations, in which the most serious subjects are treated with indecent levity; in which the double entendre, and the indelicate sallies of a wit, affect to cover the grossest ideas with only a thin veil; in which the irregularities



and disorders of a licentious youth, instead of calling forth a strong and virtuous indignation, are made the subjects of pleasantry and mirth? in that rage for deep play, without which certain parties cannot exist? In the waste of time, and the risk of fortune, which should be employed in the nobler uses of justice and benevolence? In the unholy passions which agitate the breast, and disturb the harmony of those who commit their happiness daily to be distracted in the vibrations of chance?

But, not to confine our view too long to particular examples, suffer me to pronounce as a general maxim of christian morals, that few very expensive amusements can justly be esteemed consistent with perfect innocence. What then? are you not masters of your own fortune; and accountable only to yourselves for its employment? By no means; you are accountable to the Almighty Father of the universe, who hath made you stewards of his bounty for the general happiness of his human family. But are you not free? and who shall judge you for freely pursuing your own enjoyments? Yes; but, are you not men? and has not humanity the first claim on the superfluities of your fortune? For what end has divine providence so mingled, in the order of the world, affluence and want, prosperity, and suffering, but to connect mankind more strongly together by the interesting ties of mutual dependence and charity? Surrounded as we are by misery, is it consistent with the spirit of humanity more than with the precepts of religion, to dissipate in vain ostentation, or in costly pleasures, what might

carry consolation to the hearts of so many unhappy sufferers, and bring home the purest satisfactions to your own bosoms? Can you innocently waste in vain shew, can you piously hazard at play, or lavish on your own indulgence, what might light up the cottage with joy, and cheer the receptacles of wretchedness and disease; what might instruct the ignorant, and reclaim the vicious; what might carry the glad tidings of salvation, along with the light of divine truth, to the remotest regions of darkness, and the savage habitations of cruelty?

This reasoning, I am aware, still leaves the boundary line between the innocent and the culpable too indefinitely traced. It is impossible, perhaps, to mark it with entire precision in language. It varies, in a certain degree, with the different situations of men in society. And under this uncertainty, alas! our unhalloved rage for pleasure often seeks to find a shelter for its own indulgence. We may lay down general principles of conduct, but, in their details, the particular application must often be left to the integrity of every hearer's reason and conscience. True christian charity will always be disposed to circumscribe the sphere of indulgence within very restricted limits, that it may proportionally enlarge the sphere of its virtuous and pious beneficence.

The amusements of fashion are not always, indeed, to be called to too rigid an account. A certain indulgence in them may not only be lawful, but, in some cases, may even be amiable, by introducing a certain charm of softness and humanity into the character of

piety, which might otherwise be deemed austere. But when we consider the numerous duties which are to be fulfilled in the short and uncertain term of life, if we are faithful to God, to society, to those who depend upon us, or to ourselves, Ah! what portion of it can be innocently devoted to the purposes of mere amusement?

I would not affect to be a severe censor of the public, or of individual manners. I ask only the verdict of your own hearts. Can they be innocent who make the variety of their amusements, which ought to form the gentle relaxation and refreshment of our duties, almost the business of life? who esteem life insipid without them? who can seldom enjoy their own reflections, or retreat with satisfaction from the scenes of the world to the intimacy and friendship of their own hearts? who seek to live perpetually out of themselves? who make party succeed to party? who pass incessantly, from one company, and one scene to another? who carry the pleasures of the day into the night, and the repose of the night into the day? And when pleasure and duty come into any collision, are ever ready to postpone the duty to *a more convenient season*?

In order to determine the innocence of our pleasures, how many inquiries are first to be made? Have all the offices of piety and devotion been discharged? Have all the duties of life been fulfilled? Are your families instructed? Are your children educated? Are the functions of your offices, of your professions, of your employments, whatever they may be, faithfully acquitted? Can then those amusements, or pastimes,

be exculpated from the charge of criminality which usurp the place of God, of the soul, of eternity, of our families, of the church, of our country, of justice, of charity, of that sympathetic concern which every human being should feel for the general interests of human nature? Let us examine all our pleasures, or amusements by this rule, measure them by this scale, weigh them in this balance, and if they can bear these inquiries, and answer to these tests, indulge in them in the name of God—indulge in them as under the eye of God, with a pious reference to his final tribunal. But are there not certain forms of pleasure which have taken such hold of your imagination and your heart, that you feel yourself ungratified, and discontented, when you are not able to command them? Do they not, I address myself to those who are governed by some rational solicitude about their duty; do they not often intrude upon those sacred retirements, which you would consecrate exclusively to God? Do they not, like the impure birds, which disturbed the sacrifice of Abraham, interrupt your pious meditations, and distract the mind in the most holy offices of devotion? If you appear before God, with the assembly of his worshippers, are not your thoughts, in spite of yourself often starting aside from the solemnity of your immediate duties, and idly straying perhaps, among the scenes of your last, or anticipating the plans of your next amusements? Ah! can pleasure any longer be innocent which has thus enslaved the imagination? which pursues you into the sanctuary of God? which



distracts and disturbs your devotion at the very foot of the throne of the heavenly grace?

All those indulgences likewise must we condemn, the obvious tendency of which is to lead others into vice. *No man liveth to himself. All are members one of another.* The moral character of society is chiefly formed by the powerful influence of mutual sympathy and example. What though you may find apologies to your own hearts, in your wealth, and leisure, for your injudicious expenses, or your waste of time? yet, if they contribute to form, or to nourish in society an injurious extravagance, or a hurtful dissipation, is it not manifestly a sin against the public manners?

If your estate can bear the risks of gaming; if the strength of your head exempts you from the disgrace of intemperance so frequently incurred in those convivial meetings, which, by a false courtesy, are called *social parties*; yet when you perceive so many examples of their pernicious effects, do you not, by assisting the corrupted current, grievously sin against the order of society, and the great law of christian charity? Will not a good man likewise, sedulously shun those indulgences which he has found by experience to threaten his own virtue, by insiduously drawing him, on certain occasions, to the very verge of crime? To another, whose appetites are differently poised, the same scenes might be attended with no hazard. But your habits, your propensities, your associations, surround them with danger to you. Such is the infirmity of most men with regard to particular *sins which more easily beset them*, that the security of their virtue consists in

fleeing from their temptations, and declining certain situations which seize too powerfully on the imagination, or the senses. Therefore are we taught by our blessed Saviour continually to address this prayer to our Father in Heaven; *lead us not into temptation*; and by the same authority enjoined, to *watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation*.

If those pleasurable pursuits, the obvious tendency of which is to lead others into sin, or expose our own virtue to too strong temptations, are to be esteemed criminal, much more to be suspected and avoided are those which tend to efface the serious impressions and purposes of duty, or the salutary convictions of sin, which have, at any time, been wrought in the heart by the word, or providence, or Spirit of Christ. Few persons have lived under the light of the gospel, who have not, at some times, felt their hearts deeply touched by the exhibition, in the ordinances of the church, of the mercies or the judgments of Almighty God; and who have not, in consequence, formed many purposes of repentance, many resolutions of duty, and who have not raised to Heaven many ardent aspirations, for the requisite grace to enable them to fulfil the whole will of God. But have you found any enemies more hostile to these blessed emotions of the Divine Spirit, than the amusements and pleasures of the world? Ah! how hardly do pleasure and repentance inhabit in the same heart? Behold, then an infallible criterion by which to estimate the safety of our conformity to the manners of the world. Do you come from its scenes as deeply impressed with the importance of divine things,

as vividly awake to the purposes of duty; as warmly penetrated with the affections of religion; with as lively a relish for the exercises of devotion? Or do you find the warmth of your pious affections subsiding: the fervor of your religious zeal by degrees languishing: and your heart settling in a peaceful calm without having its peace fixed upon the *rock of ages*? Christian! you have advanced upon forbidden ground! Arrest your steps, *lest you provoke the Holy One of Israel to depart from you.*

But what shall we say to those who deliberately enter into plans of dissipation, to chase away the anxious thoughts of futurity? and there are not wanting examples of this horrible profanity, for the purpose of quenching their convictions, and restoring to their hearts that guilty peace, which had been mercifully disquieted by the Divine Spirit? Can we speak to such unhappy souls a milder language than that in which the Holy apostle has already addressed them? *Of how much sorer punishment suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God; and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite to the spirit of grace?—Will you say then. go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure? Ah no! Behold this also is vanity! I have said of laughter, it is mad, and of mirth, what doth it?*

And now, christians! in the conclusion of this discourse, may I not confidently appeal to your own hearts, to your experience, to the most obvious dictates of reason, as well as to the holy scriptures, for the just-

ness of those principles which have now been urged upon this subject? Will you answer me that the principles, though apparently reasonable, yet, in the extent which has been given them, and the conclusions which have been drawn from them, effectively take away what, at first, they seemed to concede; and, in their practical application, prohibit all the best enjoyments of life. No, my young friends, examine them: they prohibit those only which are excessive in their degree; which are criminal in their object: or, by the passions they excite, are evidently dangerous to the purity and simplicity of your hearts. But, when the labors of duty shall have entitled you to repose, and the seriousness of useful employment shall demand a space in which to unbend the mind; how many pleasures are there in the cheerful intercourse of society, in harmless amusements which interfere with no duty; in books calculated chiefly to please and cultivate a chaste imagination, by presenting to it only the charming pictures of taste and virtue, which religion not only permits, but assists the pious man to enjoy. All nature ministers to the pleasures of piety. The heavens which lift the soul to God in a sublime devotion,—the earth which displays the varied goodness of the Creator,—the verdant field, the running stream, a flower, a plant, yields a more exquisite sensation to a pure mind than all the thoughtless dissipations of fashionable folly. And what an additionable charm does cultivated society yield the virtuous mind, when the sincerity of truth, the sentiments of an exalted reason, and the mutual affections of a divine charity reign in it?



Religion not only approves but augments all the innocent enjoyments derived from the senses, the imagination, society; and it possesses others which are still superior, springing from its own divine nature, richly to indemnify you for every sacrifice which it requires. Taste these with a heart purified by divine grace, and animated with the love of God our heavenly Father, and you will never have reason to complain that piety has narrowed the sphere of your comforts. The entrance on a religious life is indeed attended with its pains, as is every improvement in our imperfect and depraved nature, either in its intellectual powers, or its moral habits. But let the first oppositions be surmounted, all then is a smooth and delightful path. The works of nature in which the glory of God is displayed, afford a boundless theatre in which the pious soul may expatiate with pleasures perpetually new. The redemption of the world by Jesus Christ yields to a sincere penitent a *joy past all understanding*. And with the sweetest effusions of heart does a child of God, at the throne of grace, pour out his soul into the bosom of his gracious Creator; sometimes in gratitude for his multiplied mercies; sometimes in humble acquiescence in the dispositions of his holy will; and sometimes in fervent thankfulness as his supreme protector in all the vicissitudes of life. What pure joys arise from the love of him who is perfect and essential love! What ineffable consolations from the believing hope of a blessed and glorious immortality! A hope which exalts the soul above all the afflictions of the world; and

at length enlightens and comforts the shadows of the grave.

Come blessed consolations! and take possession of my whole soul! I will never regret the false joys I forsake for you. Virtue can need few of those subsidiary aids to the enjoyment of existence which the world affords.

But, will youth reply that these pleasures are not adapted to its tastes? that fashion justifies, and that your age requires certain excesses which are not to be measured by the rigid rules of religion? Youth is the season of joy. Age which corrects the imprudent ardor of the passions, and tempers them by experience, will be time enough for reflections so serious. Reflection would mar the enjoyments of the young, and cast an unseasonable gloom over all the innocent gayeties of life. Oh! mistaken votaries of pleasure! Religion which is replete with delights of the purest and noblest kind, drawn from its own bosom, is not an enemy to all the moderate, and well regulated enjoyments of the young; which are, in truth, those only which are sincere and real. But, were it much more void of all that you affect to call pleasure, are not its duties indispensable? Is youth a title of exemption from all the most sacred laws of our being? And is not the first law of the moral nature of man, and the first dictate of the virtuous and ingenuous soul; *to love the Lord our God, with all the heart, with all the soul, with all the strength, and with all the mind?* Still do you repeat, it is difficult for a young man, in all the fervor of his blood, and encompassed with all the blandishments of the imagi-

nation, entirely to subdue his passions. It belongs only to the coolness and experience of age to be always prudent. I will wait till time has, in some measure, subdued this impetuosity; till the force of the passions is somewhat subsided, and the world begins to lose its charms. But, if time should already have extinguished your passions, where would be the virtue of subduing them? If the impotence of years has already taken from you the power of enjoying them, where is the virtue of sacrificing them to your duty? Let me entreat you likewise to bear in mind, that true piety is not the natural fruit of imbecility and decay; nor is it the spontaneous growth of time in an impure heart. It is the fruit only of the operation of the Holy Spirit, inspiring and giving effect to our own most assiduous attentions to our duty. The whole soul, with all its active powers, must be employed in working out our salvation. It is the law of Christ; *Strive to enter into the strait gate*. You have, my dear brethren, an immortal prize to gain. And what an amiable spectacle both to God and man, is a youth, in that period of life when the impulses of pleasure are the strongest, who is able, by divine grace, to impose a law upon himself, and to hold the rein of reason and conscience with a firm hand, over all the movements of appetite;—who is able to say to God,—O my Creator! my age, indeed, continually impels me to the pursuit of false joys, companions solicit, appetites provoke, opportunities invite, even public opinion is indulgent; but to thee I sacrifice them all! And that sacrifice is the dearer to my heart, as it is the offering of love and duty to thee, to whom I owe my existence, my happiness, my eternal salvation!

Do you still repeat that the gravity of years is best adapted to the seriousness of devotion; and you will wait the approach of that cool and sedate age before you apply yourself to cares too incompatible with the vivacity of youth. Oh! unwise, and most commonly fatal error! Not to speak of the enfeebled powers, and languid affections of advanced age, which render that season most unfavourable to this radical change of character; not to mention the increasing force of habit, or the strength of passions which attach the sensualist to the world, and become even more inveterate by time, after he has lost the power of enjoying them; how know you that the future, which you too presumptuously promise yourself will ever be indulged you by the forbearance of God; so long offended by your sins?—Does not death stand ready every moment to cut asunder the thread of an abused life, and carry the reluctant spirit to its decisive reckoning? Seriously, then, ask your heart if, at this moment, he should do his dreadful office upon you, what answer are you prepared to make at the tribunal of Heaven, not for transient and occasional starts of folly, in which you might have been surprised by the suddenness of temptation; but for days and months, and years, deliberately wasted in idleness and vanity? Would you be willing to meet at the bar of God only the images of those pleasures which you now esteem to be innocent pastimes? Instead of the good works which follow the righteous to their judgment, and crown them with glory and honor; would you not see in that *mirth* and *laughter* here condemned by the sportive king of Israel, only the spectres



of murdered time—terrible witnesses—impartial judges, pronouncing in your own breasts the fearful sentence of the justice of Heaven?

Ah! children of folly! who say *go to now, I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure*; remember, at the last you will say with the king reformed, *it is mad*; and in the end you will exclaim *what doth it?* Be assured, and may the Divine Spirit impress the conviction on your hearts! Thoughtless pleasures are the gulf of time. The splendor and gayety which surround them and intoxicate the heart, are only preparing its more certain perdition. You resemble the bewildered insect which flutters with delight, and bounds in security about the brilliant taper, at once attracted and dazzled by the flame into which it will shortly plunge to its destruction. Oh! sinful pleasure! Is this the termination of your fatal joys! Almighty God! raise *our* souls to purer delights, and to sublimer hopes, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

AMEN!

## THE IMPERFECTION OF OUR KNOWLEDGE.

For we know in part, and we prophecy in part. 1 Cor. 13. 9.

THE pride of man, unwilling to confess his mortifying ignorance, often supplies by presumption his deficiencies. For, when true science has not furnished him with principles which, in their consequences, lead to the results of truth, he is prone to have recourse to bold conjectures, and fancies that he is unfolding the works of God, and the secrets of nature, when he is only weaving a web out of his own brain to involve them in greater obscurity; or substituting his own prejudices for the dictates of divine truth. Too often, he is ready with extreme arrogance, to impose on mankind his visions for the infallible prescriptions of wisdom, and to denounce every deviation from the absurd orthodoxy of his own creed.

The pride of pretended knowledge and of spiritual gifts had inspired many vain men in the Corinthian church with the factious idea of placing themselves at the head of separate parties, which they had ambitiously formed in that holy society, within which no factions ought ever to have been known. In their overbearing contentions for superiority, they forgot the exercise of that meekness and charity which is of higher price in the sight of God, than the most splendid talents, or the most admired *spiritual gifts*. The apostle, in order to repress their vain confidence in those fancied powers, on which they had erected such criminal hopes, de-

monstrates, with great beauty and force of language, the preference which is due to charity above knowledge; to the virtues and graces of the heart, above all those merely intellectual attainments to which the wisest of men can arrive in the present life. These ostentatious talents, from their imperfection, shall necessarily cease; but that divine charity, which comprehends the love of God, and the love of man, shall endure forever. Transferred from the church on earth, it shall flourish in the temple above, and prove the eternal bond of union among all holy and happy spirits. — *Prophecies, tongues, knowledge*, all shall *vanish away*; for *we know* only in part. The most distinguished acquisitions in human science are comparative darkness. They resemble the first faint rays of the dawn, which, while they obscurely sketch the images of things, often serve at the same time, to exhibit them under false appearances.

He adds, *and we prophecy in part*. *Prophecy* is employed in the sacred scriptures, with great latitude of meaning; being used to signify, not only the prediction of future events, but all illustrations of holy writ,—all psalms and hymns sung in divine worship, and generally, all instructions addressed to the people in the name of God, and founded on revelations made by his Holy Spirit.\* When the apostle, therefore, pronounces that we know only *in part*, it implies, that few objects

\* This leads to the true design of those institutions among the people of Israel styled *the schools of the prophets*; they were schools of theology, and sacred learning; of eloquence, poetry and music, employed in the worship of God.

in the compass of nature come within the range of the human faculties; and of these few, owing to the imbecility of the mind, the greater part are necessarily, but imperfectly understood. And, when it is added, we *prophecy* in part, he conveys this implication farther than our understanding even of revealed truth is liable to many errors, arising from the narrowness of our information, and still more, perhaps, from the sinful bias of the heart:

Your attention therefore, my christian brethren, is, first requested to a few reflections on the general imperfection of human knowledge, and

II. Afterwards, to some pious practical lessons which we may derive from this humiliating truth. On both these subjects, my observations shall be circumscribed within a verry narrow compass.

The slightest inspection into the immense field of nature must convince us, that nothing is understood by us of its vast and complicated system, besides the sensible qualities of the few objects which are nearest to us in situation. But, of the boundless extent of the universe, its innumerable worlds, and endless variety of being; and of God the Almighty author of all, what can be known by man who, in the estimate of infinite wisdom, is *less than nothing and vanity*? Above all,—with regard to a future state of existence, and the lawful hopes of piety and virtue beyond this life, or the just apprehensions of conscious guilt, reason can form only anxious conjectures, or fearful anticipations.

If mankind, in the present age appears to reason with more clearness, consistency, and probability, upon



these important subjects, than the ancient heathen who were left to the guidance solely of their natural powers, is it not because the general turn of thinking both among philosophers, and the great mass of mankind has received a better direction from the lights of revelation. Principles have been received as natural dictates of the understanding which have been imbibed only from the fountain of christianity, or have insensibly taken possession of the mind by its sympathy with public opinion. For we have found that, when reason deserts these heavenly lights, or shakes off these useful prepossessions, it becomes immediately bewildered in doubt, and involved in perplexing mists out of the darkness of which it is never able again to trace any clear and plain path, till it returns to the author of truth.

Of some objects the sublimity raises them so far above the ken of the human intellect, that they can present to it no distinct lineaments of others, the remoteness from the sphere of sense,—the complication of all with the infinite and inscrutable plans of the Divine mind, continually baffle the efforts of the wisest understandings to explain, or comprehend. Of the existence of an omnipotent and all wise Creator we can no longer doubt, when we contemplate the grandeur, the regularity, and beauty of the works of nature; with the evident characters of intelligence and design impressed on every part of the universal system. But what adequate conceptions are we able to form of greatness without bounds,—of eternity without succession,—of the wisdom which conceived the plan, and regulates the movements of the whole, of the power which, in the

beginning, said to the dark and infinite void;—*let light be*, and the light, and the universe existed at the word.

When we descend to those things which are most palpable to sense, is it not merely the surface which we discern? Can we analyze into its primary elements the air which we breathe? Can we tell how an herb vegetates, or how the frost is congealed? Can we explain the essence of that thinking principle within us, or unfold its mysterious union with the body? On every subject, are there not ten thousand inquiries which no science can resolve, but which must remain to be explained only in some future period of our existence. Man in his present state of being is evidently destined for action, rather than for speculation. His knowledge is, therefore, almost exclusively limited to the few ideas which are requisite to enable him to improve the habitation in which he is placed by his Creator, and to discharge usefully those practical duties which, as a reasonable being, he owes to himself, and to God; and, as connected with his fellow men, for their mutual happiness, he owes to society. At the same time, he is evidently endowed with powers calculated for a much higher and more ample sphere of improvement, and which point his hopes forward to a more illustrious scene of their development and exercise in the future progress of his being.

2. In the next place, the infinite combinations of all events, with the universal system of things, render it impossible for minds so feeble as ours, always to form a perfect judgment concerning the rectitude of the moral government of God, or in every case, to reconcile

the fact before our eyes, with our imperfect views of his wisdom and goodness. What estimate can a child frame of the policy of nations, or even of that domestic discipline, under the restraints of which he at once is cultivated, and repines? What judgment can an unlettered man form of those great principles of social order, which embrace the various relations of individuals in society, and the still more extended relations of the great communities of the world to one another? To that uninstructed man, or that child, how many things appear inexplicable for want of comprehending the reference of each to one another, or to the whole? But, with regard to the infinite plans of Jehovah,—to the boundless compass of things, and to the eternal progression of ages, all the parts of which are intimately linked together, and dependent upon one another, are we not less than children in the judgments which we are able to form of them? And is not this the proper answer to all the objections which have been raised against religion from the existence of physical, or of moral evil in the works of God; and from the apparent inequalities which are found in the distributions of divine providence? To be able satisfactorily to resolve them, we ought perfectly to understand our own nature, and all its destinations; we ought to understand all the purposes of heaven concerning man both in this world, and the world to come; we ought to understand the relations of the present to future periods of our existence; of the infancy to the maturity of our being; of time to eternity.

But if God hath imparted to us a revelation of his will, to aid our imperfect reason on all points affecting our duty, our spiritual interests and eternal hopes; why should any subject, either necessary, or useful to human nature still remain covered with obscurities and doubts? To this, perhaps too presumptuous inquiry, let me reply; that the visible order of the universe, and all the arrangements of divine providence, render it evident that Almighty God acts with a sovereign control over the whole system of things in the moral, as in the natural world, and bestows, or withholds the illuminations of his Holy Spirit in that measure which seemeth good to him. But, though imparted, or limited according to his sovereign good pleasure; still, are they yielded in that degree which is wisely accommodated to our present state of discipline and trial; in which, while we must be engaged in the active scenes of life, and are permitted to taste its lawful pleasures, we are commanded to live above them, habitually looking up to a higher and better world as our final habitation. In which, while we are placed in the midst of temptation, and in the very theatre of the passions, we are commanded incessantly to combat them. In which we are required to cultivate our whole nature by the strenuous and continued exertion of all its faculties; and, in the midst of many conflicts to strengthen its virtues, gradually carrying them forward towards their ultimate perfection.

It is in vain to ask why this order has been established? It is plainly the appointment of divine providence. But, that we may not be overcome by our manifold



trials, it hath pleased God to afford such a measure of light, as, if faithfully improved, is sufficient for all the ends of piety and virtue. If the light is only like the obscure dawning of the morning, it is because this faint discovery of spiritual and eternal things is best adapted to our present condition of being. Were the majesty of God, and the glories of the heavenly world, displayed with an overpowering illumination on the mind, there could be no liberty of choice, and no proper probation of faith, or of virtue. It is the proof of a heart piously and properly disposed, to be willing to admit the feeblest rays of truth, and to govern the life by its dictates. It appears, therefore, conformable to the divine wisdom to impart to mankind only that degree of illumination, which will afford to a fair and candid inquirer after the path of eternal life, a reasonable ground of faith on all subjects connected with our essential duties; but will still leave to much uncertainty and doubt, those who are not willing to receive the truth, *in a pure heart, and obey it, in the love of it.* He would not take from us the merit of a voluntary obedience, by exhibiting spiritual objects in too strong a light. Above all, he would not unfit us for the duties and employments of the present world, by presenting with too dazzling an effulgence the glories of the world to come. Our knowledge, therefore, is limited according to the imperfection of our nature, and the trials by which he prepares it for a higher state of being.

But I add, and it deserves our most serious consideration, that not only does God, in his wisdom, deny to mankind those degrees of illumination concerning

spiritual and, especially, celestial objects, to which they aspire; but the very order of nature renders us incapable of receiving them. We have no organs fitted to admit ideas which exclusively belong to that world which awaits the next remove of the pious soul; no powers capable of embracing the principles of so sublime a knowledge. Can the infant be made to take in conceptions belonging only to the period of manhood? Can the worm that lodges itself beneath the earth, and inhabits perpetual darkness, be made to conceive of the lustre of the sun, or feel one transport from all the beautiful and splendid colouring of nature? What then can mortals conceive of an immortal being? Worms of the dust, and heirs of corruption, of that celestial and incorruptible world which the glory of the invisible God doth enlighten? While we continue in these dark and cumbrous bodies, no revelation could render them comprehensible by our imperfect faculties. If all the splendors of heaven were to shine around us, they would shine in vain to our profound obscurity. *This corruptible must put on incorruption; this mortal must put on immortality* before we shall be able to take in the scenes of an incorruptible and immortal existence. If then Almighty God, by placing man in such a probationary condition as we experience in this world, has denied him all that knowledge of his future existence to which he ambitiously aspires, it is not less true that the very laws of our nature, render this knowledge to us, at present, impossible. We must be contented to *know* only *in part*. The perfect maturity of our heavenly and eternal being; those bodies of cele-

tial light; those souls partaking of a divine nature; those habitations of angels and of perfect spirits, illuminated by the glories of the sun of righteousness, transcend all ideas of sense, and can receive no illustration from any of its images.

II. But, to what purpose is it to present to your view these truths, so humbling to human nature, unless we can derive from them useful and practical lessons of conduct?

To these reflections let us turn our attention, and endeavour to make the consciousness of the great imperfection of our knowledge subservient to our improvement in true wisdom.

From the view which has just been presented of the narrow and obscure sphere of human reason, evidently appears the folly of those objections most strenuously urged against our holy religion, by men who vauntingly have assumed to themselves the first honors in the schools of philosophy. The gospel they affect to condemn because it embraces mysteries. Oh! the presumption and folly of human ignorance! What is there in the whole compass of nature which is not a mystery? What is there in our own existence, which does not transcend the powers of the human intellect to explain? Do you say, it is impossible to conceive of the eternal co-existence, and union of three infinite Intelligences in one Deity; the Creator, the Saviour and Ruler of the world; and of the exertion of the whole power of the Godhead in the operations of each? And in your own nature, can you comprehend how reason, affection, and volition co-exist in the same simple essence? And

how the whole energy of the soul is put forth continually in each act of these several faculties? Do you complain that it is impossible to conceive of the resurrection of the same body after it has been dissolved, and mingled with the substance of a thousand different bodies? And can you conceive how a thousand different bodies have been combined to form its original germ; or how they are afterwards concocted for its nutriment, and gradual increase? If nothing is to be received but what we clearly, in every part of it, understand, what is there which must not be discarded from science as well as from religion? Do you demand again, of what benefit to the moral discipline of mankind can be the revelation of principles, or facts above the faculty of reason distinctly to explain or comprehend? I answer of much. The precious facts of the gospel; that the Son of the eternal Father has assumed our nature; that, by the sacrifice of himself, he has taken away the sins of the world; that *he will come again, at the last day, to judge the quick and the dead*, when all shall come forth from their graves, some to the *resurrection of life*, and others to the *resurrection of condemnation*, may be received as the positive dictates of divine truth; duties of the greatest importance to our eternal salvation may arise out of them; yet may we not be able to comprehend how God could unite himself to man; how a vicarious substitution could be accepted in the room of the sinner, who alone is guilty; or how the dead shall be raised. Many other inquiries may be involved in each of these facts, which although the basis of our most essential obligations, as christians,



must remain unresolved, till we are admitted to contemplate them with the regenerated powers of immortality. Let me illustrate this observation by an example drawn from natural religion. Are not the being and perfections of the Eternal and Self-Existent Mind, as much above the comprehension of human reason as any fact or principle in the system of revealed truth? Are there not ten thousand questions concerning his nature and the government of his providence over the world, which cannot be resolved, ten thousand difficulties which cannot be explained? And yet, is not the *fact* of the being of God, the Creator, and Ruler of the universe, the true basis of all morality, and all religion?

How vain and unwise is man to pretend to make his short line the measure of infinity! To reject what God is pleased to reveal, because he discloses only part of his ways? Proud man! how little art thou sensible of thy own weakness, and the narrow limits within which the Almighty hath circumscribed thy intellectual range. Ignorance is always presumptuous. Knowing but little it boldly concludes that nothing more is to be known. If children were to measure the domestic government of their parents by their own immature reason, what rash and wild conclusions must they necessarily form? How prone would they be to pronounce folly on the sagest experience of age. Oh! less than children! then, what know you of the spiritual and eternal world? What know you of the infinite system and relations of the universe? What know you of the unsearchable plans, the unfathomable depths of

divine wisdom? Yet, will you dare to pronounce upon them your bold decisions, and reject the most palpable evidences of revelation, because its doctrines do not, in all things, comport with your narrow views, and the plans which your presumption would prescribe to the wisdom of the Supreme Creating Mind? Impious philosophers! behold the follies lately committed by you in the first nation of Europe; the ridiculous and monstrous systems which, sometimes with childish versatility, and often with horrible extravagance, you have alternately built and destroyed, under the pretence of extending the happiness, and refounding the liberties of human nature. In what have they issued? In throwing the world into convulsions, and plunging your unhappy country into the damnation of despotism. Ah! said our Saviour to the Jews, *if, when I tell you of earthly things, you believe not; how shall you believe if I tell you of heavenly things?*

If the powers of the human mind are so feeble, and the sphere of clear and certain knowledge is circumscribed within such narrow limits, with what profound humility and gratitude should we be prepared to receive those precious and sublime truths which God hath been pleased to reveal to mankind through Jesus Christ our Lord, and to submit our hearts to their blessed influence!—God forbid, that, because our reason is weak, we should indiscriminately, and hastily embrace any pretences to a divine revelation which may be offered to our faith. It is, in the first place our duty to examine, with scrupulous caution, the evidences which it proposes of its authenticity; the operations of omnipo-

tence by which it is confirmed; the prophecies which, in their development, should afford continually new and increasing testimonies in its favour; the sanctity of the doctrine it promulgates, which should be worthy of him whose nature is holy. But when on fair, candid, and faithful examination, we find sufficient grounds to assure us that God hath spoken, the mysteries which accompany his word, and which ought to be expected whenever God speaks of himself, and of the eternal world, should form no objection in our feeble minds against the truth. We are bound, with all humility, to submit our wisdom to the wisdom of God. If some of the doctrines of the sacred scriptures, and some of the dispensations of divine providence, have their springs still hidden in the depths of eternity, a good man will wait, with faith and patience, for that mature period of his existence when they shall stand all revealed in the light of heaven. In the mean time, as far as the present faculties of our nature are competent to the task, he will strive, by profound study of those holy writings, by all the aids of human wisdom which the degree of his cultivation will enable him to employ; by devout and serious meditation; by fervent prayer to the Father of lights, to attain, if possible, to some dawnings of that celestial day which will open its full splendors on the holy soul only in the eternal habitations of the just.

3. Let me derive from this subject, in the next place, a reflection already suggested by the blessed apostle, on the superiority of the virtues and the graces of the heart, to the highest endowments of the understanding, the

benevolence of the gospel to the utmost splendor of intellectual talents. *Though I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gifts of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains and have not charity, I am nothing. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.* Knowledge and gifts, the grace of faith, and the powers of miracles themselves, are only means to create or to nourish in our hearts, the love of God, and the love of man; in a word, that charity, meekness, and benevolence, which is the perfection of our moral nature, and the consummation of the moral law. All that we call wisdom here, which is little more than specious error, shall vanish away. Of no attainments, however, are men more apt to be vain than of the little distinctions of genius, and knowledge, which, along with power and wealth, possess almost the exclusive admiration of mankind. But, in the esteem of God, the wit of the most ingenious, the wisdom of the most sage of the human race, are nothing more than infantine ignorance, and, with so many other objects which dazzle and delude the world with their false splendors, are hasting to perish forever. Of all the gifts and graces cultivated, if I may speak so, in the garden of God upon earth, none shall be transplanted into the paradise above but charity; but that divine love which unites us with God, and with all being.



Finally, if on earth, it is a certain and necessary law of our nature that we *know* only *in part*, and must continue ever to contend with ignorance and error, the gospel affords to a sincere believer an unspeakable consolation, in carrying his view forward to the future state of his being, and the perfection of his nature in heaven, where shall be opened to him according to the promise of his Saviour, the clear and eternal fountains of truth. For, *when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. And we shall know even as also we are known.* The desire of knowledge is one of the strongest propensities of our nature; and, among the chief felicities of heaven may justly be reckoned the complete gratification of this principle. There, we have reason to believe, the works of nature will be laid open to the curious and admiring view of all those who have been *redeemed from the earth by the blood of the Lamb*, and the study of them facilitated by the assistance of superior spirits. There those divine truths, and those celestial objects, which here are covered with the veil of sense, or faintly disclosed by the glimmering lights of faith, shall be beheld in all their glory. What now *are seen through a glass darkly*, shall then be contemplated *face to face*. Escaped from this world of shadows, christians! the world of realities shall open on your views, and the feeble dawns of faith be converted into the meridian splendors of the *Sun of Righteousness*. Oh! how desirable the moment when you shall emerge from this region of clouds, to the serene skies of the heavenly Canaan? With many painful efforts have you sought to know your Creator,

and to comprehend that infinite perfection, which seemed to you, as to the Sicilian philosopher,\* only the more to elude your grasp as you thought you were just seizing the sublime conception, and left you more profoundly lost in its unfathomable abyss. Often and fruitlessly have you not studied to understand how evil could exist in the works of God, infinitely wise and good; to comprehend the union of Deity with the imperfect nature of man for the expiation of human guilt; and how often, to raise your ideas to some faint conception of the future glories and felicities of the saints in heaven; but ah! you could only complain of the imbecility of your minds, the narrowness of your conceptions? Yet with this precious hope be consoled, that, *when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away*; and the mysteries of the divine existence, the mysteries of divine providence, the mysteries of redemption, the mysteries of the cross, the mysteries of the resurrection, the mysteries of eternity, shall stand all revealed, and shine in their full glory on the view of the believer redeemed from the corruptions of the grave, and the imperfections of this mortal nature.

Is it not with reason, then, that we often hear the dying christian, as these scenes begin to open on his soul, exclaim, Oh! when shall these remaining shadows flee away, when shall these tears be forever dried from my eyes! When shall I walk no more by faith, but by sight! When shall all that is in part be done away? Ah! when shall I see my blessed Saviour face to face,

\* Simonides.

who will penetrate all my being with his love! When shall I behold God who will deign to unite himself to me, and dissolve my soul with the joys of his presence! Ah! when shall faith and hope be converted into vision and fruition! When shall I ascend to the mansions of perfect knowledge, and perfect love! Lord Jesus! Come quickly.

AMEN.

## THE HISTORY OF MOSES.

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And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and three score and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters, &c. Ex. 15. 27.

IN the sandy and arid deserts of Arabia, the greatest evil with which travellers have to contend, is the defect of water; and the caravans which, for the purposes either of commerce or devotion, pass through that country, are obliged to carry with them on the backs of camels, this necessary of life, rendered there still more necessary by the nature of the region. The calamity of extreme thirst soon began to be experienced by the people of Israel after they entered the desert. Ever ready, at the appearance of each new difficulty, to murmur and rebel against the illustrious leader who was conducting them in the name of God, they showed their discontent on this subject in loud complaints, first at the waters of Marah, and afterwards, in the country of Rephidim, at the foot of the mountain of Horeb. In both places, their necessities were supplied by a miracle. In the former, the waters, which were rendered bitter and nauseous, by the nitre with which that region is impregnated, were sweetened by casting into them the branch of a peculiar tree, directed by God. In the latter, Moses, by divine command, brought a stream from the heart of a flinty rock, which according to the suggestion of the apostle seems to have fol-



lowed them through all their migrations in the desert. Travellers of the best credit have related that the waters of Marah have returned to their original bitterness, but that the channels in the rock of Horeb which the streams that then issued from it, had worn to themselves in a course of forty years, are still plainly discernible. As miracles were never operated by God, except in cases in which the necessity was apparent and strong; wherever natural fountains could be discovered in the desert, there the hosts of Israel made temporary encampments. It was with this view that, parting from Marah, they encamped at Elim where were twelve wells of water, and three score and ten palm trees. The original is ambiguous, and may well signify a *grove or forest of palms*, in the shade of which the people might repose and refresh themselves in that sultry climate. This meaning of the terms is the more probable, as it corresponds with a passage in the historian Strabo, who says that “at five days journey\* from Jericho is a forest of palm trees, which is held in high veneration in all that country on account of the rich fountains of water which are found there.” Tacitus and Plutarch have manifest reference to this part of the Mosaic history, when they say that “the Jewish nation, ready to perish with thirst (*in the deserts of Arabia*) were preserved by discovering a living fountain of water.” (Tacit. hist. lib. 5—Plutarch Symposiac. Tom 2. lib. 4.)

Decamping from Elim they came into the desert of Lin, a name derived from its proximity to the mountain

\* Probably on one of the swiftest of their animals used for travelling.

of Sinai, (and which is carefully to be distinguished from that of Zin, another part of the desert which lies between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, and extends towards the North East, to the borders of the Dead Sea.) Here this people, always distrustful through ignorance, of that merciful providence which conducted and preserved them; and, through the debasement of their servitude in Egypt, always devoted to their appetite, raised a new clamour, and almost excited an insurrection against their illustrious prophet and prince, for want of the leeks, the onions, and the *flesh-pots* of Egypt, beside which, when they were exhausted with labour, they had glutted their hunger. Moses had delivered them from bondage, he had divided before them the Red Sea, he was conducting them in full march towards the land promised to their fathers; but at the first inconvenience which they suffer, all these services are forgotten; and they are ready for rebellion. What a picture of human nature! The greatest benefits are obliterated by the slightest contradiction to our inclinations, our humours, our imaginary interests. Though a man has served his country with fidelity, with integrity, with the most splendid reputation, with the highest success; though his fellow citizens should have confessed that they owe every thing to his wisdom, his prudence, or his courage; yet, in the insolence of their prosperity, let him once thwart their will, and all his merits are in an instant covered with ingratitude. Clamour, sedition, faction, inflaming a giddy and unthinking multitude, who delight in change, and who hate the superiority even of their benefactors,

will treat him with indignity and count him for an enemy. Such is ever the humour of a populace; at one moment they will deify their favourite, at another destroy him: make Christ a king, or cry out, away with him! crucify him!

The people of Israel now complained for want of the provisions to which they had been accustomed in Egypt. And probably they had become apprehensive also of famine, as the magazines which they had brought up with them from Goshen were nearly expended. Their discontents, it is said,\* were inflamed by that mixed multitude which followed them, composed partly of Egyptians, and partly of a mixed race between the Israelites and the Egyptians, who had lived more in the habits of Egypt, and who were less concerned for the interests of Israel, than for their own appetites. The people wept, complained, reproached, threatened. Moses, in all his distresses, and his exigencies, had ever his recourse to God. And God, on this occasion condescended to promise them meat and bread even to satiety. The meat was only a temporary provision, but the bread was to be continued daily through the whole course of their peregrinations in the desert. And indeed, without such miraculous aid, how could a nation, in their circumstances, consisting of more than two millions of men, without husbandry, without commerce, without revenues, have been subsisted in that parched and unfruitful wilderness. For bread, a small, white granulated substance, of the size

\* Num. 11, 4, which seems to be a narration of the same, or a similar event.

of coriander seed, was concocted in the atmosphere, and fell with the dew in great abundance, about the encampments of the Israelites. This they called *Manna*, from its resemblance probably to that natural gum which bears the same name.\* When the sun was risen upon it with a fervent heat, it soon melted, and was resolved again into air. But when preserved in the shade it contracted a hardness which rendered it fit to be ground in mills, or bruised in mortars, into a species of meal, which when baked, had the taste of cakes kneaded with honey, or with fresh oil. But, in order to make them feel their dependence more absolutely on that particular providence which supplied their wants, they were obliged to collect each morning the food of the following day. If they attempted to preserve it longer, it became putrid and unfit for use. Two remarkable exceptions from this general fact, however, render the miracle more conspicuous, and clearly discriminate it from the operation of every natural cause. The first is that on the sixth day of the week, they always gathered a double portion of *Manna*, that they might have no worldly occupation on the Sabbath, but might devote that day exclusively to the duties of devotion and benevolence. The second is that Moses was commanded to fill a vessel with this miraculous grain, which should be laid up in the side of the Ark of the Covenant, and preserved in the most Holy place in the Tabernacle, to be a memorial to future generations, of that heavenly bread on which their fathers were nourished in the desert. Both the one and the other, was

\* Critics are very much divided about the derivation of this term.



preserved from the ordinary law of corruption to which this food was subjected. Thus was God, in the continual displays of his mighty power, and his paternal care over that people, forever present to their view. They were hitherto, a refractory and murmuring nation: but he intended by a painful discipline in the wilderness, by alternate chastisements and blessing, to render them, at length, a people worthy to be the depositary of his laws, and the seed of that spiritual kingdom which is, eventually, to be extended over all the world. Being thus supplied with bread, their provision of meat, consisted of an immense flight of quails,\* which, according to the narration in the eleventh chapter of the book of Numbers, continued during the full term of a month. And it is not improbable that this repast was often furnished to them at the same season of the year, while they remained in the wilderness, though spoken of only twice;† as the water of the rock of Horeb, though mentioned only once in the history, is said by the apostle, to have followed them in their various encampments. This event so extraordinary to us is, perhaps, to be ascribed partly to natural causes, and partly to divine and supernatural direction. It is thus described. *There went forth a wind from the Lord, and*

\* The original term is ambiguous, or not perfectly understood. Bochart, whose opinion is of the greatest weight on every subject relating to ancient oriental literature, maintains by many arguments almost irrefragable, that it signifies quails, agreeably to our translation.

† Exod. 16th. and Num. 11th. If, indeed, these be not relations of the same event.

*brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and, as it were, two cubits high upon the face of the earth. And the people stood up, &c. and gathered the quails.*

The quail, in these regions, is a bird of passage. It is produced in incredible numbers on the southern coasts of the Mediterranean, and in the countries bordering on the Red Sea. In the beginning of the spring, according to the testimony of many respectable writers, they pour themselves in clouds on the shores of Greece and Italy, and migrate in this manner about one month. Pliny, the natural historian, relates that, fatigued with their flight across the sea, they often fall in great numbers on board of vessels, and clinging to the sails, render them unmanageable. Gesner the naturalist informs us that, in the South of Italy, you may frequently take an hundred thousand, at this season in the compass of five thousand paces. But Josephus assures us that the Arabian Gulf is that part of the world where these birds abound in the greatest numbers, whence they spread themselves, in immense flocks, over the deserts of Arabia. Miracles, I have said, are never employed where they are not necessary. And the miracle, in this instance, seems not to consist in the sudden multiplication of this species of birds beyond what was natural, but in the direction of the winds which assembled them, at that moment, in such numbers round the camp of Israel. Fatigued with their flight during the day, they had sunk, in the even-

ing, to within two cubits from the surface of the earth, so that they were easily taken. In this manner they were extended to the distance of several leagues about the encampment. But while God gives them meat, displeased with their murmurs, he punishes them in the very gift which he bestows. And, *while the flesh was between their teeth, the Lord smote them with a great plague: and in Kibroth—Hataavah they buried the people who lusted*, that is, whose appetites had overborne their sense of duty. Perhaps, that very appetite was made the instrument of their punishment, and they perished by the effects of their own gluttony.\*

Israel had now but one short march to make before they arrived at the base of that sacred mount from the summit of which Jehovah promulged his law in thunder. But it would be imposing too much on your attention in the present duty to enter, at this time, on a scene so awful and important. I reserve it, therefore, for a future occasion; and conclude this discourse with a few spiritual and practical reflections on those particulars of the Mosaic history which have been just recited.

And, in the first place, that heavenly bread on which the Israelites were sustained in the desert, is an image of the bread of life by which the church, which is now in the wilderness, is nourished, during her earthly pilgrimage. Those wonderful streams which followed and refreshed them in their parched journey, are lively

\* I consider the recital in the 11th of Num. as a repetition of that in the 16th of Exod. with the addition of some circumstances omitted in Exodus.

emblems of the grace and consolations of the gospel. *I would not have you ignorant, saith the apostle, that our fathers did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ. Jesus saith, I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. Your fathers did eat Manna in the wilderness and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die. And the bread which I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.* What can be more just and expressive than these images?

The world is not our resting place; we are looking beyond it to a land of promise in the heavenly Canaan. The world, by the sin of man, has been rendered only a vast desert, in which there is no durable habitation, no solid provision, no complete happiness for an immortal soul. It is to us, however, as the desert was to Israel, a state of discipline for a better country, in which we must live in the constant exercise of faith in God, and in which we must derive all our spiritual supplies immediately from him. And does he not follow us continually with the refreshing streams of his grace, the merciful influences of his Holy Spirit, and the ordinances of his church, which, like the waters of the rock of Horeb, sustain our spirits, and comfort our hearts in this weary pilgrimage? And art not thou, blessed Saviour! who hast given thyself for us, the life of our souls, the precious Manna, the bread of life which came down from Heaven! Daily we should



nourish our souls with this spiritual food, and refresh them with this spiritual drink, that we may grow up, in spiritual health and vigor, to everlasting life.

In the next place, we have in the conduct of Moses in the communication of this bounty of Heaven to Israel, a lamentable example of human frailty, and of the righteous severity of God mingled with his mercy. No human character is, in all points, perfect. Moses, notwithstanding the intimacy of his communion with Him in whom all glory and perfection dwells, and contrary to the natural meekness of his own temper, and the habitual government which he had acquired over his passions, was surprized into a paroxysm of anger. Who is secure from error, when that sublime prophet, that holy man chosen to lead the armies, and the church of Israel, was tempted to speak unadvisedly with his lips? God, compassionating the distress of this great people, now ready with their numerous flocks and herds to perish with thirst, resolved once more to demonstrate the particular care of his providence over them, and to display the glory of that merciful power which he had so often exerted for their salvation. For this purpose he commanded Moses to speak to the rock of Horeb in his name and it should pour forth a copious supply of water.\* This great and good man, deeply offended at their unreasonable complaints, their mutinous spirit, and their impious distrust of that

\* Perhaps it was by assembling together all the subterraneous streams within the mountain of Horeb, which had been accustomed to seek different passages to the sea, and bringing them out by one channel at this famous rock.

providence which had so often appeared in their behalf, forgot for a moment, in his displeasure against them, the holy veneration and awe due to the eternal and self-existent Jehovah. *Hear now ye rebels, saith he, must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice.* In this action, and in these words, you perceive the unhallowed passions of the Legislator prevailing over those sentiments of patience, of humility and of piety, which alone should have filled his breast, and which, ordinarily, did eminently distinguish his character. But mark and tremble at the severe but righteous decree of God both against him, and against Aaron, for this ebullition of petulant and unguarded temper. They were doomed to die in the wilderness, and though they conducted Israel, were condemned themselves never to enter into the promised land. *Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore, ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.* That is, because your faith in my glory and my presence has not been sufficient to quell all your passions, and to honor me by a profound reverence and humility in the eyes of the nation of Israel,\* therefore, shall you fall in the wilderness with this whole generation which is unworthy to inherit the land of promise. They fall by their crimes; but in you, on account of the intimacy of

\* All the commentators most improbably interpret this passage as if Moses and Aaron doubted the accomplishment of this miracle, although God commanded them to bring water out of the rock. The reproach rests on this ground, that their faith in the majesty and presence of God did not overcome the irritation of their minds against Israel.

your communications with Heaven, even foibles are crimes. You shall exhibit a great example of my justice, that others may fear, and learn from your fate the veneration due to my holy name.

Besides other instructions conveyed in this narration, my brethren, do we not discern in it the fidelity and impartiality of the sacred writers? They present to us, without concealment or palliation, their own errors and vices, and the punishments inflicted on them by God. In this conduct do we see any thing like the vanity and affectation of imposture? Do we not see in it the simplicity and fairness of truth? God makes use of men as the medium for conveying his holy revelations to the world; but still they are men; still those frailties and imperfections adhere to them which necessarily belong to human nature in its present state. But do I say this to extenuate the sense of our errors, or our crimes, because some of them may be common to us with the best of men? No, but only to present to you a humiliating view of our nature; that, while we penitently confess before God our personal sins, we may also humbly deplore the universal depravity of that great family to which we belong. It aggravates, in some measure, the sense of our own corruptions, to remember, at the same time, before the throne of divine mercy, the corruption of our whole degenerate race.

Observe, finally, and observe with awe and self application, the judgments of Heaven inflicted on those murmuring and rebellious Israelites in the very enjoyment of the mercies which they abused. The whole

congregation were not equally culpable. But that part of them who, for the sake of a gross and sensual appetite, began and fomented the discontents, and carried the sedition to the greatest height, were smitten with death while greedily devouring the delicacies which they had demanded. *While the flesh was between their teeth, the anger of the Lord was kindled against them,* and they perished. Ah! how often is intemperance made its own punishment by undermining the constitution, by destroying the health, by depraving the heart, by sinking men into insignificance and disgrace, by cutting short their days, and by opening to them, in a premature death, only a gulf of everlasting despair! Alas! how often, like these sensual Israelites, we know not the consequences of our own wishes, we solicitously pursue our own ruin, we pray for blessings, which, by our use of them will prove our greatest curse! Are you anxious to be connected with a person whom you love? How often does that connexion prove the bane of all your future happiness! Do you pine for children? How often may their misconduct pierce your heart through with many sorrows! Or, if virtuous, how often may the misfortunes and miseries of the world falling upon them be more bitter than death to yourselves! Do you eagerly thirst after riches, and hasten to accumulate a fortune? Ah! how often is it only to fall from the height of prosperity with greater misery! How often has wealth corrupted the heart, put a stop to every mental improvement, embittered death, and robbed the soul, at length, of its eternal inheritance! If Israel had waited upon God, all their wants in his



good time would have been supplied: but they were impatient, they never distrusted their own goodness, or the wisdom of their own request, they followed the impulse of their appetites, and were ruined. My brethren, let us resign ourselves to God. Confiding in his providence, contented with his will, we shall always be happy, if our desires are bounded by our duty. O God! teach us that true wisdom which cometh from above!

AMEN!

## ON THE FEAR OF MAN.

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The fear of man causeth a snare. *Prov. xxix, 35.*

**RESPECT** to public opinion is an indication of a modest and ingenuous mind. It is, to a certain degree, favourable to virtue. Men seldom approve of the sinful passions of others unless they contribute, at the same time, to promote or encourage the indulgence of their own. In all other cases, the vices of individuals, being contrary to the good order and interests of society, are the objects of reproach and condemnation. And sinners are often restrained from open and gross vice, through fear of public opinion, when reason and religion would both be ineffectual. But there is a sinful fear of man against which the maxim in the text is aimed, which has a pernicious influence upon all, but especially on the younger part of society, in destroying, or making them disguise their respect for religion; and withholding them from repentance, and a real change of life. Society is subdivided into innumerable small circles in which men are thrown together as inclination, or accident, has happened to connect them. These circles frame to themselves ideas of religion, that is, of virtue and vice, of innocent and of unlawful pleasure according to the manners and characters of the persons who compose them. All virtue and all professions and appearances of piety which go above their standard are the subjects of suspicion, of ridicule, of misrepre-

sentation and censure. In associations of youth, especially, where warm passions concur with inexperience to mislead them, mutual opinion, and the mutual fear of ridicule and scorn push them on to excesses of which, in private, or if left to themselves they would not have been guilty.

Easiness of temper frequently subjects persons of feeble minds to a dangerous influence from sinners more practised and more hardy than themselves; and frequently a cringing deference to wealth and power leads men, against their own convictions of justice, of humanity, of duty, to imitate their crimes with their manners. A disposition to court power and distinction, whether it is derived from prince or from people, is exposed to great temptations, and too often tends to corrupt the mind, by hypocrisy, by falsehood, by disingenuous arts, by a vile subserviency to their passions.

There is a deference to the opinions of the world which is just and prudent, there is a respect to its manners and customs which a benevolent and pious man ought to pay, from a principle of humility, and from a desire of doing good. But that fear of the world which leads us to accommodate our religion to its manners, to profess a religion which we esteem false, or to disguise our veneration for that which is true; which tempts us to decline from the service of God; which shows that we are governed by a supreme regard to the world; which affects to think, to speak, to act in all points like the world, is that sinful *fear which causeth a snare*. It is attended with a twofold danger—it withholds men from duty; it tempts them to sin.

I. It withholds men from duty. What is necessary to the faithful discharge of our duty? Does it not require a profound and habitual impression on the heart of the existence and perfection of God; of our dependence on him as our Creator; of our obligations to him as our Saviour; of his holy and continual inspection of all our thoughts and actions, as our Judge? Does it not require, in order to overcome the temptations and oppositions of sin, a heart inflamed with the love of God; a pious taste and habit of the soul which sets the Lord always before us and gives to his law, and his glory an ascendancy above all the objects of love or of fear in the universe? But if, because God is invisible, he is therefore out of mind; if a criminal regard to the sentiments and manners of men bears sway in the heart over the principles of piety, have you in that case, sufficient courage always to obey your own convictions of duty?—Although open and flagrant vice is generally condemned in the world, yet the world does not permit you to rise above the standard of its own virtue. Therefore, vital piety, strict holiness of life they do not easily endure. Because it condemns themselves, they speak of it with reproach, they load it with contempt, they impute to it secret and dishonourable motives. If, then, convinced by the reflections of reason, if, impressed by some affecting dispensation of providence, if touched by some tender and interesting exposition of divine truth in the word of God, you have been penetrated with a conviction of your dangerous state, you have begun to enter into yourselves, and to perceive the vanity of all things out of God, if you are persuaded



that a reasonable soul was made only for him, that he is the true center of its felicity, and you have almost formed the pious resolution to devote yourself to him, to break your idle and criminal connexions and to change entirely your manners, Ah! are not all these wise reflections extinguished, these good purposes broken in the beginning, by the fear of man? You dread the observation, the remarks of your companions, their conjectures concerning your motives, the sneers by which they will revenge themselves for your having forsaken their party. Thus your convictions of duty, and your purposes of amendment are quenched time after time, and you sacrifice your soul to a word, to a look, to a sentiment of your fellow sinners; perhaps even to your own unfounded fancies of what they will think or say. For, not unfrequently it happens that young persons, all of whom are partially persuaded of their duty, but, mutually afraid of each others sentiments, become advocates and examples of vice, by this common mistake, against the better principles and wishes of their own hearts.

Do we not daily see many other pernicious effects result from this principle? Is a man fallen into a train of expense which is injurious to his affairs? Though he feels his embarrassments; though, perhaps, he sees his ruin before him, why cannot he retrench his luxuries, and descend to that honourable frugality which is now his first duty? He fears what those who have moved in the same circle will think and say:—he dreads the loss of a certain respect which they attach only to ideas of fortune! Is a woman involved in a

circle of dissipation, of amusement, of idle visits? Is her family neglected? is her duty forgotten? Does she feel the painful void which is created in the heart from running perpetually round the same insipid frivolities? Does she ardently wish to return to herself, and to such rational and useful engagements as will satisfy the heart, while they acquit her duty? But what keeps her still a slave to vanity? The reverence which she pays to fashion;—the apprehension of what will be said of her in society. And to these vain ideas she sacrifices her ease and peace of mind, the sense of her own true dignity and honor, the education, and the order of her household.

What is that frenzied honor which commits so many murders, or exposes itself in so many ridiculous or cruel encounters, but the fear of an absurd opinion?

Has not the fear of man sometimes corrupted the tribunals of justice? In seasons of public faction and violence how frequently and how lamentably do we see them tainted by the spirit of party? And alas, does it not often mount into this sacred place, and, in the name of God, speak only the language of men? Respecting the false delicacy of a carnal taste, does it not often substitute the vain decorations of human eloquence for the simplicity of the gospel? Does it not too often withhold, or soften the truth to the ears of those whom it is solicitous to please, rather than to profit, in the sacred offices of religion? Oh enormity! Oh horrible perversion of duty! before the throne of the Supreme Judge, in the presence of him who searcheth the heart, we consult the interests of our own vanity, instead of

opening our hearts only to the impressions of divine truth, and consecrating all our powers to the glory of his holy name!

If the fear of man often corrupts the principles of duty, and withholds us from the faithful discharge of it, it is not less frequently, perhaps,

II. A temptation to open and actual sin. What is the character of the world? What are its opinion and its fashions? Do we see reigning in it the spirit of piety, the law of holiness? Although vices of a certain kind are proscribed there: yet is not virtue, beyond a certain degree, equally proscribed? Is not every sin which is consistent with that degree, both practiced and approved?—If then you court their sentiments, and are solicitous to stand well in their good opinion, will you not be afraid of the appearances, will you not be ready to smother the principles of a fervent and genuine piety?—Are there not circles in which vice is a recommendation? Profane wit, levities on the subject of religion, intemperance, debauch, meet with applause, and elevate a man, who is called a good companion, to distinction.—If you are once embarked in such associations, does not sympathy draw you on? Will not mutual instigation stimulate you to many excesses? Have you resolution to oppose their manners? Will you dare to listen to the better sentiments of your own hearts, or to attend to the voice of truth, though it speaks ever so loudly to you in the name of God? Would you not be ashamed before them to be seen in a serious office of devotion, as if you had been detected in a disgraceful act? Yes, my brethren, unhappily the multitude of

sinner takes away the shamefulness of sin, and casts the shame upon piety. All, delighted to find in the example of others, an excuse or justification of their own sins, encourage their crimes, by smiles, and marks of open approbation, which their hearts in secret do not avow. But, the mutual fear of each other's sentiments, or at least, the mutual desire of each other's favour and applause, urge on all in the career of sin.

Besides the slavery, especially of the young, to opinion, to fashion, to the universal sympathy with vice, do we not see men frequently led into sin by a certain weakness or baseness of mind which cannot rely upon itself, and the consciousness of its own rectitude, but stoops to unworthy compliances in order to court the favour of power and station? Nor less base and criminal, generally, are the hunters of popularity. Hypocrisy, falsehood, violence, are the usual arts by which the ignorant are deceived and inflamed. And the man who will first stoop to be their slave, that he may afterwards become their master;—who will descend to all the cunning, or assume all the turbulence, necessary to become a favourite, can rarely possess that high integrity of mind which is united with the independence, and the self-respect of virtue. They are crimes of a different nature, but they are equally crimes, which flow from an unworthy complaisance to rank and power, and from a base subserviency to popular clamour. Ambition to gain the smiles, and dread of the power, of the one, and of the other, are equally enemies to integrity, and often to humanity. Was it not the fear of man which betrayed Jeremiah to the clamours of the



Jewish nation? Was it not the same motive which impelled Herod to sacrifice John the baptist whom he, at the same time, venerated and esteemed? Was it not this which tempted Peter to deny the Lord of life, and Pilate to crucify him, after he had again and again pronounced him innocent? *Then Sanctify the Lord in your hearts; let him be your fear, and let him alone be your dread.* Fear God, and have no other fear; then will you be preserved from the degrading and corrupting influence of the fear of man. A decent reverence I have said is to be shown to the opinion of the world; a decent respect, and even accommodation to its manners: but this, in order to render it either just or safe, should always be regulated by a supreme regard to him who is infinite in power and wisdom, *and is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.*

In whatever way, then, the fear of man may manifest itself, whether it be in such a conformity to the sentiments, the manners, and fashions of the world as will lead you to cover, and study to extinguish your respect for religion;—in such apprehensions of the power and displeasure of men as will tempt you to decline from your duty;—in such associations with sinners as will bear you along with the stream of their manners, and take from you the courage and the inclination to resist them, let us contemplate, a moment, its guilt, its weakness and its folly.

What! will you make worms of the dust, whose breath is in their nostrils, who are perishing from the first moment in which they begin to exist, the arbiters of your duty to God? And wherefore? Do you dread

their power; but, cannot the omnipotence of God crush you in an instant? Are you intimidated from obeying your conscience by the shame of their sneers or their disdain? but, is not the most terrible destiny of sinners that of them the Son of man shall be ashamed? Is it not to awake to shame and everlasting contempt from God? Is it their presence which gives their sentiments such a powerful influence over your hearts? but, is not God, your witness and your judge, every where present? Does he not penetrate your bosom, and surround your path? Can you flee from his Spirit, or escape his observation? Will you plead, in extenuation of your guilt, the force of temptation? What! are you menaced with chains, imprisonments, flames, which could not shake the constancy of the first christians? No, a smile, an air of ridicule, a sarcastic expression, a word, a look, subdues your soul, overcomes the force of your better principles, and sets at nought your Creator and Redeemer. Is not this crime aggravated by ingratitude? What have you that you have not received from him whose commandments you dare to despise, for the breath of miserable mortals? Is not his the earth, and all that it contains;—your soul, and all your powers, and sources of enjoyments? And is your benefactor forgotten in the midst of sinners whose friendship lasts no longer than you are necessary to their pleasures, or their interests? Do you set the blessed Saviour, his condescensions, his love, his inestimable grace, below a vain sentiment, a breath of sinners who trample on his precious blood? Should not a sense of the infinite majesty of God, his goodness and

mercy, continually absorb our minds, and annihilate that guilty influence which would make us ashamed of our duty, or weaken its principles in our hearts?—Great God! what are sinners! what are worms of the dust, that before them we should be ashamed of thee!

Is it not a proof of disgraceful weakness and imbecility of mind thus to submit our duty, our honor, our highest interests, to the sentiment and opinion of others? It is noble to be able to rest upon ourselves, and the approbation of our own conscience, in the discharge of our duty; but we are degraded in feeling the ascendant of another, especially, when it is only the ascendant of vice. Are you governed by a veneration for fortune or for station? Do you assume a vanity from being noticed by persons who enjoy these advantages, from being admitted in some measure to their circle, from adopting their fashions, from imitating their manners? Nay, do you affect a levity and superiority to the prejudices of religion, which goes even beyond them, in order more effectually to recommend yourselves? Does not this sacrifice of your convictions, of your independence, sink you in your own esteem? And, however, willing they may be to be flattered, it will sink you even in the esteem of those whom you court.—The father of the great Constantine, though a pagan, has given us an instructive lesson upon this subject. He had in his army many christian officers. On a certain occasion he called them together and demanded of them an avowal of their religion. All supposed it was to purge his army of christians, and to leave none behind but such as adored his own Gods. Those whose

minds, as well as whose principles, were weak, thought to flatter the emperor, and to recommend themselves to his regard by disguising, or denying their religion: those who preferred the integrity of their conscience even to imperial favour, openly confessed the name of their Saviour. Contrary to universal expectation, that wise emperor dismissed from his service all that weak and degenerate crowd who had been willing to sacrifice their conscience through flattery, or through fear of him; and retained near him, and even advanced to honor, those only who had ventured to incur the risk of his displeasure; with this just remark, so full of wisdom. *If men are not faithful to their God, how can I count upon their fidelity to me?* Might such dereliction of duty and conscience always meet with its merited reward! But whether or not, those who hope to gain the good opinion of others by flattering them with the sacrifice of their religion, or their virtue, more frequently meet with their secret contempt. And such weakness well deserves it. Wealthy vice indeed, too often has its dependents, its expectants, its parasites, who are ambitious to sacrifice to it their religious duties. Fashion acquires its pernicious influence, by this ascendancy which a few obtain over the minds of many; and then which the many obtain over one another. How hard is it, against the stream of fashion, or of general example, to fulfil our duty and to manifest our love and reverence for religion! How much harder to break from the manners of the world and to dare to be singular for a good conscience! But from no cause are young persons more in danger; from none do they



meet with more obstacles in entering on a religious life than from companions and associates in iniquity. Not only do they give boldness and confidence to one another in a sinful course; not only do they instigate one another by continually new projects; but when any among them are beginning to return to better sentiments, a thousand difficulties are opposed to their reformation. I speak not merely of the force of habit, of the temptations, of the solicitations which they must encounter, but of that unholy influence which all have obtained over the mind of each by the force of opinion. Do you not dread the ridicule, do you not dread the scoffs of your companions? Are you not afraid of their hints, their looks, their cold and distant contempt? Do you not apprehend their obloquy, and that, going back into your life, they will recall all your former errors, foibles, and vices, only to compare them with your present religious profession, and to charge you with hypocrisy?—Alas! this sinful fear of companions and associates has often checked the rising purposes of repentance and reformation in the breasts of young persons; and, even after they have begun to make some progress towards a change of life, has drawn them back again into their unhappy courses of folly and sin.

Do these remarks, my young friends, meet the experience of any of you? Let me beseech you to lay seriously to heart the dangers of your state, and resolutely to break from the snares in which you are entangled. Fulfil your duty, and the most idle, or the most profligate of your companions, though they will endeavour, at first, to shake your purpose, or to take revenge on

you for forsaking their party, will afterwards respect you, and even envy the felicity of your change. But, were not this the case, will you sacrifice your honor, your duty, your soul, to a sentiment of vain and foolish mortals? Will you put your peace of conscience, and your everlasting hopes, in competition with the idle conversation, the empty mirth of sinners? Look up to the majesty of God, the awfulness of his tribunal, the solemnity and the near approach of an eternal existence, and how will the grandeur of these ideas, and their infinite interest to us, annihilate *the fear of man which causeth a snare!* O God! elevate our souls above the world, above both its pleasures and its fears, and fill them only with thee! AMEN!

THE EXCUSES FOR NOT ENTERING  
AT PRESENT  
ON A RELIGIOUS LIFE, VAIN AND ABSURD.

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And they all, with one consent, began to make excuse. *Luke xiv, 18.*

ONE of the most common and fatal errors of mankind, is their apparent indifference to the cares of their salvation; and when urged to a serious and immediate concern for this most necessary and indispensable of all obligations, they are ever ready to oppose to the command of Christ, some unreasonable excuse, drawn from the business or engagements of the world; and for the madness of neglect, they are always solicitous to find some apology to their own hearts. The importance of the duty they acknowledge; the necessity of all the offices of piety they do not deny; but having at present, their whole souls engaged in the interests and pursuits of the world, they study to postpone their entrance on a religious course of life, as a sick man puts off the nauseous draught that is to restore him to life. Their pleasures, and the gratification of their imperious appetites, they cannot yet resolve to forego. And though the most urgent calls are continually sounded in their ears from the word of God; though eternity presses for their care; and though

religion holds out to them on the one hand, the terrors of eternal death, and on the other, the glorious hopes of immortal life, *with one consent they begin to make excuse*. Not that they renounce the hope of the future felicity of heaven, not that they do not acknowledge the authority of the gospel, and believe the death of a sinner to be the most dreadful of all evils; they do not profess to abandon, they only postpone, with infinite folly, the cares of their everlasting peace. With the presumption natural to health, and the false images of passion, they securely count upon life; and, with the error no less natural to self-love, they presume that time will nurse in their hearts the dispositions of duty. Contented with these delusive hopes, they tranquilly rest in their dangerous security, confiding in the deceitful promises of the future.

Various are the excuses which men oppose to their entering immediately on religious duties. Youth opposes its thoughtless age, its ardent passions, and its sanguine hopes: advanced life opposes its importunate interests: and even reason, conviction, and the best inclinations to duty often oppose the difficulties of religion.

1. Youth opposes, as I have said, its age, its passions and its hopes. It is, say the young, the season of levity and joy. The young are prone to depict to their fancy, the gravity of wisdom, the sedateness of reflection, the solemnity of religion, do not belong to their years. Meditations on death would throw an unseasonable gloom over gayeties which, at this period, are innocent and lawful; and the melancholy temper of re-



pentance, of retreat, and of prayer, they think would poison life to them before they had begun to enjoy it.

Listen to the secret reflections of a vivacious youth. Shall I yield the spring of life to an eternal gloom, and instead of living in pleasure, waste my powers of enjoyment in painful self-denials, in mortifying penances, in perpetual sacrifices; shall I not rather wait till time has somewhat mellowed my spirits, till business has tempered my vivacity, till the decencies of society, which are exacted of riper years, produce a state of manners more adapted to the serious character of religion; or, perhaps, till old age, having withdrawn me from the gayeties of the world, leave me nothing to think on but the world to come? Let me expect, at least, some season more favourable than the present. Now it is impossible, and I must yield to the torrent which bears me along. Alas! upon how many false ideas does this apology turn! It pictures to the young fancy that there are no high enjoyments in religion? What then! must all the pleasures of life expire in levity, in thoughtlessness, in dissipation, in those follies which are forever springing out of the high and uncorrected flow of animal spirits? Is happiness to be found only in the indulgence of passions which, by their excesses, so often destroy their own peace? Are there no enjoyments in the tranquil and pure affections of religion, in the tender and delightful sensibilities of a benevolent heart, in the calm dignity of virtue, in the contemplation of the glory and the supreme excellence of the universe, in the consciousness of the favour of God, in the sublime hopes of an immortal existence? True it is, a

change of heart and of life must begin in repentance; but is there not a satisfaction in becoming superior to our errors, in renouncing our sins? in the ingenuousness of a pious and virtuous grief for our manifold offences? in subduing those passions which degrade, and in the end, destroy the sublimity and perfection of our being? Nay, how amiable, how dignified, how happy would be a youth consecrated to God. already unfolding all the most excellent affections of human nature, and blossoming, if I may speak so, for immortality and the sublime felicities of heaven!

But, were it otherwise, were religion as gloomy as it is imaged by the foolish world, yet is it not most necessary? are not all who die in their sins, whether in early or in advanced life, the certain heirs of misery? Do you then plead your age for not devoting yourselves to the service of Almighty God? Will you wait till time shall predispose you for the graver duties of religion? This, this is the folly which is daily destroying the generations of your equals in age. What assurance have you that death will not surprise you, as it has done the greater part of mankind, in the midst of their career? Look upon the state of the world; contemplate the destinies of men; what terrible and instructive examples do they present to your view! How many are daily cut off while forming resolutions like yours, which heaven will never permit them to fulfil! Oh! how often does the earliest youth perish like a tender and lovely flower plucked by the recreant spoiler before it is fully blown! What then becomes of all your abortive purposes of repentance and of duty? Perishing without

fruit, the memory of them shall follow you to the state of retribution, only to fill the soul with a vain and eternal regret.

Be it, however, that death should not surprise you, that you have yet many years to live, does time destroy the power of sin in the heart, or weaken the attachments of men to this vain world? On the other hand, does it not add the force of habit to the predominance of inclination? If it should put an end to certain youthful irregularities, yet has not experience rendered it almost proverbial, that the habits of worldliness become by time only more deeply rooted in the heart? The callousness of age, and the custom of sinning, even blunts those convictions which, in youth, frequently mingle themselves along with its irregularities and crimes, and which serve to impose some restraint upon their indulgence.

Do you repeat to me again, I cannot sacrifice my first and happiest years? This is the season of joy. When its relish is blunted, when the world becomes more indifferent, I will then yield to the obedience of Almighty God. What! the refuse of your days? Oh! impiety! Oh! ingratitude! To whom do you owe your being? To whom do you owe the powers and the means of pleasure which you abuse? Is it not to God? And shall the fruits of his bounty be turned against himself? Ungrateful youth! will you give to the world, to your appetites, to the demons of vice, the first fruits of your strength, the finest spirit of life, and to your Creator and Redeemer only its useless dregs? Ah! when life is coming to its terrible period, when all the illusions of

falsehood shall be ended, what remorse are you treasuring up for your last hours! what fuel are you preparing to kindle the eternal fires of conscience!

2. You admit, perhaps, the truth of all that has been said, the importance of early piety, the hazard of delay, the base ingratitude of sinful pleasure; but you add, the force of certain passions, which have acquired an imperious ascendancy in my heart, absolutely precludes my present return to virtue and to God. I feel, and I lament my chains, but I find it impossible to break them. When this passion, which governs me, says one, shall have subsided, when I shall have ended this engagement in which I am too far involved to retreat, I will begin seriously to think of my eternal state, and to put in practice the many good resolutions I have formed. All this specious verbiage is only a new, and not less dangerous, illusion than the former. Whenever you plead the imperious and uncontrollable force of passion, it is only an apology to your own heart, for your want of fidelity and sincerity in your duty. Your destiny is placed by God, with the aids of his grace, in your own power; if you are only faithful to yourself, and to him, there is no passion which you ought not, and which you may not subdue. But when will these engagements end of which you complain? When will your passions subside? If those which at present occupy you were extinguished, would not others instantly burst forth from their ashes.

Believe it, no state is more hazardous than this of resolving and postponing, and re-resolving only to postpone again. Yet is this the fatal error of a great,



shall I not say of the greater portion of the hearers of the gospel. Who is so hardy as to say, I am resolved never to repent? Who is so wise as to resolve on immediate repentance? And, at last, how often does death step in between their delusive purposes, and the accomplishment of them? How often, did I say? Alas! how seldom do men see the end of their designs!—Among all those on whose death-beds we are called to attend, how few have expected and prepared for this greatest of all changes? How few have not bitterly to lament their abortive resolutions, their fatal delays? If you wait till your passions give you leave to return, you never will return.

But, although your passions should not adhere to you in all their vivacity till your last hour, will you be any nearer a sincere and real conversion to God by your listless resolutions? Is not the power of sin continually growing stronger? Is it not extending its roots wider, and striking them deeper into the whole mass of your being? If they should be blunted, at length, by their own excesses, still the soul, absorbed and sunk in sensuality, would be incapable of the pure sentiments, the refined and spiritual enjoyments of real piety. If they should cease at last, only because you are fatigued, or the powers of nature are already exhausted in their vile pursuits, the soul that stagnates in vice is, if I may speak so, still farther from virtue than it was in the very tempest of the passions.

What is the progress of the sinner during these dangerous delays? Mark it, and tremble at the fatal issue. At first, he ventures on sin with timidity, always en-

deavouring to appease conscience by certain restraints put upon himself, even in his indulgences, by certain appearances of innocence, mingled with his crimes. He proceeds, by hesitating steps, to doubtful actions; and finally by a bolder course, to known and acknowledged sins. Deliberate and wilful guilt is at first followed by severe compunction, and it is repeated only after long intervals have made it be, in some measure, forgotten; but familiarized, at length, with crime, his falls become more frequent; he hardens himself against the admonitions and reproaches of his own heart; vice grows to be a habit. Appetite imperiously demands its indulgences, reason is employed only to excuse or justify them, conscience is silenced. Having long resisted every divine admonition, he is, at last, abandoned of God. Such is the monstrous progression of sin when it is completed. Oh! unthinking youth! know that every delay in the purposes of repentance, is one step in this fatal progression; and, while you are led captive by Satan at his will, there is no safety but in speedily breaking the chains by which you are enslaved.

3. If youth opposes its passions to the calls of religion, does not a more advanced age oppose its interests, which have incorporated themselves with all its plans and all its feelings? See the worldly minded man, engaged in the infinite and anxious pursuits of gain, which so occupy all his thoughts that he can no longer resolve to suspend or moderate them, that he may *seek first the kingdom of God, the righteousness thereof*. He does not, indeed, ultimately renounce the hope of hea-

ven; nothing, perhaps, would be more terrible to him than the idea of dying impenitent; but boldly or thoughtlessly presuming upon life, he still protracts the period of devoting himself in earnest to the momentous cares of his eternal inheritance. Your present engagements, you say, require all your attention; your present embarrassments perplex and agitate your mind, and leave it no time for reflection, but the first leisure you can redeem from the world, you will devote to your soul and to God. Oh! fallacious promise! which has already deceived its thousands. Will you ever enjoy this leisure which you vainly promise your heart? as soon as one plan of profit is accomplished or defeated, will you not be ready with new ardor, to embark in another? Have you been unfortunate? The loss must be repaired. Have you been successful? The gain at the same time whets the lustful appetite, and furnishes you with new means of enlarging your enterprizes. The demands of the world increase with your age, increase with your growing families, increase with your projects, increase with your misfortunes, increase with your success. Are you able to fix any point at which you will ever say it is enough? No; forever you must have the same plausible pretence for postponing the care of your salvation; forever you will have the same excuse for neglect, to offer to God and to your own hearts.

But, if satiated with gain, you should, at length, retire to enjoy in tranquillity the precious fruits of your industry, would you carry into your retirement dispositions more favourable to the views of religion? Not to

speaking again of the effects of protracted time and habit, when men, who have been active in the pursuits of gain, subside into love of retreat, is it not usually united with an indolence of mind the most opposite to the lively sensibilities, to the arduous duties, to the deep compunctions, to the spiritual conflicts, in which all the energies of the soul are to be engaged in the exercises of piety and devotion.

4. But finally, although you should become fatigued or disgusted at length, with the fruitless pursuits or sinful gratifications of corrupted passions; although you should be convinced, at last, of the vanity of the world, and the infinite importance of your eternal interests; though urged by your own hearts to enter publicly on the profession of a religious life, still will not a new excuse arise out of the difficulties which religion itself opposes to the infirmities of human nature?

Such a conspicuous change, will attract upon you the malignant observation, the invidious remarks of the world. That world which is prone to ascribe all pretences to piety, and to superior regularity of manners, to a canting hypocrisy, and to rake up against you the errors of your life to reproach your present zeal, and you have not courage to support the ridicule of the world, or make yourself the subject of its general conversation, of its malignant inquiries, perhaps of its falsehoods and slanders. You hesitate, you balance upon this interesting subject. You have seen others make shipwreck of the faith, enter with a certain ostentatious zeal on a pious course, and then shamefully fall back again into the vices they had pretended to



have forsaken. You have feared lest your good purposes might be only a temporary fervour; lest you might not be able to support the gravity, the dignity, the purity of the profession of the gospel, and thereby afford a subject for the profane mirth of sinners, and bring a reproach on the holy cause which you had too hastily espoused. You have before, perhaps, been the subject of transient awakenings; you have been urged to secret prayer, to meditation, to pious reading. You have been almost persuaded to be a christian; and to make a public avowal of your change; but your convictions of duty and of sin have been lost; you have ceased your devotional exercises; new temptations have arisen; and you have plunged again into the follies of the world. Again your seriousness has revived, and your thoughtlessness returned; and now you dare no longer trust your own heart. Humble and penitent soul! are you for these causes restrained from devoting yourself to the service of your Redeemer, and making a conspicuous profession of his holy name? Have you considered the dishonours you do him, by refusing the duties which he imposes, and putting no discrimination between yourself and the world which is his enemy? Does he not demand this example of you? If you are weak, is not his grace sufficient for those who trust in it? If your heart is filled with his glory, will you fear the vain opinions or the contempt of the world? If you are impressed with the awful sacredness of your obligations, with the infinite love of your Redeemer, can you ever fear being left of

God, thus to dishonour his holy name? Banish, then, every vain excuse. Lay it to heart that your duty is urgent, your danger is imminent. From your very dangers derive new courage for exertion, and new strength for perseverance. Would the perishing mariner count the dangers between him and a distant shore to which he might escape? Would he yield himself without a struggle to his fate, because it was doubtful whether he should be able to bear up against the winds and the waves? Would he not, on the contrary, put forth all his strength to meet and combat the difficulties before him? And when ready to faint with fatigue, would not the yawning abyss only make him redouble his efforts? Look up then to the judgment of God; survey that eternal world on which we press; assemble round you all the awful and all the glorious motives of religion? and, will not every vain excuse vanish before them?

Christians! can we now express in language too strong, the folly and the guilt of these excuses by which men decline their most urgent duty, and hazard their eternal peace? What is it you postpone? Your own happiness. What is it you seek to avoid? The service of God, which is perfect freedom; the protection and favour of Almighty God, the best and the only security against every danger seen and unseen which can assail you; the love of God, the undecaying fountain of the purest and the sublimest felicity. And for what do you make these tremendous sacrifices? For follies that are unworthy of a reasonable being; for pleasures which degrade human nature, and disqualify it for all

the highest and noblest ends of our being; for passions which ally us to the inferior brutes; for vile and momentary interests which perish from our hands while we are grasping them. Ah! sinner, should not the deep and aggravated colours of this guilt fill you with shame; and strike you with horror? Let reason decide; let conscience pronounce, and you will tremble at your crime. You stand on a tremendous precipice! over a fearful abyss! There may be but this moment of escape. While you are saying at some future time; God may pronounce his fearful decree that your time shall be no longer. Ah! thoughtless soul! your duty you may postpone, but can you postpone the arrest of the king of terrors? When your hour is come, will death let go his prisoner, only to give you time to repair so many fatal errors? Let me then repeat again and again the calls, the admonitions, the denunciations of the Spirit of Truth; let me sound in your ears once more this gracious, and yet this awful invitation—*behold now, perhaps now only, is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation.* AMEN.

## ON A WRONG CONSCIENCE.

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Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience. *Heb. x. 22.*

CONSCIENCE is that power within us which makes us sensible of the obligations of duty; and which in examining our actions by the law of God, pronounces on each the verdict of right or wrong. This divine law, as it is laid down in his holy word, or is collected by reason from the indications of nature, is, on the great points of conduct, clear and unambiguous; but, as it is interpreted by men, it is often variable and uncertain, and leaves us no sure rule of duty. If the heart is pure, the judgments of conscience will be sound and conformed to truth; but if the heart is corrupted, it, in the same degree vitiates the judgments of the mind on the subject of duty. And these false judgments cover and protect sin in the conduct of life and augment the corruption from which they flow. A wrong conscience justifies sin, and, by covering it in the heart, pollutes our devotions, and renders every offering impure which we bring into the temple of God.—Therefore, the apostle, in directing christians how they may pay to God a spiritual and acceptable worship, exhorts them *to draw near with a true heart*; and, farther, *to have the heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, and their bodies washed with pure water*. The expression is remarkable, and deserves your particular attention—It contains an evident allusion to the sacred rite of bap-



tism, the emblem of a divine purity. The *washing of the body*, and *sprinkling of the heart* being types of the same sanctity and perfection of the soul, derived from the ancient service of the temple, in which the washing, and especially the sprinkling, of its sacred vessels was the symbol of their holiness to the Lord.

What, then, is the import of this expression, *the heart sprinkled from an evil conscience*? The heart is not only a general term comprehending all the principles of conduct, but is frequently taken for the conscience itself. Freeing the language, then, of the figure it implies, having the soul purified from the consciousness of guilt, by having the heart, the fountain of conduct, regenerated, sanctified, and united to Christ. It implies more, that the conscience itself should not be perverted in its judgments of what is right and wrong, so as to call good evil, and evil good, thereby becoming ignorant of its guilt, and covering its pollutions in the presence of God. An *evil conscience*, then may be taken in two senses. either as that consciousness of known and voluntary guilt which disquiets and harrasses the sinner, and which prevents his approaching, or destroys his comfort at the throne of grace; or as that false idea of virtue and vice, of innocence and crime, which mistakes the true nature of duty, and renders the heart no longer sensible of the guilt of its sins. It is called an evil conscience because it nourishes and protects so many unrepented evils in the heart, and thereby keeps the sinner buried in the most dangerous security, while he dishonors God, and is continually violating his most holy law. It is in the latter

sense alone that I now mean to consider it, and to make it the subject of the present discourse. Let me, then,

I. In the first place, point out the nature, and the causes of a wrong conscience;

II. And, secondly, demonstrate its dangers.

I. A wrong conscience is a habit of judging erroneously concerning duty and sin, virtue and vice, innocence and criminality in conduct. Many are the forms under which it shows itself, and the degrees to which it arrives. In its highest and most culpable degree it is seen in the inventors or disciples of those false and atrocious systems of impiety which annihilate religion, and hardly consider man as an accountable being—or, accountable only to himself or to society; every thing is lawful, by their system, which his passions vindicate, and which can elude or defy the public tribunals. At first, indeed, the force of nature will long resist these monstrous conclusions—the principles, which he calls the prejudices of education, will long struggle against opinions which overturn all morality as well as piety—the compunctions of a better, but expiring, conscience, will continue for a time to agitate and harrass the sinner; but the refinements and deceptions of a false reason enable him at length to adopt the most destructive errors with a fatal tranquillity.

A wrong conscience may be formed, on the other hand, by a false or defective religious education. One becomes rigorous and austere in his ideas of moral conduct—another, relaxed and indulgent to excess—One values only the devotional and speculative part of

religion; another only the duties of humanity and sociability—One frames to himself a narrow and gloomy standard of penance and self-denial—another believes that self-denial can form no part of the duties enjoined by a merciful God—Paul, educated a Pharisee, esteemed persecution a duty, and verily thought with *himself that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Gallio cared for none of these things*; and esteemed all zeal for religious practices and opinions superfluous, or enthusiastic. Every careless hearer of the gospel has framed to himself in one degree or another, a false conscience. Would you have a proof of it? What is it that keeps him in peace? If he saw his sins in their true light, would he not tremble? Could he possess any tranquillity in his soul till, by a sincere repentance he had renounced them; till, by a lively faith, he had submitted his heart to the law of Christ? He confesses, perhaps, that he is a sinner? He is even afraid to handle the sacramental memorials of his Saviour's love, which are appropriated only to his true disciples. Yet, has he not, on each of his actions in particular, some principles which satisfy his conscience, and make him contented with himself? He acknowledges the general truth that he is guilty; but in the detail of his actions he finds some vindication, some palliation, some excuse, for every one of them, that stifles compunction, and still maintains the dangerous security in which he lives. Each man by degrees frames a law for his own conduct, with which, allowing for some secret and transient uneasinesses of heart, he is, upon the whole, satisfied—And this law

is usually some softening, some interpretation of the law of God in favour of his own ruling inclinations. This indeed is a natural consequence of our self-love, of our desire to preserve a degree of self-respect, and of our perpetual study to unite the enjoyment of our passions with the peace of our minds. No man can consent to live in a state of continual warfare with himself, exposed daily to the bitterness of remorse, the humiliations of self-reproach, the apprehensions of a judgment to come. He must renounce his sins by repentance, or he must find some covering or palliation for them. If he does not explicitly avow principles inconsistent with the strictness of the divine law, he endeavours to forget the holiness of its requisitions, and then the passions frame their own rules, and easily bribe the verdict, or the connivance of conscience. It is true, men cannot all at once arrive at this tranquillity in sinning—many alarms they suffer, many struggles they are obliged to maintain with their own convictions; but, by repeated efforts, they are able at length so far to bias conscience, as, if they cannot procure its approbation, at least to make it silent. A wrong conscience then is an habitual judgment of our actions on principles different from those of truth, of reason, and the word of God, by a standard framed by a vain and false philosophy, growing out of a vicious education, or a lax interpretation of the divine law, accommodated to our own character, pursuits, and wishes.

2. What, then, are the causes of this wrong standard framed by men for the government and the judgment of their actions? They might be greatly diversi-



fied and amplified in the detail. They might be drawn for example, from ignorance, which, leaving the mind unenlightened by truth, gives opportunity to sinful passions to root, and defend themselves in the heart—They might be drawn from general custom and example, which, at once, strengthen the temptations, and give plausibility to the principles of vice—They might be drawn from a false education, which is almost equally dangerous, whether, on one hand, it narrows the mind by superstition, or, on the other, lays it open to libertinism—They might be drawn from the subtlety and refinements of a vain and proud reason, which esteems itself able to illuminate every subject; for in a mind so weak as man's, the extreme refinements of reason almost always lead to error; and, in experience, it has been found that there is no principle so absurd, or so immoral, that it may not be plausibly *vindicated*, and even has not, at some period or other, been *avowed* by ingenious men.

But, without going into such a wide field, we may find the more general and practical causes of a wrong conscience in the inclinations—and the interests of men. And these, indeed, give the principal efficacy to those other causes, which have been just enumerated.—Our inclinations—*Whatever we desire*, says saint Augustine, *is good*; *whatever we love*, he adds, *is esteemed holy*—Such an influence has the heart over the determinations of the understanding. At first, perhaps, we may not dare to rank our favourite pursuit in the class of duties, or of virtues—we may only consider it as desirable, as agreeable, as useful or convenient,

but, by meditating upon it—by inflaming our desires for it—by keeping it constantly before the mind, such is the connexion between the ideas of beauty and virtue, of what is pleasing, and what is right, we come, at length, to make a thousand apologies for it,—to see a thousand reasons to justify it—to persuade ourselves that it is innocent. Is there any thing so unjust—is there any thing so impure—is there any thing so impious, which may not be, which has not been vindicated in this manner? Hence, says the Psalmist, has proceeded the most monstrous conclusion which has ever been formed by the human mind, in the ultimate progression of vice. *The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.* The heart wished it—the heart desired to be free from all restraint in the indulgence of its passions—it could not associate the idea of God with its corruptions—its corruptions it would enjoy,—it pronounced *there is no God.* Reason would long remonstrate against the horror of such a conclusion; but the heart was the advocate, and the heart never continues to plead in vain.—Take any vice to which it is strongly attached—what a tendency is there to think, to reason, to decide only according to this dominant inclination? to see nothing but what favours it? to exclude from the mind, and turn aside the view from every consideration which would bring its innocence and lawfulness into doubt? And, by continually searching only for reasons to justify what we love, what is there which we may not come at length to approve? Can that be guilty which so strongly recommends itself by its pleasures? Can such a small de-

parture from the divine law, if it be a departure, deserve eternal death from a merciful God? The heart judges it to be impossible—then pursues its objects with new ardor—and resigns itself to a fatal security. Place on one side, the feeble emotions, the faint remonstrances of duty and virtue in an unrenewed mind, on the other, the impetuous desires, the imposing charms of pleasure, that fascination by which it dazzles and blinds the mind while its tumults fill the heart, and, would it not be a miracle if conscience should judge impartially between them? Yes, in these cases, the conscience too often makes its rules only in favour of the heart.

If pleasure contributes to form a wrong conscience, not less frequently, perhaps, does interest. By interest, I mean, whatever besides pleasure is peculiarly attached to ourselves—whatever our pride, our vanity, our rivalships, our resentments, our avarice, our ambition, may represent as necessary, or important to us. What intrigues for power, what frauds in speculation, what unfairness in commerce, what insincerity to friends, what insidiousness to rivals, what malignity to enemies, what injustice, what hardness, what illiberality, what selfishness, may not conscience be made to justify, or to excuse, when our own interests are balanced against those of others? Place interest out of the question, and we will, perhaps, judge fairly on all the points of duty that may arise on any of these subjects—our decisions will coincide with those of the divine law. Thus before we entered into the world, and before our interests became so entangled with

those of others, had we not fixed in our mind a most exact standard of justice? of propriety? of good conduct? But, since we have entered into the business, the intrigues, the collisions of the world, is not every thing changed? How often have we found that our former laws do not apply? Do we not feel a thousand reasons for relaxing their strictness, with regard to ourselves? We flatter ourselves that *we* would make a good use of the privileges or exemptions which we claim; but which would certainly be abused if they were common.

Let men answer sincerely and candidly: I speak not here of those who have been taught always to judge right by that wisdom which is from above, dwelling in their breasts, but of the world in general—when is it that their decisions on the subjects of integrity, benevolence, charity, candor, meekness, and of virtue and duty universally, are exact and conformable to the word of God? Is it not when their own interests and feelings are not concerned? Is it not when they judge for their neighbours? Is there not, with regard to others, frequently even a rigor in their decisions which seems designed to balance, or to cover the relaxation which they yield to themselves? Let a man of the world, for example, pass sentence on a professor of religion—with what severity, at the same time, perhaps, with what truth, will he judge his actions? But, for the same, possibly for much greater errors in conduct, with what indulgence does he judge himself? with what tranquillity does conscience sleep in his breast? Wherefore? Is it because the same duties are not



required of *him* by God? No, he only applies a different standard of judging to himself and to the friend of religion. Ah! conscience is right when it does not touch our inclinations, our interests, our *self*; but when these are affected, they combine to warp and bias its judgments.

If you would draw near to God, saith the apostle, have your heart sprinkled from an evil conscience, that you may offer him a holy sacrifice, and meet from him a gracious acceptance—but, if the conscience is wrong, it covers in his presence, not indeed from his sight, but from our own, innumerable evils which defile the soul, and cause our prayers to be rejected.

Reserving till another occasion the illustration of the dangers of a wrong and treacherous conscience, I conclude this discourse with some reflections which suggest themselves from what has been already said.

My brethren, we cannot forbear to lament the frequency, I had almost said the universality of this evil. Are the professors of religion, the disciples of Jesus themselves, wholly exempted from it? At various periods of the church, a bigotted and mistaken zeal for rites and opinions, which they misconstrued into a zeal for God, inflamed the different sects against one another with unchristian resentments—but in this lukewarm age, do not the errors of the conscience manifest themselves chiefly by that low standard of religion, which prevails among christians, and with which they are contented in practice? Do we see reigning in our christian assemblies that fervent devotion, which is due to the glory, the wisdom, the pow-

er, the goodness of the Creator—which becomes penitent sinners worshipping under the sense of redeeming love? Do we see reigning in the life and conversation of christians, that sanctity, that purity, that abstraction from the world, that submission to the will of God, that charity, that candor, that brotherly-love, that active benevolence, which should distinguish the followers of so holy a master, and which were the glory of his primitive disciples? Yet who is making an effort to change the lamentable state of the church, to rekindle its zeal, to reform its errors? Instead of raising ourselves to the genuine standard of the gospel, are we not endeavouring to bring it down to the state of our own hearts and manners? Have we not framed to ourselves a false conscience, which if it does not approve, is, at least contented with a formality and coldness, which are hastening to extinguish among us the last sparks of the spiritual life?

What shall we say then of the mass of the hearers of the gospel? If they do not make a visible profession of religion, yet, do they not live in a fatal security? Although they dare not say they are holy, yet, are they not saying peace to themselves in the midst of their iniquities? And, my brethren, when life is vanishing, when death is approaching, when God is the witness of their actions, when the tribunal awaits them, when the gospel is sounding in their ears, when eternity demands their cares, could they thus possess their souls in quiet, and hear without emotion, calls so loud and interesting to mortals and to sinners, if they had not already a corrupted conscience, and depreciated

the holiness of the divine law, the purity and the majesty of the divine perfection? Can a little self-indulgence, they secretly ask, deserve everlasting perdition? Can actions which appear so innocent, so pleasing to me, be so fearfully condemned by God? Can God himself be inexorable? Will not repentance always be in my power? Ah! sinners! these are suggestions of an evil, a depraved conscience. You have bribed this judge to speak the language of the heart—you have lulled asleep this watchful guardian of the soul—it is held by the enchantments of prosperity and pleasure. But this charm must soon be dissolved. And, great God! what will be its awakening? The dreadful call of death—the thunders that surround the tribunal of heaven. Merciful Father! before this fatal period arrives, awaken these sinners from their profound and mortal sleep! penetrate with conviction the secure soul! shed thy holy light upon the dark and misguided conscience!

There are certain circumstances in life in which men are more exposed than in others, to those vices which create a false conscience, and endanger their eternal peace, which therefore demand in them an extraordinary vigilance and guard. It has often been said that a man is made by the situations into which he is thrown. To what crimes have not the prospects of ambition opened the minds of men, who, in private life would have been virtuous citizens? To what licentiousness has not flattery often seduced a sensible heart, which might have been the greatest ornament of a virtuous and retired circle? To what frauds have

not straightened circumstances sometimes invited men who had, in better fortune, supported the fairest reputation of integrity and honor? The extremes of poverty and wealth offer the greatest temptations to corrupt and pervert the conscience. The wants, the humiliations, the pressures of the one—the effeminacy, the luxury, the ambition, the intrigues, the passions, the pleasures, of the other. Even long continued prosperity is apt to enfeeble conscience, and to blunt its keen and delicate sensibilities to duty, while it makes man forget himself. On whatever side your danger threatens you, there christian! set your principal guard—there chiefly distrust the reasonings and conclusions of your own minds. Know the treachery of the heart, and its power over the judgments of conscience; shun, as far as possible, the temptations which are peculiar to your state—the societies, the conversations, the objects which strengthen them, and where it is impossible to shun them, stand with the law of God in your hand to measure every action by its spirit. Would you preserve conscience always upright in its decisions, and faithful in its admonitions? Meditate on the divine law, bring yourselves often to your own bar, possess your minds with the infinite danger of being deceived, remember that, although the judge within you should sleep, or be deceived, there is one in heaven who never slumbers nor sleeps, and whose judgments never can err. Implore from him the light, and aids of his most holy spirit to teach you always what is truth, to keep you always in the perfect way which ends in eternal life.



And now to the king eternal, immortal, and invisible, the only wise God, be honour, and glory, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end!

AMEN.

## DANGERS OF A WRONG CONSCIENCE.

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I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. *Acts. xxvi. 9.*

THE example of Paul before his conversion, demonstrates the dangerous influence of a wrong conscience. It covers the greatest sins from the censure of our own minds; it often converts even a zeal for religion, into pernicious crimes. Educated among the strictest, and also the most austere sect of the Jews, he had, together with their prejudices and their bigotry, deeply imbibed their intolerant spirit. He persecuted with fury the meek and harmless christians, and made the Blessed Saviour himself, the object of his exterminating rage, till, arrested by a light and a voice from heaven, he received, along with the truth, that mild and benevolent spirit which became the gospel of which he was now to be an apostle. All the errors of his conscience were rectified by that celestial light which, at the same time, created his heart anew. If religious error could mislead this great man to such atrocious acts, what corruptions, what crimes may not the passions, may not self-love, may not false reasoning impose upon us, as innocent; or excuse as small and pardonable offences against Almighty God? There is scarcely any evil which a perverted conscience may not, and, at some time or other, has not, been made to

justify; and when it sins in security, it sins almost irreclaimably. In a former discourse I have illustrated the nature of a wrong conscience, and the causes which create it; I am now, from a melancholy example in the history of the apostle's life, to point out its dangers.

It is dangerous—because it may be made to give its sanction to the greatest crimes—It is dangerous, because it sins without apprehension—It is dangerous, because it destroys the most effectual means of reformation.

I. In the first place, conscience may be so perverted as to justify the greatest crimes. Conscience is the light of the soul; when well-informed, it points out with clearness the path of duty—but, *if the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness.* Men, unless they have arrived at the ultimate stage of vice and profligacy, rarely study to corrupt the lights of the mind universally on all the subjects of duty, and moral truth. They have favourite indulgences which they wish to pursue, particular aversions which they desire to gratify, predominant inclinations which they are solicitous to reconcile with their sentiments of rectitude. On these they bestow the chief pains to bias the judgments of the mind. And, to what conclusion may they not arrive! what errors, what faults, what crimes, may they not cover, and sometimes even invest with the colours of duty? Let me be more particular, and render these ideas, if possible, palpable to every understanding. Let a man, for example, once embark in the projects of ambition. What duties is he not capa-

ble of violating? What iniquities is he not capable of committing? What sentiments of humanity, when they stand in his way, will he not remorselessly extinguish? Retrace the history of this passion from Nimrod to Cromwell, from the atrocious conquerors who have desolated the earth, to those petty leaders of faction whom we see among ourselves, and do we not perceive an eternal repetition of the same intrigues, deceits, treacheries, falsehoods, violence, injustice? Do these crimes think you, outrage conscience? No, they have brought conscience to be of the party of their ambition. What is that, indeed, which is called the *hardening* of sinners? Is it not that the custom and practice of sinning overbear the authority of conscience? Is it merely that they silence its awful voice? Is it that they are able wholly to extinguish it? No—but conscience, by degress, comes over to the side of their passions—they sin in tranquillity, and, therefore, they sin with the greater boldness.

On the other hand, let conscience be bought over by avarice, and the avidity of gain, what hardness, what griping, what frauds, what usuries, will it not sanction? It will oppress the dependent, it will wring the hearts of the poor, it will feed itself on the tears of the widow and the orphan. And, to give another example, if pride and revenge can draw conscience to their side, do they not easily imagine their most vindictive resentments to be just? They embroil society—they destroy the peace of their own breast, and of the world, in the whirlwind of the passions—and, at last glut themselves with the miseries, and even the blood of their enemies!



O thou false honor! which art nothing more than revenge justified by a wrong conscience, with what cool deliberate villainy, canst thou look on murder, and on the tears, the distractions, the horrors, which thy cruelty has created? When these passions do not proceed to such horrible extremes, under what false pretences will they not vindicate the murder of character and reputation—the violation of that precious treasure which is more dear to an honest mind than life itself? Malicious slander, cruel insinuations, bitter invectives, ridicule, contempt, a thousand secret ill offices, are but ordinary faults. Society is filled with private and malignant whispers—the public is agitated with virulent and groundless scandal against the greatest and most virtuous characters in the nation. Yet have these crimes their pretended justification? You would strip the mask from a hypocrite who enjoys a reputation which he does not merit, you would guard your fellow citizens against imaginary evils, which the spirit of party never fails to impute to its rivals. Shall I go through other passions, through other appetites, and show how, under the protection of a perverted conscience, licentious pleasure, intemperance, dissipation, idleness, justify, or colour over with specious apologies, their innumerable evils? Shall I again represent the bigotry, the animosities, the persecutions to which mistaken ideas of religion have given rise? Paul attempted to exterminate the church of Christ under the full persuasion that he was rendering service to God. The greatest crime which was ever perpetrated among men, sprung from the same source. A wrong conscience pol-

luted the heart with the blood of her Creator. Shall I, after such a crime, mention the inferior ones of substituting the form, for the power of goodlines, of *neglecting the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and truth*, while the whole of religion is placed in exterior services and rites—of separating devotion from morals, or morals from devotion. Are there not those, who, by the performance of certain religious duties, think themselves acquitted for the want of kindness, and charity to their fellow men? Do we not see the sabbath violated without remorse, under the pretence of necessary business, or of necessary relaxation? Do we not see baptism scrupulously solicited for children, while conscience, satisfied with the external rite, forgets the duties which the act imposes? On the other hand, do we not see the holy table of the Lord as scrupulously shunned, that men may enjoy their sins in peace, as if they were comparatively innocent, as long as they have not violated the most sacred of vows? But, it were endless to attempt to enumerate all the errors and crimes of a conscience blinded by sin, the hypocrisy, the pride, the vanity, the impure desires, the criminal attachments, the unjust gains, the deceits, the treacheries, the cruelties, the refined slanders, the oblique injuries, which it covers and justifies. It is, says St. Bernard, like a dark and fathomless gulf, filled with every filthy and impure reptile.

A wrong, and ill-informed, and perverted conscience, then, is dangerous, because it may be made to justify even the greatest sins—It is dangerous,

II. In the next place, because it sins without apprehension.

A peaceful self-approving conscience, resting upon truth and virtue, yields a good man a felicity next to that of heaven: but a conscience at peace in its sins, is, perhaps, the most deplorable state in this world. Where shall we find an adequate image of it? It is an intoxicated man sleeping at the summit of a mast in the midst of a tempest, which he does not perceive—it is a thoughtless child stumbling blindfold on the edge of a giddy and tremendous precipice, from which he is shortly to be dashed in pieces. The law of God denounces indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man that doeth evil—the justice of God is ready to execute the sentence—death is in ambush before the sinner unperceived—a thousand arrows from the king of terrors, prepared to pierce him are flying round him—a thousand messengers are ready to bring him to the tribunal—yet a wrong conscience, nourished by prosperity, blinded by passion, misled by the wandering lights of a false reason, is saying peace! peace! *though sudden destruction is coming upon him*, though the tempest is gathering round him, *and he shall not escape*. He is in the most imminent danger, yet is he not apprehensive of his situation. He sins boldly, because he sins securely; and his security is the seal of his perdition. When a wrong conscience flatters him in his errors, and makes him taste the pleasures of tranquillity in the midst of his guilt, he neither is acquainted with his sins, nor has a motive to renounce them. Infinitely better, though not so pleasant

in the present enjoyment, is a conscience at war with his peace—a conscience reproaching, but enlightened—a conscience harassing him continually, in the midst of his guilty pleasures and his worldly plans. Such a conscience contains some principles to lead him back to his duty, and to repentance. If he is the enemy of God, yet he is conscious of his state, and finds a voice within that is forever urging him to return to the fountain of his life—if he is enslaved by his passions, yet, there is a sentiment in his heart, which continually resists their dominion, and recalls him to *the liberty of the sons of God*. A holy light still shines in the soul in the midst of those convictions which distress him, but, when conscience is at peace in its sins, that light is extinguished, and the soul becomes a prey to its own vices and corruptions.

III. This is the last danger of a wrong conscience, it destroys the most effectual means of reformation.

An enlightened conscience is the voice of God in the breast, still pointing out the path of duty—still checking the career of vice—still pressing on the heart the motives of repentance. It is the last and most precious mean of grace, which God bestows to bring men back to himself, from the dangerous errors of their ways. But if conscience has ceased to speak, what is there to warn, what is there to restrain, what is there to recall the sinner? If it is so perverted as to flatter where it ought to condemn his vices, to reconcile him to himself when he is at enmity with God, and to impress the stamp of innocence on sinful desires and pursuits, what access is there for conviction? What prin-



ciple upon which the motives of reformation can take hold? Exhortations, remonstrances, reproofs, the menaces of the divine law, are all in vain—they touch not the soul that is already satisfied with itself—they glance, if I may speak so, from the shield with which a false conscience covers a deceived heart. Speak to him of duty—his heart has already marked out a law of duty to itself, and he attends to no other—warn him of the guilt, and the dangers of an impenitent state, he hears in his heart nothing but the whispers of innocence—lay open before him the way of salvation—He is hastening to go down to the gates of death with a lie in his right hand. A more fearful judgment cannot be inflicted, in the righteous displeasure of almighty God, on an individual, or a nation, than insensibility, or perverseness, and error of conscience. When he had prepared for Jerusalem and Israel the most terrible and certain perdition, what is the indication of it? what are the means which infallibly conducted them to it—*hear ye, indeed, saith the prophet, but understand not; see ye, indeed, but perceive not; make the heart of this people fat, make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes*—which are so many figures to express this deplorable state of the conscience. It is a general truth, *whom God is willing to destroy he first infatuates*. He suffers their own errors and mistakes to ruin them.

But, while a right conscience is not absolutely extinguished—while it still speaks truth at the bottom of the heart, there is left the hope, and the means of reformation. Even in the midst of its vices and dissolutions, when the soul seems to be absorbed by them,

and borne irresistibly down their current; there is still something within which checks its course—the word, and the providence of God have some hold on which to fasten, in order to draw it at length from the gulf of its passions and its crimes. Some remonstrance from the divine word, some stroke of divine providence may, at last rouse it, reanimate it by new light, reinvigorate all its energies; and give it the victory through Jesus Christ. Among a thousand examples to illustrate this truth, none is more instructive or interesting than that of the illustrious St. Augustine. Educated with pious care by his mother Monica, the impetuosity of his passions was such that they long overbore his better principles, and he appeared to be lost in the dissolute pleasures, first of Carthage, and afterwards of Rome. Led at length, by curiosity to hear St. Ambrose, the most celebrated preacher of his age, the truth fastened on the heart of Augustine, roused the sleeping embers of his conscience, and recalled all the pious instructions and principles of his earlier days—he became a triumphant believer, and has been honoured by God, to become one of the most distinguished fathers of the church. In his confessions, those admirable models of penitence and christian humility, with what energy does he speak on this subject? “Yes Lord! saith he, it was an enlightened conscience which saved me, which drew me from the profound abyss of my iniquity—my conscience, though guilty, was always a just judge of itself, and declared for thee, against my own sins—this it was that restored me to thee!” Behold my brethren, in St. Augustine, the methods of divine

grace—behold the value of a conscience enlightened by truth! Christian parents! be not discouraged by the present unpromising effects of your labours—Be reanimated by this great example to impart holy principles, to give pious examples to your children. The precious seed, though long buried, may rise at length, and produce the unexpected fruits of a glorious harvest.

Such are the advantages of a right, such are the dangers of a wrong conscience.

Let me now conclude with a few of those reflections, and admonitions, proportioned to your time, which the train of this illustration must have suggested.

It is often asked on this subject, if a mistaken conscience does not excuse error—if invincible error does not take away guilt—if we ought not always to follow the dictates of conscience, whether well or ill informed? The doctrine of conscience is complicated; and to elucidate it thoroughly would require a much greater detail, and the solution of a much greater number of questions, than this place will allow. I will merely state a few general maxims, leaving your own reflection to apply and detail them. Invincible ignorance, where it is truly invincible, and has not been induced by previous neglect, or previous vice, does excuse error. But men often mistake on this subject. Error is not pardonable if we have neglected the proper season, the proper opportunities, the proper means of information, although circumstances should arise, in consequence of that neglect, to render it afterwards invincible. Error is not pardonable, if our vices, our passions,

our self-love have so biassed reason that the light of truth can no longer reach the mind. Such immoral causes of wrong reasoning, and consequently of a wrong conscience, may, in the just judgment of God, become invincible, but never excusable. But may we ever violate the dictates of conscience? *Whatever is not of faith*, saith the apostle, that is, is not accompanied with a clear and full belief of its rectitude, *is sin*. A man also is guilty of sin if he violates the law of God, though fully persuaded of the innocence of his actions—by his own vice therefore he may be brought into such a state that whether he acts with or against his conscience, he sins. Crimes, the result of a mistaken, but well meant education, are more easily than others entitled to pardon: *therefore*, says Paul, *I obtained mercy*, though I persecuted the church of Christ, *because I did it ignorantly, in unbelief*. And, on this ground, the Saviour himself prays for his murderers—*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!* But crimes springing from errors grafted originally on our own vices, merit no indulgence. The cause, and the effect both concur to augment their guilt—this was the crime of Balaam, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, and taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before Israel—But the highest and most consummate degree of guilt, is violating at the same time the clear lights of conscience, of the Spirit, and the law of God—This was the crime of Judas. And crimes approaching to it we too often see in those impious and virulent enemies of the gospel, who, not only renounce its laws, but oppose



with bitterness and malignity its holy spirit wherever it appears.

If these ideas are just, with what caution should we trust our hearts! with what care should we examine our consciences! with what scrupulous inquiry should we try, on all subjects, if their decisions are in conformity with the will of God! Beware of trusting those vague and general sanctions of innocence which your hearts are apt to give to your ordinary actions, or your favourite pursuits. While men enjoy health and prosperity, seldom are they willing to enter deeply into their own breasts—they cannot endure the trouble of searching them to the bottom, nor the humiliations, and compunctions of seeing that they are sinners—they regard the heart with a transient glance, they shut their eyes against the views of their corruptions—by giving way to the agitations of business or amusement, they endeavour to forget them—they hope the best, and march on in security amidst all the calls, the remonstrances, the denunciations of the word of God, and even of their own consciences which now and then raise a feeble and a warning voice from the bottom of their hearts. Oh! that God would convince every careless hearer in this assembly of the infinite danger of flattering his soul with a deceitful peace which God himself has not spoken! Oh! the horror of being surprised by a midnight call! of perishing in the midst of your vain hopes! Be honest to your soul, and to God. Let conscience give a faithful and enlightened decision on your duties, and your sins, on your hopes, and your fears. Enlighten it, not by your own fallacious rea-

soning, not by the depraved wishes of a heart still devoted to its sins, but by the word and the spirit of God. Yield yourself to its authority, encourage the full energy of its denunciations, till it bring you a willing and humbled penitent to the footstool of divine mercy. But do you ask, how shall we prevent or rectify the errors of a wrong conscience? how shall we escape dangers to which we are exposed both from the frailty, and the corruption of our nature? My brethren, the whole art consists in diligence, fidelity, and prayer—Be diligent to search the scriptures, and to learn the will of God our maker, from every aid which he has given to enable us to understand it—Be faithful and honest, that is be *willing* to hear the truth that condemns yourselves. Conscience will commonly speak clearly, and speak truly to those who, in the simplicity of their hearts, are resolved to obey it. Add fervent, humble, and sincere prayer to the Father of lights, and the Father of mercies. He is ready to impart his holy spirit to them that ask him. Commit yourselves to him and he will guide you surely. But, be serious, be in earnest in this important concern. Flatter not yourselves, because you have bribed the verdict of the judge in your breast, that, therefore, you have obtained the approbation of the Supreme Judge. Hope not to carry even your own approbation to his bar. The approach of death, when it is too late to change, will awaken you to juster ideas, and a severer judgment of yourselves. Listen to the word of divine truth which is daily brought to your ears. Listen to those small whispers of conscience which you now endeavour to drown.

Hear their warnings before God in judgment has made them cease to speak. Let not the light that surrounds you only blind your eyes, and harden your hearts. Great God! shall these ministrations of thy blessed word, intended for the salvation of sinners, only seal their more terrible perdition? Hast thou made their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, and, in thy wrath given them a deceived heart? Father of mercies! consign them not so fearful a doom! Shed thy light upon their hearts! awake, arouse the sleeping conscience! make it speak with energy! make it effectually speak for thee!

**AMEN!**

## THE PERFECTION OF CHRISTIAN MORALS.

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Finally, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think of these things. *Phil. iv, 8.*

IN this comprehensive passage the great apostle of the Gentiles obviously designs to exhibit under a single view a beautiful epitome of christian morals. He had, in the progress of the epistle, recommended to his Philippian converts many of the virtues and graces of the gospel in detached exhortations. Here he appears studious to embrace the whole in a brief summary, and to depict, at a single stroke of his pencil, a full portrait of christian manners. He had always, in all his discourses, and his epistles to the churches, laid at the foundation of the christian system, *repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ.* And in all his practical instructions, in which these principles are not definitely stated, their existence is ever presupposed. But his immediate purpose in this place, is to recommend the gospel to the world by its excellent moral influence, and to derive a testimony in its favour, from the amiable and holy example of its disciples. Its morals compose the body, and visible part of this divine religion, and form, to the eye of the world, *the beauty of holiness.*



We perceive the holy apostles, ever solicitous to commend the doctrine of God their Saviour to the acceptance of mankind by the purity and excellence of its moral system. And the concurrent voice of evangelic history bears testimony to the exemplary simplicity, innocence, and charity of the primitive christians; and gives us reason to believe that, to this cause not less than to the eloquence of its first ministers, are we to ascribe its rapid triumphs over the opinions, and manners of the world. And it seems to have been particularly in the view of Saint Paul, in the text, not so much to press upon his christian converts the fundamental and distinguishing doctrines of the gospel, as to inculcate those useful and amiable virtues which, being more obvious to the senses of mankind, are calculated, most immediately, to win their way to the heart. Thus would they adorn the profession of God their Saviour; and others, beholding their good works be led thereby to give glory to God.

In the passage which I have chosen as the subject of our present meditations, he urges upon the Philippian saints, the cultivation of truth, of honor, of justice, of purity, of amiable manners, of virtuous reputation, that the nascent cause of christianity might thence derive the most effectual recommendation to the esteem of mankind.

The virtues here inculcated by the sacred writer, and the arrangement which he has given them will form the subject, and the order of the following discourse.

*Whatsoever things are true*, expresses the first feature in that divine portrait of christian perfection exhibited by the apostle.

Next to the great question concerning the *chief good: truth*, constituted the subject of supreme inquiry and disquisition among the ancient sages.

The excellence of this principle which awakened so powerfully their anxious investigations, is its subserviency to virtue, and to public happiness. The science which illuminates the mind, contributes, at the same time, to rectify, and strengthen the dictates of conscience, and to confirm the control of reason over all the plans of life. The apostle, in this precept, therefore, may be regarded as enjoining every disciple of the faith earnestly to establish for himself the soundest principles of truth, on the subjects of his duty, of the nature and worship of Almighty God, and of his everlasting interests and hopes.

In these researches, christians, it is of the utmost importance to be deeply convinced that a sincere love of truth is the most certain mean of arriving at the possession of it. It inspires an energy of character which refuses no labour in order to attain it; and begets a fairness and candor of heart, on all moral questions which is congenial with its simple and upright dictates. It covers no secret bias in opposition to the truth, but is ever willing to admit without disguise, its purest and holiest lights, even when they are found to thwart our favourite inclinations. But, because the most clear and resplendent mirror of truth is held out by our blessed Saviour in the sacred scriptures, it is peculiarly in-

cumbent on every believer, to apply himself to the study of these divine volumes with humble and assiduous zeal, enlightened and animated by the spirit of a prayerful faith. For, in them are found all those precious doctrines most important for man to know. And the holy fervor of prayer purifies the perceptions of the soul, and strengthens the illumination of the divine word.

But, as the apostle, in this passage, appears to have in his view chiefly those social virtues which eminently contributed to recommend the gospel to the esteem of the world, and which at that period, in the decline of manners throughout the Roman empire, were greatly impaired, the *love of truth* is probably intended, further, to embrace that open and sincere temper which is the basis of mutual confidence, and holds, almost the first honors in the moral intercourse of mankind. Sincerity and candor are the offspring and the image of an ingenuous character of soul. And an inflexible adherence to the dictates of truth, in all circumstances, is the evidence of a firmness of mind which is not easily shaken by any weak and unmanly fear, or tempted to decline from the path of righteousness by any enfeebling seductions of pleasure. Vice alone studies to wrap itself up in the folds of dissimulation, or hopes to elude detection under the disguises and coverings of falsehood.

If, at any time, the ingenuousness of a noble nature has been betrayed into an error through the inconsiderate ardor of the passions, never will it seek a dubious justification in concealment, or a disingenuous palliation



in disguise; but with generous candor is able to rest upon itself in the fair disclosure of the fact. For it is the maxim of a high and virtuous mind, that more true greatness of soul is often displayed in frankly confessing, than in not having committed an error. It is a sublime homage paid to virtue, and implies an elevated turn of thinking which is superior to what is mean, and abhors what is unworthy or dishonourable. God has imposed upon all men inviolable obligations to truth, not only in the powerful dictates of conscience, but in its obvious and indispensable subserviency to the order and happiness of society. Society exists only by the force of truth. *Whatsoever things are true, think of these things.*

Be then the love and pursuit of the truth, as it is in Christ Jesus our Lord, ever among your supreme cares. To display its glorious evidence to the world, Christ himself descended from Heaven. And the soul penetrated and purified by its holy light, is raised to the likeness of the Saviour, and becomes more and more assimilated to him, who is the author of truth. For this end, besides the ample volume of nature, containing the visible declaration of his will to all mankind, he has given to his disciples the more luminous volume of his Holy Spirit. And to study both the one and the other, with profound attention, and with continual prayer to the Father of lights for his illuminating grace, is at once, our precious privilege and our indispensable duty. To read them with understanding requires the purest simplicity of heart, and the most profound humility, that no corrupt bias within may ob-



scure the light: For he only, saith the Saviour, *who doeth my will shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.*

2. Next to this divine principle which assimilates the soul to him whose nature is truth, the sacred writer adds,—*whatsoever things are honest.*—

The force of this term in the original, is better expressed in our language by *honourable* or *respectable*.—The obvious intention of the apostle is, to enjoin that dignity and gravity of manners which become a christian, always conscious of the presence of Almighty God, and always occupied with the pure and sublime affections of religion. Principles which display themselves in a manly seriousness of deportment, not only while engaged in the immediate offices of devotion, but in discharging all the ordinary duties of life. The unseasonable levities or the effeminating pleasures of the world, frivolity of character or lightness of manners, but ill comport with that dignified simplicity, and that reflective gravity which should be stamped on the whole exterior of a disciple of Christ. In this respect the judgment of the world concurs with the gospel, for nothing does it more severely reprehend, than its own image when seen in those who bear the name of so high and holy a master.

Far, however, is religion from recommending a pompous reserve for dignity of manner, a melancholy gloom for seriousness, or a solemn and penitential countenance, for sanctity. These imposing austerities can arise only from mistaken apprehensions of the nature of God, and the true principles of human duty. A chris-

tian, on the contrary, ought ever to exhibit in his deportment the serenity of a good conscience, and the softened cheerfulness of religious hope. A serious but placid composure of manner is the decent and natural expression of that habit of the soul which pious sensibility has thrown over the rational views and plans of life. It refuses not to descend to lighter scenes, and, on proper occasions, to mingle with the innocent amusements of society; but it descends as reason and christianity ought to descend. It touches trifles, when it is proper to unbend, in a way that engages your esteem, and never departs from the decency and self-respect which belong to religion. True piety, always occupied with the sober duties, of life, or occasionally yielding to its lawful relaxations, derives the dignity of its manner from the inward majesty of the spirit of devotion. *Whatsoever things are honourable, think of these things*; and never let the sacred honor of the gospel be impaired in your example by any act unworthy the profession of God your Saviour.

3. But by no means can the respectability of christian morals be more surely supported than by an exact fulfilment of the duties of justice. A class of virtues was included under this denomination, according to the distribution of the ancient sages, extending to a much wider compass than that to which it has been restricted in the precision of modern science. Besides the principles of simple equity, it comprehended the duties also, which we owe to God, to our parents, to our country, and was made to embrace all the charities of life. In this extent it was probably regarded by that

learned apostle who was eminently instructed in all the science of the Greeks. Hence is the term, in this place, justly deemed equivalent to that inestimable rule of our blessed Saviour; *Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do you even so to them.* A rule which requires no explanation, but must ever yield a clear and unambiguous direction in duty to every man who is only faithful to himself and to God; for God hath lodged the interpretation of it in his own breast.

But taking the term in its strictest implication, as comprising only that fairness and integrity which ought to regulate all the intercourse of mankind with one another, no virtue, perhaps, ought to bear a higher estimation in society; and no other surely, can compensate the defect of justice. Where integrity is wanting, generosity is but thoughtless profusion; benevolence is, at best, but an amiable weakness, and the profession of piety is gross hypocrisy. What vice, indeed, can be more opprobrious than that which strikes at the very existence of society?

Manifest fraud, insolent oppression, or that low cunning which lies in wait to surprise an unjust advantage from the necessities, the inadvertence, or the generous openness of heart of others, all men will loudly condemn. But there are not wanting many examples of those who, misled by their love of ostentation, or their incautious pursuits of pleasure, trespass upon the obligations of justice, while hardly are they conscious that they are, in these very acts, stained with crimes of deep offence against the holy rule of equity in the eye of Heaven. For so sacred are the rights of others, that,

voluntarily to put them in hazard, is a species of iniquity. Justice not only imperiously commands the fulfilment of the minutest claims of equity, but rigorously requires a good man to abstain from whatever, either in the habits of living, or the transactions of commerce, may eventually seduce him to impair its principles. And how often, alas! have we seen men who embarked in hazardous speculations, have been tempted at length to the most unworthy departures from an upright conduct, in order to preserve those doubtful appearances which have too long flattered themselves, and imposed upon the world; and how often do we see the vanity of some, the emulation of others, and of not a few, a culpable facility of temper in yielding to the importunities of an inconsiderate family, lead them into a style of ostentation and expense, which they have no solid means to support? Soon the pressure of factitious wants, and the false shame of descending to the level of their circumstances, engage them first in a maze of fraud, and plunge them at length in a gulf of crimes. How much then, does the honor of justice and of christianity require the cultivation of simple tastes and frugal habits of living? They are favourable to piety, they are manly, and, in the infinite fluctuations of fortune, they are essential to the security of the principles of virtue. They add a real lustre to the possession of ample wealth, if it shall be your lot to enjoy it; or they will enable you if without vice you fall, to descend with dignity, and yield with submissive resignation to the will of God.

4. *Whatsoever things are pure, form the next char-*



acter of christian perfection, in this excellent summary. As truth and justice regulate the intercourse of a good man with society; *purity* relates to his personal duties in the government of his propensities and appetites. These principles, naturally tending to excess, require to be restrained under a firm and constant rein. Moderate gratifications they demand; and, when they are preserved within reasonable limits, they contribute to the happiness and health of the individual. But, when incautiously indulged, they become an impure vortex, which absorbs into itself all the great and noble qualities of the heart and intellect. Nothing so deeply taints the purity of the soul as the gross affections of the body; or equally disqualifies it for communion with the infinite sources of purity and truth. They cloud the serenity of reason, they disturb the exercises of devotion, and often render even the spirituality of the soul doubtful to the slaves of appetite. Therefore we are so earnestly enjoined, throughout the holy scriptures, to *deny ourselves; to keep under the body; and to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts*. When the soul is enabled, by this temperate self-control, to rise above the obscure atmosphere in which they would involve it, and to purge off their turbid and intoxicating fumes, it aspires through the divine spirit, to unite itself with God, and to mingle its essence, as far as it is lawful for our imperfect nature, with that of the supreme, and all-perfect mind.

Purity, then, implies that principle of the renewed nature which is most directly opposed to every improper gratification in the pleasure of sense. It consists

not only in moderation of indulgence, but in continence of desire. The perfection of the christian morality extends to the thoughts, and to the first principles of action in the soul. At the same time that it requires manners sober, temperate and chaste, it imposes a rigorous law upon the imagination and the heart. He who will give the reins to an impure fancy, will soon find himself enslaved to the worst passions.

5. In this admirable portrait of evangelic perfection, we find the apostle, who was not less a great philosopher, and a man of polished manners, than an eminent saint, improving it in the next place by adding *whatsoever things are lovely*:—manifestly embracing in his ideas those ornamental graces of conduct by which christianity should be recommended to the esteem of the world, as his preceding directions had enjoined chiefly its substantial duties. The will of the Creator upon this subject, is not obscurely indicated in the whole structure of the world. In all his works we behold beauty combined with utility. Man is endowed by his Creator with a lively relish of whatever is beautiful in nature, or amiable and lovely in human conduct. In conformity with this general intention, we perceive that there are certain graces of manner which contribute to render a character, otherwise good, peculiarly interesting. Many pious men imagine that, if they possess the substantial virtues of the gospel,—its integrity and truth, its penitence and faith, the more amiable and ornamental graces of manners are hardly to be desired; and that the cultivation of them savours too much of the fashion of this world. The ap-

prehension of these good men, so contrary, as we have seen, to the order of nature, is not less opposed to the evangelic order: for the holy apostle, a man the most abstracted from the vanities of the world, enjoins it with peculiar emphasis, upon his Philippian converts, to cultivate *whatsoever things are lovely*.

The particular character of virtue, which is here the subject of the apostolic injunction, consists in those dispositions of kindness, benevolence, and consideration for others which form the most amiable features in the commerce of mankind. Formed for society, we regard with peculiar complacency, those manners which contribute to refine its ties, and to render its intercourse endearing. But, far be it from christianity to recommend that polite foppery, or that studied, and distant urbanity which is merely the ape of benevolence, a painted image without a heart; that is more concerned for the manner of doing an action, than for its goodness; and much more vain of its own grace than interested for your happiness. The politeness of a true christian is the simple and unaffected expression of the benevolent sentiments which occupy his mind. They give a meaning and interest to every look and action, which consequently enters the soul by a charming insinuation, bespeaking its confidence far beyond any forms of the artificial and cold civility of the world. The most benevolent intentions, and the most beneficent actions often lose great part of their value, if they are void of delicacy. And a certain insinuation in the style of conferring a favour, or expressing our regard and consideration for others, the result simply of be-

nevolent feeling, creates for the act a much warmer interest in our hearts than the highest polish of an artificial manner. *Whatsoever things are lovely*, therefore, disciples of the most mild and benevolent master! *think of these things*; that, according to the declared design of the apostle, they may at once render your virtues more amiable in the eyes of the world, and increase, which is the first wish of every real follower of his Saviour, your power of doing good.

In this comprehensive view of a perfect character traced by the sacred writer, the loveliness of its manners is not to be exclusively confined, even to the most amiable expressions of its benevolent dispositions towards others, but may justly be extended to all those small but important attentions to the proprieties of life, which contribute to render the intercourse of society more pleasing. It has, in every age, been the error of some devout men, to conceive that religion is so exclusively occupied with the great interests of our eternal being, that the body, which is destined so soon to perish, is hardly an object of its pious care. Yet, that a certain condescension to this earthly part of our nature is not unworthy the sublimity of its views, is manifest from the whole ritual of the ancient dispensation. By how many ablutions and purifications did the law of Moses express its solicitude, not only for the health of the body, but all the decencies of life? And is it not reasonable that, while our corporeal and spiritual faculties coexist, and compose but one nature, religion should embrace the improvement and perfection of both within her cognizance. Let no one be surprised, then,



that attentions even of this personal kind should be enumerated among the virtues of the gospel. It recommends, indeed, no frivolous or excessive cares of ornament, which are always the indications of a vain, and even an unchaste mind; but it is equally remote from that grossness of sentiment which disgusts by neglect. A decent regard to appearance, according to the several stations which men hold in society,—an elegant simplicity where it can be afforded; and above all, purity of person, though under the homeliest garb, are proofs of a benevolent desire to please and be pleased, which can never be separated from christian charity.

Their precious influence is, perhaps, chiefly felt in that society which is the most intimate, and ought to be the most dear to man; I mean the conjugal and domestic, which, when supported by delicate and mutual attention, is the scene of his purest earthly joys; but, when poisoned by negligence, or any want of the decencies and proprieties of life, is the source of some of his most poignant infelicities, and often, of his greatest errors and vices.

Shall these attentions, christians! be esteemed too light and unimportant to be introduced into this sacred place, when so much of the happiness of human life depends upon them? Nay, I fear not to class them with the essential duties of piety, and to claim for them a rank and consideration in the scale of morals which has too seldom been assigned them. *Whatsoever things are lovely, think of these things.* And add to them,

6. *Whatsoever things are of good report.* If we attempt to discriminate between this class, and those

which precede it, it probably consists of such acknowledged and conspicuous acts of beneficence, goodness and nobleness of heart, as are calculated to attract to themselves extraordinary reputation. Reputation is attached, in a certain degree, to the fulfilment of every duty, and the practice of every virtue, but it is especially won by distinguished proofs of a humane, benign, and munificent spirit. Accordingly, in the exercise of the charitable virtues, the primitive christians are recorded to have exceeded all mankind, and, by the precious fruits of this pious benevolence, to have preeminently contributed to the early and wide diffusion of the doctrines of God their Saviour. And the apostle, in sketching that character of christian perfection, so ornamental to their holy profession, had, doubtless, his view principally fixed on those extraordinary charities which distinguished the new sect, and were then, to the great honor and advantage of the christian name, for the first time, displayed in all their beauty before the pagan world. We can hardly hesitate concerning the design of the sacred writer in this injunction, which was to recommend to his fellow christians, the benevolent spirit of their heavenly master, and to seek a good report among their brethren, not only by the conspicuous exercise of every virtue, but especially by the liberality and amplitude of their public charities. All men indeed do not possess the same means of making their beneficence shine before the world. But, in the humblest stations of life, if they have not wealth to bestow in the relief of suffering indigence, they have their sympathies, their assiduities, their ten thousand humane of-

fices. Who is there so obscure, who has it not often in his power to render some alleviations to the afflictions of others; to succour, or befriend injured innocence; to assist or console virtuous sorrow, and, in many ways, *to do good even to the evil and unthankful*? But if heaven has blessed you with affluence, is it not putting in your power a more conspicuous opportunity of exercising a noble liberality? What a pure and virtuous reputation may you not acquire by favouring establishments for relieving helpless distress? by furnishing to the poor the means of an honest and useful industry? by assisting institutions for diffusing knowledge, and promoting virtue among the most indigent orders of the community? by works for the improvement and benefit of your country? Reputation sought by such means is a splendid ambition, and contributes as much to the honor of religion as to the glory of the individual.

If those who aspire to honorable distinction, should, instead of courting a low popularity by the vile and disingenuous arts by which it is too often attained; or consuming their revenues in invidious ostentation, employ the same talents in promoting works of public utility,—in augmenting the grandeur, the industry, and solid power of their country,—in improving arts, in advancing knowledge, in diffusing religion, in alleviating the unavoidable calamities of human life, how honorably might they flourish in the love and *good report* of their fellow citizens, and fellow christians! What a triumph might they not obtain for religion! what a glory might they not shed on the charitable principles of the gospel, which in the most splendid periods of Greece

and Rome, were hardly understood in the temples of paganism? And how strongly, in that age must the incipient cause of christianity have been recommended to their pagan brethren, by these rare virtues! In every age, what a lustre do they shed on the doctrines of the ever blessed Redeemer!—*Whatsoever things are of good report, think of these things.*

After inculcating, with the apostle, the superior virtues of the christian life, little can be wanting, in this age of refinement, and in the present state of cultivated society, to recommend that suavity of manners which he esteemed so highly ornamental to the christian profession. That civility which studies to imitate the benevolence and charity of the gospel, is incorporated by our education into our earliest habits. How desirable, that the image were converted into the substance, and that the ceremonious exterior which, too often, by a certain excess of urbanity, endeavours to cover its defects, were animated with the genuine spirit of charity! Still, however, is the image of it calculated to maintain a happy intercourse among mankind, and promote the harmony of society. And the cultivation of this character of manners, is ranked by the holy apostle, not merely among the decencies required by society, but the virtues of the christian life. As virtues, therefore, and duties to heaven, and not as what is only graceful in ourselves, let all the decent expressions of mutual civility be practised. Thus may they be made subservient to the purposes of genuine charity, and be rescued from the imputation of being merely a cold and frivolous ceremonial. The loveli-



ness of christian manners consists principally in their being a pure emanation from the fountain of a humane and benevolent heart, which gives them an inimitable, and most persuasive grace. It tends to transfuse itself into the look, the manner, and even the tones of the voice. Whatever cultivation can add to nature is not to be neglected; but it is lovely, it is sanctified nature, which touches the finest sensibilities of the soul.

7. This amiable portrait of christian morals, the holy and eloquent apostle finishes by the following striking and comprehensive strokes, which present every thing to the eye, at a single glance;—*if there be any virtue, if there be any praise*; whatever the dictates of your own heart pronounce to be right, although the individual act be not definitely prescribed by any law; whatever the common sentiments of mankind approve as praiseworthy, be this a sacred and inviolable rule of conduct to you whether it respects the minutest actions of life, or affects its most important affairs. The instinctive dictates of the heart are, perhaps always in favour of virtue; and with them concurs the general suffrage of mankind, because all are conscious of the same benevolent impulses; and virtue is ever found to be the common interest of the world. Next, therefore, to the praise which cometh from God, and the conscious approbation of our own hearts, it is lawful for christian humility, to aspire to the honorable praise that cometh from man; that by acquiring so just a title to the esteem of our fellow christians, we may be able more effectually to promote the glory of the Redeemer, and extend the influence of his most holy religion.

Such is the beautiful portrait of the christian character, as it is obvious to the observation of the world, delineated by the holy apostle. Its beauty and perfection redounded greatly to the honor of the christian name in the first ages of the gospel. And it was evidently the design of this great defender of the cross, to draw an argument in favour of the doctrine of Christ from its excellent fruits in the morals of his followers. For this purpose, he presents to our view, in this passage only the obvious and visible part of the christian character, from which intention I have not permitted myself to depart in the illustration. But when we attempt to trace the character to its secret and internal principles, it will not be forgotten by you that the morality of the gospel has its foundation deeply laid in supreme love to God, and in unfeigned benevolence towards our fellow men; in repentance and in faith. From these principles arises the whole fabric of our duties to heaven, and the whole law of truth, of justice, and of charity to mankind. By divine love we are assimilated to him whose nature and property is love;—by faith we are renewed in the spirit of our minds, and united to the righteousness of Jesus Christ, which is all prevalent at the tribunal of his justice; while, by sincere repentance, the soul is purified from its old transgressions, and prepared to be presented to God, a pure offering on his altars. From this basis, the superstructure of christian morals can never be separated. And let no man vainly imagine, that, by any pretences to repentance and faith, or any interior exercises of devotion unaccompanied with the visible

fruits of righteousness; nor, on the other hand, that any external acts of charity, justice, temperance, truth, or honor, detached from the inward principles of a renewed heart, will ever meet a gracious approbation in the judgment of God. *Being alone, they are dead*; but united, they form the perfect character of christian virtue. God is then witness of the purity of the heart; and the glory of the Redeemer is advanced by the *beauties of holiness*, exhibited in the lives of his disciples.

Now, brethren to him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before his throne with exceeding joy, be glory forever! **AMEN!**

## THE CHRISTIAN PASSOVER,

OR

DISPOSITIONS PROPER FOR THE LORD'S TABLE.

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So kill the passover, and sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren.  
*2 Chron. xxv. 36.*

THIS is the exhortation of a pious prince who had just invited the people of Jerusalem and Judah to a solemn assembly for the celebration of a national sacrifice. This action had departed from the genuine spirit of their religion, and even from its external institutions, into an imitation of the idolatry of the surrounding heathen. The king, solicitous to restore the purity of divine worship, and to procure a more uniform and faithful obedience to the laws of God, had convened them, to recognize their ancient covenant with Jehovah, and to give him renewed pledges of their duty and obedience, in the most public, and sacred acts of their religion. Such an act was their passover, when thousands of victims were slain in commemoration of their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt, and of their preservation from the sword of the destroying angel, who went through the land, and smote with death the first born of every family whose doors were not sprinkled with the blood of the pascal lamb. This pascal sacrifice was a most significant emblem of that precious lamb slain from the foundation of the



world, to deliver human nature from the bondage of sin, and to restore it finally from the dominion of death. When this excellent king had assembled the nation for a purpose so pious, and worthy the majesty of the throne, he commanded them to *sanctify* themselves for this holy service: a term which signifies their interposing an entire separation between their worldly avocations, and the holy services of the sanctuary, by the rites and purifications of their law, the emblems of that purity and preparation of heart with which we ought ever to approach the presence of the Eternal in the acts of divine worship. The passover was the most solemn ordinance in the religion of the temple. And the people of Israel usually prepared with extraordinary solicitude and anxious circumspection for its celebration in due form, according to the prescriptions of their great lawgiver. It was especially their duty in this solemnity, to look back with holy reverence to the fearful displays of the majesty and glory of God in their deliverance from Egypt, amidst the ravages of death which then surrounded them, throughout the whole land;—to recollect with gratitude the distinguishing mercy of God in *their* salvation, and to remember with thankful praise, the riches, the peace, and happiness of that promised land to which they had the hope of attaining under the conduct of their glorious deliverer.

That holy ordinance, christians, which we are convened to celebrate, is the great antitype of the pascal institution in the Jewish church, in which, according to the expression of the apostle, *Christ our passover is*

*sacrificed for us.*—*Kill the passover*, said Josiah to the people.—In this ordinance, the lamb, your passover is already slain. Let me address you then, in the language of the king of Israel; *sanctify yourselves*;—separate your thoughts and affections from the world, as you have separated your persons in this holy convocation, from its occupations and pursuits; and come prepared along with your brethren to eat it with faith.

Christians! we are assembled in the sanctuary of the Most High, to perform the most sublime act of our religion, and to celebrate, in the presence of Christ, the most awful, and at the same time, the most consoling ordinance which he has instituted in his church. To what, then, should all your preparations tend? What are those sentiments and affections which you should bring with you to that holy altar which bears the sacrifice of our passover? to that blessed table which is spread with the memorials of our Saviour's love? What humility of heart under a sense of sin for which Christ died? What mortification to the world, which, to a true believer, is crucified with Christ! What love to God, who hath given *his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on him, shall not perish, but have everlasting life!* What fervent charity to the family of Christ assembled with you round the same board! But I must confine the range of our meditations, and, as we have come up to celebrate our christian passover, let me be guided in the reflections which I shall further offer you, by those sentiments which would naturally occupy a true Israelite, when slaying his passover, and feasting on his pascal lamb. I have already

pointed them out;—A holy fear of God, whose awful judgments surrounded them on every side, while departing from Egypt,—love and gratitude to their Almighty Saviour, the symbol of whose salvation they saw sprinkled on their doors;—and hope of the promised land which supported their hearts amidst all the trials and dangers of the wilderness through which they were to march to its possession. Let us then approach our christian sacrifice with profound veneration of him who *is evidently set forth crucified among us*. With fervent and supreme love to him whose love we commemorate in this feast;—with a lively hope of the heavenly Canaan which he hath purchased for the true Israel by his death, and which shall gloriously reward the duties, the toils, and dangers of the desert.—That is, let us approach this holy table with fear, with love, and with hope. With fear in the first place. In this ordinance, indeed, you behold the blessed Saviour in his humiliation, *wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities*, and bearing *the chastisement of our peace*. You behold the infirmities of a suffering nature, symbolized by the simplest emblems. Was it not that there might be found a victim competent to bear the sins of the world? Where have you, then, so awful a display of the terrors of divine justice, as on the altar which bears the lamb of God broken and consumed as a whole burnt offering, for our iniquities?—*The angels who kept not their first estate*, were cast forth from the mansions of glory, into the blackness of everlasting darkness; the guilty inhabitants of the old world were swept from the earth by a deluge; and Sodom and Go-

morrah, for their crimes, were sunk in an abyss of inextinguishable fire; but what was the destruction of angels, and of men, to the death of the son of God, of him who is united to the Creator of the universe, and partakes of his glory and immortality? All things are nothing, and less than nothing, and vanity, compared to him, *who is the first born of every creature; the beginning of the creation of God.* This table, then, humble and simple as it appears, presents to the view of faith, the most fearful monuments of the righteous indignation of Almighty God against sin. The children of Israel ate their passover while the angel of death was flying round their habitations, and spreading desolation through an impious land: but they were sheltered by the blood of that symbolical victim which formed their sacred repast. Christians! we eat our pascal lamb under the shelter of its protecting blood, amidst the desolations of that spiritual death, which sin is spreading around us. We encompass an altar, we surround a table, on which we behold the flames of an eternal and consuming justice, combined with the light of divine mercy. How serious and awful is the transaction!

But, is there not another view which may justly inspire a pious communicant with holy fear? Although you behold on that table the most glorious fruits and pledges of the Saviour's love, although he is the lamb slain from the foundation of the world, the food of the hungry, the consolation of the afflicted soul, the hope of those who were ready to perish, yet is he the King of kings, and Lord of lords,—the righteous judge of



quick and dead; and he is seated at the head of his own table, judging the hearts of those who approach it.—He carries in his hands the decrees of life and of death. He casts a discriminating look among the guests to see who has not on a wedding garment. Yes, christians, from that table as from his tribunal, his eyes pierce the whole assembly of worshippers, who are here present to distinguish the righteous from the wicked, spiritually to divide the sheep from the goats, as he will more conspicuously separate them in the awful decisions of the last day. Are not these considerations sufficient to fill the breast of every humble communicant with holy fear, who is conscious of his own manifold imperfections, and of the deceitfulness of his own heart? Am I, he is ready to ask, of that *little flock to whom it is the Father's good pleasure to give the kingdom?* O my Saviour! while I am, perhaps rashly taking my seat among thy friends, dost thou see in the unholy passions and desires of my heart, in the errors of my life, the proofs that I have no right to *the children's bread?*—Yes, penitent believer! even while partaking of the cup of salvation, you often need to be re-assured and encouraged against your own pious fears. To the eyes of faith, a tremendous majesty surrounds the meek and condescending lamb of God, which seems, to the humble and trembling penitent, almost, to interdict an approach into his presence. But if some, to the injury of their own spiritual comfort, flee from this table which bears the sacrifice of their peace, as the children of Israel did from the thunders of that terrible mountain on which Jehovah descended

at the promulgation of his law; are there not others, alas! who, making religion consist only in a mere form, and an empty ritual, who, having never felt its vital power, regard this holy table with that irreverent indifference with which the same people braved the terrors of his sanctuary, when they presumed to offer strange fire upon his altar? They approach it without preparation, they leave it without impression, they taste and handle the symbols of the broken body, and shed the blood of their Saviour, as vulgar things, and return to the world with the same carnal temper which they brought from it, its cares and pursuits having hardly been interrupted by a hasty service, equally void of solemnity and devotion. Ah! formal hypocrites! Jesus knows the traitor who betrays him with a kiss; he perceives the hand mixing with those of his sincere disciples which shall afterwards be lifted up in rebellion against him.

Christians, sometimes, by relaxing their vigilance in duty, by immersing themselves without precaution in the pursuits of the world, or in the levities and dissolutions of certain circles of society, impair the spirit and the comforts of religion in their own hearts. They, consequently, tremble at this ordinance, they dread its approach, not through pious awe of the majesty of him who is evidently set forth crucified before them, but through consciousness of their own hypocrisy. They are not duly prepared, their hearts are not rightly disposed for this most holy service. Like the foolish virgins, they are alarmed and in confusion at the appearance of the bridegroom, whom they are not in a fit habit of soul to receive at his coming. Ah! christians! this is

not the fear of those who truly reverence the body and blood of our blessed Lord. A sincere disciple of the Redeemer should study to be at all times in habitual readiness, either to meet the bridegroom at his table, or to appear before the judge at his tribunal. His preparations for the one, and for the other, he should mingle with all his avocations in life, with his serious duties, and even with his lawful amusements; they should mingle with all his engagements, with all his habits, with all his thoughts, with his activity, with his repose, with the devotions of the closet, with the offices of the church. Thus alone, O believer! can you be prepared to honor your Saviour at his own table.

If then we ought to eat our christian passover with holy reverence and awe at the contemplation of that astonishing victim which was slain for our sins, of *that word of life* of which here we taste and handle; we ought also to come,

II. In the exercise of fervent and supreme love to him whose infinite love to us we are here invited to commemorate.

The whole gospel, which is a system of divine love, is here represented in epitome.—Jesus! Saviour! to what but thy own ineffable love are we to ascribe that wonderful, that almost incredible condescension which brought thee from heaven to enshrine thy glory in the infirmities and miseries of a mortal body; to endure that horrible exile in which, though Creator of the universe, thou hadst not where to lay thy head; to submit to an accursed death, and bear the whole weigh

of the justice of the violated law for our salvation! We are lost in the boundless wonders of this love. We are lost in the abyss of our own unworthiness and imperfection! Penitent believer! have you seen your sins in the dark and terrifying colours in which they appear to a convinced conscience? Has the condemning voice of the law pursued you as it often does the convinced sinner, almost to the verge of despair? have you trembled at the flames, which the wrath of God seemed, such is the force of conscious guilt, to be kindling around you? Ah! then, our language will be feeble, to represent to you the obligations which you owe to that love which has delivered you from its dreadful curse. To describe to you that love which moved the Saviour to place himself in your room, on the altar of eternal justice. Look on the memorials of the Redeemer's love, and will not the elevated joys of faith convey to your heart a sentiment which words are impotent to express; which indeed can only be feebly conveyed in the deep silence of devout rapture. What then, christian, will be the aspirations of your pious affections, while sitting with your Redeemer at the table which his grace has spread, and receiving from his hand the memorials of his dying love?—Lord! enter in and take possession of my whole soul! fill it with thyself alone! satisfied, inebriated with thy love, may I forget for a moment, the world, its sorrows, its pleasures, all that it contains; that, occupied only with thee, nothing may have power to interrupt the full tide of my pious joy!—Ah! Lord! is my heart too impure for thy residence? Come, purify it by thy divine spirit! Is my



mind dark and afflicted by doubts? lift upon it the light of thy countenance! Is it defiled by former miscarriages and sins? Cleanse it, Lord, with thy own most precious blood, and make it an offering worthy thy acceptance!

*Do this*, said our blessed Saviour, in instituting this ordinance, *do this in remembrance of me*. And does not love, my brethren, delight to recall the memory of every action, of every word, of every minute circumstance connected with the peculiarly cherished objects of our affections? At this table, then, covered with the memorials of your Saviour, will you not retrace with a holy pleasure, the great events of a history so dear to every true believer? Will you not go with delight along with the adoring shepherds to Bethlehem to contemplate the infant Saviour in that humble manger on which he shed such glory?—Will you not, with devout admiration follow him, through all the scenes of his life wherein he had so many opportunities to display those amiable and divine virtues which rendered him the most perfect example to mankind, of a holy conversation with the world, in his meekness, his humility, his patience, his forgiveness of injuries, his activity in doing good, his zeal for the glory of God, his benevolence and grace to men? But, among a thousand tender and affecting recollections which a believer will delight to nourish at this holy table, will he not center his meditations chiefly on that last scene of sorrow and suffering in which he made the most transcendent displays of his love and compassion to mankind? He who possesses the plenitude of infinite happiness in the hea-

vens, suffered the torrent of affliction to enter into his soul; he who will judge the universe, submitted to be judged at the bar of a worm of the dust! he who wields the thunders of Heaven, and will in the fearful day of retribution lanch them on the heads of his enemies, yielded his own life without resistance into the hands of sinful men! Oh! infinite and unsearchable love! which could submit to such humiliations for our salvation! But that his enemies might not blaspheme his condescension and grace, and ascribe to weakness the voluntary offering of love, he chose the moment of his death to make the most glorious displays of his omnipotent power. The rocks were rent, the whole land was shaken with an earthquake, darkness covered the face of the sun, and the graves of many of the saints were opened, to demonstrate the power with which he is able to break the chains of death, and release the prisoners of the tomb.—Follow him, believer, in your mournful recollections, to that garden in which, under the weight and oppression of your sins, of which he stood the victim, *he sweat as it were great drops of blood, falling down to the earth!* Follow him through that scene of insult and indignity heaped upon him in the hall of Pilate, and admire that submissive meekness, that unruffled patience with which he bore the cruel scoffing of his enemies! Follow him up the painful ascent of Calvary, fainting under the load of that cross on which he was himself to be suspended! Behold him under the cruel tortures of crucifixion, but suffering infinitely greater agonies in his soul, made an offering for sin!

O! Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world! in the midst of this unutterable scene of horror thou didst expire, in all the majesty of divine meekness and compassion, pronouncing the forgiveness of thine enemies! What shall we render thee! What do we not owe thee for love so transcendant, so divine! Our love, our duty, our lives, all the powers of our being, can form only a poor and unworthy return. But, poor and unworthy as they are, Lord! Thou wilt deign to accept them; and at thy table we come to offer them all to thee!

We are sometimes ready, says an eminent preacher, to envy those who saw Christ upon earth, and heard the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth, the apostles who listened to his heavenly discourses; the beloved disciple who reclined upon his bosom; Mary who washed his feet with her tears, and whose love carried her the first to visit his tomb.—Ah! christians, let faith, enlivened and exalted by love, contemplate him in this ordinance, and you need not regret that you did not live in his age. *Blessed*, saith he, *are those who have not seen, and yet have believed*: but, by the power of divine love in the heart, we may almost see in believing. We may even have some advantages over those who conversed with him upon earth. The veil of a mortal body concealed much of his glory from the eyes of sense. You now behold him raised to the right hand of God, holding in his hands the rewards of immortal life, to crown his faithful followers! Those gracious promises which he delivered to his disciples in his familiar discourses, he now announces to us

from that throne on which he governs the universe. On a heart animated with a sincere faith, therefore, his present glory is calculated to give them perhaps, a deeper impression, as well as to impart a higher consolation than his disciples could enjoy during his ministry on earth.

Come to his table then, that, while you hold communion with him in the acts of a pure and holy love, and feed with him upon the bread of life, you may also nourish your own religious comforts, and strengthen all your christian graces. This, indeed, should be the chief end of all communion with our Saviour, of all our devout intercourse with heaven; that *the same spirit might be created in us, which was also in Christ Jesus our Lord*; the same meekness, the same humility, the same candid and forgiving temper, the same simplicity of heart and manners, the same charity and desire of doing good to mankind, the same zeal for the glory of God, the same love of retreat, meditation, and prayer, the same purity, innocence, and usefulness in our conversation with the world. At this table, christians, learn to prepare for the eternal festival of love to which you hope to be admitted in the temple of God in the heavens. Cultivate here those graces which can arrive at perfection only in the region of immortal love, where they will bear fruit to everlasting life. Heaven only expands those blossoms, and brings to maturity those fruits, which are planted in the garden of God on the earth.

III. To awaken in the heart the lively hope and anticipation of this heavenly inheritance, confirmed by



these precious memorials of our Saviour, is the last duty and privilege of a sincere disciple of Christ at this holy table.

In the first ages, when persecution so often desolated the church, the communion of the body and blood of Christ was constantly used as a preparation for martyrdom. As soon as the decrees of persecuting tyrants were published, all the faithful hastened round their altars, to derive thence the holy courage necessary to meet the rage of their enemies. From their churches they carried with them the precious memorials of their Saviour's love, to console them in their prisons, and their dungeons, or to cheer those gloomy retreats to which they were obliged to flee to escape imprisonment and chains. Inspired by these pledges of divine mercy, they defied the powers of earth and hell, and marched amidst the ensigns of death with the courage of men who forgot its tortures, and beheld only the glory to which they led. And, my brethren, when we commemorate the death of our blessed Lord, let us not arrest our imagination at the foot of the cross, the symbol and the instrument of his deep humiliation: let us follow him also in his victory and triumph, let us contemplate him rising to the right hand of the glory of God; and seated as king on his holy hill of Zion, *to give eternal life to as many as believe on his name.* The cross of Christ has opened the gates of immortality to the heirs of death. To his table, therefore, which bears the symbols of his dying love, to his altar which carries the sacrifice of our salvation, come to fill your hearts with the anticipations of heaven, with

the joys which are in the presence of your glorified Redeemer. Nothing will so effectually extinguish the fears of death in the heart of a true believer, as those holy communions in which you hold in your hands the purchase and the pledges of immortal life. Indeed, one would think that the error of a christian, under the full and lively views of faith, would rather be an impatience to leave the sins and sorrows of this imperfect state, and to *enter into the joy of his Lord*. Hear how the holy Psalmist expresses the fervent aspiration of his soul:—*Oh! that I had wings like a dove, that I might flee away and be at rest!* that I might mount from this vale of tears, to the everlasting hills!—Come, then, christians, *take the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord*. Look beyond these frail symbols to that eternal festival of love which all the redeemed shall celebrate in the presence of God. And remember that the altar which bears the sacrifice of your salvation, is the altar also, on which you come to confirm by the most sacred solemnities, your own vows of eternal fidelity and obedience to him. AMEN!

THE END.



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